

Teaching Intercultural Business Communication to Management Students: Challenges and Strategies

Apoorva Bharadwaj

Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, India

Key words

Intercultural communication, business, value orientations, transactional culture

Abstract

Teaching intercultural business communication gives a conceptual delusion of putting socio-cultural studies, communication and business in a hybrid subject which culminates into an intellectual confusion in the students. For a communication instructor it becomes a challenge to take up the right perspective for teaching this subject and coin different pedagogy, prepare relevant course material and design an evaluation pattern which will do justice with the subject. This paper aims at revamping the entire conceptual framework of this subject so that it can be used as one of the tools for bringing globalization in true essence of the term in business schools.

Introduction and rationale

Teaching intercultural business communication gives a conceptual delusion of putting socio-cultural studies, communication and business in a hybrid subject which culminates into an intellectual confusion in the students. For a communication instructor it becomes a challenge to take up the right perspective for teaching this subject and coin different pedagogy, prepare relevant course material and design an evaluation pattern which will do justice with the subject. "Today's era is a time when Intercultural Communication has reached its prime. The increase in cross-cultural relations in quantity and in quality has been the cause and the consequence, at the same time, of the need to new learning and teaching techniques...." (Anacleto-Matias,2007). This paper aims at revamping the entire conceptual framework of this subject so that it can be used as one of the tools for bringing globalization in true essence of the term in business schools.

Research questions: challenges

The treatment of the subject poses many challenges. The first and the foremost challenge is the study of society and culture. The study of culture as taken up by the practitioners of socio-cultural studies is an in-depth probing into the extent to which the psyche of a mass of people residing in a particular geographical entity has been structured by the cultural heritage of that place. But here the question is whether an instructor in a business school should adopt the texts authored by these cerebral giants of socio-cultural studies in his personal library to teach his business-savvy students. Obviously, the answer to this is a big "no". A business student needs not bury his head into texts analyzing nuances of the culture denizens of a particular ethnicity or nationality carry in their lives. When a business professional migrates to an offshore site of business his objectives are clear - he is not there to scan the mindscape of the people there by dissecting by his razor-sharp scalpel their minds but to transact business that would augment the accounts of his firm. Hence, needless to say, that the study of culture administered to the management students has to be cast in a different frame. Thus the very first challenge is curriculum development that integrates business, culture and communication in the right interface. Then the challenge of delivery of this course follows so as to make it effective for practical purposes. There are many concepts which are theoretically very well appreciated but they do not precipitate into concrete behavioural skill sets that will contribute to the overall business intelligence. Hence the instructor needs to deliberate on the pedagogical matters so as to make the delivery of the subject efficacious. He needs to coin different methodologies not just for the classroom treatment of the subject, but also for some off the classroom "outdoor" exercises that will impart experiential learning to the students.

Yet another challenge is freezing the evaluation pattern for the subject. New types of assignments should be designed so as to mix theory with practice to help students internalize the concepts of intercultural business communication. Thus the teacher is entrusted with the responsibility of incorporating 'action projects' into the course corpus.

All these efforts should be geared to the motive of helping the students attain a 'transactional' culture to avert communication dislocations in the multicultural business environment.

Discussion

I] The cultural factors affecting business

As discussed in the section above that one of the challenges that faces the business communication instructor is to study and to teach those aspects of culture which have direct bearing on business. Hence the study should not be done through the lenses of a tourist who takes a front stage view of the culture, appreciating the exotic facets of culture with an inquisitive mind to comprehend a way of life totally different from his own. In lieu of taking this perspective the instructor should study and 'filter out' those dimensions of culture which are likely to impact business. "Knowledge of traditional culture can be helpful in business transactions, but all too often such discussions get stuck in front stage cultural behaviour: what we can see. Instead, we need to emphasize the back stage: why these behaviours exist and how cultural priorities relate to business." (Varner, 2001).

