

2022

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Kimberley Barker PhD
Eastern Michigan University

Redhwan Al-Muntaser
Eastern Michigan University

Emily J. Boerman
Eastern Michigan University

Joshua Burd
Eastern Michigan University

Scott Burns
Eastern Michigan University

See next page for additional authors

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Recommended Citation

Barker, Kimberley PhD; Al-Muntaser, Redhwan; Boerman, Emily J.; Burd, Joshua; Burns, Scott; Coleman, Stephanie; Day, Christine R.; Grantham, Ciara; Katokwe, Paul; and Philipsen-Meissner, Heidi (2022) "Diversity and Inclusion in International Communications: Applications for Today's Work World," *Global Advances in Business Communication*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <https://commons.emich.edu/gabc/vol9/iss1/4>

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Diversity and Inclusion in International Communications: Applications for Today's Work World

Authors

Kimberley Barker PhD, Redhwan Al-Muntaser, Emily J. Boerman, Joshua Burd, Scott Burns, Stephanie Coleman, Christine R. Day, Ciara Grantham, Paul Katokwe, and Heidi Philipsen-Meissner

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Abstract

Verna Myers (2016) advocated that “Diversity is being invited to the party, but inclusion is being asked to dance.” Cultural competence demands a strategic understanding of the importance of harnessing the power of diversity and inclusion in every action in organizations, communities, and nations throughout the world. Today’s work world cannot undervalue the importance of having diverse and inclusive representation in all areas of the organization, especially including international communication. By creating an environment that continually asks questions, values and embraces diversity - then collaborates and reconciles potential solutions to create positive outcomes - creates an inclusive environment in which all can thrive.

According to David Victor (1992), “Few things...are more important in conducting business on a global scale than skill in communication, because few other areas of business practice depend so much on an understanding of the cultural heritage of the participants” (p. xiii). The emphasis here should be placed on the concept that “communication and culture are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, culture itself is one form of communication... Consequently, the study of cultural differences and similarities so essential to international business success is largely inseparable from the study of international business communication” (Victor, 1992).

Roger Conaway (2015) emphasized that “Global firms today depend on their managers’ ability to communicate, whether across cultures, within the organizations, or with competitors who are challenging the company’s very existence.” Additionally, “In an increasingly integrated world economy...[while] at the same time...managing the problems posed by differing culture and norms, organizations have also found that in order to remain competitive, strategies which were once local or regional must now be global” (Victor & Day, 2016). Stahl (2016) reinforced these concepts, stating that “Cross-cultural management education and learning has never been more critical and, at the same time, more challenging, than it is today. At no time in human history has the contact between individuals, groups, and organizations from different countries and cultures been greater” (p. xiii).

These case studies are focused on applications of both theory and competency related to diversity and inclusion. They will share micro-applications that show how leaders and communicators harnessed diversity and inclusion in international communication.

For people who want to increase their global communication competencies, the key is to ask questions. People need to “ask questions aimed at obtaining enough understanding of another

culture so that one can secure the right answers” (Victor, 1992). As global communicators ask questions, they will find that more questions become evident, and, eventually, the answers start leading them to a path of understanding.

We are at a point in our work world that, while it is important to discuss these very important topics of diversity and inclusion in international communication, it is equally important to demonstrate success stories in how they can be accomplished as well as pose further questions and discussion points for consideration. These shared success stories can be discussed in many settings – within teams, organizational committees, classrooms, and community gatherings. While each incident is real, names and underlying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Micro Case One. When a nod does not mean ‘Yes’

Shared by Stephanie Coleman

Case One, “When a Nod Does Not Mean ‘Yes’,” highlights global communication, cultural, and sub-cultural issues related to working in a professional group setting. In many cultures, it is culturally appropriate when decisions are being made to nod when the leader is speaking due to reverence and not necessarily in agreement.

Susan Wilson works as a technology manager for product development applications at a global manufacturing organization. About 60% of the team she managed was in the USA (North America) and 40% in India. The 60% of team members in the USA are also a very diverse group with many people born in countries outside of the USA, including India, China, Mexico, and Vietnam. Precise communication is vital in order to have an efficient team that spans the globe aligned on what needs to be accomplished and how to do it effectively.

Wilson emphasizes that her workday is often filled with conference and video calls. Since a high percentage of communication is nonverbal, and when team members are seeing someone on a small video box on a computer screen, it can make interrupting the non-verbal very difficult.

