

“Excuse Us, Your Manners Are Missing!” The Role of Business Etiquette in Today’s Era of Cross- Cultural Communication

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Abstract

Nowadays, transnational businesses are exploring opportunities around the world and at the same time trying to be receptive towards cultural differences. Recent studies indicate that while some corporations vie successfully in the global marketplace, others have failed to sustain their competitive advantage because of cultural imperialism or due to paucity of knowledge of their managers on international assignment. Corporate analysts argue that in order to gain from the abundance and growth of international venture, the key to global business success depends on effective cross-cultural etiquette and global workforce diversity management.

Other significant studies emphasized that managers worldwide should be trained in interpersonal relationship and group communication competence, and should be equipped with cross-cultural negotiation skills that can maintain universal competitiveness. Increasingly, corporations recognize the value of preparing global managers, because business objectives are not being achieved primarily because of deficiencies in cross-cultural etiquette. Against this background, this study provides a constructive evaluation and analysis of the role of business etiquette for managers in an international arena, within the context of cross-cultural communication.

Key Words *Cross - cultural communication; Global marketplace; Managers; Business - etiquette; Inter-personal relationship*

1. Introduction

Knowledge about unfamiliar societies and values often offers people a new perception on their own culture. Sometimes, it is intricate to intermingle with others because of the prejudices one has about other cultures. That is why one has to be prepared, when dealing internationally, to meet situations that may contradict the general stereotypes about nations and communities. Undoubtedly, the business segment is much more vociferous nowadays on the issues related to intercultural communication. Trade with business partners or clientele across cultures and those working in an international brand heaves challenges and demands innovative stances and expertise.

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Inter-cultural communication in the offices and during business transactions unwrap certain situations where impending misapprehension about both verbal and nonverbal communiqué may appear to be a common nomenclature. The manner in which human resources interrelate and communicate with one another involves how well dissimilar group members exert mutually for a competent global assignment. Adequate understanding of business etiquette and manners in the workplace help the assorted people improve communication and formal relationships to a greater extent. Devoid of the correct approach, cultural differences greatly diminish efficacy in the premature stages of a liaison. However, the vigorous comprehension of the business etiquette is followed globally, and its conscious effort to acquire new dexterity would definitely emancipate unsullied source of viable gain.

1.1 Objectives

- To explore the role of business etiquette in today's organizations across various cultures.
- To review the cultural misunderstandings in business contexts in today's era.
- To provide the best possible business etiquette practices in diverse cultures.
- To appreciate the values and expectations of different cultures.

1.2 Intercultural Communication

In an era of globalization, we are progressively networking with people from many dissimilar ethnicities. Although modern technology has made it easier for us to communicate with people from anywhere in the world, such exchanges can be tricky if we do not know how to deal with people from varied cultures. Culture is made up of the collective ideals and postulations of a particular group of people. The influence of culture on business is noticeable and significant. To understand these impacts, we need to comprehend culture itself first. Marketing researchers term culture as that which gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing. Thus, it endows with a learned, common, and organized set of signs, regulations, and standards that express and validate human behavior (Harris & Moran, 1987).

In the study of marketing and consumer behavior, the notion of culture has normally been negligible. As a matter of fact, marketers and consumers have overlooked the profundity and magnitude of the idea and its position in scrutinizing human behavior (Douglas & Craig, 1995; Griffith & Ryans, 1995). Since these principles and theories are shared, it is most of the time undemanding to take them for granted and trust that they are relatively customary. Hence, it provides the masses with a wrong perception that the manners in which they conduct themselves are correct and accurate for all and sundry. As Paige (1993), has pointed out, cultures have an inner logic and rationality, and hence their own validity.

However, in order to facilitate communication between cultures it is necessary to understand human reality as socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967). In an age of rapid and effortless communication; we are evermore working and learning along with people from diverse customs and linguistic milieu. This can frequently entail us to act and think in dissimilar ways and to defy our conventional mentality. If we can understand this elementary reality, then we can begin to realize that different groups may have dissimilar values, different way of commune, disparate mores, conventions and hypothesis for arriving at a conclusion. While these may clash with our own perception and attitude, it does not inevitably mean that they are substandard, out-of-the-place or backdated.

