

Cross-Cultural Communication

The POISE Model[©]

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August 2007



The Challenges and Problems

- Not knowing and not understanding
 - What the other party is up to
 - what the other party is communicating
- Misunderstanding of meaning or intention
- Ineffective responses that interferes with effective goal attainment
- Inappropriate responses that will damage relationship
- Lost in translation, disorientation, compromised performance

Cultural Literacy Approach

- Learning to become “literate” in another culture
- Literacy as in computer/language literacy – ability to understand others, express oneself, and perform effectively in a specific language, medium, or context
- The dominant approach in cross-cultural work
- Makes intuitive sense, deceptively easy to master – illusion of literacy and mastery
- Rely on guidebooks, manuals, insider-experts
- Culture-specific strategies and skills
- Can be a useful first step, but not sufficient

Problems with the Cultural Literacy Approach

- Homogeneity assumption: that most members of the given cultural group are similar
 - Share similar values, follow similar rules
 - Manifest similar behavior patterns
 - Express meanings and attitudes in similar ways
- Neglects intra-group difference, diversity, and individual difference
- Does not recognize the fact that cultures are constantly changing and evolving
- Fails to engage with the current realities of globalization, and multi-cultural exposure
- There are too many cultures to learn about (over 150 in Toronto alone)

Problems with the Cultural Literacy Approach

- Does not appreciate the role of socialization and selective internalization – diversity of cultural beings
- Does not differentiate between levels within the hierarchical structure of culture (national, regional, organization, team, etc.)
- Inadequate accommodation of situation-specific factors: Goals, rules of the game (subjectively perceived or shared), person- or organization-specific strategies
- Inadequate recognition of the dynamics of mutual accommodation and adjustment
- Does not take into account the realities of power and needs

The Challenge to Move Beyond Cultural Literacy

- It is not easy to engage with multiple factors and contingencies simultaneously as suggested by the previous analysis
- We may feel anxious and ungrounded without a guide or reference
- Developing competency to work cross-culturally is rewarding both extrinsically (achieving goals, getting things done) and intrinsically (personal satisfaction)
- It can be achieved through adopting a new way of thinking and openness to new learning

Managing Multiple Contingencies

- Contingencies to be managed
 - Knowing the individual player(s): Purpose, goals, needs, personality, background
 - Accurately assessing the role of culture(s) and their hierarchical structure
 - Clear sense of your own purpose and goals
 - Understanding the figure-ground relationship (situation and cultural context)

Managing Multiple Contingencies

- You do not have to completely give up your cultural literacy cook-books
- Use the cook-book as a reference that provides you with helpful coordinates, instead of as a bible giving you all the right answers
- Telling the difference between the substantive point and the variable/dimension
- Knowing enough
- Not knowing attitude as an asset: Respectful, interested, honest, and engaging

A Competency to Be Built: The POISE Model

- **P**reparation: Background knowledge, some cultural literacy, but broad personal exposure can be more important, key informants or consultants, research, (opposite: ignorance)
- **O**penness: Ability to de-center previously learned cultural material, using a global frame of reference (opposite: ethnocentrism)
- **I**nquisitiveness: Showing interest in other cultures, readiness to learn (opposite: complacency)
- **S**ensitivity: Attention to relevant dimensions of cultural expression and articulation (opposite: insensitivity)
- **E**xecution: Effective actual performance, achieving goals (opposite: ineffective performance)

Rules of Engagement

- Remember the purpose of engagement and getting things done: Effective self-management
 - Negative stereotypes
 - Prejudice, emotional responses
- Negotiating cultural difference:
 - The reality of power and political history
 - Culture as excuse and strategy
 - Avoid polarization or rigid opposites (we-they split)
 - Explore common ground, respect and cooperation, mutual accommodation

OTSP

On the Spot Performance

- OTSP is what makes the difference ultimately
- The KA (knowledge-action) gap
 - Major wastage of training and professional development resources
 - KA Gap decreases with practice experience
 - KA transfer and individual difference
- How do we learn to cook or golf: Progressive building of repertoire of strategies and skills

On the Spot Performance & Systematic Learning

- OTSP most effectively learned through micro-skills learning and development, not only conceptual input
- Simulated situations with video-recording and playback
 - Demonstration
 - Rehearsal
 - Review and feedback
- Practice and habit formation: Change in everyday life

Experiential Learning Module 1

Listening and Engagement

- Effective engagement – the key factors that are more important than impressing the other party that you know his/her culture well:
 1. Shared understanding of the purpose of engagement (what is to be done)
 2. Agreement on the rules of the game (how it is done)
 3. Emotional connection: Rapport and collaborative relationship

Active Listening Skills

- Between the lines
 - Content, facts, and information
 - Emotional content
 - Mind set, opinion, attitude and values
 - Needs, motivation, goals
- Active listening: Watch out for
 - Things, words, concepts, practices you don't understand (inquisitive exploration, clarification)
 - Complimentary information that are not requested (follow up)

Beyond Listening

- Managing the agenda: Topic shifts, insertion of topic/agenda item (follow and turn, search for connection, return to own agenda)
- Managing the unexpected
 - Clarification: What, exactly, do I need to do?
 - Buying time
- Whenever in doubt or confused, summarize and refocus
- Beyond words
 - Non-verbal behavior (NVB)
 - Signifying acts (e.g., seating, drinking, airport pick-up)
 - Ritualistic performance (e.g., toasting, gifts, greeting, farewell)

Engagement Exercise

1. Careful listening
2. Following leads or using free information
3. Staying on topic or changing topic appropriately
 - Give and take, sharing air time
 - Meshing, avoid interruption
4. Empathic responses
5. Building commonalities
6. Positive feedback or compliments

Experiential Learning Module 2 (if we have time)

Assertive-Responsiveness

- Assertiveness and assertion training of the 1970s
- Being assertive as the golden mean between being aggressive and being submissive
- Cultural values and assumptions:
 - stereotypes (e.g., the assertive American)
 - potential conflict
- Risk of disregard for other people's feelings – people can feel bad even when you are right

The Bill of Assertive Rights

Taken from: *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty* by Manuel J. Smith

1. You have the right to judge your own behavior, thoughts, and emotions, and to take the responsibility for their initiation and consequences upon yourself.
2. You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behavior.
3. You have the right to judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
4. You have the right to change your mind.
5. You have the right to make mistakes - and be responsible for them.
6. You have the right to say, 'I don't know'.
7. You have the right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.
8. You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
9. You have the right to say, 'I don't understand'.
10. You have the right to say, 'I don't care'.

Assertive-Responsiveness

- Meeting your own needs (assertiveness) while having regard for other people's needs and rights (responsiveness): Trying to create a win-win situation whenever possible
 - Requires a good understanding of your own needs and objectives as well as those of others
 - Requires good engagement and negotiation skills
 - Careful listening
 - Communicating understanding of and respect for the other party's needs and feelings
 - Creative solutions, testing propositions

End of Presentation

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