A recent application of this was when Wilson’s team was having launch issues and members participated on a video conference call to ascertain the root cause of the problem. Everyone on the call had valuable experience and every person’s opinion mattered. Just like in any team, there were people who were more outspoken than others regarding the problem’s source. During the video call several people put forth some logical thoughts on the root cause and Wilson asked if everyone agreed. Team members in the conference room were nodding their heads as were the people on the video call. It was apparent that the team had reached an agreement, and the meeting was adjourned. The team implemented the solution developed in the meeting. However, that solution fixed only part of the problem, and some issues still remained. In the next team meeting, one of the team members from India mentioned her thoughts on an additional cause to the problem and provided a solution. The team listened, agreed, and once the new solution was implemented, it resolved the problem completely. Puzzled by the team member “nodding” agreement during the previous meeting, Wilson sought an answer. In a private

setting, Wilson asked the person from India why she had nodded yes in agreement before if she thought there might have been more issues to the problem. That is when Wilson learned that in India, people might head bobble, which resembles a nod, but that does not mean they necessarily agree with the course of action, but instead are agreeing with the manager out of respect because of that person's position.

This was a new cultural lesson for this leader, and she now needed to be aware of this difference—that a nod does not always mean yes--when managing the team. Wilson was very glad that the employee shared her thoughts and taught the manager a valuable cultural lesson. Part of being a good team is teaching others both in work items and items in general, like cultural differences. Wilson valued the team's feedback and made sure to let everyone know how important their feedback was to her. It is very important to learn about the similarities and differences between all team members' culture and the culture that a people might be most familiar with, such as their own.

Micro Case One: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Multinational corporations must “operate in different markets with different cultures, histories, values, social systems, and languages” (Black & Mendenhall, 2000). How can a leader create cultural competence and harness the power of diversity, and then inclusion, in their teams?

Micro Case Two. Just Ask and Learn.

Shared by Emily Boerman

Case Two, “Just Ask and Learn,” emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships and that being interested and asking questions is a key part of this. Asking and learning on the local and global level can create a level of global cultural competence that is respected, thus rewarded, by those with whom one interacts.

As an international student advisor, Kay Adams has had the opportunity to meet many students from across the world. At her first institution as a professional staff member, there were many students from Saudi Arabia. Adams was largely unaware of Saudi culture and learned a significant amount of information from the students by asking questions in a respectful manner. She found that many students were excited to share details about their home country culture and were really looking for the opportunity to share. As a leader, Adams believed the greatest thing we can do when cultural differences are identified is to learn and ask questions rather than to make assumptions and pass judgement.

By learning, people are building global competence, promoting understanding and creating inclusion. Typically, Adams begins a new relationship conversation with easy topics such as sharing information about holidays, how to get a driver's license, what the climate is

like, and asking questions regarding schooling in their home country. By starting with topics such as these, a leader is able to build rapport with the individual. It is also important to be careful to be respectful of their culture and what they are sharing. Sometimes Adams would describe similarities between their culture and the culture of the United States. By talking about similarities, it demonstrates that she is listening and that learning about their home culture is important to her. Additionally, it encouraged the individual to share more. Once the individual is more comfortable with her and she feels that they are building a strong relationship, she is able to move onto tougher questions. For an example, regarding Saudi Arabia, Adams talked about women's rights and the treatment of servants they have working in their family homes. Adams could never use this as opening questions or even in the first months of the relationship unless the individual brought it up. Without realizing it, Adams had utilized many of the skills explained by Ed Schein (2013) in his book, *Humble Inquiry*. Schein explained that "Instead of talking at the individual and telling them what I knew about their culture or make assumptions, I asked questions. I asked questions that helped me build a relationship. The relationship led to a greater understanding from both parties, global competence and inclusion."

Adams also learned these skills through being an international student during a difficult political time in which she wished she had been treated differently. While she was an exchange student, the controversial war with Iraq broke out. Those in her host country assumed that all Americans supported this war. The other students were also upset with their own government's support of the United States. As protests broke out, students such as Adams were advised to tell people that they were Canadian to avoid any issues. Rather than having a conversation about the differences regarding issues, people immediately jumped to conclusions.

Adams' experience abroad was a key contributor to learning how work in other cultures. Additionally, she was able to strengthen her questioning skills as a graduate student.

Micro-Case Two: Discussion

1. In terms of global communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. In what ways can a leader encourage an environment of *Humble Inquiry* (Schein, 2013)?

Micro Case Three: Stop, Ask Questions, and Truly Listen

Shared by Joshua Burd

Case Three, “Stop, Ask Questions, and Truly Listen,” focuses on the importance of a leader taking time to understand an employee’s needs (religious or otherwise), asking questions, and creating as much of a win-win situation for the employee and the organization.

For the last seven years, Steve Brooks has been part of a very large, diverse academic institution. Although this has allowed him to become more familiar with many different cultures, there have been times of misunderstanding. One potential misunderstanding came several years ago, shortly after Brooks had begun working as a Housekeeping Supervisor during summer operations. One of his employees was from Somalia. She was very religious and took great pride in being a Sunni Muslim. As a leader, this was a cultural difference that Brooks had identified almost immediately. He spent time getting to know this employee and asking lots of questions, so he could better understand her situation. This turned out to be very rewarding for both management and the employee. Once Brooks was able to identify the cultural difference and gather an understanding of the employee’s needs by asking questions, he was able to discuss ways to make her feel more comfortable at work.

