

An introduction to intercultural communication assignment

[Sociology](#)



An Introduction to Intercultural Communication Intercultural communication is of importance to international businesses as it examines how people from different cultures, beliefs and religions come together to work and communicate with each other. Demands for intercultural communication skills are increasing as more and more businesses go global or international. They realize that there are barriers and limitations when entering a foreign territory. Without the help of intercultural communication they can unknowingly cause confusion and misunderstandings.

For these intercultural businesses to breach the cultural barriers encountered when stepping into foreign grounds it is vital for them to fully understand the cultural differences that exist so as to prevent damaging business relations due to intercultural communication gaps. There are many theories that set principles to help interpret the basis of intercultural communication. These theories help to iron out possible ripples of misunderstanding by giving a basic guideline on how to address situations.

These guidelines help prevent clashes between different cultures groups caused by misperceptions. The basic skills of intercultural communication are fundamentally general communication skills that can be used universally by all cultures and races. These skills are simply tweaked in a direction that takes the cultural limitation into consideration. An example of such communication skills in the intercultural environment is to listen without judging, repeat what you understand, confirm meanings, give suggestions and acknowledge a mutual understanding.

In a nutshell the main purpose of following such theories is to earn respect from others. Respect in all cultures in the world is a common language and by earning it through respecting other peoples culture and religion; the favor is returned. Cross Cultural Communication Consultants Cross cultural communication consultants have come a long way in the short period of time such specialists have been in demand. No longer are they expatriates with a few years overseas experience and the capability to impart their knowledge onto others.

Cross cultural consultants now bring expertise that is founded upon a number of key factors. Cross cultural consultants generally have a broad knowledge and experience of two or more different cultures. This knowledge is then employed to assist companies and individuals overcome challenges brought about through cross cultural differences in business. Areas in which assistance is needed may range from relocation briefings to company mergers or management techniques. The ability to diagnose and treat cross cultural problems is developed through their experience in a number of different fields.

Academic Knowledge Cross cultural consultants will generally have an academic background either in specific courses such as ' Cross Cultural Communication and Trade' or ' Cross Cultural Psychology' or in related courses such as ' International Relations' or ' Business Studies'. Their studies will equip them with the academic skills and knowledge of the field that will later be applied in the business context. Business Know-how It is critical for cross cultural consultants to have considerable business experience.

If this is lacking then academic knowledge is not usually sufficient to understand the mechanics of business operations. In order to understand how things work and the different challenges facing managers and staff it is critical to have experienced it first hand. Training Experience Through courses and practical experience a cross cultural consultant will have knowledge of training techniques. This will include communication skills, presentation methods, the use of activities and utilization of different technology and media. Living Abroad

Experience of living abroad, mixing with different cultures, speaking different languages and working in foreign offices is vital for any cross cultural consultant. Without having been exposed to a different culture how can one advise on working effectively with that culture? It is important that this emersion in the target culture has been to the extent that the cross cultural consultant can totally empathise with the culture and understand its dynamics. Speaking a Foreign Language Language carries with it cultural coding. All experts, commentators and linguists are unanimous that without knowledge of the language the culture can never be appreciated. A cross cultural consultant will therefore have this insider knowledge not only through living and working in a country but also by using and understanding the language. The complexity and diversity of cross cultural challenges in the international business world is reflected in the broad knowledge and skills of cross cultural consultants. Drawing on expertise gained through a variety of interrelated fields, the cross cultural consultant is now truly a specialist of great importance.

The Definition of Intercultural Communication What is intercultural communication? Intercultural communication in its most basic form refers to an academic field of study and research. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures behave, communicate and perceive the world around them. The findings of such academic research are then applied to 'real life' situations such as how to create cultural synergy between people from different cultures within a business or how psychologists understand their patients.

The definition of intercultural communication must also include strands of the field that contribute to it such as anthropology, cultural studies, psychology and communication. There are many researchers and academics of note within the intercultural field, who naturally all have different definitions of 'intercultural communication'. For example Karlfried Knapp defines it as "Intercultural communication,' can... be defined as the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups, which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behaviour. For those wanting to dig a bit deeper it may be a good idea to look into the works of Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, Harry C. Triandis, Fons Trompenaars, Clifford Geertz and Shalom Schwartz. The theories developed by the researchers and academics can and has been applied to many fields such as business, management, marketing, advertising and website design. As business becomes more and more international, many companies need to know how best to structure their companies, manage staff and communicate with customers. Intercultural communication gives them an insight into the areas

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hey need to address or understand. Intercultural communication theories are now also used within the education, health care and other public services due to growing multicultural populations. Cross Cultural Understanding Terminology within the cross cultural communications field can sometimes be baffling to those reading the literature, websites or promotional material. Many ask what is the difference between 'intercultural' and 'cross cultural'? What is 'cross cultural awareness' as opposed to 'cross cultural knowledge' or, are 'cultural sensitivity' and 'cultural competence' the same thing?

With a view to clarifying some of the above mentioned terminology, this article will examine terms used in relation to building cross cultural understanding within the business world. Cross cultural understanding simply refers to the basic ability of people within business to recognise, interpret and correctly react to people, incidences or situations that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural differences. The fundamental intention of cross cultural training is to equip the learner(s) with the appropriate skills to attain cross cultural understanding.

Once the foundations of cross cultural understanding have been laid, the learner(s), either through continued training or experiences within the workplace, gradually attains a more acute appreciation of cultural differences. The different types of appreciation are cross cultural knowledge, cross cultural awareness, cross cultural sensitivity and cross cultural competence. Although all the terms may appear similar in meaning, subtle differences exist between them. 'Cross Cultural Knowledge' is critical to

basic cross cultural understanding. Without it cross cultural appreciation cannot take place.

