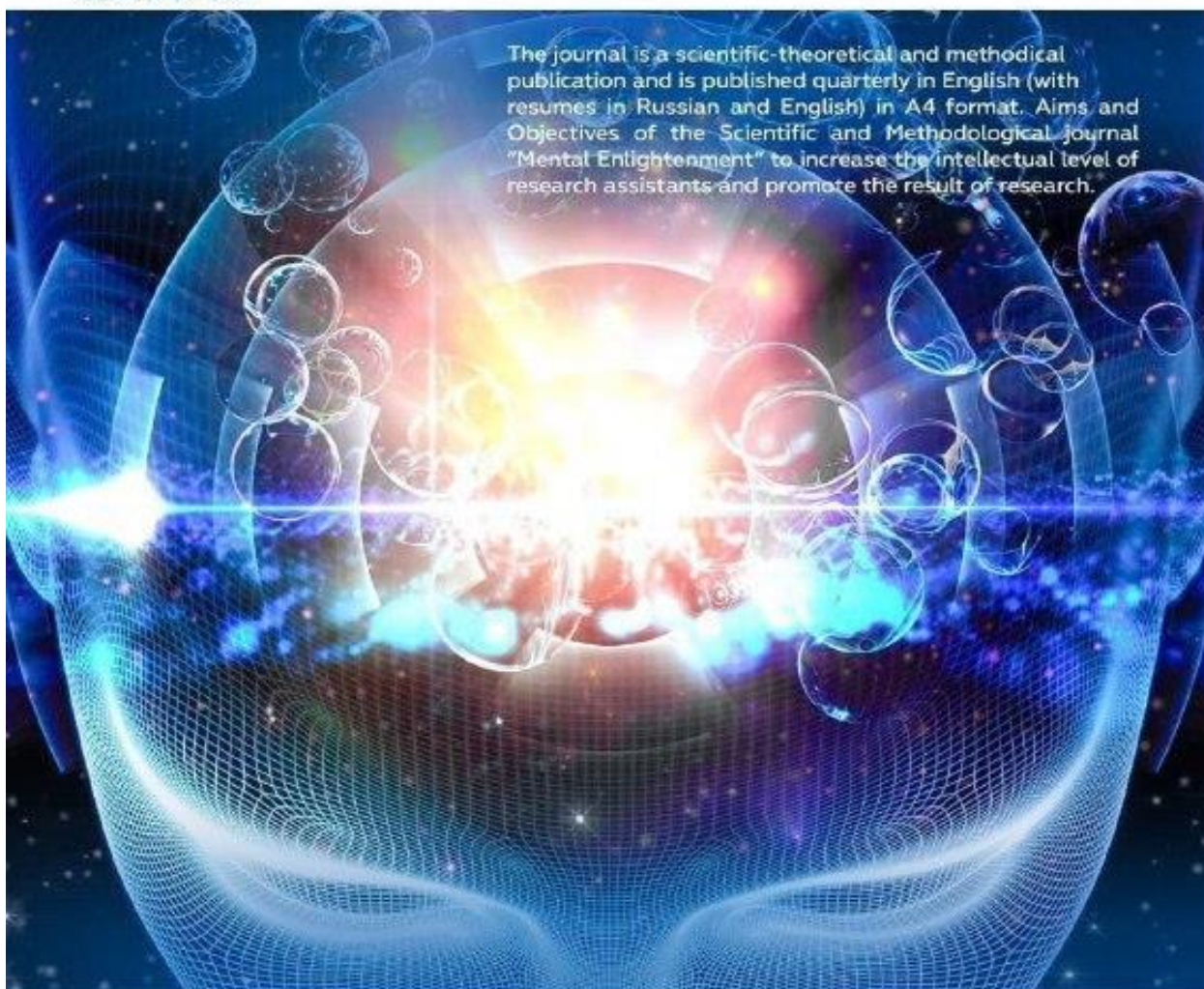


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DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Abstract: Intercultural communication skills can help improve trust and reduce miscommunication in hybrid and diverse workplaces. Effective intercultural communication has become a priority today because of the importance it has gained in the understanding of the cultural diversity of the world. Learning about other cultures and developing intercultural communication competences and skills can help facilitate the multicultural encounter and can lead to more openness and tolerance towards the significant other. Communication processes occur in specific cultural contexts, with unique normative beliefs, assumptions, and shared symbols. Culture influences what people communicate, to whom they communicate, and how they communicate. This article will make you understand the basis of intercultural communication and its relevance in today's era of globalization.

Key words: intercultural communication competence, culture and communication, intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity

Introduction

Globalization has made intercultural communication inevitable. Communicating with other cultures characterizes today's business, classroom, and community. Technology especially the internet has increased the probability that whatever is documented online will be read by someone from

another culture. Intercultural communication is of importance in any career field thus the art of knowing how to communicate with other cultures should be a work place skill that is emphasized. Communication with people of different cultures is a common activity in the classroom, in the workplace, in healthcare or politics. Intercultural communication is a fascinating area of study within organizational communication.

Intercultural communication is an essential requirement in the critical efforts to ensure world peace, stability, necessary to improve relationships between countries, ensure resource sustainability and promote values like tolerance and diversity. Different cultures are characterized by different languages, values, behaviors and attitudes towards aspects such as time (the importance of punctuality), context, customs, distance, non-verbal signs, etc. All communication takes place in a culture, therefore the differences between cultures is the primary obstacle in intercultural communication. We first discuss intercultural competence. Next, we present the relationship between culture and communication Then we give a brief overview of the intercultural communication effectiveness.

