

C-Gap Phenomena in Cross-Cultural Communication

Abstract

In the era of globalization different cultures meet with several cultures and there is a cultural gap(c-gap) exists. The communication processes are also different in those cultures. People from different culture find it difficult to communicate not only due to language barrier but also affected by cultural styles. In some cases cultural differences override the language gap. At today's rapidly growing organizations, there are many different types of communications that effect interactions between employers and employees in small or big organizations. Besides being successful in achieving objectives, management must also be able to work and communicate well with people to run an organization well. There were two main reasons why communication was so important within management. First, communication is the process in which functions of management to be accomplished. Second, communication is an activity which managers dedicate major of their time, mostly 70%. These two reasons show the relationship between an organization, management and effective communication.

Keywords: Cultural Gap, Communication Barrier, Culture Diversity.

Introduction

With the increasing pace of globalization it is unavoidable that different cultures will meet and blend. People from different culture find it difficult to communicate not only due to language barrier but also affected by cultural styles. In some cases cultural differences override the language gap. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking, ways of seeing, hearing and interpreting the world. Thus same word can mean different thing to different people from different culture even when they speak the same language. The study of cross-cultural communication is a global research area.

Now a day every international organisation involves cross-cultural communication. In this increasing globalizing world, now a days employer are facing challenges across time-zones, country borders and cultures. It is the successful communication and adequate management of the cultural differences which lead an international workforce to success so as to overcome conflict and miscommunication situation against individuals across different cultures.

At today's rapidly growing organizations, there are many different types of communications that effect interactions between employers and employees in small or big organizations. Besides being successful in achieving objectives, management must also be able to work and communicate well with people to run an organization well (Robbins, 2006, p9). There were two main reasons why communication was so important within management. First, communication is the process in which functions of management to be accomplished (Stoner, 1994, p408). Second, communication is an activity which managers dedicate major of their time, mostly 70% (Stoner, 1994, p.408). These two reasons show the relationship between an organization, management and effective communication.

Aim of the Study

This paper shows the various advantages and disadvantages of cross cultural communication and how to overcome such disadvantages.

Barriers in Cross-Cultural Communication

Language Barrier

Daniels et al. (2009) discovered that "when people from different cultures speak the same language, culture spreads more easily", and "there is greater cultural homogeneity" among them (Daniels et al., p104, 2009). The biggest issue dealing with cross-cultural communication is the difficulty created by language barriers. Though people can use a common

Sanjay Kumar Satapathy

Associate Professor,
Deptt.of Commerce,
Ravenshaw University,
Cuttack

Sumanta Behera

Research Scholar,
Deptt.of Commerce,
Ravenshaw University,
Cuttack

language such as English to communicate or understand each other through translators, misinterpretation or misunderstanding may still happen due to cross-cultural differences. For example Chevrolet was surprised when their popular compact car, the Nova, when exported to Mexico, didn't sell. What they failed to realize was that "No va" when translated into Spanish means "no go" or "won't run". An American ink manufacturer attempted to sell bottled ink in Mexico through their advertisement that they could "avoid embarrassment" (from stains) through their brand of ink. However, the Spanish word used for "embarrassed" was "embarazar" which means to become pregnant. People thought the company was selling a contraceptive device (Ilona Mathe, p86, 2008). In this globalizing world, the greatest challenge for one is having a sense of awareness to talk in their language of different cultures to create effective communication. (Managing Diversity: Toward a Globally Inclusive Workplace, Michalle E. Mor Barak, 2005, USA: Sage Publications, Inc).

Nonverbal Communication Barrier

According to Albert Mehrabian, communication can be made up with different elements, words, voice, tone and nonverbal cues. Mehrabian discovered that words are 7% effective, tonality is 38% effective, and body language is 55% effective. So it proves that nonverbal communication plays a significant role in communication. Gestures and eye contact are two areas of nonverbal communication that are utilized differently across cultures. Companies must train employees in the correct way to handle nonverbal communication as to not offend other cultures. For example, In China, Chinese like to touch child's head to display affection, but in Arab and Thailand, it is an offensive action (Liangguang, p199, 2010). Another example is pointing a finger is considered appropriate in many countries but such gesture is considered rude in Japan. Nonverbal communication, includes our body language, sends some kind of messages without words (Tyler, Kossen & Ryan 2005, p. 182). There are many nonverbal theories that include environment, haptics, kinesics, artefacts, proxemics, paralinguistics and physical factors.

Kinesics is the study of the relationship between non-linguistic human body motion, or body language, and communication (Bordia, et al 2008, pg 346). There are many different types of body language such as different types of facial expressions that are articulated mainly with the eyebrows, mouth, forehead and eyes. Posture and gestures are also body language indicators. Kinesics is the most obvious nonverbal communication form as it includes body language like slouching of the shoulders, raised eyebrows, rolling of the eyes, an opened surprised mouth and a nod of the head. Artefacts are another form of nonverbal communication. Artefacts are the way we dress which includes the clothes we wear, our hair styles, the jewellery we wear, the makeup we use and any facial hair we may have. Bordia, 2008, says that artefacts are the use of personal adornments and provides important non verbal cues. The way we use

artefacts today, especially in the way we dress, tells people a lot about ourselves. It will establish and create the first impression we give to people when meeting them. The clothing we wear to work should reflect the nature and position of where you are employed e.g. you wouldn't wear your football game outfit to your office; you would wear a suit and tie.