It refers to a surface level familiarization with cultural characteristics, values, beliefs and behaviours. ' Cross Cultural Awareness' develops from cross cultural knowledge as the learner understands and appreciates a culture internally. This may also be accompanied by changes within the learner's behaviour and attitudes such as a greater flexibility and openness. ' Cross Cultural Sensitivity' is a natural by-product of awareness and refers to an ability to read into situations, contexts and behaviours that are culturally rooted and be able to react to them appropriately.

An suitable response necessitates that the actor no longer carries his/her own culturally determined interpretations of the situation or behaviour (i. e. good/bad, right/wrong) which can only be nurtured through both cross cultural knowledge and awareness. ' Cross Cultural Competence' is and should be the aim of all those dealing with multicultural clients, customers or colleagues. ' Competence' is the final stage of cross cultural understanding and signifies the actor's ability to work effectively across cultures.

Cross cultural competency is beyond knowledge, awareness and sensitivity in that it is the digestion, integration and transformation of all the skills and information acquired through them, applied to create cultural synergy within the workplace. Stereotyping and Intercultural Training A common observation people make about intercultural awareness training is that it stereotypes people. The fact that intercultural training presents information on a particular nationality or culture is taken to be a negative attribute, i. e.

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that we box people with rigid labels that correlate to their behaviour, values or actions.

Such observations are misplaced. Intercultural awareness training does provide conclusions on cultures or nationalities but it does not stereotype. Stereotyping is usually a negative statement about a group of people. A stereotype emerges when a blanket perception is applied to an entire group of people. For example, we may know one Japanese person who is very quiet so we conclude that all Japanese are quiet and reserved. Or we see certain media images and conclude that because a person is Muslim they are prone to violence and aggression against non-Muslims.

Both are far from the truth. A stereotype is an incorrect perception of a people based on minimal experiential evidence. Stereotyping is therefore rightly seen as a negative way of seeing people. This is even true of positive stereotypes. Again, a positive stereotype is where we use a blanket expression for a whole people, i. e. all the Chinese are great at maths, all Germans are well organised or all English people are well mannered. Although the intent behind the statement is positive, it still does not reflect the truth.

As a consequence people shy away from making stereotypes and believe every individual should be taken on their own merit. Although in a perfect world this is an ideal scenario, when preparing someone with intercultural training to live in India, negotiate in Dubai or work with Brazilians, it is completely impractical. Intercultural training must therefore provide people with some sort of standard against which they can make reference. This is

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done through “generalizations” not stereotypes. Generalizations are different from and far more reliable than stereotypes.

What intercultural training does is observe a people, pinpoint commonalities and draw certain conclusions based on these. For example, an intercultural researcher or trainer working and/or living in Kuwait is able to make a few accurate, but at the same time, general statements about the Kuwaitis. They may therefore be able to make the generalizations that one should be aware of gender roles, that to do business building a personal relationship is crucial, that if you have a good network of contacts this should be used, and that decision making can be a long slow process that ultimately always rests at the top of an organisation.

Naturally there will be exceptions to these rules, but generalizations can and do paint a pretty accurate picture of a country or people. This is because although there are many layers to people, i. e. gender culture, lifestyle culture, regional culture, etc, they all in one way or another fall under the umbrella of national culture. To a certain extent then, most people will share common traits defined by their national culture. A salient point to note is that intercultural training discourages participants from using blanket views of peoples.

The spirit and ethos of intercultural training is to encourage people to discover one another through personal interaction. Real intercultural awareness only comes through experience. What intercultural training does is provide people who feel they need to know more about a country before working or living there with a safety net. This safety net provides them with

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a safe form of reference when they are unsure about an intercultural situation. Once that person actually goes through the experience of meeting someone, conducting negotiations or entertaining a guest they can then discard the safety net and refer to their own experiences.

In conclusion, intercultural training does not stereotype people but provides generalizations. These generalizations are based upon careful research and observation and offer people with simple guidelines on a country or culture. These guidelines simply act as an intercultural safety net people can turn to when uncertain. Only through experience can people really apply true intercultural knowledge and competency. Intercultural Training and the Iceberg Model Many people question what culture is. How can it be defined? What analogies can be used to describe it?

In intercultural training one of the questions that is often asked of participants is to think what culture means to them. What picture can they draw to describe it? Whether they draw a tree, cauldron, plate of food or a tapestry they are all valid as culture means different things to different people. In essence what they are trying to describe is something that is made up of lots of things and is multifaceted. Within intercultural training though there is one model or analogy of culture that most agree sums up the concept best; and that is the iceberg.

The iceberg perhaps lends itself best to this as it so graphically demonstrates the idea of having both a visible and invisible structure. Furthermore, the fate of the Titanic, whose crew failed to appreciate the true size of the unseen part of the iceberg, adds another dimension in illustrating to people

within intercultural training what can happen when this is ignored. So why the iceberg model? The iceberg as mentioned above has the visible tip. These are the areas of culture that we can see manifest in the physical sense.

In addition, more often than not these are the elements that we come into contact with first when diving into a new country or culture. Such “ visible” elements include things such as music, dress, dance, architecture, language, food, gestures, greetings, behaviours, devotional practices, art and more. In addition it can also relate to behaviours such as seeing people ignoring red traffic lights, spitting on the floor, smoking in public or queuing for a bus. All, depending on your own culture, may come across as weird, strange, rude, ignorant or simply silly.

None of the visible elements can ever make real sense without understanding the drivers behind them; and these are hidden on the bottom side of the iceberg, the invisible side. It is these invisible elements that are the underlying causes of what manifest on the visible side. So, when thinking about culture, the bottom side of the iceberg will include things such as religious beliefs, worldviews, rules of relationships, approach to the family, motivations, tolerance for change, attitudes to rules, communication styles, modes of thinking, comfort with risk, the difference between public and private, gender differences and more.

