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Global Communication and Cross-Cultural Competence: Twenty-First Century Micro-Case Studies

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Global Communication and Cross-Cultural Competence: Twenty-First Century Micro-Case Studies

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Global Communication and Cross-Cultural Competence: Micro-case Studies for Today's World

Kimberley Barker, Christine R. Day, Deanna L. Day, Elizabeth R. Kujava, Juliette Otwori, Robert A. Ruscitto, Alex Smith, and Tianjiao Xu

Sensitivity to diversity now demands a strategic understanding of the importance of cross-cultural communication competence in every action in organizations, communities, and nations throughout the world. Employers cannot under value global business communication and cultural competencies.

Cross-cultural misunderstandings can be tricky in the best of circumstances and literally explosive in the worst. To prevent misunderstanding requires awareness of as many aspects of the other's culture as possible to avoid trespassing on someone's beliefs or cultural sensitivities. Being blind to the global communication and cross-cultural implications is no excuse once an incident has happened. According to Victor (1992), "Few things...are more important in conducting business on a global scale than skill in communication, because few other areas of business practice depend so much on an understanding of the cultural heritage of the participants" (p. xiii). The emphasis here should be placed on the concept that "communication and culture are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, culture itself is one form of communication.... Consequently, the study of cultural differences and similarities so essential to international business success is largely inseparable from the study of international business communication" (Victor, 1992). Collaboration is a strategic imperative. "Cultural synergy in today's global economy requires individuals with multinational organizations to be culturally aware and competent in cross-cultural communication" (Schmidt, Conaway, Easton, & Wardrope, 2007).

Managing what Rogers (2015) identified as the "necessity of multi-tasking, compromise, and competitiveness, challenged by information overload and misrepresentation, attention deficit, and cross-cultural impatience," the authors have developed these seven micro-cases which are designed to create cross-cultural awareness on multiple levels, spark discussions, and prevent unintended *faux pas*. They are examples of how global communicators and global organizations must "process information, decipher falsehood, speak truthfully, seek understanding, reach consensus, and discipline self-centeredness" (Rogers, 2015). Conaway (2015) reinforced Roger's point: "today's firms will not succeed without effective business communication. Global firms today depend on their managers' ability to communicate, whether across cultures, within the organization, or with competitors who are challenging the company's very existence." To assist with this process, at the end of each case, discussion points and questions are included. Case discussions can be held in many settings—teams, organizational committees, classrooms, and community gatherings. One unique feature of these cases is the "bumper sticker" summary which captures the essence of each case. While each incident is real, names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Micro Case One. A Reluctant Handshake

This case was prepared by Deanna L. Day and Christine R. Day.

Case One, "A Reluctant Handshake," highlights the global communication, cultural, and sub-cultural issues related to touching in a professional setting. One additional point made by the

case is that the underlying reason for an action may not always be a religious one, but could be health related.

Leeann Ruskin, a third-year adjunct faculty member at a major university, looked at her course evaluations from students for the term just ending and shook her head in disbelief: What could have prompted the very negative comment one student made?

She remembered vividly the day in question. It was the first day of class for a new school year and a new semester. Since this was a freshman-level class, students were also new to campus. New classes routinely require introductions, and Ruskin tried to have an interesting icebreaker. She had the students do a "mix it up" exercise where they had to stand up, move around the room, shake hands with and greet every other person in the class. The room buzzed with excitement as the new students greeted each other, and it seemed to be quite a success. The rest of the semester went as expected, and students continued to network with each other.

Now, at the end of that term, Ruskin was looking at a student's comment on the semester-end course evaluation and was shocked. The student rated her "D" (the lowest possible) and commented: "The instructor was very insensitive and unaware. She even expected us to shake hands during introductions."

Thinking about that first day of class, Ruskin did not recall that any of the students participated reluctantly. No one seemed to hesitate, or to avoid the activity, or to ask to be exempt from the introductions. She wondered why the student did not immediately indicate any discomfort. Why did this student not ask for an alternative way to participate?

Looking back, Ruskin tried to think through how students who were reluctant to "touch" anyone else could participate. While she thought of the handshake as a form of friendly interaction, clearly some students did not see things that way. How could she re-design the exercise so that students from outside the main culture could fully participate but not have to do anything that would make the giver or the receiver of the handshake uncomfortable? She also thought about the idea that religious beliefs were not the only reason for a reluctance to touch others. Perhaps students were germophobic, had skin sensitivities, or were adverse to having others touch them for health reasons. She asked herself what other inclusive instructions could have been provided, such as, "If anyone does not want to shake hands, let's work out an alternative now, before we start." This would have provided an option before the activity started. Also, in a low-key, positive and friendly way, any concerned student needed to be prepared to suggest an alternative action, such as, "I am not able to shake hands, but I would be very happy to do this [provide alternative]." No big loud "ugh....." no moaning or groaning, but a maturely presented alternative. It was now apparent that, for the entire semester, the student had harbored a grudge about the handshake introductions.

