PDF 2 - Professional & Deeper Intercultural Situations.



CULTURAL DIFFERENCES & INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Professional & Deeper Intercultural Situations

Focus: International meetings, workplace expectations, communication breakdowns, cultural adaptation and problem-solving.

A. Warm-Up – Working Across Cultures

Discuss:

1. Can cultural misunderstandings affect business results?
2. Should international companies have one common workplace culture?
3. Is it more important to adapt to others or remain true to your own communication style?
4. How can managers encourage cultural understanding?
5. Can technology make intercultural communication more difficult?

B. Professional Communication – What Could Go Wrong?

Read each situation. Explain the potential misunderstanding and suggest a solution.

1. The Uncomfortable Disagreement

During an international meeting, a junior employee strongly disagrees with a senior manager in front of the entire group. The manager appears uncomfortable, while the employee believes open discussion is encouraged.

2. The Missing Deadline

A project manager expects a colleague to complete a task by Friday. The colleague says, "I'll do my best." The manager assumes this is a firm commitment, but the colleague intended it as a possibility rather than a promise.

3. The Camera-Off Meeting

During an online international meeting, several participants keep their cameras switched off. The team leader interprets this as a lack of interest, while the participants believe it is perfectly acceptable.

4. The Decision That Never Happens

An international project team discusses a proposal for an hour. Everyone appears to agree, but nobody takes responsibility for making the final decision.

Questions:

- What assumptions are being made?
- Why might people interpret the situation differently?
- What would be a fair and practical solution?

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D. Case Study – The International Project

A company has brought together employees from four different countries to develop a new product.
After two months, the project is falling behind schedule.

The problems include:

- Some team members expect detailed written instructions.
- Others prefer informal discussions and flexibility.
- Some employees are uncomfortable challenging senior colleagues.
- Team members have different expectations about response times to emails.
- Several important decisions have not been clearly communicated.

Your task: You are the international management team. Develop a practical plan to improve cooperation.

Discuss and agree on:

1. How meetings should be organised.
2. How decisions should be recorded and communicated.
3. How deadlines should be agreed upon.
4. How employees can raise concerns.
5. How the team can avoid making cultural assumptions.

Present your plan to the class.

C. Language for Intercultural Problem-Solving

Clarifying meaning

- Could you clarify what you mean by that?
- Just to make sure we're on the same page...
- How should we interpret that in this context?
- I wonder whether we've understood each other correctly.

Showing cultural sensitivity

- I'm aware that expectations may differ.
- I don't want to make assumptions about your approach.
- Could you explain how this is normally handled?
- I'd be interested to understand your perspective.

Adapting communication

- Perhaps we should agree on a clearer process.
- It might help if we established some common expectations.
- Let's find an approach that works for everyone.
- We should take everyone's working preferences into account.

Managing misunderstandings

- I think there may have been a misunderstanding.
- That wasn't how I intended it to sound.
- I can see how that might have been interpreted differently.
- Let's focus on what we can do to avoid this happening again.

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E. Role-Play – The International Meeting

You are attending a meeting to organise a major international conference.
There are three participants:

Student A – The Project Director

You want firm deadlines, clearly assigned responsibilities and quick decisions.

Student B – The International Partner

You prefer consulting your colleagues before agreeing to important decisions. You dislike being pressured.

Student C – The Event Coordinator

You are responsible for the practical arrangements. You believe communication is unclear and several important details have been overlooked.

Your objective: Reach agreement on the venue, budget, responsibilities and planning schedule.
The group must:

- Identify misunderstandings.
- Ask questions rather than make assumptions.
- Adapt communication where necessary.
- Reach practical agreements.

F. Critical Thinking – Adapt or Don't Adapt?

Discuss the following statements.

1. When working abroad, employees should adapt to the local workplace culture.
2. Companies should train all employees in intercultural communication.
3. Being culturally sensitive sometimes means changing the way you communicate.
4. International teams are more creative because they bring different perspectives.
5. Cultural differences are sometimes used as excuses for poor communication.

Choose one statement you strongly agree or disagree with. Defend your position.

G. Final Reflection

1. What is the biggest challenge when communicating across cultures?
2. How can we distinguish between a cultural difference and an individual personality difference?
3. What should someone do after accidentally offending a colleague?
4. Is cultural adaptation a two-way responsibility?
5. What three qualities make someone an effective intercultural communicator?

Final challenge: Imagine you have been appointed to lead an international team. Give a short presentation explaining five principles you would introduce to ensure successful communication.

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