1.3 Intercultural Misunderstandings in Business Contexts

It is often difficult for speakers of other languages to deduce the inner meanings from the words being expressed verbally. Besides, it is not easy for mono-lingual speakers to recognize this predicament in the real sense of the term. People from different cultures use verbal communication to accomplish their routine activities in varied manner. A person who says, "Give me a coffee" is seen as discourteous by an English speaker in the UK, but for an Indian English speaker, it is moderately normal. Let us take into consideration, Fred E. Jandt's (2001; 2012) illustrations on some of the palpable gaffes, few celebrities and corporate houses have made when interacting (trying to) with diverse lingos and ethnicity:

Jandt, 2001, Intercultural Communication: An Introduction

- In Australia, President Bush flashed a backhanded peace sign in motorcades. Many in Australia interpret that gesture as obscene.
- When Braniff translated a slogan touting its upholstery, "Fly in Leather," it came out in Spanish as "Fly Naked."
- In Germany, a Berliner is a jelly donut. In his speech at the Berlin Wall, President Kennedy, when he said "Heute, ich bin ein Berliner" actually said "Today, I am a jelly donut" when he really meant, "Today, I am Berliner" (a native of West Berlin).
- American Motors tried to market its new car, the Matador, based on the image of courage and strength. However, in Puerto Rico the name means "killer" and was not popular on the hazardous roads in the country.
- In China, KFC's "finger-licking good" was translated as "eat your fingers off."
- Parker Pens translated the slogan for its ink, "Avoid Embarrassment - Use Quink" into Spanish as "Evite Embarazos - Use Quink" ... which also means "Avoid Pregnancy - Use Quink."
- Chevrolet attempted unsuccessfully to market its Nova compact car in Latin American countries. In Spanish, *no va* means "does not go" or "it doesn't run".
- Mountain Bell Company tried to promote its telephone and services to the Saudi's. Its ad portrayed an executive talking on the phone with his feet propped up on the desk, showing the soles of his shoes-- something an Arab would never do!

Source: Jandt, F. E. An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community. 7th Ed. Thousand Oaks.

These language and cultural mistakes can clearly be avoided if we increase our knowledge and understanding of inter-cultural communication. It addresses the problems by examining the communication and interactions between people of different cultures or subcultures. Fundamental to intercultural communication is the belief that it is through culture that people learn to communicate.

Today, with the emergence of more and more multi-national companies, it is unlikely to do business without communicating cross culturally. Targowski and Metwalli (2003) viewed this millennium as an epoch that transnational organizations will ever more focus on the imperative cost of the cross-cultural communiqué procedure. In order to successfully communicate inter- culturally, aspects of cultural variance and assimilation such as use of language, immigrant acculturation and sexual preferences (Jandt, 1995), should be taken into consideration. The other paramount thing is the proficiency, capability and cost of doing business. Knowledge and understanding of cultural factors such as values, attitudes, beliefs and behavior should be acquired. Effective inter-cultural communication in global economy provides pragmatic tools about how to define a communication strategy, train representatives and conduct business talks in order to achieve success.

2. The Role of Business Etiquette in Today's Global Business

Typically, inter-cultural gaffes stem from misjudging situations that involve mingling and communicating with others. These include, but are not limited to the way in which we introduce ourselves and meet others, the dress sense for formal occasions, expressing thanks to the hosts as well as appropriate etiquette for the exchange of visiting cards and the presentation of gifts. By considering the fact that in the process of transforming ourselves culturally, the management of a company should be ready to articulate projects, guidelines, procedures and directives with reference to the new corporate culture, and more than that, should be unambiguous in matters concerning employee's expectations (Osborne & Plastrik, 2000) and embolden the variation of pattern.