One of the first matters the new employee discussed with Brooks was daily prayer. The employee needed to pray multiple times each day. He reported the situation to his manager, and it was decided to allow the employee adequate time for prayer during each of her break times. Additionally, they allowed her to use a lounge room so that she could have privacy and not be interrupted. She was very thankful for this. The department was very understanding of this situation and was happy to make arrangements that would satisfy her needs. Brooks had a significant amount of support from his manager and the associate director. He felt that his own cultural orientation encouraged positive change during this situation.

Brooks tried to be very open-minded when it came to religious beliefs, and he liked to learn as much about every religion as he could. He confirmed that by getting to know the employee and showing her that he wanted to help make her work time more enjoyable, made a difference in her work performance as well. He said that the employee, who was very soft spoken, would always be very happy after these breaks and have a big smile on her face as she went about completing her work. As a new manager, this was Brooks’ first experience dealing with a cultural difference. Seeing the employee happy made him feel good about himself as a manager and encouraged him to pursue a management role long-term. This experience reminded him of the importance of getting to know employees on an individual basis. He affirmed that if he had not spent time early on getting to know this employee, then he would not have been aware of her religious needs. The employee would pray in the break room which was very compact and crowded with other employees. Getting to know the employee allowed him to understand that this disrupted her prayer time. This is why he strongly believes that managers need to know each employee so that they can understand the needs of their employees. Brooks stated that as a leader it is important to stop, ask questions, and truly listen! It’s a win for the organization, it’s a win

for the employee, which in turn means it can be a win for the customer as well!

Micro Case Three: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. What is cross-cultural about this situation? Varner (2015) pointed out that “an understanding of local culture is crucial to success in global business. We need to realize that the importance of understanding local culture may depend on specific tasks and goals of the business/industry.” How does the concept of identifying the things that makes the employees work life better become an important and specific task for the manager?
3. What could be done to enhance psychological safety in this setting? Note: According to Miles (1981) psychological safety is where an employee “...enters a safe situation and lets go of the usual set ways of behaving...” (p.37)

Micro Case Four: It Rains too much in England to know a “Rocky Mountain High”

Shared by Heidi Philipsen-Meissner

Case Four, “It Rains too much in England to know a “Rocky Mountain High,” focuses of the importance of a leader and the employee taking time to understand each other’s wants and needs by asking questions and creating as much of a win-win situation for the employee and the organization.

A number of years ago Hannah Smith was a weather presenter in Berlin, Germany for the English-speaking bureau of Deutsche Welle-TV, which was an international broadcast TV station in German, English, and Spanish-languages, on par with the BBC. Her colleagues at the station were British. Being an American and used to American humor, Smith liked to insert into their daily news content of the less serious nature, such as an anecdotal comment that “there was a Rocky Mountain High across the West in the United States today.” She thought of herself as quite clever, in fact, and included such anecdotes whenever she could, no matter what geographic area of weather she was describing. On the contrary, her British colleagues didn’t think it so cute at all. One day, her superior approached her and disdainfully said, “Hannah, no more jokes around the weather. It’s not funny--nor a good thing--when there’s sun in the Sahara and a major drought. So please just keep it basic and no-nonsense.”

Imagine Smith’s surprise that a superior would tell her that she could not use her American-cultural humor when describing weather situations she knew that viewers, especially her American viewers, might appreciate (the station had a global audience of over 55 million viewers a week)! The superior’s corrections had nothing to do with her performance, just the optimistic way she saw the world and the cheerfulness she wanted to impart. Her colleagues, however, felt that cheerfulness was not professional. To be taken seriously at a news station, one

must be serious. So, she listened, acknowledged their concern, apologized for the cultural insensitivity, and asked if there might be certain situations in which her humor might be appropriate – for example, when she was reporting the weather in America. They told her a resounding “No!”

Smith and the station management did reach a mutual agreement. She decided that she would modify her language, but that her demeanor of being cheerful is what made her who she is and that could not be dampened. Her superior seemed satisfied with the elimination of the corny jokes, but she was allowed to keep her happy outlook.

Micro Case Four: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. What can be done when cultural differences are identified?
3. What are common dynamics involved in cultural differences or dilemmas?
4. What types of support systems can be put in place to prevent a negative impact on employee situations such as this?

Micro Case Five: Language Barriers in Hospitality

Shared by Ciara Grantham

Case Five, “Language Barriers in Hospitality,” focuses on the cultural difference in language when an international guest stays at a location, in addition to the appropriate non-verbal and verbal way to communicate through cultural differences.

A small select service hotel had recently won a contract with the prestigious Toyota Motor Corporation, headquartered in an industrial city east of Nagoya, Japan. The negotiation for the contract has gone well, since the hotel sales manager smoothly conversed with the person who set up the contract, because the hotel employee was bilingual in English and Japanese.

