



**CASE STUDY
LIGNELL&PIISPANEN
Theoretical introduction:
Intercultural
communication problems
- understanding**

Work Package 2

Authors:

**Anneli Juutilainen, PhD, Lecturer,
Valeriya Gogunskaya, Student
Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Finland**

Communication is above all relationship between people in professional situations as well as in everyday life. Communication can be found between nations and governments, it can also be racial when sender and receiver are not of same race. Elements of intercultural communication are perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, world views and social organizations.

Verbal symbols portray things and experiences. Nonverbal communication is bodily behavior. Contextual elements are business, health care, tourism and relationships between people. Misunderstanding in cross cultural communication originates often from different values: core beliefs, national characteristics, attitudes and world view. Misunderstandings in communication originate from speech styles, listening habits and thirdly of how people think about authority and leadership.

Intercultural adaptation means the phase when cultural modification of an individual, group or people are adapting to, or borrowing traits from another culture or when cultures are merging as a result of particular society. The adaptation process starts from confusion when people face the hidden aspects of culture, from frustration and then when the old ways of dealing fail to work. Growing effectiveness takes place when new skills are acquired. Appreciation takes place when new skills and attitudes enable the person to live more fully in the new situation. Stages of adaptation are excitement, confusion, frustration, effectiveness and appreciation.

Excitement phase neglects differences and reinforce similarities. Confusion stage may bring problems: newcomers misread or misinterpret behavior and speech of the local people because they interpret the meanings according to home culture grammar. There is danger existing: interfere with or delay adaptation to the culture. In "frustration-phase" negative things are appearing. Then more attention should be taken to what the people around are actually doing. In "effectiveness-phase" the sojourner has more positive feelings about the new culture. The phase of a "new attitude of appreciation": one develops a more personal understanding of the new culture and starts to value it and then also he/she is able to "understand" cultural identities.

Communication is a dynamic and systemic process as meanings are created and reflected with symbols. Communication is also contextual as the context event is influenced by culture. People define their world by communication. The symbols and rules vary from culture to culture. Meaning of words is determined by the culture where people have been raised. People often assume that text in one language can be translated into another language very accurately.

The importance of intercultural communication should and must be understood and accepted when doing business with people coming from another culture. Intercultural communication is one of the major learning issues when working and dealing with people from different cultures. It is important to study intercultural traits of the overseas partners before the very first meeting. This will help in formal and in informal situations to go along with business partners. From the first meeting the importance of communication must be a clear issue above everything else.

Lewis has categorized cultures. According to him, Finns are seen as "reactive culture". Lewis states that in Europe only Finns are "strongly reactive" which means reacting to partners' timetable, seeing the whole picture, making slight changes, understanding statements as promises, use both first-hand and research information, are people oriented, quietly caring, considering "all participants" (Lewis 35, 2006).

For example Swedes are categorized as "linear active", meaning that they are interested on facts, figures and data. They do one thing at a time, want to complete action chain, stick to plans, follow fixed agendas, be brief on telephone, respect officialdom, confront with logic, have limited bodily language and are job-oriented. Surprisingly, but easily understood that the neighboring country cultures are opposite – Scandinavians and Finns do not have the same cultural background.

According to Lewis Finns have many weaknesses in communication: speaking too little and avoiding showdowns with people due to shyness or feeling the lack of "Savoir Faire". The reluctance not to communicate has also extended to the foreign media: Finnish managers are having a reputation as straightforward players and at the same time being shy. This has to be understood as in Finland silence is not equated with failure to communicate but as an integral part of social interaction: "for a Finn the silence is golden". This view of Finns isolates them in international discourse. Finns are known as sincere and furthermore, they are known to be slow, hard-working, honest and easily deceived by other people. Finns prefer to keep quiet and when they say something, they really mean it. Finnish managers from the Finnish point of view are supposed to have qualities as persistence, courage, individuality and original thinking.

Swedes are partly seen as "occasionally reactive" according to Lewis. Swedes have a clean-cut profile as honest, caring, well informed, efficient plodders producing quality goods delivered on time. They speak proficient English and they can say all important things in 15 minutes. At the same time they are not popular inside the Nordic area. Surprisingly Sweden and Finland according to Lewis are very close the linear-active types. Still, the differences in behavior are easily listed and seem to be true from the Finnish point of view.

Cultural values for Swedes (Lewis 2006) are conscientiousness, loyalty, equality, love of nature, kindness, honesty, tolerance, love of peace, cleanliness and modesty.

Swedish management is decentralized and democratic. In Sweden decisions maybe considerably delayed, but once decisions are made they are unanimous: everyone in the company will agree. Swedes are avoiding conflicting, they are fear of confrontation and are always relying on their own team. With swedes confrontation and rushing are not the solution in business. For a Swede one should list the objectives, be diplomatic rather than frank and also see the business as beneficial to society rather than be profit oriented. Also a swede is expected to promote harmony, wait patiently to reach decisions by consensus, discuss in detail and accept the procedures. Lewis mentions Sweden as an example of collectivist form of decision making. It is seen as important that all colleagues have the opportunity to discuss projects thoroughly as the right to debate belongs to all. The decision may be delayed, but once made: everyone in the company will be pulling the same way. Robert Moran (Lewis, R. 340) mentions some weaknesses in the implementation of business: Swedes are avoiding conflict and taking sides, they have

fear of disagreeing, they rely on their own team and avoid competition with others in the company.

Geer Hofstede (2005, 57 - 59) concludes that in his study of business cultures the Swedes are seen as feminine because in masculine cultures the dominant values are success, money rewards, object and possessions. In Sweden aspects as quality of life, physical environment, rendering service and nurturance are considered more important. Also in companies the Swedish managers have to understand the requests for individuals.

Hofstede (2005) further lists common characteristics to the people of Nordic countries. The result was clear: Finns and Norwegians have plenty of common traits when Swedes and Danes create their own cultural group in Scandinavia. It was also recognized that although Nordic and Anglo-American values and business methods are relatively compatible, it is important to address seemingly minor differences that can seriously impede efficient team action and generate harmony.

For example Swedes and Danes have clearly similar cultural traits: smooth talking, diplomacy, compromise, articulation, avoiding confrontations, politeness and substantial confidence when facing foreigners. Finns and Norwegians created a group of "comparatively rough and ready truth where frankness trumps diplomacy", where loquacity was suspect, obstinacy was justified if backed by facts, statements were promises and world deed correlation was essential (Lewis 2010, 58). When groups were compared, new qualities and strengths were found. Finns would have to learn to be patient and respect Swedish consensus building. Swedes might try to speed up a bit; Danes would have to analyze the weight and importance of Finnish silence; all would have to synchronize their actions with other cultures.

Sources:

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