Chapter 12
Cross-Cultural Business Communication:
An Anthropological Approach Toward Diminishing Geographic Borders

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ABSTRACT

It is broadly recognized that cultural factors act as invisible barriers in international business communications. As such, understanding cultural differences is an essential skill for both business educators and business practitioners as geographic borders become increasingly fluid. This chapter provides a framework for both business practitioners and educators engaged in international business. Seven themes are suggested for future research: cultural impacts of markets, international vs. domestic business communication, standardization vs. adaptation in cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural dimensions of business communication research, cultural aspects of the business communication mix, cultural aspects of business communication in the service sector, cultural communication implications of the aftermarket, and cross-cultural business communication education and professional training. The chapter concludes with suggestions that business anthropology be adapted as a tool for culture on international business and education.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is perhaps one of the most important functions to be master for any international enterprise, whether it is business firms or business education institutions. For instance, a firm's profitability is largely determined by its cross-cultural communication strategies and a university's retention rate is contingent on sensitivities to cultural issues in an international classroom. To maintain a competitive

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advantage in an increasingly multinational landscape, business educators and practitioners must consider the invisible barriers cultural differences create in business communication. Cultural factors play an influential part in communicating with an international audience, and as business education institutions attract students from various cultural backgrounds, educators must maintain social cohesion in culturally diverse settings. Likewise, businesses need to adapt to the needs of their international consumers to cultivate an attractive brand image in international markets. Even as the world is becoming globalized, many nations have increasingly voiced their claim to "a right to culture" in international businesses, and sensitivity to cultural minorities in top business schools across the world is an increasingly salient issue. It is predicted that national culture will be a critical factor affecting economic development, demographic behavior, and general business policies around the world. Such claims at the macro level will be important for making trade policy, protecting intellectual property rights, and creating resources for national benefits. At the micro level these claims could be invisible barriers for firms working in or wanting to enter international markets (Lillis & Tian, 2010).

The last summit of francophone nations in the 20th century called for a "cultural exception" in GATT/WTO rules governing trade of goods. This type of claim will affect public policy on international trade rules in these nations and might initiate worldwide cultural protectionism for trans-national trading. Footer and Graber (2000) discuss the conflict between liberal trade policies pursued by the WTO and national policies aimed at protecting cultural diversity, identity, and heritage. As the voice of cultural rights increases, firms doing business internationally will face other challenges from other dimensions of culture. From a management perspective, it is important for companies to realize that markets today are worldwide and cross-cultural. In contemporary business, sensitivity toward cultural differences is a major factor for success in the world marketplace. Failure to put marketing strategy in a cross-cultural context of the countries where a company is doing business will work to the detriment of brands and business relationships (Emery & Tian, 2003, 2002; Tian, 2000a).

From an education standpoint, cross-cultural awareness and education are becoming increasingly important as classrooms become more culturally diverse and educators must prepare students to work in international business environments. With increasing globalization, there has been significant growth in the demand for culturally intelligent employees. Ramsey and Lorenz (2016) suggest that it is essential for business school educators to cultivate students' intercultural competencies in preparation for employment at global business firms. Further, the researchers find that cultural intelligence training is an effective method to increase competencies in cross-cultural management and that students who increased their cultural intelligence were more satisfied with their courses compared to those who did not (Ramsey & Lorenz, 2016). Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini (2013) also raise concerns over the current approaches to cross-cultural management teaching; they suggest contemporary curriculums generally follow an etic approach to business management education and that current curriculums fail to grasp the nuances of culture specific components. To attenuate this issue, the authors claim that cross-cultural management education should transition toward an emic approach and that a culture specific curriculum is essential to training students as culture learners.

Mooij and Hofstede (2010) have taken several of the Hofstede model's constructs, which are most relevant to branding and advertising, and have suggested that those constructs be used in the pursuit of a localizing, adaptation strategy with reference to branding and advertising, citing recent studies which have demonstrated that an adaptation strategy is more effective than a standardization strategy. Additionally, this adaptation strategy can be applied in business education settings as researchers suggest that education with an emphasis on specific cultural contexts is more likely to enhance cultural intelligence than cur-

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