

CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE

Chapter 12

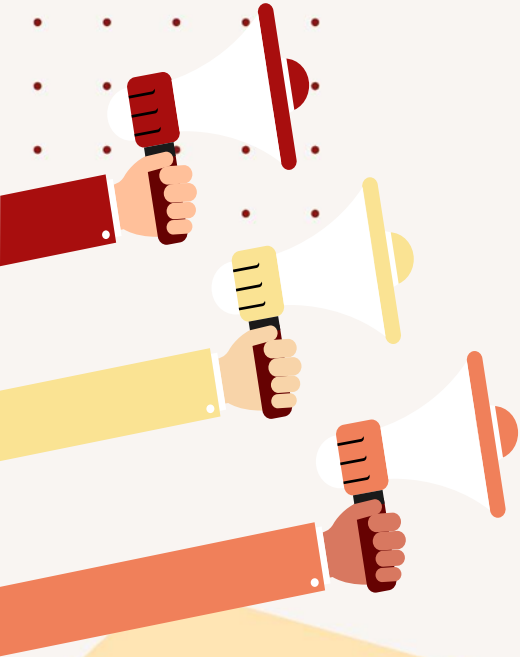
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the impact of globalization on today's workforce
- Describe the role of English in the global workforce
- Define diversity and identify the benefits of diversity for the global workplace
- Discuss the role of language, culture and power in the global workplace
- Identify challenges to diversity in the global workplace
- Explain the key elements in five cultural difference frameworks employed by social scientists to explain intercultural communication in the workplace
- Discuss the impact of the cultural difference frameworks on intercultural business education and diversity training
- Identify the limitations and dangers of the cultural difference frameworks
- Explain interpretive, experiential and critical approaches to understanding language and intercultural interactions in the global workplace
- Identify constructive ways to enhance language and intercultural communication in the global workplace.

Introduction



Today's interconnected world economy has had a profound impact on the global workplace. Large corporations and even small businesses have become increasingly multicultural and multilingual. Migration and global workforce mobility are resulting in more intercultural contact as temporary workers and long-term expatriates intermingle with locals, including immigrants from many parts of the world. In organizations, it is now common for people to work together in teams or on projects with individuals who have different linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds or disabilities.

(Jackson, 2014)

GLOBALIZATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Globalization is not new; the exchange of ideas, goods, and people has long been a part of human history. Nowadays, communication and organizational operations increasingly cross national boundaries and involve global business operations (**Jackson, 2014**).

The term **multinational business** signifies 'operations targeted toward and conducted in two or more countries, whereas a **global business** is a broader term meaning operations and strategies to serve a world market' (**Krizan et al. 2011: 37, as cited in Jackson, 2014**).



GLOBALIZATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Diversity encompasses differences among humans in terms of culture, language, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies (**Jackson, 2014**).

Surface-level diversity refers to 'differences that are easily seen and generally verifiable via a quick assessment of physical characteristics, including gender, age, race, and national origin/ethnicity (**Baldwin et al. 2013: 471, as cited in Jackson, 2014**) whereas **deep-level diversity** relates to differences that lie below the surface and are not so easily observable such as attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills and values or worldviews (**Jackson, 2014**).



ENGLISHIZATION, IDENTITY AND THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE

Partly as a consequence of globalization, the dominance of global English in business and other sectors has strengthened significantly in recent decades: 'English is not only a language of wider communication in the modern world, it is far more than that – it is, in a singularly powerful sense, the “global language” of commerce, trade, culture, and research in the contemporary world’.

(Reagan & Schreffler, 2005: 116, as cited in Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

In today's globalized world, an organization's success increasingly depends on its ability to embrace and manage diversity. A multicultural and multilingual workforce can be beneficial in a number of ways. It can add value to businesses and organizations by helping them to become more adaptable, flexible, and productive.

(Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Increased adaptability and productivity

When managed well, diversity can help organizations become more adaptable to the increasingly complex, dynamic, and interconnected world in which we live and work. As well to unique individual characteristics, each employee possesses strengths derived from his or her linguistic, gender, and cultural socialization. Co-workers with diverse backgrounds, ages, religions, and attributes bring unique experiences, ideas, and perceptions to groups and work teams.

(Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Synergy and enhanced creativity

Businesses and organizations that employ a diverse workforce can generate a greater variety of solutions to a wide range of issues (e.g. problems in service, sourcing, allocation of resources, labor disputes, and expansion in the global marketplace). The sharing of diverse experiences can inspire idea creation and increase innovation. For this to materialize, leaders (e.g. administrators, team leaders, unit managers) must cultivate an open, responsive atmosphere in teams and other workplace domains or activities.