So for example, why do the English queue for everything? This relates to their approach to fairness, justice, order and rights. The rationale behind the queue is that those that get there first should by rights be served first or get

on the bus first. Many other cultures simply do not queue in this manner as it is not part of their cultural programming. It is for the reasons of clarity that the iceberg model has become so popular. As one can see from the brief example above it perfectly demonstrates the idea of an unseen world manifesting in many different ways on the seen.

Stereotypes: An Intercultural No-No As more or more people from different backgrounds, countries, cultures and religions immigrate to foreign lands, those countries become an intercultural melting pot. In order for the native people and the immigrant population to blend and create a thriving and successful atmosphere both sides need to develop some sort of intercultural tolerance and understanding of the differences that may exist between them. An example of poor intercultural understanding, or one based simply on stereotypes, is offered by the town of Herouxville in Quebec, Canada.

A declaration issued by the town in January 2007, which was designed to inform immigrants, “ that the way of life which they abandoned when they left their countries of origin cannot be recreated here [i. e. Herouxville]”. It then went on to state that the immigrant population would therefore have to refrain from their cultural norms and activities such as to “ kill women by stoning them in public, burning them alive, burning them with acid, circumcising them, etc. The declaration paints a rather sad picture of the officials that administer the town and highlights not only their rather insular outlook but a world view of “ others” based on crass and frankly incorrect stereotypes. To simply consider that anyone from another country (in this case more than likely a Middle Eastern or Asian one) regards the stoning of

women and burning them alive as part of daily life derives from crude, and media led, stereotypes of other peoples.

Stereotypes are at their most basic level a set of assumed characteristics about a certain group of people whose actual beliefs, habits and realities more often than not disagree with the imposed assumptions. Stereotypes are usually based on factors such as exaggeration, distortion, ignorance, racism, cultural factors or even historical experiences. Stereotyping is therefore rightly seen as a negative way of seeing people. This is even true of what are called “ positive stereotypes”. A positive stereotype is where we use a blanket expression for a whole people, i. . all the Chinese are great at maths, all Germans are well organised or all English people are well mannered. Although the intent behind the statement is positive, it still does not reflect the truth. What we have witnessed in Herouxville should not be seen as an isolated incident. Such assumptions about foreigners exist all over the planet. However, this does not make it right or excusable. The message it does give is that there is a lot of work to be done in order to educate people to become more culturally competent.

Cultural competency is a term used to describe the ability to work, communicate and live across cultures and cultural boundaries. One achieves this through an instilled understanding of cultures on a general level as well as an informed one about specific cultures on a more detailed level. As well as knowledge it has to work in tandem with behavioural and attitudinal changes. Cultural competency is important in this day and age for exactly

the reasons cited in this article. We, as citizens of planet earth, are no longer confined to our national and cultural borders.

We mix with people from different cultures, ethnicities, religions and colours on a daily basis. In order to make this intercultural experience work on all levels from education to business to government, people have to develop basic skills in intercultural communication and understanding. In order to assist the officials at Herouxville, five basic steps to cultural competence are presented below: 1. Break Assumptions Everyone makes or has assumptions about others. Assumptions are beliefs rather than objective truth and are usually influenced by a number of subjective factors.

People need to assess their assumptions and ask themselves why they hold those ideas or beliefs. 2. Empathise In order to come to appreciate and understand people from different cultures, empathy is vital. Through putting yourself in someone else's shoes you come to see or appreciate their point of view. 3. Involve Involving others in your world and involving yourself in other's empowers and educates. Don't build walls between people but learn from one another. 4. Avoid Herd Mentality Herd mentality refers to a closed and one dimensional approach.

Such a way of thinking curbs creativity, innovation and advancement as people are restricted in how to think, approach and engage with people or challenges. Cultural competency can only develop if people are encouraged to think as individuals, bring their cultural influences to the table and share ideas that may be outside the box. 5. Shun Insensitivity People can and do behave in culturally insensitive ways. By attacking someone's person, you

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attack their culture and therefore their dignity. This can only be divisive. Cultural competency is based upon people thinking through words and actions to ensure they do not act inappropriately.

When insensitive behaviour is witnessed it is the responsibility of all to shun it and ensure it remains unacceptable. 6. Be Wise Wisdom is not called wisdom for nothing. People need to be aware how to interact with people with respect and knowledge. Cultural competency is essentially founded upon wisdom, i. e. showing maturity of thought and action in dealing with people. Through thinking things out and have background knowledge to intercultural differences much of the communication problems witnessed within business could be avoided. What is Culture? The question is often asked - " What is culture? How can it be defined and what does it do? By way of answering the question a set of quotes has been compiled which hopefully gives some sort of indication as to what culture actually is. O Mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. The Quran, 49: 13 Culture is a thin but very important veneer that you must be careful not to scratch. People from different cultures are basically the same and respond in the same way. However, make sure that you understand their basic customs and show an interest and willingness to learn the differences between your cultures.

Mike Wills Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas. E. Schein Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action.

Clifford Geertz Culture is a little like dropping an Alka-Seltzer into a glass-you don't see it, but somehow it does something. Hans Magnus Enzensberger I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mahatma Gandhi

If man is to survive, he will have learned to take a delight in the essential differences between men and between cultures. He will learn that differences in ideas and attitudes are a delight, part of life's exciting variety, not something to fear. Gene Roddenberry On a group of theories one can found a school; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together among men. Ignazio Silone A culture may be conceived as a network of beliefs and purposes in which any string in the net pulls and is pulled by the others, thus perpetually changing the configuration of the whole. Jacques Barzun

Culture is the name for what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table-talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training, the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire. All communities have a culture. It is the climate of their civilization. Walter Lippmann Culture means control over nature. Johan Huizinga Culture is roughly anything we do and the monkeys don't. Lord Raglan Business Culture UK In the last few decades the intercultural communications field has increasingly gained importance within politics, trade and commerce.

