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Career Development Tips

A Guide for Cultural Differences in Communication

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Guide Overview   ＞
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An overview of cultural differences in communication

Your culture affects the way you communicate with others, as it includes beliefs and behavioral norms that influence how you think and what you do while communicating. Knowing about the culture-based features that impact communication is essential, for

cultures differ and exchanging data is essential for your career development. To learn more about cultural differences in communication, check out this article.

What are cultural differences in communication?

Cultural differences in communication relate to the dissimilarities between communicators exchanging information with each other that are caused by differences in their respective cultures. These contrasts manifest in the way in which each communicator thinks and behaves, so they change the communication and its outcomes. Cultural differences have a major impact on communication due to several reasons, such as:

- **Culture drives the way you behave.** Each social group in the world has developed unique beliefs, habits, and norms of behavior over a long period of time. This collection of societal characteristics is called a culture. Culture directs how people think, so it directs their behavior.

- **Communication is an important form of behavior.** Your communication relates to what you do while exchanging information with others, so it's one of your behaviors.

- **Culture informs your communication.** Your communication is informed by the beliefs, habits, and behavioral norms with which you identify. In other words, it's informed by your culture. Essentially, your culture informs the decisions you make when communicating with others, your actions in the communication process, and your reactions to the communication of others.

- **Each culture is different.** Each homogenous social group with shared beliefs, habits, and behavioral norms has a unique culture. This culture differs from another that does not match its characteristics. Consequently, culture varies across societies based on its characteristics.

- **Culture's influence on communication is not always obvious.** While some cultural differences that impact communication are obvious, others are difficult to identify. For example, two people can be dressed in similar suits and have totally different cultures that drive the way they perceive each other, react to what is being said, and understand each other. Consequently, it can be difficult to resolve cultural differences in communication.

- **Culture influences beliefs and values.** Culture has an unseen influence on people because it impacts their beliefs and values, which cannot be seen by others, to inform

their behavior, which can be seen by their coworkers and employers.

- **Culture is a part of the personality.** As culture affects a person's beliefs, values, and behaviors, it's a part of their personality. This makes it difficult to modify your cultural differences or those of others that impact communication.

- **It's difficult to change a culture.** It's hard to change the culture of a social group because it has a hereditary component. In other words, culture, including the cultural differences that impact communication, is inherited. This is why cultural characteristics are shared by the individuals of a society at a point in time even without anyone making an effort to preserve them.

- **Your culture impacts your soft skills.** Culture is a part of a professional's unique personality. One's personality generates their natural abilities or soft skills. Consequently, culture influences the soft skill set of all workers, which includes communication skills.

- **A strong culture can make you a competent communicator.** Communication skills involve capabilities in active listening, empathy, discipline, collaboration, teamwork, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and written communication. These proficiencies enable you to tailor your communication to suit different audiences, solve issues, and achieve shared targets.

- **Cultural differences can be difficult to bridge.** It's easier to ignore the existence of cultural differences when communicating to achieve corporate goals. However, they can be difficult to overcome because each culture-based dissimilarity is a part of a communicator's personality.

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Examples of cultural differences in communication

The various ways in which cultural differences in communication manifest in the workplace can be assessed using a variety of techniques. The method developed by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch psychologist, identifies cultural characteristics which generate these differences. Based on Hofstede's extended framework, examples of culture-based dissimilarities in communication include:

Power distance

This refers to how people with relatively less power in a social group accept the unequal distribution of power. For example, a person who believes in more power distance accepts an unequal power structure in the communication process. In contrast, one who values less power distance does not do so. The latter individual is likely to challenge authoritarian communicators and prefer being an equal contributor when exchanging information.

Individual-focused vs. group-focused

Masculinity versus femininity: According to Hofstede, cultures that prefer assertiveness, heroism, material reward, and achievement are more masculine, while those that prefer modesty, cooperation, quality of life, and caring for the weak are more feminine. However, while the cultural differences can be used to differentiate communicators effectively, assigning them to fit inaccurate gender stereotypes is unnecessary. These differences include the following:

- Assertiveness versus modesty

- Heroism versus cooperation

- Material reward versus quality of life

- Achievement versus caring for the weak

Individualism versus collectivism: This differentiates cultures based on whether people prefer to work for themselves or work with others. Therefore, it closely resembles the differences articulated in the masculinity versus femininity dimension. Subsequently, it makes sense to treat Hofstede's masculinity versus femininity and individualism versus collectivism ideas in an individual-focused versus group-focused dimension.

