

Intercultural Communication and Globalization

Today's governments, organisations and companies are dealing more and more in a global scenario. We are no longer constrained by borders or distance and as a result globalization has meant a fundamental change in who, where and why we do business. The people that make these organisations tick, from the workers, to bosses to suppliers, are increasingly based in remote locations in foreign countries or drawn from a rich mix of cultural backgrounds. The need for effective and clear intercultural communication is becoming vital in securing success in today's globalized workplace.

What is intercultural communication? In short, it has many definitions but fundamentally it looks at how people, from differing cultural/national backgrounds, endeavour to communicate or work together. It draws on areas within academia such as cultural anthropology, sociology and business studies to provide it with a basic framework. Notable academics that have become specialized in intercultural communication are Hall, Hofstede and Trompenaars. At its foundation, intercultural communication's objectives are to establish and understand how people from different cultures behave, think or do. Once this is appreciated it is then possible to help people overcome intercultural differences and make for a better (working) environment.

Within the context of the globalized business or organisation, intercultural communication looks at how people communicate (verbally and non-verbally), manage, work together, approach deadlines, negotiate, meet, greet, build relationships, etc. These topics are becoming much more relevant now on two fronts. 1) for businesses with a mix of cultures working together and 2) for businesses wanting to trade successfully abroad. In both situations if individuals are unaware of how best to get along and get business done, it can and does lead to poor performance and lost deals. Greater understanding of intercultural communication differences, manners, etiquette, protocol and communication styles certainly leads to a much higher probability of achieving business goals.

Ultimately intercultural communication today means getting a competitive edge. Why? We all know that business today is highly competitive and fast changing. People need to get it right, and get it right the first time. Whether someone is looking for a new supplier, giving a presentation, or negotiating a contract intercultural communication can, does and will play an important role. It impacts our ability to communicate effectively within a culture as well as how we are perceived.

Working in the globalized world economy is proving to have a positive effect on individuals and companies. As people are forced to think outside the box they develop greater interpersonal skills, flex their creative muscle and learn new ways of doing things. In conclusion, the need for intercultural communication skill is obvious – we are all working in an interconnected global economy and it is important to build good relationships with people from other cultures. This leads to better business.

For those interested in learning a bit more about intercultural communication, why not try some of these books?

Mind Your Manners (Managing Business Cultures in Europe)

By John Mole, Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Riding The Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Global Business

By Fons Trompenaars, Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival

By Geert Hofstede

Building Cross-Culture Competence

By Charles Hampden-Turner & Fons Trompenaars

Beyond Culture

By Edward T. Hall

About the Author

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