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Intercultural Communication

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“Do you know what I mean?”

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Intercultural Communication

When in Rome, do as the Romans do!

Japanese:

When in Rome, understand the behaviour of the Romans, and thus become an even more complete Japanese.

Intercultural Communication - What is culture?

„Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas.“ Richard D. Lewis

- Culture has several layers, like an onion:
 - Outer layer: Products of culture (e.g. buildings, art)
 - Inner layer: Values and norms (e.g. autocracy, democracy, honesty, modesty)

Intercultural Communication - What is communication?

| | same place | different place |
|----------------|---|--|
| same time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face communication • None-verbal communication (mimics, gestures etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephoning • Video-Conferencing • ... |
| different time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackboards • Sticky notes • Newspapers • ... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Mails • Fax • Letters • Newsgroups • ... |

Intercultural Communication - Cultural differences

- ✦ Can't be completely understood
- ✦ Authority, bureaucracy, creativity, good fellowship, verification and accountability are experienced in different ways
- ✦ As we use the same words, we don't realize that our cultural biases and our accustomed conduct may not be appropriate or shared

Why Intercultural Communication?

- ✚ Many products and services are becoming common to world markets
- ✚ „Glocalization“
- ✚ The balance between consistency and adaption is essential for corporate success:
 - ➔ Standardised organisations, systems and procedures
 - ➔ Local legislation, fiscal, socio-political and cultural systems

Intercultural Communication - Problems

- ✚ Multi-national companies apply formulas abroad which are derived from and are successful in their own culture
- ✚ Language problems:
Misunderstandings, “wrong tone”, “wrong information”
- ✚ Lack of communication to avoid conflicts
- ✚ Decision-making takes a long time

The basis of cultural differences - Different concepts of time



For the Italians being late is not an inability to deal with time, but a demonstration of freedom, the none-acceptance of having to plan one's life and thus to rob it off all spontaneity.



The Swedes are usually punctual (that's where they get along with the Germans) and then say the most important things within the first 15 minutes (that's where they don't get along with the Italians).



Time is central to Germans. The whole day is structured: Get up at 6, breakfast at 6:14, leave for work at 6:45, arrive at work at 6:58. Just in time! If you have arranged a meeting with Germans at 8, you must be there on the dot.

The basis of cultural differences - Different concepts of space



Once upon an time, people in Finland lived far apart from each other. Personal contact was rare, and when they met, people screamed, because they thought they had to deal with long distances. Aki Nokia was a bit tired of this, so he invented something to overcome space. As the Finnish are the only ones who understand their language, he felt obliged to give the instructions in English.



The Dutch have made the best of the most crowded piece of land in the EU. In former times the Dutch also used their colonies. Historical developments then forced them to expand seawards not landwards. In the Netherlands, rooms, houses and furniture are small and space nowadays is overcome by bikes and cars with trailers.



In Germany the “distance of comfort” is exactly 1.2m. If you get any closer beware of the consequences. You might get pushed. For the same reason, Germans like their privacy. They like locked rooms, big walls, high fences, closed doors and single offices. Germans shake hands and don't kiss each other- like the French and the Spanish do, whose distance of comfort seems to be about 0.5cm

The basis of cultural differences - Different concepts of qualification



For the Americans it is important that your daddy is a governor, that you went to Harvard and that you know either the presidential family or someone important in Hollywood. If you know the right people you can become president, no matter whether movie star or Austrian.



For the Swedish, interpersonal contact is considered a better qualification than degrees or political background. Hence the long sauna sessions and wild parties around Midsummer Night.



To the French German is a mis-sounding rural dialect, suitable to express cloudy states of mind, certain kinds of madness and mental abysses which thank God the French have no access to. Language is important and how you use it shows how qualified you are.

The basis of cultural differences - Different concepts of the environment



The Danish household is the smallest in the world (2.17 persons) and its people are the world's third highest telephone users, but they don't make many long distance calls. As their country is very small, the Danish constantly try to rebuild parts of it with colourful, small, plastic building blocks. Funnily enough this addiction has spread all over the world.



The Swedish appreciate their environment. Their life is much more determined by nature. It is perfectly ok to spend as much time as possible at your summer house in summer. And in the long winter nights you think about life, have a drink and go to the sauna.



Germans have many rules and regulations. Homes and offices should be kept in good order - after all the layout has been carefully planned. If the neighbour's hedge is a little bit too wide, there is open conflict. If he washes his car on a Sunday, he's taken to court.

The basis of cultural differences - Different concepts of relationships



Americans overestimate. Everything is „bigger“ (cars, roads, hamburgers), „taller“ (skyscrapers, bridges), „better“ (Microsoft and the military) „more wonderful“ (including silicon implants. Isn't that absolutely fantastic and overwhelmingly wonderful, honey?)



Excentrics and law-breakers gain sympathy in France. See Asterix, Obelix and Brigitte Bardot. However, the French are always polite, as shows a regular letter-ending: “...avec les salutations les plus chaleureuses, je reste, chère Madame, votre humble serviteur.”



In Britain there is the unwritten iron rule of understatement which means that e.g. the Nobel prize was handed to you because of a mix-up and the marathon you have just won must have been a couple of miles short

Intercultural Communication - Conclusion

- ✚ Intercultural communication is interesting, fascinating, full of problems and a constant challenge to all who are involved.
- ✚ It requires a lot of motivation and willingness to work together to overcome the obstacles.

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