Both international and national companies are now realising that a clash of cultures can and does have an adverse affect on business success. This clash takes place both on an international level, with staff frequently being sent abroad to conduct business and on a domestic level, with an increasingly diverse and multi-cultural UK workforce. The interdependent, global and multi-cultural marketplace of the 21st century brings with it new challenges. Intercultural communication training aims to reduce the negative impact culture can have on business transactions.

With differences in areas such as values, beliefs, norms, manners and etiquette there is plenty of room for misunderstandings and poor communication. Intercultural awareness seeks to minimise such consequences and maximise the potential of businesses by equipping them with the appropriate tools to communicate across cultures effectively. Many will ask what intercultural differences impact upon business. By way of highlighting this it may be useful to briefly look at UK business culture. If a foreigner were to come to work or conduct business in the UK what areas may they find different? Let us consider punctuality.

Most North American and European countries are 'clock conscious'. Time is money, being late for an appointment is the height of bad etiquette and coming in late to work is unprofessional. However, in many other countries this is not so. Being late for work or an appointment is acceptable and would not have harmful repercussions. Compared with other countries, the UK office can be a reasonably relaxed and informal environment. Conversations can become personal, humour is seen as a positive and relationships

frequently switch between that of friends and colleagues depending on the situation.

A new German or Japanese colleague may at first find this unprofessional and lacking in professionalism. Brainstorming, gaining consensus and objective criticism are all part of the British business meeting. However, in hierarchical cultures none of the above would take place. Meetings are usually the forum for decisions to be conveyed rather than made, criticising or challenging the ideas of colleagues and seniors would be completely unacceptable and would result in the loss of honour and face.

These brief examples are but three of numerous illustrations of business culture that a foreigner may need to understand before working with the British. If a person came to the UK and was unaware of such issues they may very well be misunderstood if they were constantly late, never contributed in meetings or did not join in with office banter. Intercultural awareness training aims at familiarising people with a culture they (are going to) work with. The end result is stronger relationships, enhanced communication and an environment where culture becomes a vehicle to success.

Far from wanting to stereotype nationalities and offer definitive, concrete definitions of their culture and society, intercultural awareness training offers a framework that can act as a safety net for those dealing with different cultures by offering guidelines and boundaries in order to minimise the negative impact of intercultural differences. Cross Cultural Advertising Culture is a like dropping an Alka-seltzer into a glass - you don't see it, but somehow it does something Hans Magnus Enzensberger Culture affects

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everything we do. This applies to all areas of human life from personal relationships to conducting business abroad.

When interacting within our native cultures, culture acts as a framework of understanding. However, when interacting with different cultures this framework no longer applies due to cross cultural differences. Cross cultural communication aims to help minimise the negative impact of cross cultural differences through building common frameworks for people of different cultures to interact within. In business, cross cultural solutions are applied in areas such as HR, team building, foreign trade, negotiations and website design. Cross cultural communication solutions are also critical to effective cross cultural advertising.

Services and products are usually designed and marketed at a domestic audience. When a product is then marketed at an international audience the same domestic advertising campaign abroad will in most cases be ineffective. The essence of successful advertising is convincing people that a product is meant for them. By purchasing it, they will receive some benefit, whether it be lifestyle, status, convenience or financial. However, when an advertising campaign is taken abroad different values and perceptions as to what enhances status or gives convenience exist.

These differences make the original advertising campaign defunct. It is therefore critical to any cross cultural advertising campaign that an understanding of a particular culture is acquired. By way of highlighting areas of cross cultural differences in advertising a few examples shall be examined. Language in Cross Cultural Advertising It may seem somewhat

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obvious to state that language is key to effective cross cultural advertising. However, the fact that companies persistently fail to check linguistic implications of company or product names and slogans demonstrates that such issues are not being properly addressed.

The advertising world is littered with examples of linguistic cross cultural blunders. Of the more comical was Ford's introduction of the ' Pinto' in Brazil. After seeing sales fail, they soon realised that this was due to the fact that Brazilians did not want to be seen driving a car meaning ' tiny male genitals'. Language must also be analysed for its cultural suitability. For example, the slogan employed by the computer games manufacturer, EA Sports, " Challenge Everything" raises grumbles of disapproval in religious or hierarchical societies where harmonious relationships are maintained through the values of respect and non-confrontation.

It is imperative therefore that language be examined carefully in any cross cultural advertising campaign

Communication Style in Cross Cultural Advertising

Understanding the way in which other cultures communicate allows the advertising campaign to speak to the potential customer in a way they understand and appreciate. For example, communication styles can be explicit or implicit. An explicit communicator (e. g. USA) assumes the listener is unaware of background information or related issues to the topic of discussion and therefore provides it themselves. Implicit communicators (e. . Japan) assume the listener is well informed on the subject and minimises information relayed on the premise that the listener will understand from implication. An explicit communicator would find an implicit communication

style vague, whereas an implicit communicator would find an explicit communication style exaggerated. Colours, Numbers and Images in Cross Cultural Advertising Even the simplest and most taken for granted aspects of advertising need to be inspected under a cross cultural microscope. Colours, numbers, symbols and images do not all translate well across cultures.

In some cultures there are lucky colours, such as red in China and unlucky colours, such as black in Japan. Some colours have certain significance; green is considered a special colour in Islam and some colours have tribal associations in parts of Africa. Many hotels in the USA or UK do not have a room 13 or a 13th floor. Similarly, Nippon Airways in Japan do not have the seat numbers 4 or 9. If there are numbers with negative connotations abroad, presenting or packaging products in those numbers when advertising should be avoided.