Cultural synergy refers to the combined power of different cultural elements (e.g. people from diverse backgrounds) working together to create a greater, stronger effect than if they were separate. In the global workplace, this **collaboration** can be a positive force for creativity and change.



(Jackson, 2014)

THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Enhanced relations with diverse customers/clients

With increasing global mobility, a company's current and potential customers or clients are more likely to come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A diverse workforce can strengthen the organization's relations with multicultural and multilingual populations and better meet the needs of specific customer groups

(e.g. minorities who are not fluent in the primary language of the community, members of a particular religion).

(Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

International reach

Diversity in terms of language competency and ethnic affiliations can also benefit a company that has global aspirations or ties. As well as interacting with local minorities, bilingual or multilingual employees can help a business explore and enter new global markets and cope with the challenges of international partnerships.

Business acumen refers to one's ability to understand business situations and make appropriate decisions in a short amount of time.

(Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Enhanced reputation and competitive advantage

Organizations that promote diversity and inclusion are much more likely to be viewed favorably by multicultural customers, local and global business partners, and the media. When a business develops a reputation as an open, inclusive workplace, it also has a greater chance of recruiting and retaining talented individuals from diverse backgrounds.

(Jackson, 2014)



THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Personal growth and intercultural development

As well as enhancing the competitiveness of organizations, workplace diversity has the potential to stimulate personal growth in employees and their leaders. Exposure to new cultures, languages, perspectives (e.g. different worldviews), values and behaviors (e.g. communication styles) can help individuals develop intellectually, psychologically, and socially

(Jackson, 2014)



THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE



‘No one can be exempted from dealing with issues related to cultural diversity . . . Establishing common ground with others and developing the necessary empathy and degree of intercultural awareness, while constantly challenging one’s own perspectives, has therefore become almost a daily obligation for all those involved in the work process’.

(Guilherme et al. 2010: 243, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

A language barrier

In a diverse workplace, individuals who are not fluent in the primary language of communication are disadvantaged. It can also be very challenging for proficient speakers to explain ideas and procedures to second language workers or colleagues who are not fluent in the primary language. Communication difficulties are compounded when jargon, slang, and special codes are used in business contexts. Ineffective communication can result in confusion, frustration, misunderstandings, lack of teamwork, conflict, anger, and low morale. In worst-case scenarios, it can also result in accidents and injuries in the workplace.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Translation/interpreting limitations

- ❓ **Translation** refers to the written form of mediation (e.g. translation of written business documents and texts)
- ❓ **Interpreting** the oral form of translation (e.g. the interpreter translates spoken communication).
- ❓ **Simultaneous interpreting** refers to the act of interpreting while the speaker is talking (e.g. at an international business conference or meeting).
- ❓ **Consecutive interpreting** takes place after the speaker has finished.

As different skills are required, translators and interpreters usually receive different, specialized training.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Conflicting communication styles

Workplace settings typically involve both individual and group tasks. When people differ in terms of age, gender, language, culture, ethnicity, and many other aspects, it can be difficult for them to work together in a productive way, especially if they have divergent communication styles and are unwilling to adapt.

? **Direct Language**

Examples: Giving explicit directions, clearly expressing likes and dislikes.

? **Indirect Language**

Examples: 'I have one small suggestion, 'I'm not sure if this is relevant but ...'

? **Hedging**

Examples: 'It may be that ...', 'Perhaps, that might work ...', 'It appears that ...'

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Variations in emotional display/nonverbal codes

Workers may find some of the effective verbal and nonverbal behavior (e.g. emotional displays) of their colleagues baffling and annoying. In particular, the ways individuals from different cultural backgrounds respond to reprimands and requests may differ and this can lead to misattributions and misunderstandings.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

A clash in values

Cultural values are judgments about what is considered good and bad, important and unimportant in a particular culture. During enculturation, as children, we learn what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in particular contexts and situations. As we develop socio-pragmatic competence, we learn to consider the status of our communication partners when we speak and express ourselves nonverbally. For example, we use a different style of speech when interacting with our grandparents and peers. This learning continues when we enter the workforce.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Conflict (interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, gender, etc.)

When employees from diverse backgrounds interact they bring with them ideas, values, and expectations that have been influenced by their upbringing and life experiences. Men and women learn strategies to avoid or cope with confrontations within particular cultural contexts. Some approaches work well in some business settings but are less than optimal in others. Well-intended conflict management techniques may backfire and disputes may escalate.

