

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 079

CS 508 942

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TITLE International Communication: A Multicultural Challenge for the Professional in Multinational Organizations.
PUB DATE 30 Oct 92
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (78th, Chicago, IL, October 29-November 1, 1992).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business; *Cultural Differences; *Females; Higher Education; International Relations; *International Trade; *Multicultural Education; Professional Training; *Public Relations; Sex Role
IDENTIFIERS Internationalism; Professional Concerns

ABSTRACT

In 1990 Daniel Bellack advised in an article that business people should "give up the search for the fabled 'global customer.' There's no such thing. Instead, be sure you understand each local market--it's custom, culture, and, of course, language." Understanding each local market is a big challenge for the communication professional in a multicultural organization, especially when American business is known more for its ethnocentrism and ignorance of culture generally. There are various levels of knowledge demanded for going international. First, there is knowledge of culture. Cultures can differ very widely in their attitudes toward being on time, making accommodations for family matters, or practicing small talk with colleagues. Second, there is knowledge of foreign languages, one of the most highly rated requirements for going global. Third, there are skills in multicultural negotiation. A contrasting list of different norms of behavior from the United States and Japan shows just how different cultures can be. The most qualified for an international public relations role may be "she" who has the qualities of flexibility, interpersonal skills, and patience. From early on in Western culture, women are trained to have these qualities. A list of the qualities respected in a negotiator from a range of cultures--from Indians to Arabs--further underscores the diversity of cultural approaches. Contains 10 references. (TB)

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Paper presented to panel on:
International Reverberations: The Essence of Excellence
Friday, October 30, 1992
Commission on Public Relations
Speech Communication Association
Seventy-Eighth Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois

CS 508942

ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Professionals often speak of the "global marketplace." But in the environment of economic coalitions the experience is more like diversity—one must know the many cultures within an organizational grouping.

This paper presents the key areas for more successful involvement in another cultures. These areas include: 1) knowledge of the specific culture, 2) knowledge of the foreign language, and 3) skills in multicultural negotiation. Obviously, the best approach is to integrate these areas into the educational curriculum where students would come prepared for the cultural challenge as a public relations professional.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Daniel Bellack, Chairman of TFB/BO Business Communications Inc. advised in his article on "What's Ahead 1990--Exploiting EEC marketing Potential" that:

... give up the search for the fabled 'global customer.' There's no such thing. Instead, be sure you understand each local market--its customs, culture and, of course, language" (Bellack, 1990).

Understanding each local market is a big challenge for the communication professional in a multinational organization. Especially when American business is known more for its ethnocentrism and ignorance of culture generally.

The following literature review establishes that 1) multinationals are painfully learning about the multicultural challenge in international communication, 2) that females may be far better suited for the multicultural challenge, and 3) the result of the multicultural impact changes one's perception about the communication demanded and certainly has implications for higher level education.

The Painful Multicultural Lesson

Bellack reorients the discussion by exploding the myth of a "global" market. The signs of not researching the particular needs of a culture reveals itself in a number of ways. Latin America women, who tend to be shorter need front-loading washing machines. U.S. companies think more in terms of "retrofitting" than creating a model especially for another culture. Other examples abound. The Chevrolet Nova in Spanish means no va (it doesn't go) (Rossman, 6). Placing a picture of a baby on baby food is translated in Africa as "the jar containing the ground-up child" (Rossman, 7). Why picture pork in refrigerators marketed in Moslem countries? Pork is forbidden in this culture.

The increased competitiveness is what makes the U.S. have a greater need to participate sensitively and multiculturally. The degree to which the global market reached us was clear when the Japanese called one day from Inland Steel (they had recently bought part of the company) and requested my students to revise their manuals. Obviously, the graphics were not up to Japanese standards.

In many ways the foreign competitiveness has dramatically reached our corporate offices.

For example, The European Economic Community equals the U.S. in people and productivity. The Asian market is another concentration of economic power. The push is real and regardless of whether one is in the United States or abroad, the competition is here to stay.