Micro Case One: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Multinational corporations must "operate in different markets with different cultures, histories, values, social systems, and languages" (Black & Mendenhall, 2000). How does this level of diversification reflect in this case?
3. What responsibility should the student assume to communicate his/her own reluctance to participate in a handshaking introduction? What responsibility should Ruskin take for her

introduction exercise to be inclusive and respect other cultural customs outside the host culture's practices?

4. What recommendations do others have for the student who did not want to shake hands?
5. Many times, a situation such as this may be immediately labelled as based on "religious reasons." What other reasons would cause sensitivity to handshakes? Ruskin's orientation was that handshakes are a form of friendly interaction. Clearly the student did not see handshakes or physical contact that way.
6. Would a different set of more inclusive instructions provide help, such as, "If anyone does not want to shake hands, let's work out an alternative now, before we start"? This would provide an option before the activity started. Also, in a low-key, positive, friendly way, the student needs to be prepared to suggest some alternative actions, such as, "I am not able to shake hands, but I would be very happy to do this alternative."

Bumper Sticker: Provide Options before the Start!

Micro Case Two. Power Distance Consequences: Authoritarian Doctor and the Silent Student Nurse

This case was prepared by Juliette Otworl.

Case Two, "Power Distance Consequences: Authoritarian Doctor, Silent Student Nurse," emphasizes the cost of remaining silent as well as how powerful people are sometimes not open to communication from others. How does power distance impact the lives of the people surrounding the authoritarian communicator?

Nursing student Gayathri Gupta, an international medical student from India, was troubled over the case of Rachel Laurel, a 23-year old patient who had been diagnosed with stage IV laryngeal cancer. Laurel had just started law school at a major university where she was a very brilliant, dedicated student. Her treating physician, Dr. Topoli, had weighed all the possible options and concluded that if he operated on Laurel, the consequences could include brain damage, blindness, hemorrhage and, worst-case scenario, an untimely death. The doctor discussed these scenarios with the parents and the patient, and they agreed on palliative care (care to minimize pain without invasive treatment) and Laurel signed a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) form.

Since this was a teaching hospital, Dr. James, a medical professor, came in one morning accompanied by her students. She used Laurel's case as the example in order to explain the condition of the patient and the pathophysiology of cancer to his students. Upon looking at the MRI scans, Dr. James thought that the tumor *was operable* and the patient could walk away cancer free after the procedure and chemotherapy.

Nursing student Gupta had heard Dr. James discussing Laurel's case, and she followed up with Professor James. Gupta asked in-depth questions about the procedures and treatment. From Dr. James' answers, Gupta began to understand that Laurel might have a chance to survive and even become cancer free.

During this time, Laurel's family had slowly been coming to terms with the fact that their daughter was dying, and they just wanted to make her happy. Concerned, Gupta informed the charge nurse about the conversation with the professor, and the nurse agreed with Gupta.

At the hospital level, this facility was a prime candidate to adopt a communication and care strategy known as Patient-and Family-Centered Care (PFCC) which presents all options to the patients, and then let the patient decide what is best for him or her. PFCC focuses on the patients, families, and the healthcare staff as the co-decision makers in the patient's care. The traditional,

hierarchical, vertical model of care has care and control moving downward from physicians to nurses to other specialists and then to patients and families. In this model, patients and families lose much of the control over their medical care. PFCC focuses, instead, on changing an ingrained, vertical centric culture into a more horizontal culture and patient centric system (Barker, 2015).

Unfortunately, two days later patient Laurel stopped breathing, but, after resuscitation, she was able to breathe again. This brief reprieve at life made Jones think that maybe this was her opportunity to do something to help the patient. Gupta discussed Laurel's case again with the charge nurse, who told Gupta that she, as the charge nurse, had hinted to Dr. Topoli about the possible alternatives mentioned by Dr. James, but Dr. Topoli did not care to listen. Gupta was acutely aware that no one dared question Topoli's judgment because he was the most experienced oncologist at the hospital. It seemed to be an unwritten rule that no one questioned Dr. Topoli's decisions. Gupta understood enough about power distance to know that she would not succeed in overcoming Dr. Topoli's case management decisions.

The treating doctor's judgment prevailed, and Laurel died two weeks later.