Although the middle-of-the-road people all over the world consider following the rules of business etiquette to be very monotonous, the fact remains that the elucidation of these societal obligations differs from each other. Etiquette is important for a variety of reasons. It helps to ease what might become a troubled situation and can make or break professional associations, which may be extremely important. In quintessence, etiquette helps people to comprehend what is suitable in any condition. It is also important to know the variance between business protocol and business etiquette.

Abundant research works have been undertaken in such tips to use in international business, as insights into some of the cultural norms that guide effective business communication in different cultures. Business etiquette refers to the manners that guide righteous behavioral decisions in one's professional life (Post, 2007). The application of

business etiquette is challenging because the mannerisms and methods of communication vary among cultures. Some differences are subtle while others are more obvious from one culture to another. For example, a kiss on the cheek is an acceptable way to greet someone in many European countries, while this haptic method is not considered acceptable in the U.S.

In addition, individuals from different cultures also have different sets of *communiqué* causing impending confusion. In the late seventies of the last century, cultural anthropologist (Hall, 1976) theorized that people's cultural values and beliefs determine their way of communication. Hall characterized this communication behaviour in terms of High context and Low context.

Table 1: Edward T. Hall, 1976, High-context culture and the contrasting Low-context culture

In high context cultures	Most of the information is inferred from the context of a message; little is "spelled out." Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Latin American cultures could be considered high context.
In low context cultures	Context is less important; most information is explicitly spelled out. German, Scandinavian, and the dominant North American cultures could be considered low context.

Source: Hall, Edward, T. Beyond Culture. Anchor Books (December 7, 1976).

In Table 1 above, High context refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over a long period of time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from years of intermingling with each other. Low context refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but of shorter duration or for some specific reason. In these societies, cultural behavior and beliefs may need to be pronounced clearly so that those coming into the cultural environment know how to behave. The social cultural environment plays an important role when a company wants to enter a new market, especially if there is a huge cultural difference between the home country and the host country.

When people from different ethnicity communicate in a business setting, those differences sometimes cause misunderstandings or difficulty in sharing information. For example, when one first meets another businessperson, one must be careful not to use the usual firm handshake with those from countries such as England, Asian, or the Middle East where it is a custom to use a softer handshake (Chaney & Martin, 2007). It may also be expected that both Chinese and Japanese will to bow during initial greetings. On the other hand, Germans are accustomed to use the firmest handshakes. Thus, one must use the appropriate handshake when greeting someone from a different culture to avoid misunderstandings.

2.1 Best Practices for Business Etiquette

Creating a set of expectations and standard communication methods helps improve communication within an organization. All employees need an understanding of the behaviors that are expected when interacting with cross-cultural colleagues in the workplace. In a company with a lot of diversity, laying out detailed expectations for behavior might be necessary.

2.2 Introductions across Cultures

It may be *Adaab/Nomoshkaar* in Bangladesh, *Guten Tag* in Germany, *Akwaaba* in Ghana, *konnichiwa* in Japan, *Salam* in Iran, *Merhaba* in Turkey or *Aloha* in Hawaii -- saying hello is easy -- but comprehending cultural distinctions for international business is far more challenging. The etiquette of greeting colleagues across cultures definitely differs. For example, it might be expected that both Chinese and Japanese may bow during initial greetings. To diminish misunderstandings, one may also know how to adapt to others' personal space. For instance, in Cambodia people are addressed with the honorific title "*Lok*" for a man and "*Lok Srey*" for a woman followed with the first name or both the first and surname. Here, the conventional way of greeting is a bow combined with a bringing of the hands together at chest level, which is many a time analogous to the joining of the hands together for prayer.

In the case of India, it is a country composed of a horde of religious cultures and etiquettes coexisting side by side. The dominant faith is Hinduism, but significant numbers of Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians Jains, and Jews have also lived here through centuries. Within this religious diversity, one finds a coating of British formality and fine etiquette resulting across the country (Rinehart, 2005). Here, the people take pleasure in bargaining during business meet and they have the inclinations for some extensive corporate conventions. When doing business in India, it is important to build a good relationship with the Indians (Overgaard, 2010), because India is a fairly particularistic oriented culture. In a population that is as courteous as it is idiosyncratic, Indian culture's dependence on relationships is easily noticeable.

