**Lecture 3. *Ethical aspect of intercultural communication field and its characteristics***

**The aim:** to think about ethics in relation to business; to examine the most common ethical lapses in organizations; to learn the many meanings of communication; to consider different ways of communication.

**Plan**

1. The subject matter of business and communication ethics.

2. Characteristics of communication.

3. Levels of communication.

**Keywords**: corporate responsibility, ethical business, civil society regulation, business ethics, communication ethics, ethical lapses.

**1. The subject matter of business and communication ethics.**

One could easily be misled into thinking that the idea of ethical business behavior and practices is a creation of the 21st century, but the discussion of ethical and unethical behavior is as old as the marketplace itself. As for the formal study of business ethics, the Center for business Ethics was founded in 1976 at Bentley college which then held the first academic conference on the subject in 1977. In 1982, The Journal of Business Ethics began publishing four issues per year devoted to the analysis and understanding of ethics in modern organizations.

A number of theorists have highlighted the merits of considering the relationship between ethics and business at more than one level (for example, De George; Solomon). For a start, we might consider business ethics at a *micro* level; that is, we might explore ethicality in relation to the day-to-day activities and decisions of individual businesspeople.

Moving up a level, we can also consider business ethics at a *meso* level.That is, we might think about things like right, wrong, good and bad in relation to the activities of particular companies or specific industry sectors.

Stepping up again to a *macro* level, we might consider the wider role that business plays, or should play, within society. At this macro level, business ethics touches on considerations of national and international economic policy. It also crosses into the realm of political ideology.

It’s important to emphasize the interconnections between these different levels. Micro, meso and macro levels should not be viewed as distinct, separate spheres that are unconnected to one another. Rather, we should be alert to the possibility that what goes on at each level may affect what goes on at others. Thus, dominant attitudes concerning the relationship between business and society may help to shape the activities and the decisions made within specific corporations and industry sectors, which can, in turn, influence the conduct of individual businesspeople. Similarly, the decisions made by specific people and groups within corporations can have a significant effect on meso-level corporate activity, while certain individuals and corporations may also exert a powerful influence over macro-level policy.

To help us more fully understand the arena of business ethics, we will examine the most common ethical lapses in organizations. While most organizations believe that their specific ethical dilemmas are unique, J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992) found that most organizations face a specific list of twelve different ethical issues:

## 1.Taking things that do not belong to you (stealing).

2.Saying things that you know are not true (lying).

3.False impressions (fraud and deceit).

4.Conflict of interest and influence buying (bribes, payoffs, & kickbacks).

5.Hiding versus divulging information.

6.Unfair advantage (cheating).

7.Personal decadence.

8.Interpersonal abuse.

9.Organizational abuse.

10.Rule violations.

11.Accessory to unethical acts.

12.Moral balance (ethical dilemmas).

 In 1990, William A. Reinsch examined the state of ethics research in business communication by examining the empirical research conducted on this subject. Based on his analysis of 28 different research articles, W. Reinsch found nine basic areas of agreement:

1. Communication behaviors vary in moral worth, and various groups (e.g., advertising executives, general public) demonstrate a relatively high level of consensus about the moral weight of many specific practices.

2. Blatantly unethical behaviors sometimes occur in business organizations.

3. Unethical business communication can be effective in the short run.

4. A person’s behavior is related to his or her ethical beliefs.

5. The concept of business communication ethics is relevant to many different aspects of business including direct mail marketing, management, and consulting.

6. The concept of business communication ethics is related to other significant concepts such as honesty and trust.

7. Persons differ in ethical values, beliefs and behaviors, and the differences may be associated with variables such as gender, age, perceptions of an employer as typical or «generous», and the values, beliefs and behaviors of one’s cohorts.

8. Ethical analysis in business communication has sometimes been impressionistic; consistent, careful attention to the work of ethicists in other fields (e.g., philosophy, interpersonal communication) is desirable.

9. Business communication ethics should encompass oral communication as well as written.

W. Reinsch concluded that quite often unethical behavior can help people get ahead in life and in business. The researcher noted that individuals interested in organizational communication ethics tend to agree that unethical behavior is effective in the short-run, but there is disagreement about the effectiveness of unethical behavior in the long-run. Basically, the longer someone engages in unethical communicative behavior, the greater the likelihood that others will start to notice, thus establishing clear diminishing returns to unethical behavior (to use an economics term).

