COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

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ABSTRACT

The communication across culture may become less frustrating if we know that different communicative style, and different norms of social interaction are not only universal but also simple and easy to understand. Good communicative outcomes may come out of the reduction in discriminatory language or harmful speech, more effective learning of the other culture's language, dialect, or style by members of both (all) cultures.

The roles of communication are understanding, accepting, and appreciating cultural differences which includes not only issues of nationality, ethnicity, and race, but also gender, socioeconomic status, age, etc. Communication is a key component of bridging cultural differences.

The study includes four sections, section one is involved the problem, the aim, and the value of the study, while section two is devoted for barriers to communication, then section three is concerned with understanding process and section four deals with conclusions.

Contents

Section One

Literature Review

Communication is a dynamic subject to multifaceted interpretations, it is relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit some form of response, messages are the core of communication; we use verbal and nonverbal messages to get our ideas across to each other. The goal of a communication is to transfer message from the speaker to the hearer. As describing meanings part of the process of understanding utterances, the hearers perceive it in their own value, so there is still a gap between describing a meaning. We can exchange messages, but we cannot exchange meanings, communication is a symbolic exchange process, between two individuals who attempt to accomplish shared meanings. Communication does not take place in a vacuum, but in a context.

1.1. The Problem

Communication and the problems which surround it, is in many ways an inherently cross-cultural phenomenon.
Meaning changes and varies with circumstances and situations in which all responses might be both effective and appropriate. The real danger in many activities which involve communication is misunderstanding in a wide range of personal and professional contexts.

1.2. The aim of the study

The study aims at:
Showing the problems which arise in communication of different cultural conventions and trying to give the reasons and solutions for them.

1.3. The Value of the Study

The study gives a better understanding to communication, identifies sources of misunderstandings which lead to serious problems, and helps to reduce these misunderstanding.

Section Two

Barriers to Communication

Barna (1982) differentiates between observation and interpretation in cross-cultural communication which is the core of intercultural awareness. She mentions five barriers as follow:

First*: Language Difference:*

Language is not just learning new vocabulary and grammar but much more than that. It involves cultural competence: which means we have to know what to say and how, when, where and why to say it.
The same word may don't have the same meaning in different situations within the same language.
There are many ways to decrease this language barrier:
 (1)Language learning.
 (2) Get the help of someone who can speak the language as an interpreter.(Hofstede, et al.,2002 :17)
(3) If you don't understand what someone says, ask for clarification.

Second: *Nonverbal Communication:*

The communicator depends on gestures, facial expressions, body language, appearance or distance. All these gestures and other ways we show what we feel and think without speaking put in consideration while interpreting according to his/her own cultural interpretation.

To cross the nonverbal communication barrier these ways will help:
(1) Do not presuppose you understand any nonverbal signals or behavior unless you are familiar with the culture.
(2) Don't take a communicator's nonverbal behavior personally.
(3) Develop your own nonverbal communication patterns.

Third: *Stereotypes barrier:*

It refers to reject the interpretations that don't suit with what we expect, and try to fit people into patterns depend on our previous experience.(Hofstede, et al., 2002:18)
To overcome this barrier one can follow these steps:
(1) Increase awareness of your own stereotypes of communicator's culture.
(2) Learn more about the other people's culture.
(3) Reinterpret their behavior from their cultural perspective.

The Forth: *Tendency to evaluate behavior:*

The evolution of the other culture as good or bad, to make a judgment based on our own cultural bias.
Observation and interpretation, lead naturally to attribute meaning.
Different attitudes can cause misunderstanding about evaluation them. For example: food and drink.
 Many ways used to decrease this barrier:
 (1) Maintain appropriate distance.
 (2) A culture (or yourself)cannot change overnight.
 (3) Do not judge someone belong to another culture depending on your own cultural values.

The Fifth: *the high level of Stress:*

Intercultural involves some stress.
To decrease stress there are many ways:
(1) Communicators have to accept the ambiguity of cross-cultural situations.
(2) Reduce other intercultural barriers.

(3) Forgive others, to get the benefit of the doubt.
 (Hofstede, et al., 2002:19)

There are many communication barriers that can create misunderstandings and misinterpretations of your message such as:

Language Barriers, Cultural Barriers (Ethnic, religious, and social differences),**Gender Barriers** (Variation exists among masculine and feminine styles of communication). **Physical Barriers, Emotional Barriers** (Trouble listening can occur if one is consumed with emotion; Hostility, anger, fear, and other emotions)**.**

Different barriers can be divided into four parts**:**

1- **Semantic Barriers (**misunderstanding the feelings of the sender of the message or getting a wrong meaning of it**).**
2- **Psychological or Emotional Barriers** (The importance of communication depends on the mental condition of both the parties).
3- **Organisational Barriers** (Organisational structure).
4- **Personal Barriers** (directly connected with the sender and the receiver).