A number of the major multinational corporations have expanded their operations throughout developed and developing nations. Some of the businesses are direct investments and others are partnership arrangements and strategic alliances with domestic operations. For example, when one is in China, a country with strong traditions, one will have to know that if one is invited to someone's home, it is polite to eat and drink only after the host does it, and the host appreciates it when one tastes every offered dish. During mealtimes, it is also a custom to have the eldest member, or the person with the highest ranking on the table start the meal before anyone else gets to eat.

The accurate way of greeting a person is awfully significant in Chinese culture, because inappropriate greeting is considered very much objectionable. Amongst unfamiliar

persons, associates or at official events, the greeting (in Mandarin) 'Ni Hao' (or 'Nin Hao if much respect is meant) meaning, literally 'you good?' is used. The phrase 'Have you eaten?' is typically used as a household greeting and confirms to the pre-dominance of food in Chinese culture (Li, 2005).

In the northern African country Morocco, during any business transaction/s, it is exceedingly imperative to validate anything that has been agreed to in front of others as it may not have been a genuine conformity and the person may have no intention of following through. Honour and respect are immensely important for the Moroccans, and as an outsider, one has to be careful enough while conversing with Moroccans. While the definition of respect for some Moroccans entails following the norm and remaining modest, the definition differs depending on the individual (Ermilo, 2011). Here, once a relationship has developed, it is a widespread business custom to kiss on both cheeks, first on the left cheek while shaking hands, and men with men and women with women.

In contrast, Australians are more informal, and follow egalitarianism in interactions, and focus on the present and the future (Hecht et al., 1989). Surprisingly, being punctual is looked down upon here, and giving and exchanging gift/s is not a common practice in business. In Australia, one must maintain good eye contact during business conventions and formal tête-à-tête. Furthermore, a single, male passenger using a taxi should sit in the front seat. It is also important to note that first names are almost always used in preference to family names, dress is casual even in the workplace, and greetings are also very informal with phrases such as g'day [good day] (Wilcoxson, 1992). Spoken language is also more likely to be direct, logical, and precise (Hecht et al., 1989).

2.3 The Importance of Listening

Engaging in active listening may also serve to promote understanding across cultures in business settings. For instance, expressing active listening may help individuals ask effective questions to reduce one's perceived assumptions that may lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. By engaging in active listening one may be more equipped to adapt to others' needs and values despite cultural differences (Starosta & Guo-Ming, 2000). Active listening often leads to less cross-cultural conflict in the communication between managers in business settings (Rao, Southard, & Bates, 2005).

2.4 Appreciating and understanding Business Etiquette in a diverse culture

Management and communication scholars (Chaney & Martin 2011; Harris & Moran, 2000) concur that in today's global business environment, more managers and directors should be required to understand and appreciate people who are coming from different cultures and nationalities. They added that international management skills are needed for the increasing scope of global trades and investments for the next several decades. Combs (2007) also recommends diversity training for leaders to enhance their own self-

efficacy to meet the current demands for intercultural communication competence due to globalization, which has increased the likelihood of working with more cross-cultural colleagues.

The expansion of EU represents both challenges and opportunities for the business people coming from EU and non-EU countries. Even before the expansion, the EU had a significant role in the way the world conducts business. With the U.S. dollar declining, the Euro became one of the main currencies of the world, with its obvious ups and downs. Thus, all companies doing business in the EU must align with the EU's terms and regulations, observing the directions of the European Commission, even the ones belonging to the new members that came from quite a different background.

If we focus on Romanians and the way in which they do business within this context, the aggressiveness of Romanian businessmen in negotiations depends on their partner and on the compromises they are willing to give. But, generally, Romanians are not aggressive in negotiations; however, they are rather collaborative. People with integrity, confidence and broad-thinking are highly appreciated, as doing business over a glass of wine and toasting on such occasions.