**2. Characteristics of communication.** Intercultural communication occurs when the people creating shared meanings have different cultural perspectives and values. Typically, it is the differing world views of members of different cultures that make intercultural communication challenging.

Few words have as many meanings as communication. The term can refer to everything from messages on T-shirts to presidential speeches, from computer code to chimpanzee behavior. Communication has been the professional concern of philosophers, scientists (social, biological, and physical), poets, politicians, and

entertainers, and so on. Concerning broad and general definitions there are primarily three types:

* Communication is seen as synonymous to behavior.
* Communication is regarded as a stream or flow of information.
* Communication is used as synonymous to interaction.

A survey of the ways in which scholars use the word will show that there is no single, universally accepted usage. Some definitions are long and complex, whereas others are brief and simple. W. Gudykunst conceptualizes the phenomenon of communication as «...a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures». A very general definition is «communication occurs whenever persons attribute significance to message-related behavior» (C. David Mortensen). But we need a working definition that will help us in our study. For our purposes we will say that **intercultural communication** is an interdisciplinary field of research that studies how people communicate and understand each other across group boundaries or discourse systems of various sorts including national, geographical, linguistic, ethnic, occupation, class or gender-related boundaries and how such boundaries affect language use. *In short*, it’s the exchange of information between individuals who are unalike culturally. This definition implies several *postulates*.

First, *communication is* *dynamic*: it’s not a static “thing” but a dynamic process that maintains stability and identity through all its fluctuations. A process is anything that is ongoing and continuous. David Berlo (1960) provided a particular clear statement about communication as a process: “If we accept the concept of the process, we view events and relationships as dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous. When we label something as a process, we also mean that it doesn’t have a beginning, an end, a fixed sequence of events. It’s not static, at rest. It’s moving. The ingredients within a process interact; each affects all of the others”.

Although individual verbal messages have definite beginning and ending points, the overall process of communication does not. Meanings are dynamic, continually changing as a function of earlier usages and of changes in perceptions and meta- perceptions. For example, imagine you came across a classmate in a shopping centre and started exchanging ideas about an assignment due in a week’s time. Your conversation would presume an earlier exchange of information (perhaps during class on the previous day) and the communication process would not necessarily end after you have said “good bye” to each other. You might go home and modify your previous assignment framework as a result of your talking with your classmate – a continuation of your communication in the shopping centre.

As a dynamic process, communication is more like a motion picture than a single snapshot. A word of action does not stay “frozen” when we communicate; it is immediately replaced with another one. Communication is dynamic, because once a word or action is employed, it cannot be retraced. We probably all know the saying “You cannot step into the same river twice”, by the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who was known for his doctrine of *change* being central to the universe. People cannot experience exactly the same thing twice with exactly the same feeling. As an example, you may see the same film twice, but you may have some different feelings each time. You cannot recapture or repeat exactly the same experience of seeing the film for the first time. Similarly, we cannot take back what we have communicated. Once you have said and done something, it is irretrievable – many people have found this out the hard way when using emails, Facebook, and Twitter, but it applies to all modes of communication. If you have hurt a friend’s feelings, you can apologize, but you cannot unsay what you said or undo what you did. A process is irreversible and unrepeatable (Cooper, 2007).

Second, *communication is irreversible:* the very fact that communication has occurred (or is occurring) means that the persons in communication have changed, however subtly. The fact that we have memories means that once we begin the process, there is no “reset” button; we cannot begin again as blank slates.

Third, *communication is* *proactive:* in communicating we are not merely passive respondents to external stimuli. When we communicate, we enter the process totally and are proactive, selecting, amplifying, and manipulating the signals that come to us.

