

Effective (intercultural) communication

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Intercultural communication is the communication between people with several cultural contexts. Because we are all different, it is important to recognise each other's communication manners, and then learn to handle. Conditions for effective, intercultural communication are the following:

- respect for other cultures
- awareness of other cultures and own culture
- knowledge of different cultural codes
- social skills to bridge differences
- Make contact between persons; met people, not a culture

Communication is effective if the recipient understand the message in the way the sender has meant.

You can also say: the contact has impact because the sender and recipient understand each other entirely.

Language is much more than only knowledge of words and senses. As we saw earlier in this module, the chance on wrong communication between persons from several cultures is larger by the difference in standards/norms, values and the world view.

These differences can be bridged. In short, when you do efforts for purposive/target aimed and consciously communication.

For intercultural competence or effective (intercultural) communication there are, according to Pinto (1990), four conditions linked to:

Technical condition: there must be reciprocal understanding of the language in which is communicated. This means that:

- you understand each other's (sign) language

- you can see each other and/or hear
- a possible interpreter does work well
- technical equipment (phone, radio, television etc..) well functions

Cognitive condition: both parties must speak at an intellectual level acceptable for each other; This means that:

- you can understand each on intellectual manners
- the subject of conversation is familiar enough

Interpretative condition: the same interpretation must be granted to the used words; This means that:

- you give the same meaning to the used words, gestures and mimicry (interprets in the same way)
- interpreting is more difficult, as the language in which you do speak is not your native language is

Affective condition: both parties must know what the emotional meaning is of used words, gestures or operations. This means that:

- you must have the same feeling about certain (language) actions (for example politeness codes or look to each other directly.)
- you are prepared to communicate

Especially the last condition can lead to wrong communication, because one assumes when one speaks the same language the same meanings are granted to the verbal and non-verbal language. To serve to the affective condition, it is necessary to understand or know the culture of each other. For development of intercultural competence, and therefore

communicate with persons from other cultures, several models have been developed. For a compact overview I refer to Azghari (2005). Within the framework of this module students get acquainted with two methods:

- three-steps method (Pinto)?
- the bridge model of values and interests (Azghari)

Doing the intercultural dialogue: integration of the previous. In a number of exercises the student had learned his own (culture-based) values and standards/norms. By means of dialogue and presentations the student had learned values, standards and behavioural codes of other students. Students came (almost automatic) in conversation with each by means of the three steps method (Pinto, 1994).

Three steps method

The three steps method of David Pinto is a practical way to bridge cultural difference. This method learns to look from a double perspective and helps the student to deal with possible differences, in order to increase the effectiveness of the communication. The DSM is based on the double perspective, or learning to look from the perspective of your own culture (knowing your own standards and values) and from the perspective of culture of others (learning the standards and values of the other). By knowing these aspects, is it possible to understand each other's world view and is there a possibility to prevent the following problems, which can arise during the communication:

- a restricted vision: to see, experience and interprets from your own perspective;
- attributing your own standards and values to your speaker; you cannot indicate your own wishes, restrictions and borders because it is not clear what the communication codes and the cultural values of the other one is.

Culture has a manifest aspect and a hidden aspect. The first aspect has been linked to age, sexes, training, ethnicity, profession and the social status and is directly perceptible. There are however also characteristics whom are

not directly perceptible, such as emotions, belief, feeling and perception. These hidden aspects of culture play a large role in the communication. When you act from a double perspective, the chance to misunderstandings is less. The three steps are:

- Step 1
 - Learn to know your own (culture-based) standard and values. Which rules and codes influence your thinking, actions and communication?
- Step 2
 - Learn to know the (culture-based) standards, values and codes of the other one. Separate opinions from behaviour. Research what the "strange behaviour" of the other means.
- Step 3
 - Think how you will handle in the given situation with the observed differences in standards and values. Mark your borders concerning adaptation and acceptance of the other. Make these borders clear to the other. (Pinto, 1990: 174-175)

As the DSM can be applied, according to Pinto, preconceptions can be removed and other one's standards and values can be understood and respected.

Bridge model of values and interests (Azghari)

Azghari has described a number of intercultural communication models (among the described model of Pinto) and provide with criticism. The model of Pinto, according to Azghari, seems to be a recipe book "how to go with the other one". On the basis of this and other insights Azghari developed the bridge model as an answer on the question which method can be used to improve intercultural conversation.

The bridge model of values and interests goes through the following three phases:

Phase 1 Try to retrieve which values and/or interests play a role in a certain situation in the contact with the other and verify that also at the other.

Phase 2 Recognise which values and/or interests play a role in your communication with the other and make that clear to the other (explanation!).

Phase 3 Decide which values and/or interests have the highest priority for you in a given situation and behave like that.
(Azghari, 2005)

To each stage a pursuit belongs. Reflected schematically:

Stage 1: collecting knowledge concerning the other one (what can I know?)

Stage 2: pronounce expectations and standards (how do I want to handle with the other one?)

Stage 3: translate expectations in concrete behaviour (how do I act?)

All three stages examine successively: values, standards/norms and interests.

A value answers on 'in which I believe ', a standard 'how we want to handle each other ' and interests about 'which aims we pursue?'

Standards haven't been incorporated separately in the bridge model, because they generally give the concrete interpretation of a value.

Moreover standards are liable to change. That comes because people let lead themselves also, everywhere in the world, in the communication by their interests (own interest versus public interest). People must find almost daily a correct assessment between their values and interests. Those can clash with each other.

For example;

Don't smoke in the house. But if a foreign guest comes on a visit the smoke ban is immediately lifted. To make the guest sense is of more importance.

The result of the first stage is knowledge, the second is clarifying of (own) standards and be aware of commonplaces, and the third is decision-making.

All stages appeal at three levels: knowledge, skills and attitude.

Some talk commandments from Azghari:

Ad 1 Be curious and open-minded!

Three things are necessary at familiarisation: listen first two times then talks and ask questions. By listening: pay attention to verbal expression and non-verbal signals. By talking: avoid commonplaces.

By questioning: avoid suggestive questions.

Ad 2 Be sincere and respectful!

Try to be empathic: not only move in the situation, also try to feel the situation and react correctly.

Ad 3 Be consequent and unpretentiously!

By decision making: word and action must agree as much as possible. Successful pass through of these three stages must eventually lead to insights to better understanding between speakers, because the expectations from both sides have been pronounced. Moreover one is aware of its own cultural commonplaces. (Azghari, 2005)