

Lecture 4. *Business communication as a process of becoming proficient in intercultural communication competence*

The aim: to learn the salient features of various methods of communication; to consider the basis of intercultural communication competence that is in the attitudes of the person interacting with people of another culture; to analyze different models of intercultural communication competence.

Plan

1. Key competences for lifelong learning.
2. Models of intercultural communication competence.
3. Methods of communication.

Keywords: intercultural communication competence, methods of communication, intrapersonal competencies, interpersonal competencies, content-competencies, procession competencies.

Key competences for lifelong learning. In the academic world today, as participants of the exchange programs, visiting lecturers or plenary speakers, or even as tourists and family members, we cross the boundaries of many countries, meet many people from other cultures, speak with them or correspond with them by e-mail. This globalization of people creates a new and major challenge for everyone – to cross not only the frontiers of the country but to bridge the cultural boundaries of that country. Culture is the aspect of the global context that is most often overlooked (Thomas & Inkson).

We all find cultural differences hard to deal with. We all tend to play *be like me* with the people we are getting to live, study or work with. According to D. C. Thomas and K. Inkson, the list of the most common intercultural failures could be the following one:

- being unaware of the key features and biases of our own culture. Just other cultures may seem odd to us, ours is odd to people from other cultures;
 - feeling threatened or uneasy when interacting with people who are culturally different. All of us find difference threatening to some extent;
 - being unable to understand or explain the behavior of others who are culturally different. When we use a *be like me* approach to explain the behavior of others, we are often wrong, because their behavior may not be based on the same goals or motives as ours;
 - being unable to transfer knowledge about one culture to another culture;
 - not recognizing when our own cultural orientation is influencing our behavior.
- Much of our behavior is programmed by culture at a very deep level of consciousness, and we are often unaware of this influence. Behavior that is normal to us may seem abnormal or even bizarre to culturally different others;
- being unable to adjust to living and working in another culture. The severity of culture shock may vary, but it affects us all;

- being unable to develop long-term interpersonal relationships with people from other cultures, because even if we learn how to understand them and communicate with them a little better, the effort of doing so puts us off trying to develop the relationships any further.

There is one more factor that facilitates the necessity of effective and appropriate communication especially among the members of academic communities, i.e. – membership in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). European universities have always had a wide range of international contacts and academic collaboration with partner institutions around the world. With the consolidation of the EHEA came the realization that Europe is increasingly attractive globally, both as a study destination and a partner for exchange.

Under the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 eight Key Competences for Lifelong Learning have been approved for the knowledge-based society of the European Union. What are these key competences?

1. Communication in the mother tongue.
2. Communication in foreign languages.
3. Mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology.
4. Digital competence.
5. Learning to learn.
6. Social and Civic competences.
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.
8. Cultural expression.

2. Models of intercultural communication competence. Being interculturally competent means that a person from one culture is able to interact effectively with people from different cultures. The term “competence” incorporates understanding, awareness, intelligence, flexibility and adaptability. The most known definition of *intercultural communication competence* is the one provided by Byram (1998) in which he defines it as “**the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes**”. To a large extent, **intercultural competence** appears to be **the ability to cope with one’s own cultural background in interaction with others** (Beneke). It becomes evident that **Intercultural Competence** becomes the key competence of the citizens of the 21st century (D. Deardorff).

Scholars have written on this topic for over five decades. Their voices from different cultures and fields represent different visions of the target competence. In this lecture you will be introduced to some of them. First of all, some common features, typical nearly of all the Intercultural Competence Models should be pointed out:

All the models of Intercultural Communication Competence include three perspectives: – *affective or intercultural sensitivity* – to acknowledge and respect cultural differences; – *cognitive or intercultural awareness* – self-awareness of one’s own personal cultural identity and understanding how cultures vary; – *behavioral or intercultural adroitness* – message skills, knowledge of

appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management and social skills.

There exists a multitude of different models to conceptualize elements and stages of intercultural competence. The most renowned are those of Bennet, Stier, Fantini, Deardorff. For **Bennet** three conditions are necessary for intercultural contact to be constructive: 1) intercultural mindset (cognitive characteristics) – the recognition of cultural differences and the maintenance of a positive attitude toward them (e.g. cultural self-awareness, culture-general and culture-specific knowledge, interaction analysis), 2) intercultural skillset (behavioral characteristics) – the ability to use learning-to-learn framework to identify potential areas of misunderstandings and to choose behavior appropriately (e. g. empathy, information gathering skills, relationship building skills, listening and problem solving skills), and 3) intercultural sensitivity (affective characteristics) – the ability to experience cultural difference in sophisticated ways (e. g. curiosity, cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness, a non-judgmental posture, tolerance and ambiguity).