Images are also culturally sensitive. Whereas it is common to see pictures of women in bikinis on advertising posters on the streets of London, such images would cause outrage in the Middle East. Cultural Values in Cross Cultural Advertising When advertising abroad, the cultural values underpinning the society must be analysed carefully. Is there a religion that is practised by the majority of the people? Is the society collectivist or individualist? Is it family orientated? Is it hierarchical? Is there a dominant political or economic ideology?

All of these will impact an advertising campaign if left unexamined. For example, advertising that focuses on individual success, independence and stressing the word "I" would be received negatively in countries where

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teamwork is considered a positive quality. Rebelliousness or lack of respect for authority should always be avoided in family orientated or hierarchical societies. By way of conclusion, we can see that the principles of advertising run through to cross cultural advertising too. That is - know your market, what is attractive to them and what their aspirations are.

Cross cultural advertising is simply about using common sense and analysing how the different elements of an advertising campaign are impacted by culture and modifying them to best speak to the target audience. Cross Cultural Awareness - ' Big Brother' in Arabia The breadth and scope of cross cultural understanding applies to many fields in the business and personal spheres. Many cross cultural experts focus on the application of cross cultural communication to business and related areas such as negotiation, advertising and marketing. Others promote the idea that cross cultural awareness is necessary in most aspects of 21st century life due to the international nature of the world today. Therefore art, music and TV are also areas where cross cultural awareness becomes relevant. A recent example of poor cross cultural sensitivity occurred with the launching of a new TV show in the Middle East. The television show ' Big Brother', where contestants are kept under lock and key inside the same house until public voting leaves a winner, was first launched in the UK on Channel 4 in 2001. It has gone on to see spin off versions in countries such as Russia, Turkey and Australia.

In early 2004, the Arab TV channel MBC surprisingly decided to produce their own version, Al-Ra'is (the Boss), in Bahrain. Perhaps just as unsurprising was

the decision to cancel the show after its second showing following intense media criticism accompanied by protests on the streets of Bahrain. One can only wonder how the MBC producers failed to see the cross cultural implications of Al-Ra'is. An understanding that the format and logistics of the show demanded some cross cultural modifications became manifest as the producers decided to segregate the sleeping quarters of the male and female contestants.

In addition a prayer area, women's lounge and mixed-sex communal area were introduced to better accommodate Islamic principles. Targeting an audience comprising of mainly Muslims, Al-Ra'is failed to read the cross cultural signs. The close quarter interaction between men and women was culturally unacceptable to the majority of viewers. " It is normal for males and females to mix, but not to put them together in the same house for a long time," said 21-year-old student Maryam al-Sayrafi, who summed up most Muslims' feelings on the show.

The failure of Al-Ra'is points to two things: 1) the adverse consequences of a failure to incorporate cross cultural analysis into a business strategy; in this case a TV show, and 2) the importance of cross cultural understanding in transferring ideas and concepts across cultures. Cross Cultural Communication & PR The Public Relations (PR) industry is responsible for creating and maintaining relationships between clients and customers. Through areas such as brand management, advertising, media relations and crisis management, PR practitioners seek to foster interest, trust and belief in a product or company.

PR practitioners are aware of how best to carry this out when dealing within their own nations and cultures, however, when dealing with a foreign audience it is critical that cross cultural differences are recognised. By way of illustrating the impact cross cultural awareness can have on the success or failure of a PR campaign a brief example can be cited: Pepsodent tried to sell its toothpaste in Southeast Asia by emphasizing that it “ whitens your teeth. ” They found out that the local natives chew betel nuts to blacken their teeth because they found it attractive.

Had the PR company behind this campaign analysed the cross cultural issues related to Pepsodent’s product, the failure of this PR campaign could have been avoided. Cross cultural differences can make or break a PR campaign. It is therefore crucial that PR practitioners dealing with PR campaigns that incorporate a cross cultural element analyse likely cross cultural differences. A few key areas shall be highlighted in order to help PR practitioners begin to consider how culture may affect future projects. Language and Culture

In order for a PR campaign to be successful abroad, an appreciation of the target language and its cultural nuances is necessary. The PR and advertising industries are littered with examples of poor translations and a lack of cross cultural understanding leading to PR failure. For example, when Ford launched the ‘ Pinto’ in Brazil they were puzzled as to why sales were dead. Fortunately they found out that Brazilians did not want to be seen driving a car meaning ‘ small male genitals’ and promptly changed the name. Translation of documents, slogans and literature must be checked and double checked for meanings and cross cultural nuances.

This should not only take place between languages but also within languages. Even in English there are cross cultural differences in meanings. For example, the airline UAL headlined an article about Paul Hogan, star of Crocodile Dundee, with, “ Paul Hogan Camps it up” which unfortunately in the UK and Australia is slang for “ flaunting homosexuality”. The Spoken Word Areas where the spoken word is used in PR, such as press conferences or interviews, should be prepared for within a cross cultural framework. In short, speaking styles and the content used differs across cultures.

British and American communication styles are described as ‘ explicit’, meaning messages are conveyed solely through words. Correlating background information is deemed necessary and divulged, ambiguity is avoided and spoken words have literal meaning. In many other cultures, communication is ‘ implicit’. The message listeners are likely to interpret is based on factors such as who is speaking, the context and non-verbal cues. Spoken words do not fully convey the whole story as listeners are expected to read between the lines.

With relation to content, speakers must be aware of the cross cultural differences in humour, metaphors, aphorisms and anecdotes. In addition, references to topics such as politics and/or religion can be a very sensitive issue in other cultures. When the spoken word is used the cross cultural distinctions of the target culture must be incorporated in order to help the speaker appeal to and identify with the audience. The Written Word Press releases, features and copywriting all require a certain amount of cross cultural sensitivity when being applied abroad.