Some of these dimensions to be scanned by a business expert are as cited below:

- **The role of individual** – Some societies are individualistic in the sense individual achievements are valued and glorified. Competition is not considered an ugly word, for example, in America. But some cultures like that of Japan believe in societal cohesiveness. Here society is placed above the individual. Thus in these cultures pursuing individual interests is considered a self-centred approach and working and achieving in unison with others and not at the expense of others is considered the true merit. Hence if a candidate is planning to apply for a position in Japan he should stress in his résumé his team performance rather than his individual accomplishments. Some cultures promote individual values such as personal achievement, while others emphasize collective values, such as respect for conformity – identification with group harmony.
- **Approach towards formality and status also varies** – In some cultures the work ambience is very formal and transgressing any code of conduct of this officially prescribed and sanctioned formality is taken serious cognizance of. For example in Japan if an employee takes off his blazer for his comfort while working, this act may earn him frown there because it is against business etiquette, whereas in America such an act will not raise people's antennae. It will be considered normal and acceptable. Similarly in some cultures status plays a pivotal role in the assessment of a person. When a person gives a suggestion, the suggestion is not valued in isolation but in the context of the designation he holds. That is why in countries like China business messages bear official titles in the inside address in lieu of proper names because the position tag is considered more important than the individual.
- **Attitude towards uncertainty** – In some cultures people tend to play safe, they are averse to taking up risks, whereas in some cultures one may find people to be enterprising, willing to take up new business challenges, and are open to out of the box experimentation. In such cultures if one steps in with a proposal of new business there is likelihood of acceptance, but the same move may be considered negative in cultures where people are conditioned to play safe.
- **Attitude towards time** – Some cultures are monochronic like that of Germany where time forms the basis of all the planning and therefore is to be monitored religiously. As a result in such cultures punctuality becomes a necessary virtue. While in countries like India the concept of time is polychronic – time is taken to be flexible, multi-tasking is done and there is no rigid demand on the issue of compliance with the stipulated time limit.

- **Role of hierarchy** – In certain cultures the corporate structures are hierarchical hence communication has to travel through prescribed links before it is received by the intended recipient. This kind of hierarchical system has a major impact on the composition and scope of messages exchanged. It also results into certain formatting requirements that have to be adhered to. On the other hand, some cultures are egalitarian when it comes to organizational set up. In such a case, the flow, the formatting and the content of the message will be designed differently.
- **Role of gender** - Some cultures are male dominated and hence, if a company from a country, where the gender divide is not very sharp, sends a female executive to a male-dominated country to transact business, she may not be taken seriously. Also of late huge research has been done on the factor of gender affecting communication style. Hence this aspect also impacts business communication.
- **Choice of communication channels** – In UK, for example, business is transacted mostly through email communication but the same choice of channel may not be effective in other countries like Latin America, South Europe and Arab countries where it is believed that face-to-face communication is the best channel especially when it comes to conveying sensitive or important information. Hence business executives also need to understand the preferential choice of communication channel when contacting different companies.
- **Degree of formality** - The dimension dealing with frequent use of form versus lack of form is also useful for the study of cross – cultural communication in business. In the United States, business people observe form rarely and are somewhat suspicious of it; given names rather than family names are used in business and casual dress may be acceptable – men may remove their jackets, for example, while working. By contrast, Japanese never use given names in business and men rarely remove jackets while at work. Focus on form may make the United States business people uncomfortable. Norms of both formality and informality assure members in their respective cultures that they are behaving correctly and not risking embarrassment, but the very assumptions about what constitutes comfortable behaviour are not universal and can cause discomfort to members of the other cultures.

III] Questions to be asked to probe the penetration of cultural practices into business

Pose right questions for students to mull over for highlighting the link between culture and business.

Some such questions are laid down below:

- What is the social status of business?
- What influences does culture have on organizational structures impacting the development of business strategies, the flow of information, and the decision-making process?

Posing these questions will give the communication instructor a stimulant to induce critical thinking skills in the student by dint of which they will be able to rationalize the connect betwixt culture and business.

For example, the aspect of power and distance, the variables which are context-sensitive are the ones which impact the politeness strategies, rhetoric devices and request diction followed. Thus culture controls the organization, tone, degree of formality, document design and use of visual symbols in written communication. The result is a complex system entailing layers of culture, communication and business. There is corporate culture, the industry culture, the general business culture and the national culture into play. For instance, in Islamic countries religion prescribes norms on usury – forbidding the charging and receiving of high interests practiced in compliance with the religious dictates and which, in turn, have profound implications for the size of businesses, the organization of the banking industry, and the financing of business projects. Conducting such live discussions through case studies will develop critical thinking skills in students which will help them in exploring and comprehending the explicit, the implicit and the subtle ways in which culture may shape up business.

Some other dimensions worth discussing include gestures which have more information value for Italians than for the British subjects. Likewise, it is interesting to note that touch channel is used more by

Americans than the Japanese. In some cultures self-enhancement is considered abhorrent and premium is placed on the practice of self-effacement.