When the first group of Toyota employees arrived at the hotel they smiled and bowed at the front desk agent when eye contact was made. The front desk agent smiled back and said, “Hi, welcome to our hotel, may I see identification and credit card for check in.” The first guest hesitated yet continued to smile at the front desk agent. He began fidgeting with his personal bag, but still did not provide the items she had just asked for.

Eventually, the first Toyota employee to check in looked back at his colleagues and stated a comment in Japanese. The employee shared a few more words before he finally turned around and presented his passport. It seemed that the front desk agent was not prepared for the challenge in language, as she nor her coworkers at the time knew how to converse in Japanese. The front desk agent politely shook her head in agreement as she took the passport

then said payment slowly, but in a louder tone. As the front desk agent did this, the front office supervisor walked out and became worried that the Toyota employees were unhappy so far with the service and confusion at hand.

The front office supervisor went back to the manager's office and told the manager that they did not prepare appropriately for the group. As assumption was made that the Toyota guests would know the basics of English and how to check in at a hotel. A deeper concern arose in that what other problems might occur during their stay that the hotel was unaware of but possibly could have easily solved? Without a translator on location, the hotel supervisor proposed using google translator until he could find a better training that all of the hotel employees would be able to complete.

Micro Case Five: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. What methods should management have taken to train the workers on smooth transition to overcome the cultural differences experienced?
3. What stereotypes did the front desk agent and the guests experience while trying to check into the hotel?

Micro Case Six: Cultural Differences and Tardiness: The New Employee

Shared by Paul Katokwe

Case Six, "Cultural Differences and Tardiness: The New Employee," focuses on cultural differences in time orientation.

Jean Banza, a citizen from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, came to the USA to pursue their bachelor's degree. It was their first trip to the USA, and they were very excited. A few months later, Banza got his first on-campus job as a student ambassador which mainly consisted of conducting tours and orientations for incoming students. Having been in the United States for a short period, Banza still had a lot to grasp regarding American culture, especially in the workplace. However, despite that they were unfamiliar with various expectations within the American working environment, Banza's motivation and work ethic helped them quickly become a high-performing employee. A few weeks after he started the job, Banza was set for his first performance appraisal with Nancy, his supervisor.

Considering that Banza was satisfied with his performance, he anticipated that this meeting would be a positive experience. As he walked into Nancy's office, he quickly sensed that something was wrong but was unable to figure out what it was. After taking a seat, Nancy opened the discussion by praising his hard work and progress over the previous period. All

seemed to go well for Banza just as he initially expected, but he knew that his manager's straight face was a clear sign that not all was right. Yet, Banza still had no clue about what he might have specifically done wrong since he started the job.

As the meeting progressed, the discussion took on a different tone as Nancy expressed her dissatisfaction regarding their constant tardiness. Instead of reprimanding them, Nancy sought to understand what was the main cause behind his lack of punctuality. Nancy's attempts to clarify the situation led her to find out that they had no acceptable excuses for his tardiness. Instead, she learned that Banza's home was only two minutes away from the campus and therefore, transportation was not an issue as he could walk to his job. Jean had no apparent excuses, and he appeared to minimize the situation as if it was not a big deal to him. However, he apologized and admitted that he was not aware that he was expected to show up no later than his scheduled times. Banza added that people in his home country tend to be much flexible with schedules and therefore, are less strict about punctuality.

As a result, Nancy realized there was a gap between her frustration and Banza's understanding of the necessity to be on time at work. It quickly became obvious to her that Banza's apparent negligence with punctuality was tied to cultural differences. She understood that she needed to address the cross-cultural differences that existed between Banza's concept of time and American culture. Without downgrading his culture, Nancy successfully managed to advise him concerning her expectations about punctuality by emphasizing its importance and benefits to the organization. Following that meeting, Jean worked as a student ambassador for two and a half more years and was not tardy ever again! Nancy's effort to recognize the impact of synchronous and synchronic time cultural differences proved to be effective.

Micro Case Six: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Babcock (2015) stated that "global business communication is going in the direction of increasingly more complexity and diversity." How can leaders set the direction and culture of the team from the start?

Micro-Case Seven: Studying Abroad in the U.S. from Dubai

Shared by Redhwan Al-Muntaser

Case Seven, "Studying Abroad in the U.S. from Dubai," focuses on the cultural difference in language when an international guest stays in a location, in addition to the appropriate non-verbal and verbal way to communicate through cultural differences.

Redhwan Al-Muntaser was very excited at the prospect of studying abroad, so he could expand his knowledge, live new experiences, and get to know many new people. His family decided to send him to the United States (USA), because they thought it would be easier for him to adapt to the culture and the lifestyle since he had a family member in the USA.

