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# New horizons of intercultural communication: Applied linguistics approach

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## Abstract

The paper describes current trends and with them associated needs of the global market regarding business communication which must be intercultural (intercultural business communication - IBC) so that various forces working in the global environment cooperate with each other leading to optimisation of business processes. It also brings the ideas connected to implementing intercultural business communication in the university curriculum alongside with the case study bringing the information about the author's successful attempt to implement IBC in the Czech university curriculum.

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## 1. Intercultural business communication: current needs of the global market

In the current era of globalization we have moved from communication in various languages to pure discourse in some form of English language. The majority of international companies use English as official corporate language and the majority of information transfer through the Internet is made in English. In intercultural communication scholars usually distinguish three individual phases of the discipline (Bargiela-Chiapini 2009): first, it focuses on the nation and national differences between the people and their cultures, second, the companies are the source and aim of communication, and third, the individuals are the ones who compete and collaborate globally. The last phase is

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characterized by the commodification of language – i.e. the language has become a commodity (Tan 2008). Intercultural competence can be, therefore, converted into economic gain and the intercultural knowledge, e.g. in the creation of a simple company website or presentation can be highly remunerated. Therefore, it might be crucial to highlight the importance of intercultural education in our universities. The importance of intercultural and multicultural education implemented in language education is widely described by many authors (Pikhart 2013, Konečný 2013, Verluyten 1997, Washington et al. 2012).

In today's companies much of their work consists of language-related tasks which form the substantial part of management work. Managers of multinational and international companies operating in the Internet market as well have to transfer all the information from the headquarters of the parent company to the subsidiary, from the project team to the customers and potential customers, from the clients back to the company management to get some feedback. Therefore, understanding, clearcommunication strategy and flawless transfer of information on both domestic and international level is a substantial prerequisite of any business activity and this is the way how to transfer linguistic and cultural capital into economic one.

## **2. Implementing intercultural business communication in the university curriculum: Czech Republic university case study**

In the academic year 2012/13 I managed to introduce the subject *Intercultural Business Communication in the Global Environment* to the curriculum of the Faculty of Information Technology and Management, University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic, and now it has been taught two years for both Czech and foreign students each semester. There is one 45-minute lecture and a seminar intended for the students of information management, finance management and management of leisure and tourism.

Naturally, the subject is taught in English as the majority of participating students are from abroad studying in the Czech Republic. The subject focuses on modern forms of business communication in the global business environment in the last decade and draws attention to opportunities and possible threats of doing business globally. It also highlights new trends in intercultural (transcultural or cross-cultural) management. The basic points to deal with during the lectures are:

- Communication and culture
- Studying intercultural communication
- Cultural influences on context: The business setting
- Intercultural communication in an evolving business context
- Becoming competent: Improving intercultural communication
- The global manager's environment
- Managing interdependence
- The cultural context of global management
- Cross-cultural negotiations and decision making
- Implementing strategy for international and global operations
- Global alliances and strategy implementation
- Global human resources management

The subject is based on current authoritative literature in the field of intercultural management, transcultural management and cross-cultural management. All these terms (i.e. intercultural management, transcultural management and cross-cultural management) are used interchangeably as the majority of the authors do not describe significant differences. The credits are given for an oral presentation covering national cultural stereotypes the students represent according to the country of their origin and/or their personal cultural clash/clashes they have experienced both personal and business. The exam is based on theoretical knowledge based on the reading assignments given to the students at the beginning of the course.

The feedback of the participants both during and after the semester was very positive. Almost all of them expressed their satisfaction with the content and the outcomes of the course in the anonymous questionnaire. The added value of the course was the fact that they now feel to be more aware of the cultural diversity and the fact that

it can heavily influence not only personal relationship with other people but also their business performance and results. Being more culturally aware is a benefit for them making them more adaptable to the world global forces enabling them to communicate and act more efficiently in the global marketplace.