Cross-cultural communication training should include techniques for turn-taking in conversation, forms of address, and idioms for asking for clarification and explanation. Through video tapes or live interactions students may be attuned to the nonverbal signals natives use to manage conversations.

III] Comparing the value orientations

Michael G. Harvey and David A. Griffith in their article titled 'Developing Effective Intercultural Relationships: The Importance of Communication Strategies' opine that there has to be a global relationship process model for studying intercultural business communication which includes (1) impact of the global market on the rationale for increased relationship development; (2) identification of domains of relationships; (3) influence on communications by national and organizational culture; and (4) development of an intercultural communications decision process. (Griffith, Harvey, 2002).

Though different experts have proposed and expounded different models for dealing with intercultural communication, a business communication facilitator can present culture in terms of certain value-orientations that can help students in comprehending the culture-business connect in an easy and unambiguous manner.

One set of value orientation is attitude towards activity and achievement. For instance, all cultures do not share the North American need to identify goals and work toward them. Some societies emphasize the present moment and celebrate simply being. Related to this dimension is another set of value orientation: result-oriented cultures seem at a polarity with relationship-oriented culture. This set of polarities corresponds closely to the cause-and-effect pattern of thinking versus the context pattern.

A third set of polarities is a sequential approach to tasks versus a simultaneous approach. For example, in some cultures, one seller who can serve four people at once is viewed as highly efficient, whereas in other cultures it is appropriate to devote attention exclusively to one customer at a time. A fourth dimension concerns uncertainty avoidance at one end, and a tolerance of uncertainty at the other. Finally, some cultures view luck as a significant factor in outcomes including business activities, while other cultures attribute little or no importance to luck.

The fifth set of value orientations concerns the relative importance of individualism versus interdependence and interrelatedness. In some business environment age is more important than training or even experience, but this is not true of other cultures. In business cultures where the individual is rewarded, personal competitiveness is high; in cultures toward the other extreme, competitiveness may be detested. Managers may be at a loss to motivate workers who are not interested in individual achievement. Yet another dimension is a culture's preference for one gender over the other for a particular job.

IV] The organization of society

The opposed value orientations include

- 1] A tendency toward temporary versus permanent group membership;
- 2] Preference for private ownership of material goods versus community ownership;
- 3] A tendency to distrust form versus a preference for form;
- 4] More egalitarianism versus more hierarchical structure; and
- 5] A general practice of approaching authority directly versus using a mediated link to authority.

These orientations will affect format, organization, and tone of business communication documents, as well as interpersonal communication. For example, the degree to which a business letter writer speaks for a collective audience rather than an individual reader can vary greatly and will determine the vocabulary and tone of the letter.

An employee who views employment within an organization as a lifelong commitment, which perhaps extends to descendants as well, will frame messages differently from an employee who views the organization as a career-building stepping stone. The degree to which the writer expects the reader to

react as an individual with authority to respond, or as a representative of a group who must consult the group before responding, is also important.

V] The learning strategy

One can pose these questions to understand a new culture or one's own culture and use figures to illustrate the preferences of a specific culture in terms of these value orientations and at a glance cultures can be understood and compared.

This study will help in generating "other-culture" messages. For example, according to the stereotype of the behaviour of Arab letter-writers, a letter usually begins with a generalized benediction upon the reader and family. An actual letter will be tested against this expectation and may conform or contradict or partly conform to the expectation.

VII] The problems emanating from cross-cultural disjoint

Give a clear picture of culture impacting business quoting episodes of cross-cultural disjoint in communication. Certain erroneous tendencies which students should be apprised about are ethnocentrism and sophisticated stereotyping.

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to regard one's own culture as superior to other cultures and hence leads to the erroneous scanning of others' behaviour through the lenses of one's native culture.

".....the description of Indians as people who like "clearly defined tasks" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 228) denies them the attribute of creativity that the West likes to keep for itself. These dichotomous constructions of the 'Other' are not restricted to Indians alone. People tend to perceive Vietnamese, Cambodians, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, and African Americans as well with "sample traits"." (Mckie, Munshi, 2001).

Sophisticated Stereotyping has been found to have profound impact on global organizational learning - e.g. a Japanese manager may dismiss information coming from a Korean manager since he has a notion of cultural superiority over his Korean counterparts. Similarly, a Japanese's notion about American culture of individualism may lead him to discount the Americans' take on effective team functioning. Another example that can be taken in this regard is of an American dismissing a report by a French manager concerning dangerous moves by competitors in Europe as an overreaction by those "emotional French". Many a time Japanese communication culture of reticence and formality with strangers has often led to a slowdown in attaining team goals when they are involved, say, with British members in meeting situations.

