

Advantages of communication in today's life

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Ted Childs, IBM's vice president of global workforce diversity, knows from years of experience that communicating successfully across cultures is no simple task, however—particularly in a company that employs more than 325, 000 people and sells to customers in roughly 175 countries around the world. Language alone presents a formidable barrier to communication when you consider that IBM's workforce speaks more than 165 languages, but language is just one of many elements that play a role in communication between cultures.

Differences in age, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, and economic status can all affect the communication process. Childs recognizes that these differences represent both a challenge and an opportunity, and a key part of his job is helping IBM executives and employees work together in a way that transforms their cultural differences into a critical business strength. As he Ted Childs oversees IBM's efforts to build competitive advantage by capitalizing on the benefits of a diverse workforce. 64

WORLD IBM's experience (profiled in the chapter-opening Communication Close-Up) illustrates both the challenges and the opportunities for business professionals who know how to communicate with diverse audiences. Although the concept is often framed in terms of ethnic background, a broader and more useful definition of diversity “ includes all the characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals. ” 2 As you'll learn in this chapter, these characteristics and experiences can have a profound effect on the way businesspeople communicate.

To a large degree, these effects on communication are the result of fundamental differences between cultures. Intercultural communication is the process of sending and receiving messages between people whose cultural background could lead them to interpret verbal and nonverbal signs differently. Every attempt to send and receive messages is influenced by culture, so to communicate successfully, you'll need a basic grasp of the cultural differences you may encounter and how you should handle them.

Your efforts to recognize and surmount cultural differences will open up business opportunities throughout the world and maximize the contribution of all the employees in a diverse workforce. The Opportunities in a Global Marketplace You will communicate with people from other cultures throughout your career. You might be a business manager looking for new customers or new sources of labor. Or you might be an employee looking for new work opportunities. Either way, chances are good that you'll be looking across international borders sometime in your career.

Thousands of U. S. businesses depend on exports for significant portions of their revenues. Every year, these companies export roughly \$700 billion in materials and merchandise, along with billions more in personal and professional services. If you work in one of these companies, you may well be called on to visit or at least communicate with a wide variety of people who speak languages other than English and who live in cultures quite different from what you're used to (see Figure 3. 1).

Of the top ten export markets for U. S. products, only three (Canada, Great Britain, and Singapore) speak English as an official language, and two of

those three (Canada and Singapore) have more than one official language. 3 In the global marketplace, most natural boundaries and national borders are no longer the impassable barriers they once were. Domestic markets are opening to worldwide competition as businesses of all sizes look for new growth opportunities outside their own countries.

For example, automotive giant Ford markets to customers in some 130 countries, providing websites that offer local information, usually in the local language. 4 The diversity of today's workforce brings distinct advantages to businesses:

- A broader range of views and ideas
- A better understanding of diverse, fragmented markets
- A broader pool of talent from which to recruit

The Advantages of a Diverse Workforce Even if you never visit another country or transact business on a global scale, you will interact with colleagues from a variety of cultures with a wide range of characteristics and life experiences.

Over the past few decades, many innovative companies have changed the way they approach diversity, from seeing it as a legal requirement to provide equal opportunities to seeing it as a strategic opportunity to connect with customers and take advantage of the broadest possible pool of talent. 5 Smart business leaders such as IBM's Ted CHAPTER 3 Communicating in a World of Diversity 65 FIGURE 3. 1 Languages of the World This map illustrates the incredible array of languages used around the world.

Each dot represents the geographic center of the more than 6, 900 languages tracked by the linguistic research firm SIL International. Even if all of your business communication takes place in English, you will interact with

audiences who speak a variety of other native languages. Children recognize the competitive advantages of a diverse workforce that offers a broader spectrum of viewpoints and ideas, helps companies understand and identify with diverse markets, and enables companies to benefit from a wider range of employee talents.

As Renee Wingo of Virgin Mobile USA, a cell phone operator based in Warren, New Jersey, puts it, " You're not going to create any magic as a manager unless you bring together people with diverse perspectives who aren't miniversions of you. " 6 Diversity is simply a fact of life for all companies. The United States has been a nation of immigrants from the beginning, and that trend continues today. The Western and Northern Europeans who made up the bulk of immigrants during the nation's early years now share space with people from across Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and other parts of the world.

By 2010 recent immigrants will account for half of all new U. S. workers. 7 Even the term minority, as it applies to nonwhite residents, makes less and less sense every year: In two states (California and New Mexico) and several dozen large Communication among people of diverse cultural backgrounds cities, Caucasian Americans no longer constitute a clear majority and life experiences is not always easy, but doing it successfully majority. 8 Nor is this pattern of immigration unique to the United States can create tremendous strategic advantages.

States: Workers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are moving to Europe in search of new opportunities, while workers from India, the Philippines, and

Southeast Asia contribute to the employment base of the Middle East. 9
However, you and your colleagues don't need to be recent immigrants to constitute a diverse workforce. Differences in everything from age and gender to religion and ethnic heritage to geography and military experience enrich the workplace. Both immigration and workforce diversity create advantages—and challenges—for business communicators throughout the world. 6 PART 1 Understanding the Foundations of Business Communication
The Challenges of Intercultural Communication A company's cultural diversity affects how its business messages are conceived, composed, delivered, received, and interpreted. Culture influences everything about communication, including • Language • Nonverbal signals • Word meaning • Time and space issues • Rules of human relationships Diversity affects how business messages are conceived, planned, sent, received, and interpreted in the workplace.

Today's increasingly diverse workforce encompasses a wide range of skills, traditions, backgrounds, experiences, outlooks, and attitudes toward work—all of which can affect employee behavior on the job. Supervisors face the challenge of communicating with these diverse employees, motivating them, and fostering cooperation and harmony among them. Teams face the challenge of working together closely, and companies are challenged to coexist peacefully with business partners and with the community as a whole. The interaction of culture and communication is so pervasive that separating the two is virtually impossible.

The way you communicate—from the language you speak and the nonverbal signals you send to the way you perceive other people—is influenced by the culture in which you were raised. The meaning of words, the significance of gestures, the importance of time and space, the rules of human relationships—these and many other aspects of communication are defined by culture. To a large degree, your culture influences the way you think, which naturally affects the way you communicate as both a sender and a receiver. So you can see how intercultural communication is much more complicated than simply matching language between sender and receiver. It goes beyond mere words to beliefs, values, and emotions. Throughout this chapter, you'll see numerous examples of how communication styles and habits vary from one culture to another. These examples are intended to illustrate the major themes of intercultural communication, not to give an exhaustive list of styles and habits of any particular culture.