When Will the American People Learn? On taking a tour of the new Japanese-owned automobile factory outside of West Lafayette, Indiana, I was struck by the wide acceptance among employees (who were there to greet us) of the Japanese style of company management. The employees talked of Kaisons (community groups in the company) as so comfortable and supportive. Participating in decision making from the bottom up was readily accepted. The stress levels seemed to low. The trust levels so high. I have not returned recently to the company, but the initial impression (the company was just gearing up for manufacturing automobiles), was of high cooperative spirit under the Japanese management system located in our backyard. It is probably important to note at this time that--

Approximately 95 percent of the Japanese who do business in the United States speak English. In contrast, only perhaps 1 percent of Americans doing business in Japan speak Japanese. (Rossman 13)

Reorienting to an international perspective is difficult. as noted: "It's easy to redo a 30-second ad, but rethinking an entire public relations program is a daunting task" (Ovatt, 1988).

But globalization has been here for awhile. These are not recent developments. Edward Stanton, chairman and chief executive officer of Manning, Selvage & Lee comments that these international affiliate relationships has been developing since the 1970s. Basically Stanton advises, too, that one should not treat everybody the same and have locals advise the public relations corporate communicator when not to have press conferences or when not to use mass mailings (Stanton, 47).

So lot of work is ahead of us and later the specific rigors of training will be more fully discussed. An reorienting a company to think about international public relations will take significant effort, too. But primarily public relations professionals need to communicate a willingness to learn about multicultural aspects and become plugged into the world electronically. Worldwide networks will be the mainstay for those who truly want to stay in touch with global communication.

The Professional Demands on the Public Relations Practitioner

Going international is not a simple matter. There seems to be various levels of knowledge that are demanded and include: 1) knowledge of the culture, 2) knowledge of a foreign language, 3) skills in multicultural negotiation. At this point most of you in the room may decide this is not an easily accomplished task. But each level needs to be addressed.

Knowledge of the Culture. Beside the previous examples, knowledge of the multitudes of cultures involves a wide range of approaches. There are fundamental rules in cultures. Rossman describes

Such acts as using the left (bathroom) hand or showing the sole of the shoe in Arabic society, looking a Japanese contact deeply in the eyes, touching an Asian or recoiling in horror at being hugged or kissed by a Latin or Arab are the best-known examples of offensive ignorance (Rossman 14).

The role of chit-chat is also to be practiced. In Latin American and Arab societies the informal talk is actually a trust-building exercise. Getting down to business (what most American's want to do) is considered rude. The relationship must be worked on first.

There is also great concern for the family and if a family matter comes up your meeting is very likely to be postponed. Even the scheduling of the meeting will be an experience. Whereas in our country being 15 minutes late is acceptable, in other countries hours can go by and that, too, is acceptable. This seemingly casual approach to meeting times can be very frustrating to the punctual American.

You are probably getting the sense of feel by now about the really major differences in cultures. It makes sense now to say that the Middle East, Latin America, and Far East conduct "very little business through letters, calls or telexes" (Rossman 26).

Interpersonal communication is a high art for these cultures.

Knowledge of the Foreign Language. In a survey conducted by Neff and Brown on the qualifications of the agency account execs who will be dealing with the European Economic Community, the requirement of knowledge of the international approach and culture, business experience, knowledge of public relations and knowledge of a foreign language were the most highly rated areas (Neff and Brown, 1990). The account exec were therefore to be imbued with the culture in contact with, be able to negotiate in that culture, know the nature of public relations, and know the language passably. This is a major adjustment for most people in the profession. Going global is more complicated than just wanting to be global.

Skills in Multicultural Negotiation. It is another myth to believe that "management is North Americans" (Casse, 6). Various styles of management have developed in different cultures. It is simply not the same approach as used by the Americans.

Knowledge of multicultural management is another important key to successful international public relations. Whereas we may understand gift giving, chit-chat, time, space, and eye contact, the lack of ability to negotiate once having reached this stage can be equally critical.

Try musing over the following assumptions in these various multicultural styles. A Tao perspective would ask a participant to identify the "things that they found easy to understand," "ideas they do not understand," and "comments they disagree with" (Casse, 10-11). Contrasting the North American directly with the Japanese the characteristics go something like the following:

North American	Japanese
Impatient	Patient
Informal	Formal
Action Oriented	Affiliation Oriented
Individualistic	Socialistic
Concerned with Success	Concerned with Losing Face

Now take these characteristics and rate how the managers from each of their cultures would rate the following organizations norms:

Organizational Norm Relevant	Healthy	Unhealthy	Neutral	Not
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1. Promotions will come if you wait.
2. Be creative on-the-job.
3. Self-development is encouraged.
4. Do not compete with your colleagues.
5. Overtime work is highly valued.
6. Wear proper dress in office.
7. Do not rock the boat.
8. Obey orders.
9. Follow procedures.
10. Talk about your personal life.

