INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents issues raised by ineffective intercultural communication and adaptation to the environment of a new culture in a foreign land. It demonstrates the ways for developing the skills and competence for intercultural communication and conflict resolutions. Effectively successful communication can help to build better cross-cultural relationship and that can, in turn, help in better conflict resolution and better adaptation. Most of the conflicts that people face in a foreign culture arise from miscommunication, which is a real cause of misunderstandings. If intercultural communication is studied and skills are improved, no conflicts are faced by migrants and effective adaptation can be possible. For studying abroad, inside and outside business, public relations, settlements in a new culture, and for other purposes, study of intercultural communication has become a necessity in every person's life.

KEYWORDS: *Culture, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Conflicts, Adaptation*

INTRODUCTION

Every person is a cultural being. Culture is human identity. It is personal identity. Every individual is born in a culture and naturally he comes up with all the characters of that culture. Culture is built on a common ground of inheritance. Every person comes up with a taken–for-granted orientation to life from his or her culture. It is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influences (but does not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior(Spencer-Oaten, 2008). It is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion. (Nieto 1996) It is an ever-changing concept which reflects our socially acquired and learned traditions and lifestyles. Furthermore, it provides the lens through which we perceive and evaluate things, hence governing the way we think, feel and behave, affecting every aspect of life whether physical, spiritual, emotional, moral or sociological.

Communication is the two-way process of reaching mutual understanding in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share means. Communication is the process of transferring information from one person to another person along with meaningful value i.e. sent by sender and received by receiver via different mediums. Communication is the process of transmitting feelings, attitudes, facts, beliefs and ideas between living beings (Parvenu, 1987). It is the exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions by two or more persons (Newman and Summer, 1977).

Intercultural communication is an interaction between or among people from different cultural backgrounds. It consists of a process of exchanging, negotiating and mediating cultural differences through language, non-verbal gestures and it shapes relationships. Intercultural communication deals witha wide range of problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic and educational backgrounds. It is sometimes called 'cross cultural communication'. This seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. With regard to proper intercultural communication, it studies situations and modes of interaction among people from different cultural background.

Intercultural communication is the effective communication between local people and people of different cultural backgrounds. It is a communication between people with culture, perceptions and symbol systems varying enough to alter the communication event. It is necessary for a person to study and understand how people from different countries and cultures behave, communicate, and perceive the world around them.

Due to globalization, there is increasing diversity in all areas of the world; whether it is in industry, multinational companies, workplace or university, resulting in increasing interaction, and conflict as well due to miscommunication, among or between people of different cultures. Intercultural communication is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups or how culture affects communication. Culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them and the way messages are interpreted (Jakob 2011). Absence of skills of intercultural communication, lack of effective adaptation to a new environment, and lack of knowledge of intercultural conflict resolutions cause a lot of difficulties in human life during migrations, abroad study, international businesses, etc. This is the focuses the study in this paper.

PERCEPTIONS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

It has become necessary for business people to study intercultural communication for many reasons. Globalization of business, world market, means of communication, world academia, etc. has made it important for people to study intercultural communication because it helps us to understand our own identity, enhance personal and social interactions, solve misunderstanding, miscommunication and mistrust, enhance and enrich quality of civilization, know cultural differences, etc. Intercultural communication relies upon intercultural competence, or knowledge of different cultures. Intercultural competence is a combination of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from one's self. (Fantini 12)

Perception begins with the reception of sensory data followed by selecting to attend to some of those sensations, organizing those sensations into some meaningful way, and then attaching meaning to them. It is a three-step process, which consists of selection, organization, and interpretation (Jandt 62). These are affected by culture. Selection is made when people have a keen interest, and then they automatically sense it through stimuli. Organization is about categorizing things that have some common attributes as a group. For interpretation, the action, gestures and situation are interpreted differently by different people. Interpretation also depends on background knowledge, called schema in pragmatics. This background knowledge comes from the person's own culture and by studying others' cultures. Thus, culture has great impact on interpretation.