Journalistic traditions, writing styles, news worthiness, delivery systems and whether a 'free press' exists are all areas that will affect how the written word is tailored. In addition, the most important point, from a cross cultural perspective, is how to write in a way that engages the readers in that society or culture. Some cultures may prefer colourful and inspirational writing, others factual and objective. Some may be motivated by language that incorporates a religious or moral tone, others by a money-orientated or materialistic one.

When writing, the first step should always be to look at and integrate the cross cultural particulars of the target audience. Communication Channels PR practitioners employ many different communication channels when trying to circulate information relating to their campaign. The main channels of communication in the UK or America are the radio, the press, TV, internet and public spaces. However, these channels may not always be applicable abroad. In many countries the radio, TV or newspapers may not be the primary source of information. Literacy rates may be poor and/or radios may be expensive.

In Africa, only 1.4% of the population have access to the internet. Even where such channels of communication do exist, such as TV, some methods used by PR practitioners, namely guerrilla marketing, would be interpreted differently in foreign countries. For example, interrupting live TV may be laughed at in the UK but in other countries it would be seen as irresponsible and rebellious. The usual channels of communication in some countries would simply have no effect in terms of PR. In such countries, local

alternatives need to be sought such as religious leaders, tribal chiefs, school teachers or NGO's.

Information coming from such figures will not only reach the audience but be perceived as more credible than if it were from foreigners. PR Materials The use of publicity materials in PR campaigns such as logos, slogans, pictures, colours and designs must all be cross culturally examined. Pictures of seemingly innocuous things in one culture could mean something different in another. For example, a company advertised eyeglasses in Thailand by featuring a variety of cute animals wearing glasses. The ad failed as animals are considered to be a low form of life in Thailand and no self respecting Thai would wear anything worn by animals.

Similarly, logos or symbols are culturally sensitive. A soft drink was introduced into Arab countries with an attractive label that had a six-pointed star on it. The Arabs interpreted this as pro-Israeli and refused to buy it.

Conclusion The above cited areas are but a few of those that require decent cross cultural assessment by PR practitioners if they wish their international and cross cultural campaigns to succeed. The aim of implementing a cross cultural analysis in PR is to build campaigns that target the audience as best as possible, meaning appealing to their world view while avoiding offense.

Cross Cultural Presentations The international flavour of many people's jobs naturally means that there is greater interaction between people from different cultures. Within the business environment, understanding and coping with intercultural differences between people is critical to ensuring that interpersonal communication is successful. Intercultural awareness is

necessary for two reasons. Firstly, it minimises the possibility of misunderstandings and/or the causing of offense through intercultural mishaps. Secondly, it is a means to maximising the potential of business relationships through the utilization of intercultural differences productively. One area within the business environment in which intercultural awareness is a necessity is in the business presentation. Directors, managers, salespeople, consultants and business personnel are regularly required to deliver presentations. However, when one is asked to give a presentation to an audience from a different culture there are intercultural factors that can hinder the success of a presentation.

By way of illustrating some of the intercultural differences in presentations, these tips to effective cross cultural presentations are offered: Language: The language you use in a cross cultural presentation is important. Although the majority of the language that is used in a cross cultural presentation will be understood by an English speaking foreign audience, a speaker must be careful when it comes to slang, idioms or phrases. If an Englishman were to talk of being “knocked for six” or “bowled over” he may very well be met with puzzled expressions.

More subtly, when an American talks of a ‘billion’ he means a thousand million, whereas in the UK this would mean a million million. Try and keep language simple. Body Language: Pay attention to your body language in a cross cultural presentation. Some cultures are quite animated and will appreciate hand gestures and the expression of emotion through the body. Others expect speakers to remain calm and would find such behaviour over

the top. Similarly pay attention to the use of gestures. The thumbs up may mean 'good' in the USA but it means something very different in Iran.

Eye contact can also be a major intercultural difference. Some cultures consider strong eye contact a sign of sincerity, others find it overbearing and an invasion of privacy. Do your cross cultural homework before a presentation. Time: Be aware of different approaches to time across cultures.

Some cultures prefer a structured, timetabled approach to conducting business affairs, others are more casual. In countries where a start time is considered a guide rather than a definite, allow time for networking or engage in some chit chat until others arrive. Oppositely, if you arrive late to a meeting in a punctual culture, expect some negative feedback. Always show the appropriate stiffness or flexibility depending on the culture.

Emotions: Some cross cultural presentations may be in front of a small number of people and deal with sensitive issues in a pressured environment. In such intercultural situations one should always keep their emotions in check. In some cultures a certain amount of cross examination or scrutiny may occur. If this happens bear in mind the positive intentions behind such actions, i. e. the questions are only being posed to establish facts, not to undermine you.

Never lose patience, show frustration or display anger. To do so will lead to a loss of credibility. Style of Presentation: Different cultures learn and take in information in varying ways. One should always try and tailor their presentation style to meet the needs of the target culture. Some cultures, such as Europeans, prefer information to be presented in detail and in a way

that sets down foundations that act as the support to a final argument or point. In such a presentation the speaker should gradually lead the audience, using a logical succession of points, to a conclusion.

On the other hand, some cultures, like the US, prefer a much faster paced presentation that is bottom-line orientated, meaning the presenter speaks from a point rather towards a point. Use of Technology: Power Point is not the default method of giving a presentation across the world. Some countries many not even have the technical capabilities to accommodate this so one would need to adapt to the resources at hand, whether it be an Over Head Projector or blackboard. Some cultures do not even like a visual element to presentations and find much more worth in words and personality.

Content: In a cross cultural presentation, ensure you tailor the content of a presentation to the audience. Different cultures expect different things from a business presentation. Long term orientated cultures may be excited about future projections and figures, but others would rather learn more about the presenter's credentials, accomplishments and experience. A presenter needs to ask whether the target culture will appreciate factual, statistical information presented visually, or a more personal oratory approach.