In the context of communication, a person from a more individual-focused culture would prefer using their communication skills to gain short-term, personal rewards while someone from a more group-focused culture would opt for utilizing their power of communication to gain long-term benefits for their team. Additionally, the latter individual would be an effective team player while the former would lack teamwork skills.

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Uncertainty avoidance

This refers to the ability of societies to comfortably navigate uncertainty. As the communication process is fraught with ambiguity in the initial stage when everything is usually unresolved, a communicator with more uncertainty avoidance would be less effective in navigating concerns and sharing information than one with less uncertainty avoidance.

Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation

This dimension refers to whether people value short-term or long-term goals and achievements. For example, a communicator with a long-term orientation would prefer gaining value with their communication in the future. In contrast, someone who is orientated to the short-term would opt for achieving immediate gains through their communication.

Indulgence versus self-restraint

A culture's capabilities in relation to controlling desires or indulging them are explored through this dimension. For example, an individual from a culture that prefers indulgence, which relates to a social group in which the majority of individuals prefer indulgence over self-restraint, is likely to be an ineffective communicator. This is because an effective communicator can listen to others, empathize with them, and act with discipline. In contrast, someone who has inherited a cultural belief in behaving with self-restraint and the ability to do so is more likely to become a successful communicator.

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Tips for intercultural communication

Use these tips to improve intercultural communication:

Communicate more with people from similar cultures

While many societies that are linked with each other geographically or historically have similar cultures, there are others in distant, socially disconnected locations that have dramatically different cultural features. For example, some social groups have learned a language, which involves capabilities for verbal and written communication, recently while others have developed their language naturally for thousands of years. Consequently, cultural features that impact communication are not comparable between all cultures.

In a professional setting, you're more likely to invest in your communication and get fewer returns when you're engaging with people from significantly dissimilar cultures. For the best communication outcomes, engage with people whose cultures resemble yours or limit critically important communications to culturally similar communicators.

Identify behaviors that reflect cultural differences

While culture's impact on behaviors can be difficult to identify accurately, you can spot behaviors that are significantly different from those that your culture generates. When engaged in the communication process, use your active listening and empathy skills to identify behaviors among other communicators that differ from the behavioral norms with which you identify. Then, develop methods for addressing these differences.

Inform people about the communication targets

Use your communication skills to keep your coworkers, superiors, clients, or investors informed of what you're trying to achieve with your communication at every stage of the communication process. Use your active listening and empathy skills to evaluate whether your audience understands these targets. Make any necessary adjustments to your communication strategy to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Engage people with your communication

Try to engage the people you converse with by appealing to their reason, by sharing facts that support your talking points, and their emotions, by maintaining positivity and energy in your communications. This is likely to transcend differences in cultures that are similar to yours.

As discussed, culture-based dissimilarities between communicators can exponentially impact their communication. Use what you have learned about cultural differences in communication to improve your effectiveness in your current job or enhance your prospects when searching for a new employment opportunity.

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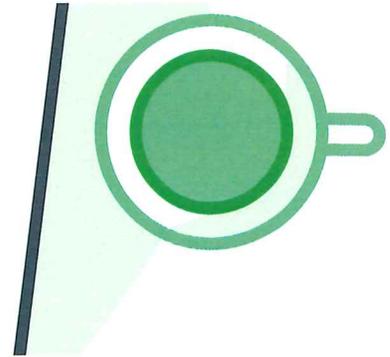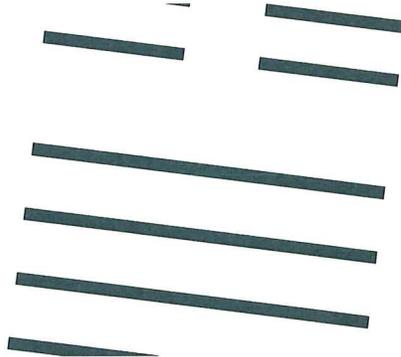### Team Culture: Identifiers, Benefits, and How to Build One that Works

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