The players involved in negotiation differ, too. Here Rossman describes the different approaches to selecting participants in the dialogue:

In most countries, including Europe and the Middle East, you will be dealing with executives on the upper levels of management. There is less delegation of authority than in the United States and most high-level managers refuse to give up authority to middle managers. In the Far East there is somewhat more group decision making, but those involved are usually on the upper levels of management (Rossman 31)

The role of the public relations program is critical here. This is why public relations must have management responsibilities. It is very important that the public relations professional be involved in the dialogue.

The end result is that who is most easily qualified for an international public relations role may have more to do with the qualities of flexibility, interpersonal skills, and patience. Females are socialized with all these qualities. Females are trained from early on to be flexible. Interpersonal skills are highly developed. No doubt the female can withstand a long dosage of chit-chat to reach the goal of concluding a deal. Asking about the family and socializing and maintaining relationships over a long period of time is definitely a female orientation. The style of negotiation, described more as "pull" than the masculine "push" is more suitable for almost all styles of negotiation.

Implications for Education

In a review of the curriculum in the American schools the presence of multicultural training is a rare opportunity. At best there is a course which focuses on multicultural and international issues. These areas are not seen as part of the fabric of public relations.

There is good reason to begin rethinking this approach. Now each public relations major must have a foreign language and perhaps two or more. The difficult languages are obviously Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. The other languages such as French, German, and Spanish are also valuable. The language requirement is a must.

The public relations major must learn about international culture in every course taught in public relations, in addition to a specialized course which should be mandatory and not an elective. No public relations candidate should graduate without a background in the demands of international multicultural thinking.

There should be very extensive and intensive course work in interpersonal communication and negotiation. The public relations majors should come out heavily experienced in these areas. Notice I have not yet addressed the typical area of expertise--writing. While good writing is always demanded, the ability to write flexibly and visually from a multicultural point-of-view will be mandatory. Moving away from a journalistic mode to a public relations orientation is absolutely essential.

Is international public relations demanding? Take a look at the following profiles and assess the degree of understanding needed for each (Casse 136, 163). In various cultural approaches to negotiation note how each negotiator would respond:

American Negotiator:

1. Knows when to compromise
2. Takes a firm stand at the beginning of the negotiation
3. Refuses to make concessions beforehand
4. Keeps his/her cards close to his/her chest
5. Accepts compromises only when he negotiation is deadlocked
6. sets up the general principles and delegates the detail work to associates

Indian Negotiator

1. Looks for an says the truth
2. Is not afraid of speaking up and has no fears
3. Exercises self-control
4. seeks solutions that will please all the parties involved
5. Respects the other party
6. Does not use violence or insults

Arab Negotiator (traditional to use mediators)

1. Protects all the parties' honor, self-respect, and dignity
2. Avoids direct confrontations between opponents
3. Is respected and trusted by all
4. Does not put the parties involved in a situation where they have to show weakness or admit defeat
5. Has the necessary prestige to be listened to
6. Is creative enough to come up with honorable solutions for all parties.

Swedish Negotiator

1. Very quiet and thoughtful
2. Punctual (concerned with time)
3. Extremely polite
4. Straightforward (get down to business)

5. Eager to be productive and efficient
6. Heavy-going

Italian Negotiator

1. Has a sense of drama (acting is main part of culture)
2. Does not hide his or her emotions (partly sincere and partly feigned)
3. Reads facial expression and gestures very well
4. Has a feeling for history
5. Does not trust anybody
6. Is concerned about the good impression created among those who watch his or her behavior.

The student of public relations must be highly skilled in interpersonal communications, particularly from a multicultural point-of-view. Obviously there is a major gap between this ideal and what is currently practiced. The recommendations follow that:

1. The myths of a "global" and "American Management" system should be clearly presented in the U.S. curriculum.
2. The skills of a public relations professional should be reoriented to interpersonal communication in a multicultural orientation.
3. The gender culture should be enhanced and be a source of learning for the public relations professional.
4. The multicultural learning should take place in every course as well as in a special course focusing on such issues.
5. The art of negotiation should be heavily stressed and from a multicultural perspective.

The U.S. educators in public relations need to act fast so as not to have the eyes of public relations turn elsewhere for expertise and advice.

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