Several case studies also propound such views, like the one conducted by Holmes on interpersonal communication differences involving Chinese students in a Western classroom with their New Zealand peers:

"Educational traditions also strongly influence the nature of interpersonal communication in the classroom. The education system of the Chinese students in this study is predicated on the Confucian tradition in which learners are expected to show effort, be respectful of knowledge and authoritative sources...student-teacher interpersonal relationships are hierarchical. Communication tends to be indirectBy contrast, interpersonal communication in the New Zealand classroom is typically low context...where communication styles are direct and explicit. However, for Chinese students, the Western classroom practices of volunteering answers, commenting, interrupting, criticizing, asking questions, or seeking clarification may be seen as bold and immodest.....Therefore, Chinese students' interpersonal communication styles and their attitudes toward knowledge and power may disadvantage them in a culture that rewards the assertive and highly verbal.....As a result, Chinese students arriving in New Zealand classrooms are likely to experience learning and communication dislocations." (Holmes, 2004)

Another case study highlights cultural differences amongst the Dutch and the Flemish. They were asked to rank the following eight requirements that they could expect from a job:

- a. Have good promotion prospects
- b. Have responsibilities
- c. Be able to show creativity
- d. Know exactly what tasks one has to fulfil
- e. Have a permanent contract
- f. Have flexitime
- g. Have a nice workplace
- h. Have good relationships with boss and colleagues

Because masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are higher in Flanders than in the Netherlands (Hofstede 1980, p. 230; 2001, pp. 500- 501) Flemish and Dutch students often differ in the job requirements that they see as most important. The Dutch often place c, f, g, and h at the top of their list, whereas the Flemish give priority to a, b, d, and e." (Gerritsen, Verckens, 2006)

Research contribution

Christine Uber Grosse lays down the following structure for intercultural communication in 'Managing Communication within Virtual Intercultural Teams: Communicating across Languages and Cultures: Opportunities and Challenges'

- Build trust and understanding
- Understand how diversity strengthens a team
- Understand pros and cons of intercultural teams
- Develop a network of good relationships
- Balance distance work with face-to-face time
- Show respect for other cultures and languages
- Overcome cultural differences
- Break down language barriers
- Be open to learning about other cultures
- Understand cultural values and beliefs, communication styles
- Understand approaches to decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution
- Use appropriate communication channels
- Check for understanding (Grosse, 2002)

Let's consider a pedagogical architecture which a facilitator can employ for intercultural communication training:

1] Activity for recognizing and overcoming self-reference criterion

The act of recognizing and overcoming self-criterion is very difficult to internalize. Hence to make students comprehend the complexity of this phenomenon organize panel discussions with foreign students in intercultural business class - e.g. a Chinese student who has worked in Pakistan may discuss before the panel his experience working there focusing on religion, treatment of women in Pakistan, emphasizing all the exotic aspects of Islamic culture and behaviour he found strange.

In discussion papers following the panel, many students will observe that this panellist had looked at Pakistan from his own self-reference criterion. This is exactly what most of us do when we look at a different culture. It is easier to recognize this behaviour in someone from another culture than in oneself. Students compare and contrast their own cultural orientations with that of the panel, but they don't judge.

2] Teaching activities

Videos shows - Organize video shows on a specific country covering history, economy, etiquette, business relationships. Communicating, negotiating, and management should be demonstrated in these

video resources in action. Culture should not be dealt with specifically so that students can themselves develop critical thinking skills linking culture with the activities displayed in the video. Video should present a mixture of do's and don'ts, front stage culture, some cultural priorities, and business practices.

After watching the video, students can be directed to author a paper identifying major cultural variables that influence business. They apply cultural concepts to business practices.

Current events – Students can be entrusted with the task of reading business newspapers, journals and magazines to follow one country and the business news related to that country throughout the semester. Then they can be asked to submit a summary of at least ten articles and an analysis of the business events in the given country at the end of the semester. If one country is assigned to one intercultural focus group and if there are ten groups, there can be class presentations on ten countries – a rich experience of correlating business with culture for the entire class.

Case studies of companies – Let students take up case studies of different multinational companies and analyze them in the light of business and culture in action.

Projects - Projects can be designed for virtual intercultural teams. These projects can include oral or written reflection on the team communication process to help students learn as they experience the opportunities and challenges of communicating across cultures with technology, say, via e-mail.