Cultural differences are very important thing to consider and for which to be prepared. He wanted to reduce the culture shock, avoiding insulting people unintentionally, and not to embarrass himself. Dubai is a diverse city and many people who live there have a different background, so he set about getting to know a little bit about the American culture. He did some research and asked people who had lived there. He found that there are more similarities than differences. Once he arrived in the USA, he lived in his aunt's house with his cousins for a while. This helped him adjust and learn about the American culture.

Al-Muntaser initially learned many concepts. First, he could immediately see that United States' history is deeply rooted in the concept of independence and individuality. Americans value differentiating themselves from each other more than other nations. Second, Americans were able to voice their opinions about politics and many things freely without fear of government retaliation. This is contrary to his home country, where speaking and protesting openly about personal beliefs and politics is prohibited. So, he was very afraid to share his opinions with others and to criticize the United States government itself. Thirdly, people respect other people's religion and it is same back in Dubai; however, people in the USA can say many disrespectful things about others' religion that can offend people and hurt their feelings due to "freedom of speech." This was hard for him to deal with. He was in many situations where people said inappropriate things about his beliefs, and he felt offended. He knew that people in the USA do not find it offensive, and they believe it is one of the basic principles that helped shape the success of the USA, so rather than being hurt, he found a way to turn this disadvantage to an advantage by sharing his beliefs with them freely, so he could correct some of their misunderstandings. Lastly, many people in the USA consider not looking at the eyes during the conversation to be disrespectful, but in Al-Muntaser's culture, looking at the ground during the conversation means the person is showing a high respect. He soon discovered that he could adapt by identifying some time that it was better not to look at the person's eyes and lower the head down to show some respect and kindness for the person.

In conclusion, it is very important for the person to learn the cultural values of a new environment and be able to distinguish between cultures. Being aware of culture differences can help the person to avoid insulting people by mistake. People should understand that people are all different in many things, but we are all human beings that should live peacefully and respectfully with each other.

Micro Case Seven: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Victor and Day (2016) "believe in the importance of cultural context in the global application

of organizational practices. Relationship building, organizational structure, specific processes, practices, and global culture have a fluid interaction that impacts the dynamics of any given situation. Resolution can often be found in the specific effort of those involved to forge a bond

3. of harmonizing expectations.” What harmonization could have occurred in this situation? What additional communication skills and sub-cultural understanding skills should Al-Muntaser also have brushed up on?
4. What specific communication, cultural, and facilitation skills could be used to interact between the U.S. and those from Dubai?

Micro-Case Eight: Going Global will only Make us Stronger

Shared by Scott Burns

Case Eight, “Going Global will only Make us Stronger,” focuses on what happens when we embrace difference cultures and learn from them.

Sean Bennett’s father was in the United States (USA) Army, and by the time Bennett was three years old, he had already lived in Germany and in multiple states of the USA. He and his two siblings were all born in different states. This type of moving around exposed a person to a lot of different cultures. However, because he was so young, he was unable to appreciate the experience and learn from it at that time. He was born in the 1970s, and at that time there was not much globalization or even the level of diversity of today. Like many kids growing up, he only knew what life was like in his corner of the world. Unfortunately, that included racism, stereotyping, and being judgmental against other cultures because they were not like his.

As Bennett matured and became more educated, he learned that some of his childhood beliefs were someone else’s version of the culture. He often found himself correcting some of his older family members who chose to stay in the past. He remembers it like it was yesterday. He was traveling for work and got assigned to go to Kentucky. Due to everything he had heard of Kentucky, he was dreading it before he had even arrived there. Little did he know that it would be one of the better traveling experiences for work that he’d ever had. The people were wonderful, and the state was beautiful; it was nothing like what everyone had said, and this was still within his own country. He couldn’t imagine how different it was around the world. About ten years ago his company’s strategy changed to reach the global marketplace, and within a couple of years the organization was working with China, Thailand, India, Europe, Turkey, Russia, Australia, South Africa, and South America. Previous to this they’d only been working within the boundaries of North America. This is when the lessons learned from dealing with cultural differences readily became apparent.

Bennett was meeting with other countries daily, and the company had employees traveling to most locations monthly to set up strong professional relationships, and to acquaint others with North America work practices. The global differences were so much information that

his team had to download a review of the meeting after each trip just to discuss the lessons learned so they could improve for the next meeting. They created a document to share this information and prepare all employees for the next trips; it was ironic that these documents were called *global lessons learned*. Prior to the meetings, people did a significant amount of investigation to make sure people were adjusting to the culture the company was entering.

Bennett mentioned that from working with individuals all over the world, he found that the people in Russia and Australia were some of the best people to deal with, while his European friends could be more difficult. Over the last ten years he has met a lot of people around the world and it allowed him to understand that stereotypes about other cultures were a problem and not really accurate as to what the other cultures were actually like. Many times, he was astonished by the manners and kindness from people he hardly knew. The ability to accept and respect others as if this is how everyone should be treated everywhere was amazing. Bennett feels strongly that these experiences were responsible for a lot of the person he has become today; for this, he recognizes that he is a better person. His most important lesson was to not be judgmental – make stereotyping a thing of the past. Globalization is needed and will make everyone stronger as a whole. He emphasized that all people should embrace different cultures and learn from them!