Conflicts that are repressed or denied may fester and build resentment and frustration, creating additional problems for the organization. If managers and employees are not skillful in managing disagreements in the workplace, they may spiral into conflicts that are more difficult to resolve.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Opposition to change

In any work situation, employees may refuse to accept that the social, linguistic, and cultural makeup of their workplace has become or is becoming more diverse. Some may be uncomfortable working alongside people with disabilities or individuals who speak a different language, have different skin colors, or belong to another religion. Individuals may reject the notion that change is inevitable.

To deal with resistant employees, companies need to clearly explain the reasons for diversity and identify the many benefits that diversity brings to both management and employees. Alleviating fears about workplace diversity (e.g. anxiety about the loss of jobs) may reduce some of the opposition.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Resistance to integration

Newcomers who differ from the majority in terms of language, ethnicity, age, physical ability, gender, etc. may find social integration at work to be very challenging. For example, people from different ethnic or linguistic groups may cluster together and avoid social interactions with 'outsiders' during breaks and lunches.

Lack of social integration among diverse employees can hinder interpersonal relations and limit the sharing of knowledge, ideas, skills, and experience. This, in turn, can curb productivity growth and limit the effectiveness of teams.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Gender differences

In some cultural contexts, males hold all or nearly all of the positions of power, and women, if employed at all, are assigned subservient or supportive roles. Even in organizations that have long been open to females, the number of female executives tends to be smaller in comparison with males. Gender inequality in the global workplace remains a contentious issue in much of the world.

As more females assume leadership roles and participate in all levels of an organization or company, males and females need to learn how to work together and demonstrate respect for each other.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Religious differences

In many cultures, religion plays a dominant role in daily life, including in the workplace. When employees from different faiths interact at work, conflict may arise. Immigrants from nations where breaks are routinely given for prayers, for example, may find it difficult to adjust to a secular work environment where employees are discouraged from openly expressing religious differences.

Attitudes toward religion in the workforce vary significantly and can impact workforce relations

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Sociocultural differences

Enculturation influences understandings of what social behaviors are considered appropriate in particular contexts and situations, including business contexts.

❓ **Business protocol**

A general term that encompasses the discourse, nonverbal behavior, dress, procedures and social conventions that are expected within a particular company or organization.

❓ **Business etiquette**

Refers to rules that guide social behavior in workplace situations (e.g. greetings in business meetings, the exchanging of business cards, seating arrangements in business meetings/dinners, table manners in business lunches and formal dinners).

❓ **Business netiquette**

Refers to guidelines for courtesy in the use of email and the Internet for communication purposes.

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Ethnocentrism and assumptions of similarities

Typically, ethnocentric individuals elevate their own culture or group to status or position above all other cultures or groups. Problems can occur between employees from different cultural backgrounds when individuals assume that their own cultural norms are the right way and the only way to accomplish tasks. Ethnocentric individuals may also wrongly believe that the patterns of behavior that they are accustomed to in their own cultural environment are universal (e.g. what they say or do, think or believe is shared by everyone).

(Jackson, 2014)

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Prejudicial attitudes, discrimination, harassment and racism

Workplace discrimination (or employment discrimination) refers to unfair practices in hiring, promotion, job assignment, termination, and compensation. It also includes various types of harassment, that is, behaviors of an offensive or threatening nature. Sexual harassment in the workplace refers to repetitive and unwanted sexual advances, where the consequences of refusing could be very disadvantageous to the victim. For example, a female secretary who is propositioned by her manager may be directly or indirectly threatened with the loss of her job if she does not comply.

(Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE



This section reviews five models that have influenced the way intercultural communication is viewed in the global workplace: Hall's (1959, 1966, 1968, 1976) dimensions of culture difference (monochronic vs. polychronic communication, high/low-context communication, use of personal space), Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) five value orientations, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars' (1998) seven value dimensions, Hofstede's (1984) value orientations framework and the GLOBE cultural framework (House et al. 2004).

(Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Hall's dimensions of cultural difference

There are 'conscious' and 'unconscious' cultures, elements that are visible, explicit, and sensible (i.e., able to be sensed), and those that are invisible, nonverbal, and unconsciously learned over time.

- **Unconscious cultures** include all dimensions of nonverbal communication (e.g. gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, differences in time orientation, use of personal space, silence).
- **Conscious cultures** fall into the low-context communication framework, whereby most of the meaning is conveyed in the verbal code.