Micro-Case Two: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Research has shown that "communication between strangers is characterized by a) limited amount of information about each other, b) ignorance of the means to reach a goal, and c) ignorance of the probable outcomes (Dumont, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005 as cited by Mukherji and Jain, 2015). What are the challenges presented by this research that have implications in this case?
3. How do we see "cultural differences such as attitudes toward [Hofstede's] power distance, individualism or collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity or femininity influence people's perceptions about competent behavior" (Mukherji & Jain, 2015) in this case?
4. What responsibility did the student nurse (or a less powerful employee) have to advocate for the patient based upon the information she overheard? What should the student nurse do? Why? What was the impact of the student coming from a culture of high power distance (Hofstede, 1980)? What medical sub-cultural is superimposed over the work communication culture?
5. What responsibility does the charge nurse (a supervisor-type employee) have to advocate for the patient to Dr. Topoli based upon the new information from Dr. James, the professor?
6. What responsibility does the charge nurse have to share the information from Dr. James (the professor) with Dr. Topoli, the treating doctor? Did she in fact share this information with the doctor?
7. How can junior staff and other professional personnel discuss intimidation by senior, more powerful leaders? How can people come to better understand power distance in the general culture as well as the work culture? What is the impact of one's role is in society, considering such ideas as teaching, education, class, gender, clergy, etc.
8. What supports a culture of unquestioning compliance to the opinions of those in charge? Why don't people voice other opinions?

Bumper sticker: Power Should Not Impede Open Communication.

Micro Case Three: Collaboration or Betrayal: Communicating Inside an Alliance.

This case was provided by Robert A. Ruscitto.

Case Three, "Collaboration or Betrayal: Communicating Inside an Alliance," focuses on the importance of accurate communication when enacting process interventions and the potential of betrayal which creates communication and psychological barriers.

Eight employees (six union workers and two supervisors) on the 4:00 to 11:00 p.m. shift in a large manufacturing facility were involved in a recent explosion in their area of the plant. They were now meeting to determine how to deal with and prevent other similar situations. The event easily could have been tragic since one employee was seriously injured and three others received minor burns. Physical damage to the plant from fire, water, dust, and smoke was extensive. The direct expected loss was about \$250,000, but indirect losses--to the product, business interruption, and the supply chain--were expected to be significantly higher.

As quickly as possible, it was necessary to convene an incident investigation team to interview the eight employees. At the initial meeting, the team worked to establish a common understanding, and posted a statement about this prominently on the team's white board at the front of the meeting room. The team decided that one operational focus, an imperative, was that the report content needed consensus, and that all members of the reporting team needed to agree on consensus with the emphasis that the team was working toward common ground.

The kickoff meeting had been somewhat cordial and began with introductions, an overview of the dilemma, and a description of the discussion's processes and objectives. Historically, the organization's management and labor did not trust each other. It was common when things went wrong for management to mete out some sort of progressive discipline or termination. This forced a situation in which employees often found it easier to lie than tell the truth.

To help frame the bigger picture and establish a sense of urgency to stimulate participation, the team agreed to try to answer two questions: 1) Who were the key stakeholders in this situation and what were their interests in the accident? 2) What might be some of the reasons for the different recollections of the accident by employees? The questions were not intended to assess direct blame, rather to have the group think on a whole-system basis. The first question succeeded in creating a better understanding of the larger scenario, but the second proved more difficult for the group to address. Typical responses were that the respondent was not in the immediate area of the incident or was not paying attention. Also, a culture of "brotherhood" was becoming evident to many people conducting the investigation. This fraternalism started to impact the alignment of the workers—should their allegiance be to the concept of safety, to the company, or to their fellow workers? The strength of this type of "brotherhood" frequently exceeded any national cultural implications, and focused on the work sub-culture. This type of comradery was a strong bond, which could infuse a sub-culture that could exist in any country at any place.

Finally, one employee mumbled a hint that providing certain information might incriminate people. After several participants mentioned the notion of incrimination, it became a plausible reason for evasiveness.

Trying to identify the reason for employees being evasive proved to be very important. Later, in a management meeting, employee hesitancy to be forthcoming was discussed in detail. One idea suggested was to offer some type of amnesty since employees were reluctant to incriminate themselves given the culture. This, however, was directly contrary to the culture of accountability, which the manufacturing facility was working so hard to establish. Granting amnesty would be a massive shift from what normally would happen.

Micro Case Three: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. What is cross-cultural about this situation? Varner (2015) pointed out that “an understanding of local culture is crucial to success in global business. We need to realize that the importance of understanding local culture may depend on specific tasks and goals of the business/industry.” How does the concept of identifying the communication theme for the group become important and task specific?
3. Is there any regiocentric management in play here? “Regiocentric management considers the region rather than the country in which the firm is located, realizing that countries can and often do have many different cultural backgrounds” (Chaney & Martin, 2011).
4. What could be done to enhance psychological safety in this setting? Why was “amnesty” an important communication tool? Note: According to Miles (1981) psychological safety is where an employee “...enters a safe situation and lets go of the usual set ways of behaving...” (p.37)
5. Why was the removal of the threat of disciplinary action crucial, even though there was no precedent for this? What was done to create “a climate of...respect, inquiry, trust and collaboration...” (Marshak, 2006, p. 71)? What would be the implications for a war-torn country or a specific region in such a country? What are the implications of alliances negotiating over scarce resources in a region?
6. Could communication have been facilitated by using a model from another industry? What are some of those models?