Intercultural competence can be enhanced by ethno relative recognition and adaptation to a variety of cultural values and customs. It can be assessed by training, guidance interventions, and aiding in personal selection and evaluation. It can be further enhanced by debriefings, workshops and curriculum design. Academia, business and government support for cultural and diversity training programs and promoting cultural awareness within the classroom are some other ways to increase intercultural competence. A person may need emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy to enhance this competence. Positive attitude towards race, religion, world government, and global education can be of help for that. Cultural sensitivity and language proficiency are equally important. (Taguchi, 2015)

Culture

Culture is composed of norms, values, symbols, language & technology. It is social behavior and norms found in human societies. Culture is a man-made thing that includes beliefs, norms, traditions etc. Norms are the shared rules of conduct that tell people how to act in a specific situation. Norms can range from trying to control unimportant activities to extremely important activities but all norms are generally focused on maintaining social order. Sanctions are positive or negative reaction to the way in which people follow norms. Some culture provides holiday to relieve the pressure of norm, specified times when people are allowed to break the norms and not worry about being sanctioned. Folkways are norms that are not strictly enforced, such as passing on the left side of side walk. Some group may view norms as folkway whereas another group may view them as mores.

Values are shared beliefs about what is good or bad, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable. Values of a group generally determine character of the people. Values also influence direct creation of other aspects of cultures. Some values are trust, loyalty, respect, intelligence etc.

Organizational culture is the collection of norms and values shared by people and groups in an organization and that controls the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization (Hill & Jones, 2009). A Multinational Company is a company that operates in different countries at the same time. Coke, Pepsi, MetLife insurance etc. are the multinational companies which are operating in different countries at the same time.

Intercultural Conflicts

Conflict is defined as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings toward each other (Fisher, 1990). Conflict may arise due to cultural differences. Thus, cultural differences tend to be a matter of proportions; culture A is relatively more hierarchical than culture B, meaning A's members espouse hierarchical values more often & under more circumstances than B's members. Successful communication plays a big role in cross-cultural relationship. The tragedy of conflict arises with miscommunication. One of the early theorists on conflict, Katz (1965) created a typology that distinguishes three main sources of conflict: economic, value, and power.

- Economic Conflict: Economic conflict arises when both parties want to gain maximum profit on a scarce resource. For example, you need 10 laborers to complete a task, but you only hire 4 laborers instead of 10 to complete the task because you don't have enough money to hire 6 people. Here in this case conflict arises due to bulky effort of works.

- Value Conflict: Value conflict includes what is right and what is wrong. It is about ideology. In an organization, different posts require different skills & educational background. They are categorized into different departments.

These differences can raise conflict. For example, in a university, when a teacher dominates a student, the student will feel uneasy. This is a value conflict.

- Power conflict: It arises when one group tries to dominate other. It creates inequality in which one group has more influence on others. It can be resolved when one group is awarded with victory and other group is claimed as defeated.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

People need to understand that there are differences in conflicts and should find some resolution ways to resolve intercultural conflicts. The conflict resolution styles developed by Mitchell Hammer (21) are illustrated below:

A Model of Intercultural Conflict Style
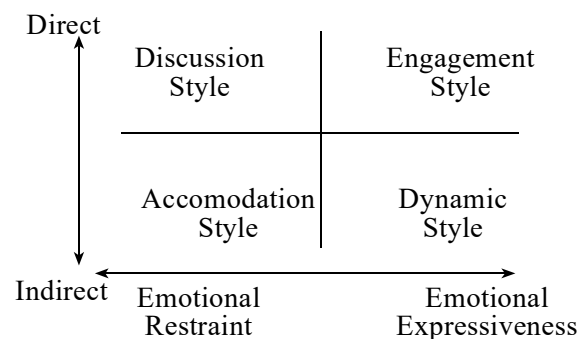
Figure: 1

- Discussion style: It involves the use of a verbally direct path: "say what you mean and mean what you say". People are not allowed to split up their own personal feelings.

- Engagement style: This style is confrontational and verbally direct using strong verbal and non-verbal communication. Sincerity is judged on the basis of intensity that helps each party to convey emotion.

- Accommodation Style: It emphasizes openness in language so that conflict doesn't get out of control. It believes in maintaining emotional calm for establishing interpersonal harmony.

- Dynamic style: This style uses indirect language which is often communicated through third party intermediaries, showing more emotion during a conflict.

