

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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### **Annotation**

This article presents the information about cultural competence is regarded as a tool for promoting intercultural communication and interpersonal communication. This paper sets out to discuss the significance of cultural competence in interpersonal and intercultural communication. In doing the discussion, the essay is divided into three sections. The first section provides an introduction with an attempt to provide scholarly definitions of the key terms; the second section discusses five significance of cultural competence in interpersonal and intercultural communication. The final section provides a viable conclusion. The thesis of this paper is that cultural competence is an essential element in enhancing interpersonal and intercultural communication.

**Key words:** Cultural, competence, interpersonal, intercultural and communication.

Firstly, cultural competence helps one to understand their own communication skills and appreciate that of others. This enables one to have effective communication in argumentative and non-argumentative contexts. The ability to appropriate language for expressing pain, emotion and dealing with ambiguity helps to send information across effectively. The chances of having close, personal, and interactions with those different from you whether in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, or nationality are increasing daily. Such relationships help an individual to learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills. For instance, when a Ghanaian travels to the USA, Britain or any other country and vice-versa, individuals are able to learn a lot from the newly geographical space. Ranging from food, greetings, dance, music, politics, sports etc. Culturally “competent” professionals in service learning recognizes that staff and clients have different needs based on many factors and providing tailored service to fit those needs. A good communicator can detect the differences in symbols, heroes and rituals between his or her own culture and another culture, because those aspects are reflected in practices, the things people do.



Miscommunication resulting from such differences between cultures can be avoided rather easily because the differences can be observed. When thinking about communication between cultures, rather than thinking of them as entirely separate and static it is more useful to consider them as dynamic and interconnected. For instance, the Japanese and U.S. Americans have very different reactions when they realize that they have committed a face-threatening act and would like to restore the other's face. The Japanese prefer to adapt their messages to the social status of their interaction partners and provide an appropriate apology. They want to repair the damage, if possible, but without providing reasons that explain or justify their original error. Conversely, U.S. Americans would prefer to adapt their messages to the nature of the provocation and provide verbal justifications for their initial actions. They may use humor or aggression to divert attention from their actions but do not apologize for their original error. This indicates that having a better understanding of cultural competence is a necessary tool to foster intercultural and interpersonal communication.

Secondly, cultural competence helps one to understand cultural variations in language use. People who are culturally competent are able to remember idioms, ambiguities, expressions, non-verbal codes during communication. For these, such a person understands that meaning of some expressions and phrases in his or her own culture may differ from different cultures hence are able to tolerate all communication tools. Culturally competent communicators are very cautious about appropriateness. Appropriateness is the ability to communicate with someone in a socially sensitive manner so as not to offend or break any rules that would result in insult, face threat, or rudeness. Embedded in the cultural norms and rules is the appropriateness of certain types of behaviors and the manner in which we communicate. Therefore, persons who are culturally competent always consider the norms, rules, and expectations of their listeners and how these are determined by an accumulation of culture and regional or subculture, organizational culture, and individual personality. Parks (1985) states, competent communicators have a vested interest in maintaining the rules of social conduct because they realize, however dimly, that their ability to pursue their own goals depends on the freedom of others to pursue their goals. Personal control, then, is more often an ally of social appropriateness than its enemy. In maintain the social conduct, it is pivotal for communicators to appreciate the linguistic background of each so that none's cultural tongue dominates that of the other.

Thirdly, it helps one to state his information clearly and precisely. Based on this, a culturally competent person is always ready to adjust his or her listening level of understanding without demeaning the person he or she is communicating with. Such



people are able to slow down speaking, speak in small units, and point out key words to their listeners effectively and efficiently. Effectiveness is the ability to achieve your goals through the communication process. Specifically, an individual must be able to maximize his or her potential for achieving his or her goals by selecting strategies that will allow the individual to achieve his or her success through interaction. Effective strategy selection is critical for clear communication in intercultural settings among culturally competent persons. M. Kim (1994) argues that strategic competency entails a person's ability to select an effective message that allows the other party to derive the intended meaning. Intercultural understanding increases both sending and receiving abilities, making communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as constructive as possible. With broader experience, the care and concern one demonstrate will not just nourish intercultural communication but will encourage further communication efforts as well. Culture is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, or religion). Competent interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures do not happen by accident. They occur because of the knowledge and perceptions people have about one another, their motivations to engage in meaningful interactions, and their ability to communicate in ways that are regarded as appropriate and effective. To improve these interpersonal relationships, then, it is necessary to learn about and thereby reduce anxiety and uncertainty about people from other cultures, to share oneself with those people, and to handle the inevitable differences in perceptions and expectations that will occur. The use of cultural competence enhances an individual's clarity of thought in the communication processes.

Finally, dignity and respect are very important in business negotiations because everyone wants to be treated as such. Persons who are culturally competent are able to demonstrate a positive regard for themselves and appreciation for others. Thus, culturally competent persons are always concern for not only their image but the listeners' image as well. This create mutual respect both parties to ensure effective communication. Goffman (1959) argues that face embodies the concept that individuals want to have others view them with respect and dignity. As argued by Watkins and Braun Instead of treating others like you would like to be treated treat others, as they would like to be treated. It is insensitive to interact with others purely based on your own beliefs and assumptions about others. However, in order to facilitate communication between cultures it is necessary to understand human reality as socially



constructed (Berger & Luckman 1967 cited in Paige 1993). If we can understand that then we can begin to understand that different groups may have different values, different way of communicating, different customs, conventions and assumptions. While these may conflict with our own understandings and assumptions it does not necessarily mean that they are inferior, 'wrong' or 'rude'. When communicating with someone from a different culture, we can therefore expect cultural differences to have an influence. Cultural differences stem from our differing perceptions, which in turn determines how we communicate with people of other cultures. By understanding how people perceive the world, their values and beliefs, we can better understand what they say and can anticipate potential cross-cultural misunderstandings. The broader an individual's outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating one becomes and this promotes dignity and respect. The chances of having close, personal, and interactions with those different from an individual whether in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, or nationality are increasing daily. Such relationships help one to learn about the world, break stereotypes, acquire new skills and honour the dignity of fellow humans irrespective of one's socio-economic background. Therefore, each cultural orientation will grants the needed respect and dignity to the other cultural space in interpersonal and intercultural communication.

In conclusion to examine the role of cultural competence in interpersonal and intercultural communication. This essay has discussed five significance of cultural competence in interpersonal and intercultural communication. The essay discussed the following reasons; cultural competence improves communication skills, variations in language, clarity in presentation of information, enhances knowledge development, and dignity and respect for other cultures.

The essay concludes that it can be said that to be a competent intercultural communicator, one requires knowledge and performance. An increased understanding of these issues is important for improving our day to day interactions with others. With knowledge, one has to be good linguistically and culturally sound. By performance, one has to be effective in appropriation and emphatic in listening. Thus to be called culturally competent communicator, means to be knowledgeable and skillful in communication. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. That intercultural communication influences the communication model first by its effect on the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview of senders and receivers; second, by its effect on verbal and nonverbal messages; and, third, by the



influences it has on the historical setting, relational setting, and a person's position within a speech community.

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