Bumper sticker: Use **Communication Focused Process Interventions**

Micro Case Four: The Ethnically Dressed Lawyer

This case was prepared by Alex Smith.

Case Four, “The Ethnically Dressed Lawyer,” illustrates communication dilemmas created by visual cultural messages. The dynamics of the case are not just the idea of a person objecting to another’s apparel, but the shock of others, supposed uninvolved, witnessing the law firm’s communication and behavior.

The partners at the city’s largest law firm were concerned over how to deal with a cultural issue that had emerged between a client and the firm. Lois Rich, the CEO of a mid-sized business which was retaining a law firm for the first time, was concerned about the person the firm assigned to represent her case. It was delegated to a young woman lawyer who wore a hijab, a flowing scarf which covered her head and shoulders. She was the first in her family to be native-born in her new home country, yet she proudly carried on the family’s cultural tradition of wearing the hijab. She valued wearing the hijab and wore it every day, all day.

CEO Rich made it clear she was opposed to having a lawyer representing her while dressed in this attire, partly because the attire could attest to the individual’s religious beliefs. Even though the case was about intellectual property rights and patent infringement, the client felt that a jury could be affected by seeing the clothing. In order to please the client, a law firm representative offered to reassign the case, but the lawyer originally assigned took issue with this solution from a professional point of view and threatened her own litigation against the firm should such action be taken.

Others within the firm observed the dynamics of this cultural difference signified by the apparel. Some were witnessing this type of communication conflict for the first time. Reactions

were wide ranging and included support for the client, neutrality, disgust with the firm for putting business ahead of cultural biases, surprise that the firm was not standing behind the lawyer/employee, and a recommendation to decline this client's business.

Micro Case Four: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Did each party have an open mind and work through any differences? What would be the role of a neutral third party?
3. Victor (1992) includes an entire section on appearance, noting that “an individual’s general appearance is a strong nonverbal communicator, both within a culture and across cultures.” He cited numerous researchers who “demonstrated that an individual’s overall appearance in the workplace has an impact on how others evaluate that person’s work-related behavior.” Victor (1992) emphasized that the choices people make regarding how they clothe and groom themselves communicates powerfully on a nonverbal level.” From a communication point of view, what misinformation, fear of the unknown, and pre-existing ideas were evident in the situation with the lawyer? Once the situation developed, what communication process could have helped the parties recover from a situation of cultural intolerance? How could each party have communicated during the situation to correct that intolerance?
4. In general, how can intercultural communicators with good intentions recover from a mistake or *faux pas*? Why did preexisting cultural stereotypes inhibit rather than help communication situations?
5. What could the law firm do in general to reduce such situations in the future? What can be done when cultural differences are identified? What type of support systems do people have when cultural intolerance is first experienced (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2004, p. 318)?

Bumper sticker takeaway: **Assume Nothing with Others**

Micro Case Five: Fried Cottage Cheese

This case was prepared by Christine Day.

Case Five, “Fried Cottage Cheese,” reminds readers that understanding regional language and sub-cultural variations are significant, because many times we don’t know what we don’t know.

Tonight, after working nine hours, the Weatherly Products negotiating team was taking a dinner break, but junior team member Catherine Roberts was not relaxing; she was worried she had committed a *faux pas*. The ten team members expected to eat a quick meal and return to the conference room at the hotel to continue preparing for the upcoming talks. Catherine Roberts felt privileged to be working on such a major negotiation project, and she looked forward to some casual discussions during dinner.

Roberts had worked for Weatherly Products for over ten years as human resources director. The team was in the middle of preparing for crucial negotiations regarding Weatherly’s supplying plastic products to a French company which had recently located a major manufacturing branch in Kentucky. The team members came from various locations throughout the world, and two spoke English as a second language. For convenience, the Weatherly team was working and staying at

the same hotel where the negotiations would be held. The site was the Convention Hotel in Paducah, Kentucky, the city's largest and most beautiful hotel.

Roberts, who held an advanced degree in English language and literature, considered herself to be articulate in her native English language. She felt she had little to learn regarding communicating in English. French, however, was a different story.

Henry Dexter, Weatherly's lead negotiator, was set to order first. Roberts listened with care in order to hear Dexter's specific meal choice, since she intended to match her order in terms of typical content. Her mind was on the idea of whether the meal of choice would be a quick sandwich or full dinner. She had one option for each picked out.

