

# Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication (or cross-cultural communication) is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups, or how culture affects communication. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In this sense it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted.<sup>[1]</sup>

With regard to intercultural communication proper, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds *interact*. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. Intercultural communication plays a role in social sciences such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology and communication studies. Intercultural communication is also referred to as the base for international businesses. Several cross-cultural service providers assist with the development of intercultural communication skills. Research is a major part of the development of intercultural communication skills.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

Identity and culture are also studied within the discipline of communication to analyze how globalization influences ways of thinking, beliefs, values, and identity, within and between cultural environments. Intercultural communication scholars approach theory with a dynamic outlook and do not believe culture can be measured nor that cultures share universal attributes. Scholars acknowledge that culture and communication shift along with societal changes and theories should consider the constant

# Purposes of intercultural communication

Intercultural communication is the verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. Basically, 'inter-' is a prefix that means 'between' and cultural means... well, from a culture, so intercultural communication is the communication between cultures

## importance

The importance of intercultural communication in the workplace cannot, and should not be undermined. It plays an important role in the functioning of an organization and affects the final output too. Though cross-cultural interaction is not new and has existed for ages, with the advent of globalization, the world has come close together. It is not surprising then that people have to travel to different parts of the world as a part of their job and have to adapt to that new environment. However, adaptation is not always easy, and a little support from colleagues goes a long way in easing the process of 'fitting in' for the immigrant employee. This article explains to you the importance of intercultural communication in the workplace. [1].

Important factors.

Intercultural communication mainly relates to issues pertaining to speech and culture of those belonging to an environment or land different from their own. It is obvious that a person who grows up in China is going to have a different culture than someone born and brought up in the United States. Even people from the United Kingdom find it difficult to adapt to the United States and vice versa, though these are seemingly similar countries and even speak the same language.

In the work environment, these cultures affect the behavior and values of the employees. How they respond to superiors, to colleagues and to subordinates, are all determined by the culture they have been bred in. Their attitude towards and their comprehension about their surroundings is also different. Their pattern of communication is varied and their concept of formality and informality is different. For instance, several organizations address their bosses on a first name basis in the West. However, in other countries such as India, it is considered informal, so every superior is addressed as either 'Sir' and 'Ma'am'. It is when a person has to work in a country other than his own and is exposed to these changes, that he experiences a 'culture shock'. Culture shock is defined as the anxiety and disorientation experienced when a person is made to operate in an unknown culture. In such cases, programs that advocate intercultural communication and encourage healthy communication among employees belonging to various cultures, are required to help each other adjust easily. This is extremely important because the environment impacts the efficiency of employees, local or immigrant. The only way you can get the best out of them is to give them a positive environment that they can embrace and move on.

## characterstics

The following characteristics are tested and observed for the assessment of intercultural

competence as an existing ability or as the potential to develop it: ambiguity tolerance, openness to contacts, flexibility in behavior, emotional stability, motivation to perform, empathy, metacommunicative competence.

## What is Intercultural communication?

Intercultural communication is the study and application of knowledge on "cultural perceptions and symbol systems" of people belonging to different cultures.

The intended meaning of any message differs when encoded by a person of a certain culture and decoded by someone of the other. The different meanings of symbols in different culture also vary making the interpretation difficult.

While applying inter-cultural communication, it refers to making people aware and able to adopt others' cultures when they communicate with them and thus have a meaningful communication.

"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."

– *Karlfried Knapp*

## Types of Intercultural Communication

There are basically two types of intercultural communication: Verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication consists of words used to communicate messages whereas non-verbal communication is gestures that give out messages.

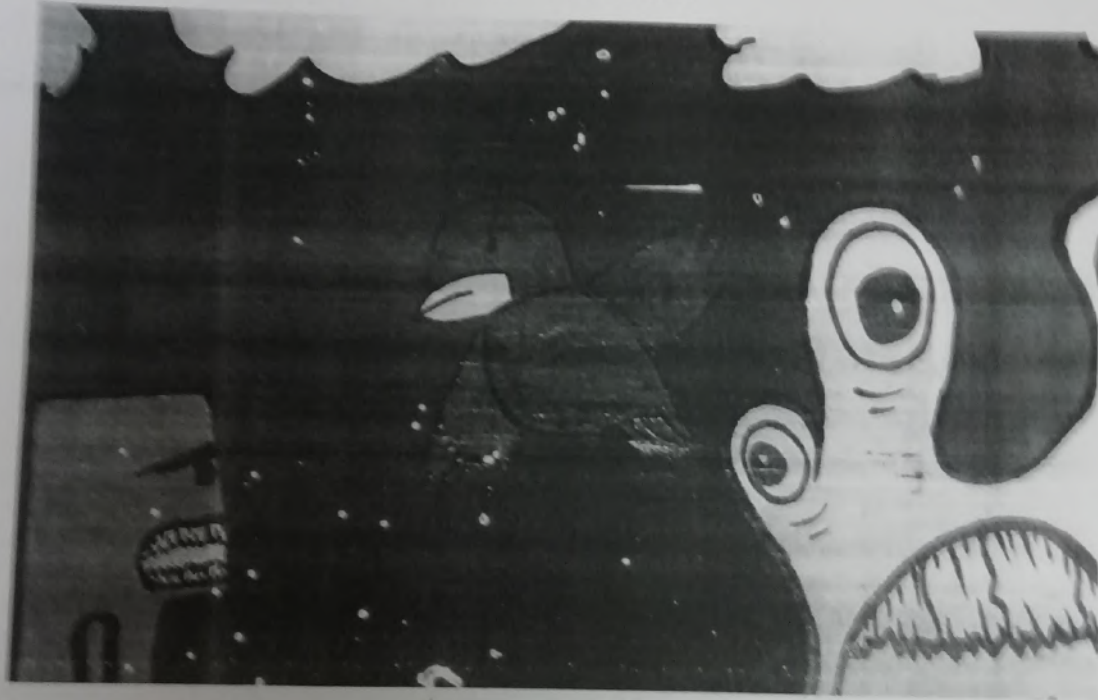
Spoken and written language are parts of verbal communication which must be considered highly while in intercultural communication. Cultural factors affect verbal communication as people can sometimes not be able to speak or write in the language of the receiver. Use of words, dialects, accents, slang, etc. can also be different according to their own cultures.

Similarly, non-verbal cues consist of communication that occurs without words like facial expressions, hand and body movements, eye contact, use of objects, clothing, etc. They help in making message clear or can give the



different message as well.

### Examples of Intercultural Communication



Language difference makes international business companies difficult to adjust to local environment and culture. For instance, Coca-Cola Company once tried to find a phonetic equivalent of their brand to be used in China and thought of using KeKou-KeLa. But the meaning of the terms made them change their decision as the direct translation of those words would be "bite the wax tadpole" or "female horse stuffed with wax".

Similarly, direct translations of one language to another can cause problems like the ad of General Motors "Body by Fisher" could be translated into "Corpse by Fisher" in Flemish language. Another example is an advertisement of wine translated into Swiss from English which said "Our wines leave you nothing to hope for."

In non-verbal communication also these kinds of problems might arise. For instance, "thumbs up" sign is taken as a symbol to say okay in most cultures but it has offending meanings in Iran, Latin America, and some other cultures.