The most important barriers are as follow:

2.1. Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is judging others' by the standards of their own culture. It is referred to as the assumption that an individual's own culture and way of life are superior to all others and can serve a positive function in societies by promoting group solidarity and loyalty and by encouraging people to conform to societal norms and values.
(Schaefer, 2002:69)

2.2. Stereotyping

Stereotypes are our value judgments about people. (Pang, 2001:114) The social classification of particular groups and people as often highly simplified and generalized signs, which implicitly or explicitly represent

a set of values, judgments and assumptions concerning their behavior, characteristics or history. (O'sullivan, et al., 1994:299)

Stereotyping, though a natural and necessary process, can distort intergroup communication. It may lead people to base their messages, their transmitting them and their reception of them on false assumptions.

   These distortions arise in at least the following ways;

1- Stereotypes can influence how information is processed.

2 – Objectively, there is more variation within groups than between them

3 – Stereotypes create expectations about "others" and individual others often feel a pressure to confirm these expectations.

4 – Stereotypes constrain others' patterns of communication.

5 – Stereotypes create self – fulfilling prophecies, leading to stereotype – confirming communication. (Guirdham, 2005:184)

2.3. Prejudice

"Prejudice refers to negative attitudes towards other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes". (Lustig& Koester, 1999:153)

"It is judgments we make about others without sufficient evidence to substantiate the opinions". (Bolgatz, 2005:27)

Prejudice is usually a negative judgment of others.

   Allport(1958:14) outlines how prejudice could be acted through people's behavior:

1- Antilocution people talk about their prejudices with friends or people around them.

2- Avoidance people avoid contact with which they have prejudices against.

3- Discrimination prejudice is the perception and which could become observable and reflected through discrimination.

4- Physical attack people overtly express their prejudices by verbal abuse of those they have prejudices against.

5- Extermination.

2.4. Emotions

   Guirdham (2005:199) mentions that problem emotions are common in intercultural encounters:

1- Disconfirmed expectations – being upset because it is not what was expected.

2- Frustrated desire to belong – not being part of the "ingroup" of a culture.

3- Ambiguity – not being sure what is "going on".

4- Confrontation with one's own prejudices – people learn to categories people as "like me" and "not like me".

5- Anxiety – feeling anxious because of not knowing if a given behavior is appropriate.

2 .5 Racism

Longman (1988:1097) defines it "Racism is the belief that racial differences between people are the main influence on their characters and abilities, and especially that one's own race is the best".

Section Three

Understanding Process

Communication is viewed as a symbolic exchange process between persons of different cultures.

The general goal of effective intercultural communication is to create shared meanings between dissimilar individuals in an interactive situation. Mindful intercultural communication requires we support others' desired self – concepts, including their preferred cultural, ethnic, gender, and personal identities. (Hofstede, et al., 2002:17-20).

When we trying to communicate, there are many things can prevent us from understanding what others are trying to accurately interpret stereotypes and evaluate behavior before we understand it correctly.

So, to solve these problems, we have to increase the range of our perception, observe and suspend our interpretation (what we think) and evolution (what we feel) and ask for clarification if needed. We should take care to clarify our intention behind words and messages correctly.

Brislin (1993:10) states the following processes which are presented to increase understanding of the communication;

1 –Communication involves varying degrees of cultural group membership differences.

We need to develop an understanding of the valuable differences that exist between identity groups, at the same time; we need to continuously recognize the commonalities that exist on a panhuman identity level.

2 –Communication involves the simultaneous encoding and decoding of verbal and nonverbal messages in the exchange process.

The effective encoding and decoding process leads to share meanings.

3 –Many intercultural encounters involve well–meaning clashes.

"well–meaning clashes" refer to misunderstanding encounters in which people are "behaving properly and in a socially skilled manner according to the norms in their own culture".

Effective intercultural communication starts with the practice of mindful interpersonal communication. Mindful interpersonal communication starts with conscious monitoring of our reactive emotions in negatively judging or evaluating communication differences that stem from cultural differences.

4 –Communication always takes place in a context.

It does not happen in a vacuum.

5 – Communication always takes place in embedded systems.

We have to mindfully observe the linkage among communication patterns, context, and culture, in order to gain an in–depth understanding of the intercultural communication process.

CONCLUSIONS

One can get from the previous study of communication, the following conclusions:

1- Understand your own culture and particularly the various nonverbal aspects of communication.

2- Learn the communication rules for the other culture and other aspects of communication.

3- Approach intercultural communication with a positive attitude and with the goal of understanding the other side.

4- Be flexible.

5- There are some basic differences in the ways people of different cultures communicate, such as (body language).

6-There are individual differences in the way people communicate.

7- Openness, caring, and mutual respect for the dignity of individuals are essential qualities for effective communication.

8- There are great advantages throughout your life to being knowledgeable, respectful, and open toward others.

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