Sitting across the table from Dexter, the lead negotiator, Roberts leaned forward and strained to hear his words against the din of typical restaurant noise. Dexter began to order, looking directly at the server standing next to him. His words were clear: He ordered a toasted ham-and-cheese sandwich with a side order of "fried cottage cheese." Catherine considered herself to be food savvy and aware of many traditional, and even some trendy dishes. She had never heard of fried cottage cheese!

She started to make a loud, humorous comment about fried food and its lack of healthy nutrition, but thought better of the idea. Dexter was, after all, the lead negotiator and outranked her by several layers of management; she certainly would not want him to misunderstand the remark as disrespectful. Thinking it was better to be safe than sorry, she said nothing.

She waited in anticipation, filled with curiosity as to what this mysterious dish of fried cottage cheese was. Of course, she knew that cottage cheese was a dairy product high in protein, but how would the cook fry it? What would it taste like? She puckered up her mouth at the thought of such a weird sounding dish.

When the food arrived, she stared at his side dish. It appeared to look like regular cottage cheese with small chunks of fruit. Roberts asked herself, "*Where was the fried cottage cheese?*" Finally, curiosity got the best of her, so she leaned over and said, "Say, that looks good. What did you order?" The lead negotiator had a puzzled look on his face when he answered, "A toasted ham-and-cheese with a side dish of fruit and cottage cheese." He said each word distinctly. This enunciation did not sound at all similar to what he told the server. Not at all. To cover her embarrassment, Roberts quickly muttered, "Well, it looks really good."

Actually, Roberts felt like she had been hit over the head by a baseball bat. She was silent as she carefully thought about the impact of what had just happened—and what might have happened. The verbal description the lead negotiator had given her did not sound similar to what he had articulated to the server. Yet clearly the server had understood, because Dexter was obviously happy with what was delivered. Roberts suddenly became conscious of the cultural noise in her brain. She would have never imagined that the lead negotiator—or anyone on the team—would speak a second "English Language," one with regional accents and all of the implications. She was aware that many in the world face these issues, but it did not occur to her that a country with the "same" language might also have similar challenges.

Micro Case Five: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. What did Roberts need to think deeply about?

3. What specific aspects of communication had she overlooked or misunderstood without even being aware of the regional variance. What considerations should Roberts reflect on, such as regarding the “implications of language and vocabulary choice, accents, dialects, regional difference, and the barriers associated with assumptions” that Victor (1992) suggested? What are the implications for the user of the dialect, Henry Dexter?
4. What lessons did she learn while sitting in her own country listening to and speaking her own native tongue? What are the implications for doing business globally?

Bumper Sticker: **Recognize that you don't know what you don't know.**

Micro Case Six: Culturally Appropriate Responses

This case was provided by Tianjiao Xu.

Case Six, “Culturally Appropriate Responses,” concentrates on the fact that acceptable ideas in one culture are not always transportable to another culture. In addition to diversity issues, the case addresses concepts around face saving, language, and sub-culture.

After two years apart, four friends from China were together in an exciting U.S. resort city, yet they found their enthusiasm dampened by a careless remark from a native-born couple. The evening had started out magnificently. The friends had not seen each other for a couple of years and they were all delighted to be going out together. They were so happy, in fact, that they were all holding hands as an expression of friendship and affection, just as they might do in social settings in China.

As the young women left the hotel where they had dined, they walked down the street hand in hand. In fact, they were all smiles, even skipping a bit with blissful energy. As the four turned the corner and headed down a main street, an American couple approached from the opposite direction. Upon seeing the four holding hands, the woman loudly commented to the man, “Oh look, honey, a group of Oriental lesbians! Isn't that nice?!” Caught off guard by the comment, the young women immediately released each other's hands as if they were stung. After the couple passed, one of the foursome tried to hold hands again, but the others would not. They were embarrassed that people would stereotype them this way, when all they wanted to do was to be happy with their friends. Under these circumstances, there was no possible way to preserve the young women's dignity. They were also caught off guard by the couple's presumption that the Chinese women did not speak English and therefore were not expected to have understood the remark.

Micro Case Six: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Babcock (2015) stated that “global business communication is going in the direction of increasingly more complexity and diversity...which results in ‘competency levels’ of familiarity and knowledge regarding how to communicate with others.” How do these concepts relate to the cultural repercussions of the girls holding hands? In China? In North America? Other places in the world?

3. Face saving is a significant issue in Chinese culture. Cardon (2009) reported about the role of face in Chinese business culture, such as giving face, protecting face, vying for face, and not considering face. Cardon also included dominant face practices and related strategies based on business relationships. How could the young women manage face saving in this particular situation?
4. What judgments were made about a non-verbal action? What could have been done to prevent these judgments?
5. How did the perceived judgments impact the young women's behavior for the rest of the weekend and well-beyond?