- (Newman, & et al., 1967)

Cross-cultural adjustment was redefined as the process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of fitness and compatibility in the new culture, including adaptation to culture shock, psychological adaptation and interaction effectiveness (Kim, 1988; Chen, 1990). Fordham and Boehner (1986) indicated that, in order to acclimatize to a new culture, people have to reduce the symptoms of culture shock that are caused by the feeling of anxiety, discomfort, embarrassment and uneasiness when they interact with the host nationals. Fordham and Boehner further indicated that effective social and communication skills such as managing friendships, understanding others and being assertive are the key to reduction of these symptoms in the process of cross-cultural adjustment (Chen, 1990). Baker and Smirk (1999) identified four factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment among foreign students in the host country. These are: academic factor, social-cultural

factor, personal-emotion factor and environment factor. A study conducted by Lin and Yi (1997) showed that academic difficulties are positively correlated with adjustment. Research conducted by Sodjakusumah and Hans (1996) found that the major source of problems faced by Asian students in Canada and New Zealand was caused by interaction with members of the host society. Asian students in New Zealand admitted that it was not easy to make friends with the New Zealand students. Barriers to active interaction with host nationals, among others, were language (especially the use of slang) and the drinking habits. Different lifestyle, age differences from their classmates, and negative perceptions by New Zealand students of international students were some factors which discouraged Indonesian students from making friends with them. The problems faced by the international students in foreign culture are such as discrimination, language problems and accommodation difficulties, financial stress, misunderstanding, and loneliness.

Communication is one of the important factors that affect intercultural adaptation process. Understanding the host culture's language and style of communication ensures better adaptation towards the environment. It is also referred to host communication competence. Host communication competence refers tothe overall internal capacity of a stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the host cultural communication practices.

Host communication competence is comprised of three interrelated subcategories: cognitive, affective and operational. Cognitive competence includes the knowledge of the host language and culture, history, social institutions, and rules of interpersonal conduct.

Affective competence refers to emotional and motivational capacity to deal with various challenges while living in the host environment. Operational competence refers to the capacity to express outwardly by choosing a right combination of verbal and non-verbal acts in specific social transactions in the host environment. Thus, openness, eagerness to learn and participation will create a sense of relatedness towards the new culture.

For intercultural adaptation, some theories are proposed like Longitudinal Approach, Communication Accommodation Theory, The Hierarchy Hypothesis, and Intercultural Adaptation Model. Among them, Intercultural Adaptation Model (IAM) is more relevant in conflict resolution. IAM is a process through which persons in cross-cultural interactions change their communicative behaviours to facilitate understanding. (Cai et al., 1996-7)It is a theory related to intercultural adaptability. This model focuses on perception, shared knowledge, adaptation, communication and miscommunication. Gumperz and Tannen (1979) argue that potential misunderstandings are more likely to occur when interactants lack shared knowledge. Therefore, if persons share relatively small amounts of knowledge, there should be an increase in miscommunication. Increase in miscommunication ais likely to result in greater misunderstanding. The research conducted by Stephen and Stephan (1992) reveal that positive experiences in cross-cultural interactions lead to low anxiety and that low anxiety should lead to effective social performance in such encounters. When experiences with adaptation are positive, effective adaptation increases. As effective adaptation increases, miscommunication decreases. As miscommunication decreases, understanding increases. When experiences with adaptation are negative, effective adaptation decreases. As effective adaptation decreases, miscommunication increases. As miscommunication increases, understanding decreases. (Cai et al., 1996-7) From the above discussion, it is very obvious that, for the intercultural communication and conflict resolution, increment in positive experiences, better understanding and effective communication will help in effective conflict resolution and effective adaptation in the foreign culture in the foreign land.

CONCLUSIONS

Globalization in business, academia, and many other areas is the main cause behind the wide range of study of intercultural communication. Miscommunication and misunderstanding in intercultural scenario lead to conflicts. In multinational companies, international study centers, universities, international businesses, etc. conflicts are caused because of difficulties in communication and adaption to the new culture. To avoid and resolve such conflicts, one must give up ethnocentric feelings and develop ethnorelative attitudes. Intercultural perceptions, competence, experiences, tolerance, habituation, reduction of feeling of anxiety, regular dialogue and cooperation, positive attitude development, effective communication, understanding, and effective adaptation will help inconflict resolutions of any kind in the new environment, inf any part of the world.

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