Audience Participation:

Audiences react in different ways across cultures. Some are very engaging and are willing to participate in exercises and Q sessions, others are the opposite. Audiences also show respect in many ways. A Japanese audience may close their eyes while listening; a US one may clap when a good point is made and a Saudi one may do nothing at all. Although the number of areas

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where one could point to intercultural differences in presentations is vast, for the sake of brevity the above mentioned areas have been highlighted as a way of drawing attention to some of the major ones.

It is hoped these can then act as a foundation to improving ones insight into the way intercultural differences manifest in the business environment. Cross Cultural Solutions for International Business by Neil Payne Globalisation, the expansion of intercontinental trade, technological advances and the increase in the number of companies dealing on the international stage have brought about a dramatic change in the frequency, context and means by which people from different cultural backgrounds interact.

Cross cultural solutions to international business demands are increasingly being viewed as a valid and necessary method in enhancing communication and interaction in and between companies, between companies and customers and between colleagues. Cross cultural consultancies are involved in aiding companies to find solutions to the challenges cross cultural differences carry. International and national businesses are ultimately the result of people.

As with incompatible software, if people are running on different cultural coding, problems can occur. Cross cultural consultancies therefore concentrate their efforts on interpersonal communication. Different cultures and cultural backgrounds between a highly diverse staff base brings with it obstacles, challenges and difficulties. Cross cultural differences manifest in general areas such as in behaviour, etiquette, norms, values, expressions, group mechanics and non-verbal communication. These cross cultural

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differences then follow on through to high level areas such as management styles, corporate culture, marketing, HR and PR. In order to overcome potential pitfalls, specialist attention is required in the form of a cross cultural consultant. As one would approach a doctor for a medical diagnosis or an accountant to examine finances, cross cultural consultants offer the expertise, experience and know-how to diagnose problems and provide solutions to interpersonal cultural differences. Within companies there are many facets in which cultural differences manifest.

Some key areas which cross cultural consultants deal with include, but are not exclusive to, the following: Cross Cultural HR: HR covers a wide range of business critical areas that need cross cultural analysis. Consultants may offer advice on a number of areas including recruitment, relocation, international assignments, staff retention and training programmes. Cross Cultural Team-Building: in order to have a well functioning business unit within a company, communication is critical. Cross cultural consultants will provide tools and methods to promote staff integration, reduce cross cultural conflicts and build team spirit.

This is essentially done through highlighting differences and building on strengths to ensure they are used positively. Cross Cultural Synergy: international mergers, acquisitions and joint-ventures require people from different cultural backgrounds to harmonise in order to succeed. Cross cultural consultants counsel on group mechanics, communication styles, norms, values and integration processes. Cross Cultural Awareness Training: working with colleagues, customers or clients from different cultural

backgrounds, with different religions, values and etiquettes can occasionally lead to problems.

Cross cultural awareness training is usually a generic introduction into a culture, country, region or religion. The aim is to equip the trainee with the adequate knowledge to deal comfortably with people from different cultures, avoiding misunderstandings and mistakes. Cross Cultural Training for Expatriate Relocation: staff that travel overseas need to understand the cultural basics of the host country or region. Knowledge of the country's history, culture, laws, traditions, business practices and social etiquettes all help to minimise the impact of culture shock and hence smooth their transition overseas.

Cross Cultural Negotiations: equipped with their knowledge of the two or more cultures that can be meeting around the negotiation table, a cross cultural consultant advises on areas such as negotiation strategies, styles, planning, closure and etiquette in order to increase the chance of a successful outcome, free from misunderstandings, suspicions and general cross cultural communication breakdown. Cross Cultural PR Consultancy: brand image, public relations and advertising are all areas companies must be careful of when moving out of the national context.

Tastes and values change dramatically from continent to continent. It is crucial to understand whether the brand name, image or advertising campaign is culturally applicable in the target country. Cross cultural consultants examine words, images, pictures, colours and symbols to ensure they fit well with the target culture. Cross Cultural Language Training:

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Language training is an area where little investment is made by companies, but where the business advantages are great. Linguistic knowledge goes a long way in bridging cultural gaps and smoothing lines of communication.

Cross cultural consultancies provide language training to business staff, moulding their learning to the business environment in which they work. In conclusion, clearly the role and expertise of cross cultural communication consultants is important for today's international business. The potential pitfalls cross cultural differences present to companies are extensive. In essence a cross cultural consultant's primary objective is integration. This integration, between colleagues, clients and customers is crucial for business success.

Equipped with experience, knowledge and above all objectivity, a cross cultural consultant creates bridges of understanding and opens lines of communication. For more information on how Kwintessential can aid your business please visit our Cross Cultural Awareness Briefings page. Culture and Website Localization With the rise in ownership of computers and internet usage growing daily, the internet is fast becoming the primary port of call for information, shopping and services. In addition, those computer and internet users are increasingly from non-English speaking countries.

At the end of 2002, it was estimated that 32% of internet users were non-native English speakers. This figure is constantly rising. In response, businesses have quickly become aware of the benefits of website localization. Website localization is the process of modifying an existing website to make it accessible, usable and culturally suitable to a target

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audience. Website localization is a multi-layered process needing both programming expertise and linguistic/cultural knowledge. If either is missing, the chances are that a localization project will encounter problems.

In the majority of cases it is the lack of linguistic and cultural input that lets a website localization project down. In order to give an insight into the impact culture has on website localization the following examples depict areas in which a solid understanding of the target culture is necessary. Language in Website Localization Translating a website from English into another language is not as simple as it may appear. There are numerous factors that have to be taken into consideration when translating a websites' content. Do all the words, phrases, sayings and metaphors translate directly to the target language?