Jonas Stier (an associate professor of sociology at the School of Social Sciences in Sweden) has suggested that intercultural competence can be divided into *content-competencies* and *procession competencies*.

Content-competencies predominantly have a one-dimensional or static character and refer to the *knowing that-aspects* of both the ‘other’ and the ‘home’ culture. They include knowledge of history, language, non-verbal behavior, world-views, ‘do’s and don’ts’, values, norms, habits, customs, taboos, symbols, behavioral patterns, traditions, sex roles etc. Typically much of such cultural ‘knowledge’ stems from ‘reductions’ or stereotypes and are attributed positive or negative value and emotional colour (Allport).

The term *procession competencies* considers the dynamic character of intercultural competence and its interactional context (Hall; Stier). Such competencies are relative to the cultural peculiarities, situational conditions and actors involved. This *knowing how-aspect* of intercultural competence, involves *intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies*.

Intrapersonal competencies involve cognitive skills, that is to say, placing oneself in the position of the other (perspective-alteration), viewing oneself ‘from the outside’ (self-reflection), alternate between and *acting* according to ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles (role-taking), coping with problems originating in intercultural encounters (problem-solving) and keeping an open, receptive mind and noticing cultural peculiarities (culture-detection), without valuing them automatically and uncritically (axiological distance). Intrapersonal competencies also pertain to emotional skills, i.e., understanding why feelings occur and their implications (Ruben; Triandis), coping with diverse feelings (e.g., xenophobia, uneasiness, uncertainty, ambiguity, frustration, anger, ethnocentrism,) triggered by unknown cultural settings (Bochner; Gudykunst), and preventing them from automatically determining one’s actions or interpretations of behavior or events.

Interpersonal competencies refer to interactive skills, that is to say, detecting and accurately interpreting variations in non-verbal cues, subtle signals and

emotional responses (interpersonal sensitivity), mastering verbal and non-verbal language, turntaking (see Ruben; Triandis), cultural codes surrounding conversations and being aware of one's own interaction style (communication competence) and adequately responding to contextual meanings (situational sensitivity).

According to **Alvino Fantini** Intercultural Speaker should have the following attributes: respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humour, tolerance for ambiguity, willingness to suspend judgment.

Intercultural Speaker should develop the following skills:

- the ability to identify areas of conflict in the relationship between two given communities;
- the ability to explain conflicting behaviour and beliefs;
- the ability to resolve conflict or to negotiate acceptance of unresolved conflict;
- the ability to evaluate the quality of an explanatory system and the ability to construct such a system on the basis of data from an interlocutor from a specific cultural background.

We're going to focus on **Darla K. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural competence** which explains the process of how to get *interculturally competent* in the clearest way. Her model describes intercultural competence as a composition of attitudes (e.g. respect and openness to other cultures), knowledge (e.g. of different world views) and skills (e. g. listening and observational skills) that are conducive to the development of intercultural competence. She involved the most outstanding intercultural experts of the country into the research, and all the scientists arrived at the consensus that Intercultural Competence may be defined as "*effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations*". The elements, or components, they agreed on were categorized into **attitudes, knowledge, skills and internal or external outcomes**. Each of them will be discussed in detail.

Attitudes. As defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, attitude is "**the way you think or feel about someone or something**"; "**a feeling or way of thinking that affects a person's behavior**", "**a way of thinking and behaving that people regard as polite/impolite; friendly/rude, etc.**" Key attitudes are considered to be those of **respect, openness, curiosity and discovery**. Openness, curiosity and discovery imply willingness to risk and to move beyond one's comfort zone. In communicating respect to others, it is important to demonstrate that others are valued. This begins through showing interest in others – in their families and their cultures, and in simply listening attentively. These attitudes are foundational to the further development of knowledge and skills needed for intercultural competence, as well as crucial for successful intercultural dialogue.

Knowledge. In regard to knowledge necessary for intercultural competence, intercultural scholars are in agreement with the following: **cultural self-awareness** (meaning the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview), **culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge** including

understanding other world views, and *sociolinguistic awareness* and *the importance of understanding the world from others' perspectives*.

Skills. According to D. Bok, “students are able “to think interculturally”, therefore, the skills address the acquisition and processing of knowledge: **observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting and relating.**

Internal Outcomes. These attitudes, knowledge, and skills ideally lead to an internal outcome that consists of flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy. These aspects occur within the individual as a result of the acquired attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for intercultural competence. At this point, individuals are able to see from others' perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated. Individuals may reach this outcome in varying degrees of success.