(Hall, 1998, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's cultural orientation framework

Five problems or challenges that all cultures face based on **Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961)**

1. What is the character of innate human nature? (the human nature orientation)
2. What is the relationship of people to nature? (the human-nature orientation)
3. What is the temporal focus of human life? (the time orientation, e.g. future, present, or past oriented ways of thinking and acting)
4. What is the modality of human activity? (the activity orientation, e.g. 'doing' or action oriented as opposed to 'being', which is person-oriented)
5. What is the modality of an individual's relationship to other people? (the relational orientation)

(Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars' value dimensions

Seven dimensions of cultural variability:

1. Universalism vs. particularism (What is most important, rules or relationships?)
2. Individualism vs. collectivism (Do we function in a group or as individuals?)
3. Neutral vs. emotional (Do we display our emotions, or do we hide them?)
4. Specific vs. diffuse (Do we handle our relationships in specific and predetermined ways, or do we see our relationships as changing and related to contextual settings?)
5. Achievement vs. ascription (Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status, or is the status given to us?)
6. Sequential vs. synchronic (Do we do things one at a time or several things at once?)
7. Internal vs. external control (Do we believe that we can control our environment, or do we believe that the environment controls us?)

(Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1998, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Hofstede's value-orientations framework

1. Power distance

Refers to the degree to which less powerful members of a society or organization expect and accept the unequal distribution of power among members.

2. Femininity/Masculinity

Refers to the extent to which gender roles are valued, and attitudes towards ascribed masculine values (e.g. achievement, ambition).

3. Uncertainty Avoidance

Refers to the tendency of a culture's members to feel threatened by ambiguous situations and to strive to avoid uncertainty.

(Hofstede, 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Hofstede's value-orientations framework

4. Individualism-collectivism

Individualism refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture to stress personal over group goals, and tend to have weaker group and organizational loyalty. Collectivism refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture to focus on collaboration, shared interests, long-term relationships, traditions, harmony and maintaining face.

5. A fifth dimension: Confucian dynamism

The Confucian dynamism orientation emphasizes persistence, personal stability, traditions, frugality, respect for elders, status-oriented relationships, long-term orientation to time, hard work, a sense of shame, and collective face-saving. These Confucian values are often credited with the dramatic economic growth in the Five Dragons (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea).

(Hofstede, 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

The GLOBE cultural framework

Six of the nine GLOBE dimensions resemble those put forward by Hofstede (2001) to address institutional and group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation. The other dimensions that have been added include: assertiveness (the extent to which people in organizations are strong-willed and confrontational), performance orientation (the degree to which an organization rewards members for their participation and quality of work) and humane orientation (the extent to which an organization rewards members for being kind and fair to others) **(House et al. 2004, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

The impact of the frameworks on global business research, education and practice

Business students and professionals across the globe are still using cultural difference frameworks to identify the core values and assumptions of their own culture as well as the target or host culture (e.g. international clients from a particular nation). Armed with this awareness of cultural difference, in theory, business professionals are better positioned to predict difficulties that might arise when they interact with colleagues and clients from the other culture.

(Jackson, 2014)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FRAMEWORKS AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

Limitations and dangers of the cultural difference frameworks

Although still widely used in intercultural business education (training) and research, 'culture difference' frameworks are not without critics. Different understandings of culture, questions about the methodologies employed in taxonomy studies, perceptions of Western or Eurocentric bias and the potential for overgeneralizations have resulted in many publications that rally against their use or, at minimum, recommend that users exercise caution when interpreting and applying the findings.

(Jackson, 2014)

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND PRACTICE



More ethnographic studies, interactional sociolinguistic explorations and critical studies of intercultural business interactions (e.g. critical discourse analysis) are needed to inform practice (e.g. the design and delivery of business intercultural education workshops and courses). Intercultural communication in organizations and businesses does not take place in a power vacuum; nor does it typically involve equal-power relations. More contextualized studies are therefore needed that take into account the power dimension in intercultural interactions whether in domestic or international settings.

(Jackson, 2014)

**ENHANCING
INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION IN
TODAY'S GLOBAL
WORKPLACE**



ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

01

Acknowledge diversity in the workplace

02

Becoming more knowledgeable about linguistic and cultural dimensions

03

Demonstrate second language sensitivity

04

Demonstrate second language sensitivity

(Jackson, 2014)

ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

05

Become more self-aware

06

Recognize one's biases

07

Be flexible

08

Expand repertoire of communication/conflict
management styles

(Jackson, 2014)

ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S GLOBAL WORKPLACE (Cont'd)

09

Be patient and humble

10

Keep an open mind and respect diversity

11

Advocate equity in the workplace.

(Jackson, 2014)

References

- Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.



THANK YOU!