Bumper Sticker: **Perceptions are not facts.**

Micro-Case Seven: Sub-Cultural Issues: Intent Versus Impact

This case was provided by Elizabeth Kujava and Christine Day

Case Seven, "Sub-Cultural Issues: Intent versus Impact," underscores the concept that cross-cultural and sub-cultural dilemmas do occur, in spite of the best of intentions. Communicators need to take responsibly to be aware, ask questions, and learn details prior to communication.

Professional meeting facilitator Rebecca Dumont was driving back to Minneapolis the morning after an unproductive, tense meeting in northwestern Minnesota. She was thinking about the encounter, because she was totally befuddled by what went wrong. She intended to be effective, but the impact of what she did was quite different from her expectations. Elsewhere in the past, she had considerable success facilitating meetings, but this time nothing seemed to have worked. Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, in a big, loud family, she had recently moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota. The day previous to this apparently unsuccessful meeting, she drove over 250 miles from the Twin Cities (as the Minneapolis-St. Paul area was called) to a very small town in the northwest corner of Minnesota to facilitate a crucial meeting between a non-profit agency and a group of local Native Americans, who communicated with silent gestures and a slight nod of the head. The meeting topic was about a crisis caused by a health care clinic service now offered which was contrary to the Native Americans' values.

An hour after the meeting started (with it scheduled to run for another hour) Dumont had shivered as she faced the room full of people. The social temperature inside the meeting room was not much warmer than the midwinter weather outside. The meeting was punctuated by long periods of silence or times when Dumont (rather than the participants) did all of the talking. The people were polite but seemed unwilling to participate in the discussion by speaking or even giving general opinions on how the group felt as a whole. This certainly differed from the loud, boisterous culture in Georgia, her home state, where everyone had something to say about everything. Dumont had tried calling on people directly, but that did not work. However, people's emotions were evident from the glaring facial expressions and the frosty non-verbal messages conveyed as many chose to sit silently with their arms crossed. Dumont had no doubt that the people there knew a significant amount about the current crisis, but for some strange reason they were unwilling to speak.

Dumont had tried to maintain her role as a neutral party, speaking objectively and impersonally, relying on facts, data, and other specific examples. She had planned carefully for the meeting from choosing to dress in her best business suit to preparing a specific, time-bound agenda. Without trying to be overbearing, she used her best managerial voice as she concentrated on moving the agenda along, focusing on the present problems with the hope that the evening's meeting could provide some quick solutions. She realized that she had just met all of the people in the room, but she tried to smile frequently to let them know she was here to help. Even though the lack of audience response made Dumont uncomfortable with the meeting process, she had still tried to pay attention to the cues in the room. Frustrated, she finally ended the meeting 30 minutes early.

As the meeting broke up, Ryan Jones, a young employee from the non-profit, came up to Dumont. Since she thought the community situation was becoming tense, Dumont was curious about what Jones might have to say. She wondered why he had not spoken up during the meeting, but chose, rather, to come up after it to comment. Dumont immediately detected what she felt was an "attitude" on Jones's part—his arms were crossed, his eyes were focused on the ground, and he did not speak immediately. When Dumont had just about concluded that Jones had nothing to say, he started to speak, slowly and thoughtfully, with emotion in his voice: "We truly do need to consider the past and its implications on this decision." Dumont had a hard time listening to this comment, because Jones seemed to have missed the point. Dumont had tried so hard to keep the meeting focused on moving forward, not looking back. She shrugged her shoulders, let Jones finish talking, and then packed up her bag and left the meeting.

It was years before Dumont came to realize the strong lessons that evening taught her. Looking back she realized that she was caught blind-sided by a sub-culture of which she was completely unaware. She also realized that during the meeting, she was unable to be open to a quick adjustment, something that all skilled facilitators needed to be able to do. She now knew that she needed to add depth to her facilitation skills, and that she should carefully avoid stereotyping associated with cultures. These were important keys to effectiveness in any communication situation.

Micro Case Seven: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Dumont came to the meeting with a lack of awareness of the sub-cultural dynamics of the communication style and the assumed values of the audience. What should Dumont have done BEFORE the meeting to create a more successful outcome? DURING the meeting? AFTER the meeting?
3. Victor and Day (2013) "believe in the importance of cultural context in the global application of organizational practices. Relationship building, organizational structure, specific processes, practices, and global culture have a fluid interaction that impacts the dynamics of any give situation. Resolution can often be found in the specific effort of those involved to forge a bond of harmonizing expectations." What harmonization should have occurred in this situation? What additional communication skills and sub-cultural understanding skills should Dumont have brought to the meeting?
4. What specific communication, cultural, and facilitation skills could she have used that night? What other details would have created a more successful meeting (see Native American communication expert Teuer's publication, *Everything you Wanted to know about Indians but*

were *Afraid to ask*, 2012)? What issues does Teuer point out that could carry across to many other cultures and sub-cultures?