Would it be wise to translate the phrase "everyman for himself" in text describing a company or product if this is going to be read by a highly collectivist culture? Does the content of your website use humour and if so will the target culture appreciate or even understand it? Native alternatives should always be sought and used in any website localization. When translating into another language carefully consider the variants. If it is to be an Arabic website then is aimed at Tunisians or Iraqis, Egyptians or Yemenis? If you are targeting all Arabic speakers then ensure Modern Standard Arabic has been employed by your translator.

One must analyse the style of the language and the target audience. If the audience is foreign business personnel, the vocabulary, grammar and punctuation must reflect this. If the audience is informal or youth orientated

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then a more relaxed language must be used. Just as we in the UK would identify the difference between a site using “ posh English” and “ street English”, other cultures will have the same perceptions of language. Using the wrong language for the wrong reader in your localization project will lead to a misunderstanding of the site or company.

It is essential to assess what information is necessary to carry over into the new site. Do not assume that all information on the English site is automatically transferred over. One must evaluate the target culture and society. Is it a culture that relies on information rich writing to fully understand a concept or product or is a culture that relies more on images or one that needs little text to grasp ideas and concepts? If your English site employs a lot of technical language then consider how best to transfer these concepts without the use of language. Pictures in Website Localization

Images carry many subtle cultural messages within them. These can speak volumes about your company or product. Pictures or images may have certain negative connotations that may repel viewers. This is now an area that thankfully is receiving attention in website localization. For example, if a travel site in a Muslim populated country used pictures of scantily clad women in bikinis, disco dancing and beer drinking, the chances are that they would not be very successful. When including pictures of personnel it is wise to tailor these to what the target audience will look positively upon.

A picture of the Director behind a desk in an office will be fine for a seniority respecting society, but for an egalitarian society it is better to show the Director mixing with staff. It is through pictures that websites can either

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relate to an audience or repel them. Symbols in Website Localization As with pictures, symbols can cause problems in localization. Icons using fingers such as an OK sign or V-sign may mean different things to different cultures. Our Western symbols do not always mean the same abroad. An oft cited example is the representation of the house referring to a home page, or a letterbox to mail.

The use of animals in logos can cause embarrassment and further problems. For example, pigs are considered unclean in the Middle East and cows as holy in India. Colours in Website Localization Colours are also loaded with cultural meanings that need to be analysed in website localization. Choosing the wrong colour for your logo or background will not always have disastrous consequences, but avoiding them is always advisable. For example, in Japan white is commonly associated with mourning. In China red is auspicious. In Africa certain colours represent different tribes.

For more information visit “ Colour in Web Design” Navigation in Website Localization It is even the most taken for granted aspects of website layout that must be analysed properly for a successful localization project. In the West we assume that how we present websites is how it naturally should be done. This is far from the truth. A common problem experienced in localization is the effect on layout through translation. Foreign scripts can make your pages need more room or less room depending on the target language in the localization. Not all languages read from left to right.

Arabic is from right to left and both Japanese and Chinese are from top to bottom. Access to certain pages is also a factor that can be considered as

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relevant. Highly hierarchical cultures may view a site positively if it is “member only” access, whereas an egalitarian culture may find it disagreeable. Content in Website Localization Examining your written content in any localization process is critical to its success. This is not only important for proper transfer of aspects such as dates, currencies, and units of measurement but for the presenting the correct image. For example, will the site focus on a product or a company?

Both bring with them certain considerations dependent on the target culture. If a company is marketing itself in a culture that respects seniority and hierarchy, readers will want to see information on senior members. Along with their titles and rank they will also want to evaluate them through information on their professional qualifications, experience and contacts. These areas in the UK may generally be avoided as in our culture it is bordering on self-indulgence and boasting. Conclusion Culture affects everything we do, say, read, hear and think and even websites cannot escape the influence of culture.

The impact of culture on website localization is huge. The above few examples are literally the tip of the iceberg. The number of variables that have to be taken into consideration requires the expertise of both a website designer along with a cross cultural communications consultant. In tandem they can identify the issues that will impact on the successful localization of a site. At a time where the internet is entering more and more houses it is crucial that companies involved in the internationalization of their business

consider website localization and take care to use effective cross cultural analysis.

To read more on the importance of Website Localization please see our article Benefits of Website Localization. Intercultural Synergy in Mergers & Acquisitions Economic pressures developed within the framework of a global marketplace have led to unprecedented numbers of mergers and acquisitions over the past decade. The number of mergers and acquisitions involving US companies alone in 2004 reached 376 with an aggregate total paid of US\$22. 64 billion. In comparison, in 2003, the total amount paid was US\$12. 92 billion. However, statistics show that the failure rate of most mergers and acquisitions lies somewhere between 40-80%.

If one were to define ' failure' as failure to increase shareholder value then statistics show these to be at the higher end of the scale at 83% (Cnnfn. com 1999). The facts highlight a worryingly poor success rate for international mergers and acquisitions. Why? Many business commentators are now acknowledging that failure does not have its roots simply in financial, monetary and legal issues but in lack of intercultural synergy. Research suggests that up to 65% of failed mergers and acquisitions are due to ' people issues', i. e. ntercultural differences causing communication breakdowns that result in poor productivity. A recent example of such intercultural failure has been that of DaimlerChrysler. Both sides in the partnership set out to show that intercultural hurdles would and could be overcome in their global merger. Recent articles in the Wall Street Journal and Business Week suggest however that DaimlerChrysler underestimated

the influence of culture, and due to culture clash, almost two years later is still struggling to become a unified global organization.

Such discourse is highlighting the need for more intercultural training both within the framework of mergers and acquisitions and for key personnel such as managers and HR departments. In both instances culture is being ignored rather than being embraced and used positively. Piero Morosini, author of *Managing Cultural Differences: Effective Strategy and Execution Across Cultures in Global Corporate Alliances*, emphasizes that, “misunderstood national cultural diff