Fourth, *communication is* *interactive* on two fronts: the intrapersonal or what goes on inside each communicator; and the interpersonal, or what takes place between communicators. We must pay attention to both fronts to understand the communication process. Communication is interactive because it requires the active participation of at least two people. To communicate, one has to address another person or persons. Of course, you can communicate with yourself (intrapersonal communication), but you are still interacting with an imagined self. You must act as if you were two people. Human communication not only calls for a response, but also is shaped in its very form and content by the anticipated response. The encoding and decoding of messages are influenced by prior interactions between communicators, and feedback influences the subsequent exchange of messages. During this interactive process, communicators may modify the content or form of their conversation. Their thoughts and feelings may also be adjusted during the interaction process. For example, a late arrival to a meeting might be interpreted by the other attendees as bad manners and they might react with frowns or silence. However, if they learned that the person’s reason for being late was stopping to help someone injured in a car accident, their reactions would most likely change from negative to positive.

Fifth, *communication is contextual*: it always happens in a large context, be that the physical environment, the emotional mood of the communication event, or the purposes (which may be overt or hidden) behind the communication. Communication is dependent on the context in which it occurs. A context is the cultural, physical, relational, and perceptual environment in which communication occurs (Neuliep, 2012). Dress, language, topic selection and the like are all adapted to contexts. For example, attending a graduation ceremony without wearing a shirt or using profanity in the classroom are likely to be frown upon, whereas in other contexts, these behaviors might be more acceptable. Similarly, how do you feel when someone keeps you waiting for 15 minutes? What do you say when you have to leave a conversation while the other person is still keen on talking? This probably depends on the context. Context influences what we communicate and how we communicate – once again, these rules are culture bound. In Mexico, for example, children are encouraged to move around the classroom and to interact verbally and physically with their classmates; in Hong Kong, it’s expected the students remain in their seats during class, and they are expected not to talk to one another unless the teacher gives permission. Context influences how we communicate with others.

Sixth, c*ommunication is symbolic*. A symbol is an arbitrarily selected and learned stimulus that represents something else. Symbols can be verbal or nonverbal, such as a sound, a mark on paper, a statue, Braille, a movement, or a painting. They are the vehicles by which the thoughts and ideas of one person can be communicated to another. Human beings are able to generate, receive, store, and manipulate symbols (Samovar 2013). Words are not actual objects or ideas, but we use these symbols to create meaning. Meaning resides in people. Imagine how difficult communication could become if two people from different cultures come together with different symbolic understandings. Not only are their languages different, but the same gesture can have different meanings. Patting a child on the head in Australian culture usually indicates affection; however, in Thai culture, it may be considered offensive as it is thought to damage the spirit of the child, which resides in the head.

**3. Ways of communication.** Within the domain of human interaction, there are several types of communication. Each occurs in a different context. Despite the features that all share, each has its own characteristics.

**Intrapersonal Communication.** Intrapersonal Communication is communication with ourselves, or self-talk. You might wonder whether *Intrapersonal Communication* is another term for *thinking.* In one sense, yes. Intrapersonal Communication does involve thinking because it is a cognitive process that occurs inside us. Yes because thinking relies on language to name and reflect on ideas, it is also communication (Vocate, 1996).

By definition, intrapersonal communication means “communicating with oneself”. We engage in self-talk to plan our lives, to rehearse different ways of acting, and to prompt ourselves to do or not do particular things. Intrapersonal communication is how we remind ourselves to eat in healthy ways, show respect to others, check impulses that might hurt others, impress perspective employers, and prepare to speak effectively in public contexts.

Intrapersonal communication also helps us rehearse alternative scenarios and their possible outcomes. You think through the options, weigh the likely consequences of each, and then choose one to put into practice. We also engage in internal dialogues continuously as we reflect on experiences, sort through ideas, and test alternative ways of acting.

**Interpersonal Communication/Dyadic communication.** Social scientists call two persons interacting a dyad, and they often use the term dyadic communication to describe this type of communication. Dyads are the most common communication setting. Observation in a variety of setting ranging from playgrounds, train depots, and shopping malls to other settings shows that most communication within larger groups consists of multiple, often shifting dyadic encounters. Dyadic interaction is sometimes considered identical to interpersonal communication. But, in fact, the qualities that characterize interpersonal communication aren’t limited to twosomes. They can be present in threesomes or even in small groups. Scholars of interpersonal communication study how communication creates and sustains relationships and how partners communicate to deal with the normal and extraordinary challenges.