Reports – Students act as consultants for companies aiming at international expansion. The teacher assigns a country to a team and the team submits a report identifying important cultural variables, discussing cultural differences, and designing ways of cooperation.

Watching television serials - Watching international T.V. serials depicting business people in various situations is also a rewarding exercise – business lunches, meetings, routine business and office interactions, and entertaining business partners.

International conferences - The traffic of people and ideas at international conferences as well as exchange visits can act as good resource. After conference is over and a faculty or a student returns from his overseas errand let him give a presentation on his intercultural experience which will give valuable insights to others. Involve business people from industry who have vast experience of doing business in diverse overseas subsidiaries of their companies in academic gatherings on the theme of intercultural business communication.

Alumni association - Personal contacts matured within the corporate world, for example, alumni association are also useful in-house sources on which researchers can draw to make first time approaches that may lead to future company-based projects on intercultural business communication.

Keyboarding blocks and participating in discourse communities - Open a portal on which professionals can post blogs on intercultural communication, even touching issues like racism – tell students to become members of this discourse community.

3] The proposed intercultural learning model to lay foundation for a pedagogical posture

The best way to understand intercultural communication is to focus on the decoding process and the role of perception in communication. This is because in intercultural communication, decoding by the receiver of signals is subject to social values and cultural variables not necessarily present in the sender.

This model postulates five levels of learning –

- 1] Acknowledging diversity,
- 2] Organizing information according to stereotypes,
- 3] Posing questions to challenge the stereotypes,
- 4] Analyzing communication episodes and,
- 5] Generating “other culture” messages.

At the level of acknowledging diversity, definitions of basic concepts for discussing diversity are important, such as “bias,” “ethnocentricity,” “value,” and “culture”.

4] Designing “task” programs for multi-cultural teams with foreign exchange students

Form a multi-cultural team with participants from different cultural backgrounds along with the native students and assign them a project.

Before the team starts working on the project administer a questionnaire to gauge their perceptions about people from the cultures to which their co-workers belong.

Once the project is completed record their responses again to see what changes have come in their stereotypic thinking about people of other cultures in comparison to their pre-project stance.

You can give them some adjectives (positive/negative/neutral) to describe their partners hailing from other cultures – domineering, insensitive, critical, cold, superficial etc or warm, curious, imaginative, confident, sincere, tolerant etc.

An e-mail project can also be administered pairing two students from different cultural backgrounds (may be geographically dispersed) with questionnaires on diverse cultural variables asking them to prepare their individual responses and then write a joint report together for submission.

5] Forming social clubs

Form social clubs to provide a continuous basis for cultural exchange, learning, and understanding. This will also help new arrivals in a country by hopefully alleviating some of the problems that seem to be experienced by all newcomers from other cultural entities. Such initiatives will develop trust and empathy in globalized settings.

6] Creation of business-oriented simulation

Present three fictional cultures (purple, red, green) with their cultural profiles including surface traits (nonverbal style, greeting protocols) and deeper cultural traits (values, beliefs, social structure). The three cultures are intentionally fictional in order to stress the need to be intuitive when interacting with people from an unfamiliar culture. Participants may try to characterize the fictional cultures as Japanese, Arab etc. but since these generalizations do not work, participants cannot resort to known ways of dealing with specific cultures.

Three companies, one from each culture, are planning a joint business venture. Scene is a party prior to important business meetings to set up the venture. Each group gets a sheet describing the culture it represents. They meet and practice their cultural traits. After the simulation activity there is a discussion on principles of intercultural interaction. The entire exercise takes 120 minutes. To apply the same exercise for different groups the culture description can be modified.

Tell the green culture members to create an imaginary religion that controls their lives and create appropriate rituals. Tell them to practice conversing without eye contact.

Purple culture members will believe that fate controls most of the things. Ask them to think how this belief will be manifested in a discussion of the business project at hand. The blue culture will host the party.

Members of the red culture need to think about how they will feel and react when offered food that is a taboo in their culture.

At the end give all the groups the three culture description sheets

The items required

- Copies of the general instructions for the simulation
- Copies of the descriptions of each of the three cultures, preferably photocopied on appropriately coloured paper (red for red culture etc.)