External Outcomes. The summation of the attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the internal outcomes, are demonstrated through the behavior and communication of the individual, which become the visible outcomes of intercultural competence experienced by others. This then becomes the agreed upon definition of the intercultural scholars, that intercultural competence is “the *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations.” It is also important to understand the implications of “effective” and “appropriate” behavior and communication: *Effectiveness* can be determined by the individual while the *appropriateness* can only be determined by the *other* person – with appropriateness being directly related to cultural sensitivity and the adherence to cultural norms of that person.

This framework illustrates that it is possible for an individual to have the requisite attitudes and be minimally effective and appropriate in behavior and communication, even without further knowledge or skills. Adding the necessary knowledge and skills may ensure that an individual is more effective and appropriate in his/her intercultural interaction. With added flexibility, adaptability and empathy, one can be even more effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions, thus, demonstrating degrees or levels of Intercultural Competence.

This framework also illustrates that Intercultural Competence is a lifelong process, and there is no one point at which an individual becomes completely intercultural competent.

3. Methods of communication.

Communication takes place through various methods and channels. The three main methods of communication are oral or verbal communication, written communication and the non-verbal communication. Oral communication takes place by way of talks, conversation, dialogue, speech, discussion and meetings. Written communication is carried out through letters, circulars, memos, reports, brochures and books. Non-verbal communication takes place through body language. Language constitutes the vehicle on which both oral and written communication travel. Apart from these three main methods of communication, there are others like the visual, audio-visual and electronic. Silence is also accepted as a method of communication. Each of these methods has its own merits, demerits, channels and aids.

Oral communication (Table 2) plays a vital role in everyday life, both for individuals and organizations. It's, indeed, the most commonly used method of communication both at the social level and at the organizational level.

Table 2 – Merits and demerits of oral communication

Merits	Demerits
It can be readily used.	1. It's not very effective when the target group is spread out.
2. It's instantaneous.	2. It's constrained by language, accent and vocabulary.
3. It can be persuasive.	3. It's also constrained by noise and other physical barriers.
4. It's cost effective.	4. It's not normally recorded or documented.
5. It facilitates effective person-to-person exchange.	5. It does not permit repeated reference.
6. It works very well in small groups.	6. It cannot be erased.
7. It can be supplemented by non-verbal messages.	7. It is often dependent on memory.

Written communication (Table 3) invariably creates a record that can be preserved over time. Letters, memos, contracts, agreements, documents and reports often carry time value and need to be stored and preserved. As a result, it becomes possible to access them for reference or study. Most businesses rely more on records and written documents rather than verbal contracts and oral commitments. One big difference between verbal communication and written communication is that in any verbal or oral communication, the words you speak are supplemented by your facial expressions, voice modulation, postures and gestures and pauses and punches, whereas in written communication, words alone carry the burden of communication.

Table 3 – Merits and demerits of written communication.

Merits	Demerits
1. It has an extremely wide reach.	1. It takes time to reach its target.
2. It creates a record and is easily documented.	2. It is less interactive.
3. It can be erased and rewritten.	3. It depends on word power.
4. It is amenable to high level of planning and structuring.	4. It takes more time to get feedback.
5. It facilitates repeated reference.	5. It depends on the messenger and the mode of transmission.
6. It depends less on memory since facts and figures can be mobilized beforehand.	6. It is constrained by language, handwriting and efficiency of the tools used.

The third method of communication relates to *non-verbal communication*, which is neither oral nor written. While oral communication thrives on listening and the written communication thrives on reading, the non-verbal communication thrives on observation. Non-verbal communication may take any of the following forms – body language, gestures, postures, appearance, personal space, codes, signs and signals, facial expressions, timings, examples and personal behavior. Non-verbal communication may be conscious or unconscious, deliberate or unintended. It may substitute verbal communication or supplement it.

Visual communication is effected through pictures, graphs and charts, as well as through signs, signals and symbols. They may be used either independently or as an adjunct to the other methods of communication. It is also useful in reaching out to an illiterate target group. It can be used in addressing groups of people who do not understand the language of the communicator. As the saying goes, «A picture is worth more than a thousand words». Pictures, graphs, charts and diagrams often convey the intended message quite effectively.

Audio-visual communication is an extremely sophisticated method of communication. It involves demonstrations and presentations through various audio-visual aids. Audio-visual communication is an effective blend of both verbal and visual communication. Such communications are very effective and, generally speaking, very effective and carry high relation value.