**Small Group Communication.** A third branch in this field is small-group communication, including communication in decision-making committees and work teams. Small-group research focuses on leadership, member roles, group features, agendas for achieving group goals, and managing conflict. Small groups posses characteristics that are not present in a dyad. For instance, two or more members of a group can form a coalition to defend their position against other members, whereas in a dyadic the members face each other on their own, without support each others. In a group, the majority of members can put pressure on those in the minority to conform, either consciously or unconsciously; but in a dyad no such pressures exist. With their greater size, groups also have the ability to be more creative than dyads. Finally, communication in group is affected strongly by the type of leader who is in a position of authority.

**Public Communication.** Public speaking remains an important branch of the communication field. Even though many people will not pursue careers that call for extensive formal speaking, many of us will have opportunities to speak publicly. In addition, we all will be in situations when speaking up is a responsibility. One characteristic of public communication is an unequal amount of speaking. One or more people are likely to deliver their remarks to the remaining members, who act as an audience. This leads to a second characteristic of public settings: limited verbal feedback. The audience isn’t able to talk back in a two-way conversation the way they might in a dyadic or small group setting. This doesn’t mean that speakers operate in a vacuum when delivering their remarks. Audiences often have a chance to ask questions and offer brief comments, and their nonverbal reactions offer a wide range of clues about their reception of the speaker’s remarks.

Within the area of public communication are sub-areas such as *argumentation* and *political communication*. Argumentation focuses on how to build effective arguments by using sound reasoning and strong evidence and by developing ideas in ways that respond to listeners’ beliefs, concerns, and goals. Skills of argumentation are essential for everybody who aims to persuade others.

**Organizational Communication.** Good communication in an organization enhances professional success. Organizational culture is the general term for the understandings about an organization’s identity and codes of thought and action that members of an organization share. Some organizations think of themselves as families. From this understanding emerge rules for how employees should interact and how fully they should commit to work. Another area is personal relationships between co-workers.

**Mass communication** consists of messages that are transmitted to large, widespread audiences via electronic and print media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and so on. Mass communication differs from the interpersonal,

small group, and public varieties in several ways. First, mass messages are aimed at a large audience without any personal contact between sender and receivers. Second, most of the messages sent via mass communication channels are developed, or at least financed, by large organizations. In this sense, mass communication is far less personal and more of a product than the other types we

have examined so far. Finally, mass communication is almost always controlled

by many gatekeepers who determine what messages will be delivered to consumers, how they will be constructed, and when they will be delivered. Sponsors (whether corporate or governmental), editors, producers, reporters, and executives all have the power to influence mass messages in ways that don’t affect most other types. Because of these and other unique characteristics, the study of mass communication raises special issues and deserves special treatment.

This is about how media represent and influence cultural values. For example the use of young female models in ads perpetuates the cultural feminine ideal which centers on youth and beauty. Films that portray men as daring, brave, and violent perpetuate strength and boldness as masculine ideals. Media reinforce cultural stereotypes about race and ethnicity: e.g. television shows and movies most often cast African Americans in supporting roles, not principal ones; or black men as lazy and unlawful. Communication scholars heighten awareness of how media shape – and sometimes distort – our perceptions of ourselves and society.

**Personal and Social Media.** The technological revolution gives us the means to communicate in more ways at faster speeds with greater numbers of people throughout the world. How do newer technologies and the accompanying acceleration of the pace influence how we think and work and how we form, sustain, and end relationships?

Opinions differ: some scholars caution that new technologies undermine human community (Assmann, 2006); some celebrate the ways that personal and social media nourish communities (Boneva, Quinn, Kraut, Kiesler & Shklovski, 2006); some scholars claim that new communication technologies will fundamentally transform how we think and process information (Steele, 2009; Turkle, 2004); some caution that the abundance of information we can now get on any topic is useless unless we learn how to evaluate it critically and transform raw information into knowledge (Lane & Shelton, 2001; Steele, 2009).

**Conclusion.** Communicationprocess is complex. “Good” communication means different things to different people in different situations. Accordingly, simply adopting a set of particular skills is not going to guarantee success. Genuinely good communicators are those who understand the underlying principles behind communication and are able to enact, appropriately and effectively, particular communication skills are the situation warrants.