- Large red, purple, and green nametags
- Different sorts of food and drinks

Conducting the debriefing

- Ask members of the green and purple cultures to describe the red culture’s behaviour, inferring the culture’s values, beliefs, and attitudes as manifested in their apparent behaviour, and explain how they felt towards these people. Ask them to employ one adjective to describe red culture.
- Some of the interpretations will be misunderstandings. Hence now tell the red culture to explain their value orientations. Ask the red culture how they felt about its own culture.
- This will be repeated for each culture. It will make the students experience how unfair negative qualities one might attribute to a culture ranging from rude to stupid to crazy. Usually each group defends its “rightness” vigorously thereby modelling ethnocentrism.
- Ask for examples of how people adjusted to the cultural differences as they discovered them. How long did it take for the participants to discover some of the underlying differences in beliefs, values, and attitudes? Which beliefs and values were never understood?

Learning

Cultural values are relative, not absolute. We all react emotionally, not just rationally, to cultural differences. What is seen (greeting rituals, name customs) is easier to deal with than what is unseen (assumptions about nature of business relationships, power, leadership, response styles). Flexibility is the key – observe others, think creatively.

7] Role-play/script analysis

- Tell the students to read about intercultural business communication first before the exercise.
- After exhaustive classroom discussion go for the role play exercise with a script –for example a case involving a hypothetical negotiation between a male buyer, a major manufacturer of CD players from U.S. and a vendor from Japan.
- For role play, three students should be appointed – two for the play and one student to read the lines marked “thinking”. These lines give the audience access to the buyer’s and vendor’s revealing thoughts.
- Give the students watching this role-play an analysis sheet with dialogues (along with actor instructions for non-verbal communication printed in italics) of the buyer and the vendor printed.
- Students don’t simply identify the weaknesses but also deepen their understanding by trying to determine why these weaknesses occurred. Once they understand why, they can look for ways to prevent such mistakes.

Specimen Feedback Evaluation Sheet for Role Play

Sender (Japanese Male Vendor)				Receiver (American Female Buyer)		
Message	Communication Bottleneck	Merit	Channel	Message	Communication Bottleneck	Merit
“Good morning, Ms. Catherine.”		Pays courteous greeting.	Two-way, face-to-face communication. Hot noisy shop, not suitable for negotiating an important issue like a delivery date.	“Hello”	Uses nonverbal communication that ratifies the Japanese stereotype of the American communicator’s profile as brusque and ill-mannered. Ignores the values Japanese accentuate in communication transactions	

Conclusions

What is transactional culture?

Transactional culture is the culture which two individuals use to communicate with each other, stepping out of their cultural haloes for the purpose of understanding each other so as to transact business. The intercultural business communication approaches need to be integrated with business strategies, financial policies, HR policies, and corporate culture. The result is a new construct called transactional culture – acceptable to the business parties involved, their governments, cultures and corporations. The parties step outside their own cultural and business environments and create a new context.

This culture is the corporate culture which is distinct from the culture of any nationality. For examples if two employees, one American and one Chinese working in the company of Motorola communicate with each other, the neo culture in which they operate has nothing to do with either American or with the Chinese culture. It is rather the Motorola culture which shapes their messages. Thus this transactional culture is that corporate culture which stands unadulterated by localized cultural influences. The studies of intercultural business communication should be directed towards helping the students attain this culture.

“Transactional discourse is, therefore, what comes into play whenever a speaker foregoes judgment, tolerates ambiguity, and actively seeks to build frames within which new, fruitful questions can be asked.” (Bargiela-Chiappini, Bulow-Mollar, Nickerson, Poncini, Zhu, 2003)

Research limitations

The research is based on the pedagogical tools employed by the author in her own course delivery and hence it is limited to her experimentation with deploying these innovative, efficacious models of instruction that may produce upshot better than the conventional text book teaching. Many more such experiments can be conducted to generate more effective pedagogical structures to make this subject instruction skills-based rather than lecture focussed. Also it is to be noted that the most opulent source of learning intercultural skills is the actual experience of working in cross-cultural contexts. The methodologies suggested in the paper can serve as some of the best second hand mechanisms of learning the skills of working in cross-cultural contexts within the ‘borders’ of a domestic classroom.

Future directions for research

The area offers a fecund ground for further research since the subject of intercultural business communication is gaining ground as one of the most important skill sets that global managers should be equipped with. The research can be based on constituting new action projects designed to give students hands-on experience of working with international students. Small business tasks necessitating interpersonal communication and handling team dynamics and leadership issues can be planned to test cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication orientation that students are expected to pick after the completion of the course to test the practical course deliverables. This would help students in internalising the take-away of the course and will give fresh insights to the instructor in further chiselling her teaching-learning tools.

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