5. What stereotypes did Dumont bring to the meeting? What stereotypes did the Native Americans bring to the meeting?

6. What issues of sub-cultural understand and communication skills should Dumont be aware of BEFORE she planned and held the meeting?

Bumper Sticker: **Good intent cannot overcome bad impact.**

Approaching the Challenges

Many aspects of the global community have created peers of people who never imagined they would be peers; it has created neighbors of people who never dreamed they would share a common business community. One incredible example of the implications of this statement is a fact pointed out by General Electric's CEO Immelt (2017): "GE now conducts business in some 180 countries, up from about 100 in 2010."

These seven cases highlighted various aspects of global communication, cultural issues, and sub-cultural considerations that arise when people use their own specific global lens. Our intent is to help people re-focus their perspective so as to integrate results with the successful application of both theory and competency. Victor (1992) emphasized that "basic tenets understood to be effective in transferring ideas and message in the workplace in one culture may prove entirely ineffective or even counterproductive in another culture." Knowledge of many cultures is necessary; an effective examination of the differences and similarities of doing business in different countries is imperative; and, skills to mitigate the multiple cultures involved in a single business transition are crucial to business success (p.3).

For people who want to increase their global communication competencies, the key is to ask questions. People need to "ask questions aimed at obtaining enough understanding of another culture so that he or she can secure the right answers" (Victor, 1992). As global communicators ask questions, they will find that more questions become evident, but the answers start leading them to a path of understanding.

Schein (2010) would have people gain a perspective by asking questions related to understanding artifacts (what can easily be viewed, such as dress, language, and the behavior of employees), values (what the business and its employees exhibit), and assumed values (a level of values that cannot be measured but do make a difference to the organization's culture, such as beliefs and the inner aspects of human nature demonstrated by the organization's culture (Schein, 2010). Once people begin to understand that their values are not necessarily shared, their communication process may start to change.

Hall (1976), an anthropologist, introduced the idea of contexting in the seminal work *Beyond Culture*. He noted that in high context cultures, equally important to the words in a message are important rituals, roles, and non-verbal cues surrounding the communication. In contrast, in low context cultures, the actual words that are spoken or written are what matters. Understanding where a country falls in this cultural continuum is critical to communicating and doing business.

Hofstede (1991) pioneered dimensional research in intercultural business communication. He defined culture as the "software of the mind" -- mental programs that make us inclined to patterns

of thinking, feeling, and acting. Hofstede created six dimensions of culture that are designed to make it easier to identify and understand cultures better. The six dimensions are:

- Power distance – Pattern of distribution of power to culture’s members.
- Individualism/collectivism – Degree to which individuals perceive themselves as members of a group.
- Uncertainty avoidance – Level of tolerance of ambiguous, new, or changed situations.
- Masculine/feminine
- Long-term/short-term - Long-term cultures prepare for change; short-term cultures focus on traditions and tend to resist change.
- Indulgence/restraint – Gratification of individual desires.

Building upon Hofstede’s research, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) developed seven dimensions that illustrate points of cultural tension. They are:

- Universal/particular – Flexibility versus rules
- Individual/Communitarian – The good that drives decisions (the individual or society as a whole).
- Neutral/affective – Expression of emotion.
- Specific/diffuse – Public and private boundaries.
- Achieved/ascribed – Source of merit (personal accomplishment or connection).
- Sequential/synchronic – Sense of time (linear and limited or cyclical and expansive).
- Internal/external – Individual control over one’s destiny.

Bohannan (1995) in *How Culture Works* shared that, “People examine cultural processes that they do not understand in terms of stories – just as they see mystical religious ideas in terms of myth.” He continued, emphasizing that “Once we succeed in recontexting cultural values into social science and the insight of social science into the real world, we stand a better chance of getting our simulations and our scenarios of the future more nearly right. If we actually get them right, our visions will have become more than some mere yearning for harmony or Utopia.”

Understanding where tensions or misconceptions are more likely to come about is not based on the magic of one model or theory. However, there are many models and theories which help ease understanding of the global communication processes. One example is evidenced in Fons Trompenaar’s TEDx talk in Amsterdam (“Riding the Waves of Culture,” 2013). In addition, Trompenaars created something called the 4Rs of applying transcultural competence: Recognition, respect, reconciliation and realization. The first step is recognizing what the cultural dilemma may be primary in a situation. The second step is respecting that there is a dilemma and that both sides of the dilemma have cultural legitimacy. The third is reconciling the dilemma through coming to some sort of agreement that honors all sides. It is looking at a win-win scenario and not a win-lose one. Finally, the fourth is bringing into realization the needed change to sustain a reconciled solution (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2004).