Micro Case Eight: Discussion

1. In terms of global business communication, what does this case help teach us? What is this case about?
2. Many aspects of the global community have created peers of people who never imagined they would be peers; it has created neighbors of people who never dreamed they would share a common business community. One incredible example of the implications of this statement is a fact pointed out by General Electric's CEO Immelt (2017): "GE now conducts business in some 180 countries" (up from about 100 in 2010). What are some of the opportunities that we face as we continue moving towards globalization of our world today?

Approaching Opportunities

These eight cases highlighted various aspects of global communication, cultural issues, and sub-cultural considerations that arise when people use their own specific global lens. The intent of these cases was to help people re-focus their perspective so as to integrate results with the successful application of both theory and competency. Victor (1992) emphasized that "basic tenets understood to be effective in transferring ideas and message in the workplace in one culture may prove entirely ineffective or even counterproductive in another culture." Knowledge of many cultures is necessary; an effective examination of the differences and similarities of doing business in different countries is imperative; and, skills to mitigate the multiple cultures involved in a single business transition are crucial to business success (p.3).

For people who want to increase their global communication competencies, the key is to ask questions. People need to “ask questions aimed at obtaining enough understanding of another culture so that he or she can secure the right answers” (Victor, 1992). As global communicators ask questions, they will find that more questions become evident, but the answers start leading them to a path of understanding, including the value of diversity and inclusion.

Schein (2010) researched the concept of people gaining a perspective by asking questions related to understanding artifacts (what can easily be viewed, such as dress, language, and the behavior of employees), values (what the business and its employees exhibit), and assumed values (a level of values that cannot be measured but do make a difference to the organization’s culture, such as beliefs and the inner aspects of human nature demonstrated by the organization’s culture (Schein, 2010). Once people begin to understand that their values are not always shared, their communication process may start to change.

Hall (1989), an anthropologist, introduced the idea of contexting in the seminal work *Beyond Culture*. He noted that in high context cultures, equally important to the words in a message are important rituals, roles, and non-verbal cues surrounding the communication. In contrast, in low context cultures, the actual words that are spoken or written are what matters. Understanding where a country falls in this cultural continuum is critical to communicating and doing business.

Hofstede (1991) pioneered dimensional research in intercultural business communication. He defined culture as the “software of the mind” -- mental programs that make us inclined to patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Hofstede created six dimensions of culture that are designed to make it easier to identify and understand cultures better. The six dimensions are:

- Power distance – Pattern of distribution of power to culture’s members
- Individualism/collectivism – Degree to which individuals perceive themselves as members of a group
- Uncertainty avoidance – Level of tolerance of ambiguous, new, or changed situations.
- Masculine/feminine
- Long-term/short-term - Long-term cultures prepare for change; short-term cultures focus on traditions and tend to resist change
- Indulgence/restraint – Gratification of individual desires.

Building upon Hofstede’s research, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) developed seven dimensions that illustrate points of cultural tension. They are:

- Universal/particular – Flexibility versus rules
- Individual/Communitarian – The good that drives decisions (the individual or society as a whole)

- Neutral/affective – Expression of emotion
- Specific/diffuse – Public and private boundaries
- Achieved/ascribed – Source of merit (personal accomplishment or connection)
- Sequential/synchronic – Sense of time (linear and limited or cyclical and expansive)
- Internal/external – Individual control over one’s destiny

Bohannan (1995) in *How Culture Works* shared that, “People examine cultural processes that they do not understand in terms of stories – just as they see mystical religious ideas in terms of myth.” He continued, emphasizing that “Once we succeed in recontexting cultural values into social science and the insight of social science into the real world, we stand a better chance of getting our simulations and our scenarios of the future more nearly right. If we actually get them right, our visions will have become more than some mere yearning for harmony or Utopia.”

Understanding where tensions or misconceptions are more likely to come about is not based on the perceptions of one model or theory. However, there are many models and theories which help ease understanding of the global communication processes. One example is evidenced in Fons Trompenaar’s TEDx talk in Amsterdam (“Riding the Waves of Culture,” 2013). In addition, Trompenaars created something called the 4Rs of applying transcultural competence: Recognition, respect, reconciliation and realization. The first step is recognizing what the cultural dilemma may be primary in a situation. The second step is respecting that there is a dilemma and that both sides of the dilemma have cultural legitimacy. The third is reconciling the dilemma through coming to some sort of agreement that honors all sides. It is looking at a win-win scenario and not a win-lose one. Finally, the fourth is bringing into realization the needed change to sustain a reconciled solution or “rooting” it as they later added (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2004).

