

Features of intercultural communication



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Intercultural communication is about how people from different cultures communicate. It is a face to face communication between people from different cultures and backgrounds (Lewis, Slade 2000). In University, the mixing of different cultures is a good example of intercultural communications. Every day, we learn different things about different cultures. This is important as it allows the world to grow and become closer allowing countries to have relations with each other and to learn and respect the different beliefs of other cultures. There will be problems faced along the way to achieving these goals nevertheless there are always ways to overcome these problems. Problems such as language barriers, traditional beliefs, Gender with regards religion are the main issues which present difficulties towards learning about different cultures.

One of the problems that can affect the movement of intercultural communications is traditional beliefs. For example, Koreans traditionally as a sign of acknowledgement and respect, greet one another with a bow. If a westerner goes to Korea and greets a Korean with a wave, it may be disrespectful towards the Korean. This can be overcome by education and the acceptance of multiculturalism within each country. A country cannot expand if it does not accept multiculturalism. Storey Douglas said in his article that international communications including the flow of popular culture and news, as well as educational, economic, and professional exchange, are shown to have profound influences on how people develop images of other nations and how perceptions and misperceptions affect interaction at the national level (Douglas 1988).

Language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories, and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007). It can be defined as a system of conceptual symbols that allows us to communicate. It also provides us with a significant frame of reference and a relational context that sustains our identities (Imberti, 2007). An example of how language can be a barrier towards intercultural communication is when a Chinese man is unable to communicate to a Western man because of his lack of knowledge of the English language vice versa. Aki Uchida mentioned in her article about understanding the need to learn English, she saw it as an important means of relating to people of different cultures and constructing shared knowledge and understanding (Uchida 1997). Understanding the need to learn another language is important for overcoming the language barrier to enable communications between cultures helping us relate to different cultures and sharing our knowledge and understanding of our cultures to them.

Some cultures believe that women are inferior to men. It is a barrier preventing us to achieve intercultural communication. For example if a successful Australian woman goes to the middle east where women are permitted to work and their job were to simply stay at home and look after the kids, Middle eastern men may find that very intimidating and offensive therefore avoiding any form of communication with the Australian woman. Aki Uchida suggested in her article that emphasizing the possibility that the beliefs and practices that constitute gender are salient cultural resources and attributes that participants may reject, accept, or integrate in the course

of cultural building (Uchida 1997). To build obtain intercultural communications; people have to learn to accept and respect their dogmata of another culture for communication to transpire. In respects to the example I gave, Middle eastern men should accept and respect the culture of Australian society and not be afraid to approach the Australian woman with respect and benevolence. Like-wise the Australian woman should realize their culture and be more respectful towards the men not in an inferior way but a restrained manner (not coming across as too aggressive).

These are ways that we can form bridges to further improve our drive towards obtaining intercultural communication with different cultures.

However there are still people in the world who are ethnocentric.

Ethnocentric is having the idea that your particular belief or culture is better than other cultures and beliefs. Having this mind set will only set us back in hopes of obtaining multiculturalism and cross cultural communication.

Ethnocentrism is divided into three stages, denial, defence and minimization are the three ways to define an ethnocentric person (Chu 2014). The person is in denial which means he or she is completely not interested in dealing with people of different cultures (Chu 2014). They are comfortable in their culture and usually do not want to step out and accept a different culture. Some are in Defence and take action towards people of different cultures (Chu 2014). Their actions are usually caused by fear of an unknown belief or action and therefore in defence, they retaliate against the person in other words categorising them as “ minorities”. Minimization is when they recognise a different culture but at a very superficial and minimal kind of level (Chu 2014).

Our aim should be to try and help those who are ethnocentric to slowly move towards being ethnorelative. Naomi Ludemen Smith described in her article that to be ethnorelative is to “adopt a position that dismantles any notion that there is a set of universal standards by which we can rightfully judge or confront the good and the bad of how a people group, religion, and society lives” (Smith 2013). Ethnorelativism is divided into three stages, acceptance, adaptation and integration. Acceptance is to tolerate different cultures, Adaptation is to experience empathy towards a different culture and integration is not regarding that there is a dominant culture (Chu 2014). To move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, according to Deardorff, the attitudes move from top to bottom. Firstly, when dealing with another culture, the ethnocentric individual will have to show respect, openness and curiosity & discovery (Chu 2014). This is the basic requirement before moving on to the next stage of gaining knowledge and skills to adaptation. Individual has to show cultural self-awareness which is acknowledging that his or her culture is not perfect. After realising this, you will accept another culture and gain an understanding of it and slowly being open to listen, observe and show respect to a different culture (Chu 2014). After which, a desired internal outcome will be obtained. The individual will gain an ethnorelative mindset and will be able to empathise with other cultures. Lastly, the individual will obtain the desired external outcome being able to behave and communicate affectively and appropriately to achieve his or her goals to some degree with another culture (Chu 2014).

Our ultimate goal is to achieve intercultural competence in today's globalised society. All these technical tools on how to become more ethnorelative will

be completely useless if the individual does not possess the correct ethics. we need to have ethics when it comes to competence of intercultural communication. In order to address ethics in communication, we must recognise them as an extension of personal convictions or we condemn ourselves to study them as idealistic, theoretical constructs (Casmir 2013). We have to gain these ethics ourselves, gaining knowledge of the norms within other cultures and show respect towards these norms, show hospitality to people from other cultures for others to display respect to our culture therefore displaying the awareness of different cultures ethical responses (Chu 2014). At the end of the day, it is people who communicate with each other and not cultures that communicate with each other. If we look at the differences between cultures from our perspective, there are many differences however if you look at it from a individual human to human perspective, There is not much difference in the way people react to things (Chu 2014).

We have to put ourselves into unknown territory for us to change and appreciate different cultures and to display ethics. The learning process or acculturation which is the process of the meeting of cultures and the changes which result from such meetings (Chu 2014). How we acculturate is the same as how we learn about things in our daily lives such as university or our work place, we expose ourselves to unknown situations and learn from it by experiencing it. Intercultural empathy is shown when we place ourselves in the shoes of someone from a different cultures perspective and try to understand what it is like from their eyes (Chu 2014). It is like setting a goal for ourselves in the future and working backwards from that goal that way

guide us and sets a focus into attaining our goal. Intercultural competence is important to communications because it helps us bridge cultural differences within and among nations (Chu 2014). Multiculturalism is spreading around the world due to globalization with countries helping each other expand through trades and multi national operations. Therefore, migration is high and individuals from different cultures are made to interact with one another which is why it is necessary for us to have an ethical response to the social reality of cultural tension. Why not get along to help make the world a better place to live in.