In Europe, different cultures offer some interesting insights on toasting habits. In some cultures, such as the Latin America's ones, business is conducted on a personal level, with agreements being made at the level of people, not companies. That is why you will need the right person to introduce you into the right circles. These intermediaries are sometimes called in Spanish and *despechantes* in Portuguese (the language of Brazil). Latin Americans are after long-term relationships, and it will take some time for people to establish trust to gain such connections. Several trips to Latin America will be necessary to get the wheels turning. Sometimes even basic communication can go wrong, because in certain multi-lingual settings it is quite difficult to appreciate when their response is a "yes" and when it is a "no."

For instance, when dealing with the Japanese, the encouraging reply "no problem" uttered in a business meeting/negotiation may be misunderstood, just because it starts with a negation, and then because the intonation of the speaker may lead to this kind of impression: "no, problem..." e.g., "the answer is no, because there is a problem." Even in the same language, holding a conversation may be difficult due to the indirectness, yet a polite approach of their communication is often used to maintain harmonious relationships to keep the other person from being embarrassed. In India, when entering a meeting room you must always approach and greet the most senior person first. Meetings must always start off with some informal conversation, because this is part of the 'ice-breaking' procedure. But, if new to India, never comment on matters such as poverty or beggars, as these are not the topics, Indians are comfortable talking to the foreigners. Positive topics of conversation are the latest business or political news (concerning India,

of course), the fortunes of the Bombay Stock Exchange or cricket. Steer clear of conversing on personal subjects.

The business persons should also know that there are questions that are not to be asked in certain societies. And here are a few examples. If you are invited to eat in a business partner's home, in some Latin American countries, like Argentina and Chile, as well as in South Korea, it is probably impolite to ask the hostess for a recipe, because it is likely that she did not cook the meal herself; usually servants do that. Besides being embarrassing, this may be considered offensive, since being involved in such labour is specific to a lower class, not to wealthy families.

Another typical example of blundering at the conversational level is asking a male Muslim partner about the female members of his family, which is considered a very intimate side of his life. Then, if invited to a Japanese restaurant it is embarrassing for the host if the guest requests a fork or other utensils, because sometimes, they do not even have them in such places. One will have to learn to use chopsticks properly, or observe others at the dinner table. It is not easy at all to approach the appropriate topics in every situation. That is why discretion is one of the key values in many circumstances. Subjects like sports can be a good choice, on the condition that you speak in positive terms about the local teams.

In some Asian countries (e.g., Japan) and African countries, direct eye contact during interactions is to be avoided because it may be perceived to be a lack of respect, and one can come across as being aggressive. However, it is the norm for American, Middle Eastern, and European cultures to display direct eye contact to be a signal of respect and trustworthiness. Thus, when one is doing business in Japan and other African countries, one must be mindful to avoid making too much direct eye contact with others.

There are also differences in the ways of interacting with others from different cultures in business teams. For instance, Russian and Japanese individuals prefer to focus on the team's cohesion, while Americans prefer to focus on the effectiveness based on the outcome of the group's goals (Christophel, 1996). American individuals tend to prefer to be assertive and celebrate individual accomplishments, while Russian individuals prefer to share feelings and engage in balanced conversations with the team members (Christophel, 1996).

3. Conclusion

To conclude, intercultural relationships in the workplace can be improvised by training the people about business ethics. As highlighted in the illustrations in this study, developing business manners across cultures can help individuals gain valuable partnerships, which can be useful for career advancement and career opportunities. In diversified businesses appropriate business etiquette can help reduce misunderstanding

and eradicate conflict among employees. Thus, it is the responsibility of managers to train individuals about business ethics across cultures to be able to communicate with intercultural competence when interacting with others from different cultures. The step towards enhancing the business based communication would also have difficulties on the other hand. But the outcome due to business etiquette and communications shall ensure growth, prosperity and a professional work environment.

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