Extending Indirect Experiential Opportunities

Hall (1989) stated that “understanding the reality of covert culture and accepting it on a gut level comes neither quickly nor easily; it must be lived.” Unfortunately, many business professionals do not have the luxury of living for extended periods of time in another culture. It is the purpose of these eight cases to start a dialogue and to help people ask questions about various aspects of global communication, cultural issues, and sub-cultural considerations that might arise from people communicating and doing business through and expanded cultural lenses. This indirect experience may begin a journey to explore the nuances of communication issues that business people operating globally may face daily.

Tan (2015) suggested that “our current thinking about what constitutes global business communication and our current theoretical models and perspectives of global business communication will undergo a paradigm shift.” He continued, highlighting the idea that new

media and social media will create a transformation “unleashed by these new media about how people connect and interact with each other.”

Foster (1992) focused on “the value of a global mind-set over a global miscellany.” He emphasized that the “more you understand about the history, art, music, literature, politics, economics, religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and mythology of a people, the more likely you will be to succeed in communicating with them.” Foster advocated that while it is “crucially important to learn all one can about other cultures, but the enormity of the challenge” creates a challenge that is nearly impossible. He strongly recommended that “it is best to begin by understanding the one culture we can truly master, our own, and becoming aware of the ways it affects the process of working with others...” (Foster, 1992). He concluded with a challenge: “our first priority should not be the gathering of a miscellany; our first priority needs to be the development of a larger, deeper, and more empathic approach to doing business with other cultures.” He used an analogy “no one can know everything about someone else’s culture, just as you cannot gather every fish in the sea;” rather, it “is more like a journey” (Foster, 1992).

Many questions remain: How can we evolve our own work and practices to further support cultural sensitivity, while championing diversity and inclusion, in today’s work world? How can such experiences be shared effectively, so that people do not feel alone in trying to conquer cultural and communication gaps? Why does the surprise of the situation seem to leave us in a befuddled state often too late for correction? It also seems as if there are more than just two sides, but as many sides as a faceted stone. Our communication and cultural lenses are often unknowingly distorted.

The need to avoid biases and optimize opportunities when dealing with different cultures is not new. Our global society demands new awareness of multiple communication and cultural patterns, not just our own. These patterns will continue to evolve, too, as the “new box” thinking changes the way we communicate in this cross- cultural and multicultural world (Glover & Friedman, 2015).

As we continue to evolve our capabilities to communicate globally and to respect cultures, we must all continue to develop our learning through shared understanding. These case studies have provided just one mechanism for extending our indirect experiential opportunities

As social scientist Brene’ Brown has said, “The willingness to show up changes us. It makes us a little braver each time” (Brown, 2018). We could not agree more.

LESCANT Model

Victor (1992) created the LESCANT model that represents seven areas to consider when dealing with international business communication. This is a useful framework when working in a global environment. The seven variables include issues related to:

- **Language**—This includes language, language being filtered through a third-party translator, cultural implications, the implications of language and vocabulary choice, accents, dialects, regional difference, and the barriers associated with assumptions. Example: On a recent trip to South Africa, one of the authors noticed that many people speak Afrikaans, which has evolved from the Dutch vernacular, and often referred to as “African Dutch.” It is a hybrid language and is spoken by many in the region, even if it is a second language to some in the area.
- **Environment**—This includes the nature of the environment in which the business communicators live and work, the use of technology in that environment, and the specific cultural perceptions of the relationship business people have to the environment, including a wide range of issues such as climate, transportation, logistics, health care, sanitation, settlement patterns, and energy
- **Social Organization**—This includes the common institutions and collective activities shared by the business communicators in that culture. This could include family, religion, community, the role of genders, and use of leisure time. The subtlety of the social organization concept centers around the idea that communicators may be aware of the differences but unaware of the implications.
- **Context (high or low)**—This includes the differences between high and low contexting in cross-cultural business situations, such as relationships, explicit communication, law, uncertainty avoidance, and face-saving. Assumptions of what is understood creates significant dynamics in the business communication environment.
- **Authority**—This includes all of the elements related to authority, such as authority conception, power perception, power distance, trust, decision-making processes, and leadership style, as well as the implications of accommodating differences in authority.
- **Non-Verbal**—This includes a multitude of issues, such as active and passive nonverbal communication, kinesics, appearance, dress and adornment, oculosics (cross-cultural and gender differences), haptics, proxemics, paralanguage (voice quality, vocalization, vocal qualifiers), and passive nonverbal communication (color, numerals, emblems or symbols, olfactory messages) (Kelm & Victor, 2017).
- **Time**—This includes the use of time beyond the clock and calendar, but as a medium of communication, the relativist perception of time, the effects of monochronic versus polychronic time, and other dimensions related to a range of intercultural differences in temporal conception.