Another form of nonverbal communication is called haptics. Haptic communication is communication through touch. Haptics is happening around us all the time without us even realising. When you greet your mate and shake his hand or when you greet your girlfriend/boyfriend and give them a kiss or hug, these are all forms of haptics that are happening quite commonly every day. Out of all forms of nonverbal communication haptics is affected the most by culture, age and gender. In terms of culture it varies a lot all over the world how accepted and appreciated touching is. With age it is found that the younger the person the more they are found to touch. It has also been found that women will touch more than men. 'Research reveals that a hug and 10 minutes of hand holding with a romantic partner greatly reduces the harmful physical effects of stress. It appears that, because touch lowers stress hormones, such loving contact protect us throughout the day' (Montagu, 1971).

Disadvantages of Culture Diversity

Cross-Cultural communication can act as boomerang if not promoted effectively within an organisation. It is very difficult to work smoothly with individuals from different culture If change is not managed successfully in culture diversified organisations, productivity may be reduced. Culture diversity in work group may increase doubtfulness, complexity and confusion (White, 1999). As such, these groups will find it hard in converging meanings, reaching a single agreement and agreeing on courses of action which reflects the communication within the organisation. Without proper communication, these work groups will not be able to function properly. The disharmony between two cultures, for any reason, prohibits the individuals from different culture to fully perform in a culturally diverse work group. Therefore, if employers are unable to manage diversity, it may detract from performance. Another disadvantage of culturally diverse work groups is intergroup conflict. Intergroup conflict can be well-managed if employers harmonise competing goals, assign power in a representative manner, affirm the identity of minority group members, and act when resources are plentiful and cultural differences are lower or well-understood (White, 1999). The biggest issue with cultural diversity in the work groups is the managers' lack of knowledge of how to lead a culturally diverse work group. The same people who don't accept other cultures are likely to openly show disrespect and indifference. This can lead to unnecessary tension and can inhibit communication in the workplace. The problem with a highly tense or hostile workplace is that everyone is affected, including those that accept and respect diversity in the workplace.

Advantages of Culture Diversity

On the other hand, being tangled in the cultural diversity circumstances can be beneficial if sufficient exploration is done as there will be much different view of points and experience from people who are raised differently in their own culture with variety of backgrounds rather than your own. Diversity creates a way of fuelling growth for organisation by tapping into fast growing multicultural markets (Pellet, 2004). If managers can effectively lead culturally diverse work groups, the organisations will benefit from the advantages. There is substantial argument over diverse groups and organisations having performance advantages over homogeneous groups (White, 1999).

These advantages are outlined as follows:

1. attracts and retains the best available human talent,
2. Increased range of services
3. presents higher creativity and innovation,
4. Presents a better problem solving ability.

Studies show that when organisations attract, retain, and promote highest employment of people from culturally diverse backgrounds, they gain competitive advantage and maintain the highest quality of human talent. By restraining the number of diverse workers in an organisation, the organisation is also restraining range of information and resources it could attain from the culturally diverse workers. The organisations can also reach out for wider and improved markets when they have an increased understanding of the social and cultural environment of foreign countries through its culturally diverse work force. The increase in understanding can ease selling goods and services in the growingly diverse marketplace. Culturally diverse employees allow the organisations to acquire high levels of creativity and innovation. The high levels of creativity and innovation generates a greater openness to new ideas. Culturally diverse work groups can provide a broader and richer experience to approach a problem.

Training Programs

In order to manage the cultural diversity successfully, diversity training is an important for every organisation to remain competitive in this rapid changing environment and managing diversity improves its competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining employees and that it increases productivity quality, creativity and morale. Diversity management workshops offer training for managers to discover what it takes to be a minority in this wide society. A multicultural board oversees the organisation's diversity efforts. New minority employees will also be introduced by mentor program to the organisation's culture. The organisation believes that managing diversity creates better customer service, improves its public image and boosts clients' confidence and credibility. With diverse training programs, efforts to educate the organisation about the benefits can help diversity evolving from programs and initiatives to be a fundamental part of an organisation's culture (Pellet, 2004).

Conclusion

In this literature review, an attempt has been made to discover on different theories to better understand the concept of cross cultural communication. Translation covers only a small part of problems of working with people of other nations and cultures. Differences in cultural background may affect communication between people of different countries, and International English may be evolving a cultural style of its own. There are various aspects like verbal and nonverbal communication which i have tried to cover with an intention to have a better understanding in dealing with the specific countries that we have covered. However these are much more complex than it is possible to convey. These aspects even influence the course of communications, and can be responsible for conflict or the escalation of conflict when it leads to miscommunication or misinterpretation. A culturally fluent approach to conflict means working overtime to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understandings in order to enhance relationships across differences. In cross cultural communication with East Asian countries, when you are dealing with people of different countries, treat people the way they want to be treated, instead of the way you think they should be. Genuine respect for their beliefs, opinions and lifestyle is essential. The key to successful communication is relationship building. The latter can only be achieved by developing an empathy with, and understanding of, the sociocultural dynamics of different communities.

Communicating with those unfamiliar to us does not come easily. The more distant and unacquainted the cultures are the greater the challenge. Therefore, good communication requires the parties to respect, show sensitivity and truly understand each others' social systems.

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