Extending Indirect Experiential Opportunities

Hall (1976) stated that “understanding the reality of covert culture and accepting it on a gut level comes neither quickly nor easily; it must be lived.” Unfortunately, many business professionals do not have the luxury of living for extended periods of time in another culture. It is the purpose of these seven cases to start a dialogue and to help people ask questions about various aspects of global communication, cultural issues, and sub-cultural considerations that might arise

from people communicating and doing business through and expanded cultural lenses. This indirect experience may begin a journey to explore the nuances of communication issues that business people operating globally may face daily.

Tan (2015) suggested that “our current thinking about what constitutes global business communication and our current theoretical models and perspectives of global business communication will undergo a paradigm shift.” He continued, highlighting the idea that new media and social media will create a transformation “unleashed by these new media about how people connect and interact with each other.”

Foster (1992) focused on “the value of a global mind-set over a global miscellany.” He suggests that the “more you understand about the history, art, music, literature, politics, economics, religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and mythology of a people, the more likely you will be to succeed in communicating with them.” Foster advocated that while it is “crucially important to learn all one can about other cultures, but the enormity of the challenge” creates a challenge that is nearly impossible. He strongly recommended that “it is best to begin by understanding the one culture we can truly master, our own, and becoming aware of the ways it affects the process of working with others...” (Foster, 1992). He concludes with a challenge: “our first priority should not be the gathering of a miscellany; our first priority needs to be the development of a larger, deeper, and more empathic approach to doing business with other cultures.” He used an analogy “no one can know everything about someone else’s culture, just as you cannot gather every fish in the sea;” rather, it “is more like a journey” (Foster, 1992).

Many questions remain: How can we evolve our own work and practices to further support cultural sensitivity and competence? How can such experiences be shared effectively, so that people do not feel alone in trying to conquer cultural and communication gaps? Why does the surprise of the situation seem to leave us in a befuddled state often too late for correction? It also seems as if there are more than just two sides, but as many sides as a faceted stone. Our communication and cultural lenses are often unknowingly distorted.

The need to avoid biases and optimize opportunities when dealing with different cultures is not new. Our global society demands new awareness of multiple communication and cultural patterns, not just our own. These patterns will continue to evolve, too, as the “new box” thinking changes the way we communicate in this cross-cultural and multicultural world (Glover & Friedman, 2015).

As we continue to evolve our capabilities to communicate globally and to respect cultures, we must all continue to develop our learning through shared understanding. These case studies have provided just one mechanism for extending our indirect experiential opportunities

As the late Nelson Mandela said, “A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination” (Mandella, n.d.). We could not agree more.

Side Bar

Victor (1992) created the LESCANT model that represents seven areas to consider when dealing with international business communication. This is a useful framework when working in a global environment. The seven variables include issues related to:

- Language—This includes language, language being filtered through a third-party translator, cultural implications, the implications of language and vocabulary choice, accents, dialects, regional difference, and the barriers associated with assumptions. Example: On a recent trip to South Africa, one of the authors noticed that many people speak Afrikaans, which has evolved from the Dutch vernacular, and often referred to as “African Dutch.” It is a hybrid language and is spoken by many in the region, even if it is a second language to some in the area.
- Environment—This includes the nature of the environment in which the business communicators live and work, the use of technology in that environment, and the specific cultural perceptions of the relationship business people have to the environment, including a wide range of issues such as climate, transportation, logistics, health care, sanitation, settlement patterns, and energy
- Social Organization—This includes the common institutions and collective activities shared by the business communicators in that culture. This could include family, religion, community, the role of genders, and use of leisure time. The subtlety of the social organization concept centers around the idea that communicators may be aware of the differences but unaware of the implications.
- Context (high or low)—This includes the differences between high and low contexting in cross-cultural business situations, such as relationships, explicit communication, law, uncertainty avoidance, and face-saving. Assumptions of what is understood creates significant dynamics in the business communication environment.
- Authority—This includes all of the elements related to authority, such as authority conception, power perception, power distance, trust, decision-making processes, and leadership style, as well as the implications of accommodating differences in authority.
- Non-Verbal—This includes a multitude of issues, such as active and passive nonverbal communication, kinesics, appearance, dress and adornment, oculosics (cross-cultural and gender differences), haptics, proxemics, paralanguage (voice quality, vocalization, vocal qualifiers), and passive nonverbal communication (color, numerals, emblems or symbols, olfactory messages) (Kelm & Victor, 2017).
- Time—This includes the use of time beyond the clock and calendar, but as a medium of communication, the relativist perception of time, the effects of monochromic versus polychromic time, and other dimensions related to a range of intercultural differences in temporal conception.

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