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Contributors' Biographical Information (in alphabetical order)

Redhwan Al-Muntaser is originally from Yemen. He moved to the United States from Dubai to attend university. He chose to pursue an undergraduate degree in Human Resources because he believes in creating a workplace where all can learn and grow. Making a positive difference in people's lives is his passion and he is doing just that at Amazon. His hobbies are playing soccer, hiking, and listening to people's stories. Redhwan can be reached at ralmunta@emich.edu.

Kimberley Barker holds a Ph.D. in organization development from Benedictine University, Lisle, IL, and an MBA from Hawai'i Pacific University, Honolulu, HI. She has had extensive experience in organization development and change, cultural competence, human resources, global leadership, dilemma reconciliation, influence and negotiation management, teams, commercial banking, healthcare management, business research, and global communication at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan. Her latest book is available (Nov. 2021) "YOU Can Create Positive Change at Work," by Kimberley Barker and Mary Ceccanese where books are sold. She can be reached at kimbarker@gmail.com and also via LinkedIn and YouTube.

Emily J. Boerman earned a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan and a Master of Social Work from The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has practitioner experience in international education and teaching leadership.

Her research interests include international education, organizational development, leadership, and student mental health. Her most recent work explores how organizational structure and design impacts international education offices. She is currently teaches leadership at Nazarbayev University in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. She can be reached at emilyboerman@gmail.com and via LinkedIn.

Joshua Burd is currently a Building Facilities Manager at the University of Michigan, where he has been working the past 8 years. He obtained his MBA from Eastern Michigan University in 2019 and his bachelor's degree from Adrian College in 2013. He is passionate about leadership, managing change within diverse work environments and supporting cross cultural teams. In his spare time, he is an active musician and avid runner. As a philanthropist, Joshua has held events through his music and running that have helped raise money and awareness for various charities and non-profit organizations. He can be reached at jburd@adrian.edu and also via LinkedIn.

Scott Burns is currently a Quality Supervisor for Troy Design and Manufacturing, where he has been working the past 19 years. He obtained his BBA from Eastern Michigan University in 2020. He is a very self-driven person who loves the challenges that come with managing others while growing from our lessons learned as a team. In his spare time, he loves northern Michigan, his fur babies, and the outdoors in general. As a philanthropist, Scott has supported several events to raise money and awareness for various charities and non-profit organizations.

He can be reached at sburns48135@yahoo.com also via LinkedIn.

Stephanie Coleman is currently an IT Manager for Ford Motor Company, where she has worked for the past 20 years. She obtained her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in Chemical Engineering and MBA from Eastern Michigan University. Stephanie has worked with teams from across the globe, including traveling to Germany, China and India. Communications is a focus and passion of Stephanie's. She is a member of Toastmasters International, an organization focused on leadership and communication skills, for over 15 years and was a semi-finalist of the World Championship of Public Speaking in 2011 and 2018. In her spare time, she is with her family and coaching softball for high school and travel for 25 years. Stephanie can be reached at coachcoleman14@yahoo.com and also via LinkedIn.

Christine Day holds a PhD in communication and has extensive career and consulting experience in corporate organizational development, human resources, and executive coaching. She is currently an adjunct assistant professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; she previously taught (retired) in the undergraduate and graduate programs in the Management Department, College of Business, Eastern Michigan University. She resides in Florida.

Ciara Grantham is currently a Cash Supervisor at The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. She obtained her bachelor's degree from Eastern Michigan University in 2019 with a focus in Business Management. Ciara has a passion for building relationships across different cultures and learning new things. Outside of work, between volunteering, traveling and coaching toddlers to dance, Ciara has hopes to join the Peace Corps to help others and gain more awareness of the world we live in. She can be reached at Ciara.Grantham@chi.frb.org and also via LinkedIn.

Paul Katokwe currently attends Eastern Michigan University (EMU) as he pursues a Master of Business Administration while specializing in Finance. Avid for new challenges and growth opportunities, earlier this year, Paul and other high-performing students represented EMU in the Design Thinking Challenge hosted by the Royal Roads University, in Canada. Paul was born and raised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With graduation on the horizon, Paul is seeking to transition to the outside work environment where he hopes to use his knowledge to further his vision, which is to positively impact the community and people around him. He can be reached at pkatokwe@emich.edu and also via LinkedIn.

Heidi Philipsen-Meissner is a producer, writer, actress, and director with twenty-five years of professional experience in international film, theater, and communications (extended bio: heidielizabethphilipsenmeissner.com). Her company, Personae Entertainment Pictures, acquired distribution for its feature film, "Darcy," (on Herflix.com). Heidi holds a BA in *Film, Theater & Germany Literature* from the University of Michigan, an MIA in Intl. Communications from Columbia University's School of Intl. & Public Affairs, a Certificate in *Film Directing & Cinematography* from the Motion Picture Institute, one in *Advance Screenwriting* from the Professional Screenwriting Program at UCLA and graduated this past spring from Eastern Michigan University's College of Business with her M.B.A. in Management.