### **3. Discussion**

The results of our research (Pikhart 2012) indicate that technological factors influence the level of company communication in the global intercultural business environment. Modern innovative intercultural training enables participants to be more competent communicators in international business and the global cross-cultural environment in which the business is done (Feng et al. 2009). One of the new approaches to intercultural training is to move away from an approach in which participants communicate on the basis of pre-taught cultural models or templates. On the contrary, it is vital to analyse our own cultural identities and to view ourselves as others might see us. The current reality of business communication is based purely on interaction with people from other cultures, backgrounds, nations and continents. To communicate successfully we make surface adaptations so that we are able to cross cultural boundaries and, indeed, transcend culture. Thereby, not only are we able to survive in today's multicultural society, but we are also able to prosper, even economically. Therefore, modern business communication must be based on an awareness of the basic communication principles of the current global intercultural environment.

As Brake puts it (1995, 20), companies generally will have to be transferred into a "global structure requiring networked multinational skills and abilities with a critical understanding of local responsiveness, integrating and coordinating mechanisms of corporate culture on a global basis." It is clear that managers will have to find themselves operating in an environment which is based on negotiating in the global cyberspace, meeting international teams, managing an intercultural workforce and generally operating and doing business globally with all the possible consequences it can have. Good intercultural communication must always mean that we are "sensitive to and understanding of others' cultural productions and the way in which they play with the various identities available to them (discourses on their identities currently available in the context of their interactions)" (Holliday et al. 2010, 21).

In order to be more effective communicators the management of the company has to take many global and intercultural factors into account such as the presentation of the company during meetings, during negotiations with business partners, in commercial correspondence abroad, and in website presentations of the company on the Internet in various cultural environments, etc. Therefore, looking for synergy effects in cultural diversity has become assessed more positively due to the fact that, in this way, we can, through enhanced business communication, achieve a considerably improved level of service on a global scale.

### **4. Conclusion: The importance of intercultural business communication and its future**

Without knowledge of intercultural communication we have little chance to be successful in the global village, and this has recently become a truism. The current situation in communication, whether general or business, can be clearly defined as more straightforward, more diverse and more interlinked. Technological changes enable us to travel faster and further than ever before; the Internet links people around the world who communicate on a daily basis without any quantitative limits; the international labour force is more mobile and it is easier to employ people from various cultural backgrounds; business people are more mobile too and, thus, more active on a global scale rather than a local one; and, finally, the workforce is becoming more and more diverse and we face an increasingly multicultural workforce in an increasingly multicultural environment (Gibson 2002).

All these changes will mean a greater need to manage diversity and diverse forces both inside and outside the company – and this will be the only way to succeed in global business both for the management and the sales force as well. The results of the research (Pikhart 2013) indicate that communication factors can influence levels of information transfer and its efficiency. Notably, to increase the company efficiency we need to create better information transfer standards and, consistently with previous research by Thomas et al. (2009), decrease the quantity of information in favour of its quality.

To sum up, the only viable, modern, innovative and successful approach to intercultural management and intercultural business communication is to focus on modern communication strategies in the global intercultural

environment, creating and maintaining communication on the basis of mutual understanding so that trust is created within an organization and between organisations when doing business globally and internationally. The development of trust and employee involvement is crucial as it strengthens a company's global presence by going beyond a simplistic understanding of communication as the mere transfer of isolated information. Current perspective provides us with an approach which has the potential to achieve effective intercultural communication where we manage cultural differences flexibly with lossless dissemination of information and innovativeness.

Intercultural communication is always interpersonal communication and we can observe that the following generation of computing will be based on the same model, i.e. interaction with difference and otherness due to increasingly global network of contacts and links. It is the task of management discourse, knowledge discovery and modern information management to maintain the interactions between cultures and various ideological, communication and information streams in the global world.

The current reality of business communication is based almost purely on electronic interaction with people from other cultures, backgrounds, nations and continents. To communicate successfully we make surface adaptation so that we are able to cross cultural boundaries and transcendent culture (Novinger 2001: 151-153), and not only survive in today's multicultural society but we manage to prosper, and even economically. To sum it up, we claim that the only viable, modern, innovative and successful approach to intercultural management and intercultural business communication is to focus on modern ways of communication strategies in global intercultural environment, creating and maintaining communication on the basis of mutual understanding so that we create trust within the organization and between them when doing business globally and internationally. The development of trust and employees involvement is, therefore, crucial for any successful entrepreneurial activities to strengthen the company's global presence by going beyond simplistic understanding of communication as mere transfer of isolated information.

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