Signs, signals and symbols have come to acquire considerable significance in the world of communication. Having evolved over a long period of time, they date back to biblical times and mythological periods. Well before language evolved, pre-historic man had learnt to communicate with the help of signs and signals. A signal is a sound or a movement that people make to give others information, instruction or warning. A signal is also understood as an indication that something exists or something is about to happen. We are familiar with the use of a danger signal and a green signal. Similarly, there are traffic signals and radio signals. A symbol refers to a credo or a manner of representation of ideas. Symbols often use the power of association to convey a specific meaning. Symbols are well accepted and widely used in present day business communication. Use of symbols at the right place enhances the effectiveness of communication. Silence is also a method of communication. It refers to a state of wordlessness or verbal abstinence. Self-inflicted silence conveys a powerful message. Silence can also be either deliberate or unintentional. Unexpected silence sometimes results in awkward situations. In personal communication as well as business communication, silence has a definite role to play.

Contemporary social and business environments are changing quickly and becoming more and more culturally diversified. Intercultural dialogue contributes to political, social, cultural and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. Employers with intercultural skills perform better in managing employees, marketing products, and interacting with customers and business partners. Effective communication across cultural boundaries is particularly important for international managers. They should develop an appreciation and sensitivity for cultural differences and build intercultural competence.

Various methods of communication have their own distinguishing features in terms of speed, reliability, cost, reach as well as overall merits and demerits. In a large organization, communication takes place at various levels. People in large organizations need to resort to all these methods of communication depending upon the situations. It is necessary to clearly appreciate the relative merits and demerits of these methods in dealing with people and situations in any organization. Good organization is hardly ever accidental. It calls for conscious efforts and the choice of the most appropriate methods and channels, keeping in view the target sections and context.

Conclusion. Contemporary social and business environments are changing quickly and becoming more and more culturally diversified. Increasing cultural diversity brings about new social and political challenges, since it often triggers fear and rejection. On the other hand, it is an economic, social and political opportunity, if it is managed adequately. Abilities for effective intercultural communication of individuals and Intercultural competencies of employees enable to take advantage of this opportunity. Intercultural dialogue contributes to political, social, cultural and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. Employers with intercultural skills perform better in managing employees, marketing products, and interacting with customers and business partners. Effective communication across cultural boundaries is particularly important for international managers. They should develop an appreciation and sensitivity for cultural differences and build intercultural competence. If they work and live in other countries for extended periods the acculturation is inevitable.

Intercultural competence, which means building an intercultural identity to some degree, is not necessarily linked to the knowledge of foreign languages, but such knowledge considerably widens the horizon of possible intercultural experience and interpersonal contact, which may lead to a different quality of intercultural interaction. The basis of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of the person interacting with people of another culture. This means a willingness to “decentre” from one’s own culture. It requires “unlearning” what seems natural and it requires a basic attitude of *respect for otherness*. Due to uncertainty and unpredictability, which emerge in interactions with people of other cultures, the second important attitude in intercultural dialogue or communication is *tolerance for ambiguity*. People who are tolerant of ambiguity are able to accept this challenge and deal with it constructively. Successful intercultural interaction is also based on the *empathetic attitude* of the persons involved; empathetic persons have the skills to recognise and respond in appropriate ways to the feelings, preferences and ways of thinking of others. An important component of successful intercultural communication is *communicative awareness*, inherent to the linguistics. It refers to the ability to recognise different linguistic conventions, different verbal and non-verbal communication conventions and their effects on discourse processes. Another crucial factor is *knowledge* of how social groups and social identities of other cultures function. Because people need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise and how they might be able to resolve them, they need the *skills of comparison, interpreting and relating*. Furthermore, it is equally

important to acquire *the skills of discovery and interaction* with the aim of finding out new knowledge about cultural practices and integrating it into real-time communication and interaction. Due to deeply embedded one's own beliefs, values and behaviors, openness to other cultures can create reaction and rejection. Because of this unavoidable response, people need to become aware of their own values and how these influence their views of other people's values. They need *critical cultural awareness* of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people.

The awareness of the urgency of possessing intercultural competence is increasing amongst educational institutions and employers. To raise the attitudes, knowledge and skills, necessary for effective intercultural communication, to motivate learning, to examine learning outcome or to track and measure the level of intercultural competences several commercial and non-commercial tools and instruments are developed. Educators, policymakers and other interested publics can also benefit from several European Union's mechanisms that promote and support intercultural dialogue and intercultural communication.