The intercultural communication competence (ICC)

Intercultural competence is the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds – at home or abroad. Intercultural competence is a valuable asset in an increasingly globalised world where we are more likely to interact with people from different cultures and countries who have been shaped by different values, beliefs and experiences. The intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to the active possession by individuals of qualities which contribute to effective intercultural communication, and can be defined in terms of three primary attributes: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Attitudes: respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery are key attitudes requires for efficient intercultural communication. Consideration for the

others, active listening, or showing that they are appreciated and valued are especially important to create lasting relationships with people with different beliefs and values. Openness and curiosity refers to the willingness to move beyond our comfort zone.

Knowledge: when we refer to culture, defined as the beliefs, values and norms of a group of people, that influence individuals' communication behaviors, more categories of knowledge can be considered: sociolinguistic awareness, cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, and deep cultural knowledge.

Skills: observing, listening, analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, and relating are the key abilities used for processing the acquired knowledge. Also, essential to the development of intercultural competence is critical self-reflection. All of these traits and abilities don't come naturally, and they can't be learned over night. Rather, acquiring them can be a lifelong process. Intercultural competence requires ongoing commitment to learning about other cultures, values, and customs. People who are keen to learn and engage in the process will find that they'll benefit from two types of outcomes: internal and external effects.

Internal effects: if the key attitudes, knowledge, and skills are acquired, ideally, internal outcomes, as empathy, flexibility and adaptability will be achieved. As a result, individuals will become able to respond to the other person according to his/her expectations. The effectiveness of communication would be the result of the amount of skills and knowledge acquired.

External effects: The external effects are observable in the behavior and communication style of the individual. We can regard them as clearly visible proof that the individual has acquired the necessary cultural competency.

Culture and communication

Speaking about intercultural communication, which he sees as a communicative relationship between different cultures, Dumitru Zaiț (2002, 55) highlighted the following:

Communication can be accepted as a complex relationship that is established between individuals or groups through a hereditary learned or inherited symbolism that enables messages to be transmitted and received in a certain context, at a given time and under certain spatial circumstances. It has, but is not always, an objective or subjective purpose, causing changes in actions or behaviors in desirable or unwanted, void or involuntary, positive or negative ways through the states that the interpretations of messages transmitted to the receptors induce. Accumulations produced at communication system are dominated by the culture in which the individual or group is born and evolves. Communication relations are therefore culturally dependent and therefore always interpretable in a certain context.

At intercultural communication, there is an interactive relationship that brings together individuals or different groups belonging to cultural environments that have particular aspects at the level of the symbolism and the meanings designated by words, behaviors, customs, gestures, etc.

The relationship between communication and culture is a very complex and intimate one. First, cultures are created through communication; that is, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural characteristics— whether customs, roles, rules, rituals, laws, or other patterns—are created and shared. It is not so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationships, groups, organizations, or societies, but rather that cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction. In Without communication and communication media, it would be impossible to preserve and pass along cultural characteristics from one place and time to another. One can say, therefore, that culture is created, shaped, transmitted, and learned through communication. The reverse is also the case;

that is, communication practices are largely created, shaped, and transmitted by culture.

Intercultural awareness

Intercultural awareness can be considered as the foundation of communication. It involves two qualities: one is the awareness of one's own culture; the other is the awareness of another culture. It implies the ability to become aware not only of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions, but also those of other cultures. Cultural awareness becomes essential when people of different cultures communicate. As people see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways, what is considered appropriate in one culture is probably inappropriate in another, and therefore misunderstandings arise. Communicating with others is difficult; it demands sensitivity and creativity. In spite of many similarities, people have differences in the way they do things. It requires to understand and reconcile these differences to function effectively in a group.

The Importance of Intercultural Awareness

In a multicultural world, most of us need at least some intercultural awareness every day. For those who live or work away from our native countries, or who live or work closely with those from another country, it is absolutely vital.

Intercultural sensitivity

DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY elaborated by Dr. Milton Bennett indicates reactions that people have to cultural differences. These reactions belonging to six stages and range from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism:

DEFENSE: during this stage, learners often feel as though their own culture is the only good culture. It often consists of negative stereotyping and "us" vs. "them". **MINIMIZATION:** the person begins to find commonalities between own culture and people of other cultures. People in this stage begin to recognize that all people are people, whether they have different traditions and cultures or not. However, in this stage deep cultural differences are

masked, including privileged position of dominant culture, under the false assumption of equal opportunities. **ACCEPTANCE:** during this stage, learners are able to recognize and appreciate cultural differences through both behaviours and values. This stage promotes the belief that one's own culture is just one of the many cultures that exists in the world. Acceptance does not mean agreement – cultural differences in this stage can still be judged negatively.

ADAPTATION: People begin to be more competent in how to communicate with people of other cultures. A major aspect of this stage is that the learner will be able to see the world through another's "eyes." Because of this perspective, learners can change their behaviour in order to communicate more effectively.

INTEGRATION: during integration the person is able to have other cultural experience move in and out of their own worldview. People that reach integration are often cultural mediators. They are able to help others understand different cultures and promote unity between these two cultures.

Conclusion

The acquiring of intercultural communication competences and skills involves more than language use and knowledge about other cultures; in the development of intercultural competence. Intercultural communication influences the communication model first by its effect on the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview of senders and receivers; second, by its effect on verbal and nonverbal messages; and, third, by the influences it has on the historical setting, relational setting, and a person's position within a speech community.

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