
CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

In today's changing business scenario increasing number of firms extends their business abroad. Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. Cultural awareness shapes how business firms behave in cross-culturally reflected international markets. It is broadly recognized that cultural factors act as invisible barriers in international business communications. Understanding cultural differences is one of the most significant skills for firms to develop in order to have a competitive advantage in international business. Organizations should focus on eliminating the cross cultural communication barriers. Understanding of cultural diversity is the key to effective cross-cultural communications. Firms which fail to understand the cross cultural communication barriers face several issues in many aspects of international business communication. It impacts free trade policies, localization and standardization strategy decisions, advertising, brand effectiveness, business relationships, international business management, international marketing, international negotiation, and consumer behavior, staffing, industrial relations, interpersonal relationships, negotiation, and teambuilding. Cross-cultural communication presents a fine opportunity to foster global peace and prosperity. It may also present unpleasant consequences if not well managed. Many problems arise in our workplace today as a result of the barriers cultural diversity imposes on cross cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication barriers such as anxiety, uncertainty, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism are caused by inadequate cultural knowledge and the lack of intercultural communicative skills. Adequate training in cross cultural communication and exposure to other cultures is essential in eliminating these barriers. This paper

concludes with a suggestion for the understanding of the effect of cross cultural communication barriers on international business.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Cross Culture, Communication Barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural factors play an important role as invisible barriers. With the continuous globalization the firms should focus on eliminating the invisible cross cultural communication barriers .Solving these barriers is important in order to foster the organizational climate .This will also create opportunities for expansion of the organization and widen their geographical outlook. Many serious problems may arise when people from different countries, races, values, corners of world come together. Working in multicultural team involves many challenges, disagreements and conflicts. These challenges and conflicts affect the performance of the individuals and the entire firm to a certain degree. In a multicultural internal environment the firms need to find out a solution to bring a clarity in communication. Cross cultural communication where people belonging to diverse cultures being in communication with each other needs to be effective in order to avoid disagreements and conflicts and in turn achieve the business objectives. In order to make cross cultural communication effective, a firm has to understand the barriers involved in cross cultural communication process & identifying means of overcoming such barriers in order to make cross cultural communication effective.

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Misunderstanding

Misunderstanding is the foremost barrier to communication in a multicultural environment .This is common among people of different cultural backgrounds whose values and beliefs vary. The variation in the different cultures results in high level of anxiety and uncertainty and end up into the misunderstanding. The misunderstanding which has been raised due to anxiety and uncertainty continues in their entire tenure.

Norms and Roles

Norms are the culturally defined rules for determining the acceptable and appropriate behavior. Individuals they themselves frame rules for themselves and also expect others to do so. Each and every culture has it's owns norms and they have their own acceptable and appropriate behavior. People working in multicultural environment often fail to understand the norms of the other culture and act accordingly. Roles are a setoff norms applicable to specific groups .In particular culture different roles are assigned to men and women, children and parents/guardians, husbands and wives. These roles vary from and culture to culture and in a multicultural team one can find several violations of the roles. This further leads to anxiety and the communication process is interrupted.

Beliefs and values

Beliefs and values are different from person to person. In a globalized working community each and every person's beliefs and values depend on his culture .The cross cultural belief and value prevailing should be known to the person in order to communicate efficiently.

Stereotyping

Value judgments about people. Inadequate information about the people leads to unintelligent choices in the cross cultural communication. Cultural stereotypes exaggerate or overgeneralize what we perceive about people, and leads to increase anxiety. Every individual enacts one stereotype on other individuals or group of people. Generally stereotypes are born out of fear of the group we stereotype or lack of knowledge of the group. These stereotypes are the major reasons for difference of opinions about the opposite culture and leads to miscommunication

Ethnocentrism

Thinking about our own culture, our group behavior as the standard against all the other groups. One's own cultural experience unintentionally makes us to feel that our culture is distinctive. This ethnocentrism increases the level of the anxiety. In work places the ethnocentrism is directly proportional to anxiety level. Multicultural team members face a lot of issues due to ethnocentrism.

OVER COMING THE CROSS CULTURAL BARRIERS

Measures to overcome barriers in cross cultural communication

Cross cultural communication competence enables an organization to achieve objectives while according due respect to values, norms, beliefs of the people being affected by its operations. A business organization has to develop cross - cultural competence in organizational set up to overcome the above mentioned barriers to cross cultural communication.

IMPROVING THE CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cross-cultural competence is defined as the ability to participate in a set of activities the core of which happens to a common communication code. This ability is aided by knowledge, skills & attitudes. Successful Development of Cross-cultural competence rests on three pillars. These components that facilitate orderly cross cultural communication would be Cross-cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural awareness & cross-cultural ability. The affectionate aspect of cross-cultural communication is identified as intercultural sensitivity. This aspect is to be developed in order to equip individuals with the ability to appreciate other cultures' differences. Through the development of cross-cultural sensitivity, an individual would be able to grasp self-concept, neutrality & self-possession. The cognitive aspect of cross-cultural communication is known as cross-cultural awareness. Intercultural awareness results in enhancing not only cultural- awareness but also self-awareness in the process.

The cross cultural competence could be improved through the following methods:

Cross cultural knowledge training

Employees need to recognize and admit the existence of differences between cultures. The differences in values beliefs, perceptions, interpretations. Employees should be given a basic cross culture training which will make them aware of the cross culture in the work place.

Language Training

Language barrier is the greatest problem encountered in multi-cultural team. Language training should be given for those who have more chances of coming into contact with foreigners

Enforcement of mutual benefit policy

Organizations should insist on mutual benefits for all the cultures in the work place. Employees while getting similar benefits as like employees of other culture will face a win- win situation

CONCLUSION

Organizations should focus on establishing a new enterprise culture. A universally accepted culture in which one understands the other person's values and beliefs and respects it. The top level management should commit in building organizational climate without conflicts and difference of opinions. Improving the employees cross cultural competence through cross cultural knowledge training and insisting on the mutual benefit policy which is a win- win situation for cross cultural population in workplace. Culturally competent involves a lot of learning about the cross cultures which will overcome the cross cultural barriers.

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