

Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace: The Case of Multicultural Teams in Spain¹

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to explore the role and characteristics of communicative interaction in an intercultural context and, more specifically, within multicultural teams. To this end, after defining the concept of intercultural communication, highlighting its importance, and examining the main elements affecting it, this study concludes by stressing the importance of certain variables of verbal and non-verbal communication, production strategies and skills or attitudes necessary to perform a successful intercultural exchange in the working place. The article is part of a more exhaustive research action dealing with multicultural teams recently carried out in Spain and inserted within the 2003-2006 ICOPROMO Project (a Leonardo da Vinci programme sponsored by the European Commission).

Keywords: intercultural communication, communicative interaction, multicultural teams, verbal and nonverbal communication, strategic competence, communication skills.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo consiste en explorar el papel y las características de la interacción comunicativa en el contexto intercultural de los equipos de trabajo multiculturales. Para ello, tras definir el concepto de comunicación intercultural, exponer su relevancia y examinar los elementos principales que la condi-

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cionan, este artículo concluye indicando la importancia crucial de ciertas variables de la comunicación verbal y no verbal, estrategias de producción lingüística, y habilidades o actitudes, totalmente necesarias para conseguir un intercambio cultural exitoso en el lugar de trabajo. Este artículo forma parte de una investigación más extensa realizada en España y centrada en grupos de trabajo multiculturales, dentro del Proyecto ICOPROMO 2003-2006 (Programa Leonardo da Vinci, Comisión Europea).

Palabras clave: comunicación intercultural, interacción comunicativa, grupos multiculturales, comunicación verbal / no verbal, competencia estratégica, habilidades comunicativas.

1. Introduction

Like no time before in history, we are finding ourselves in contact with culturally diverse people thanks to interlinked world economy, advances in telecommunication and technology, increased travel, and worldwide movement of immigrant workers. In Ting-Toomey's (1999: 7) words, «As we enter the 21st century, direct contacts with dissimilar others in our neighborhoods, schools, and workplace are an inescapable part of our life». Thus, it becomes essential in the global workplace to learn to interact with international co-workers and to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be competent in intercultural communication. Indeed, communicative interaction and the aspects it involves are particularly important in the multicultural workplace, since they are at its very core. As Ting-Toomey (1999: 5) points out, «Acquiring the knowledge and skills of mindful intercultural communication is a necessary first step in becoming a global citizen of the 21st century».

The aim of the present paper is precisely to examine, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective, the factors involved in successful intercultural communication. To this end, it begins by providing a theoretical framework, which is then applied practically to the case of multicultural teams in Spain, by reporting on the results yielded by a study recently carried out in this country within a large-scale investigation in the framework of the European Commission Leonardo da Vinci programmes. It is interesting to ascertain that practically all the variables considered in the theoretical section as affecting intercultural communication are also acknowledged as essential in the Spanish sample, a result which caters for the provision of a clear-cut categorization of the elements which need to be considered in order to guarantee successful intercultural communication in the multicultural workplace.

2. Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace: Some Theoretical Considerations

2.1. Definition and Importance

Communication is a complex process which requires the successful implementation of numerous skills and devices. In simple terms, it can be defined as the mode or method by which we exchange ideas or information. In order for communication to be effective, there needs to be interaction between the participants in the exchange; we cannot say that communication has occurred unless one person speaks and the other person understands what has been said. As Revell and Norman (1999: 128) put it, «The meaning of my communication is the response I get». If we speak and someone listens, but that person does not understand what we mean, we are not getting our message across to him/her and, thus, miscommunication occurs. As Gudykunst (1998: 206) points out, «If we consistently misinterpret strangers' messages, our communication is not adequate or sufficient, that is, effective (i.e., misunderstandings are minimized)». The solution is to respond flexibly and to work with the numerous factors which come into play in communication, trying different approaches until the desired response is obtained from the interlocutor and s/he captures the message we are seeking to convey. Appropriate communication, according to Wiseman (2002: 209), «entails the use of messages that are expected in a given context and actions that meet the expectations and demands of the situation».

The complexity involved in communication is greatly increased if the latter is intercultural, that is, if it takes place «between people from different national cultures» (Gudykunst, 2002: 179). As Andersen, Hetch, Hoobler and Smallwood (2002: 90) signal, «Intercultural interactions are always problematic. Linguistic barriers in many intercultural interactions are compounded by differences in nonverbal behavior». However, despite the difficulties inherent in intercultural communication, its study becomes essential at the outset of the 21st century, as a notable number of authors (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Andersen, Hetch, Hoobler and Smallwood, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; or Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida and Ogawa, 2005) highlight.

It is not surprising that, given its increased significance, there have been great advances in the conceptualization of intercultural communicative competence, particularly over the course of the past two decades (Wiseman, 2002; Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida and Ogawa, 2005). But what exactly does intercultural competence involve? To begin with, an adequate conceptualization of this construct requires a broader formulation of the traditional concept of communicative competence, as Alptekin (2002: 63) strongly upholds: «The conventional model of communicative competence [...] would appear to be invalid in accounting for learning and using

an international language in cross-cultural settings. A new pedagogic model is urgently needed to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication». In fact, Peterson (2004) goes as far as to propose substituting the term «competence» for the more encompassing «intelligence», which, in his view, «suggests more highly developed abilities» (Peterson, 2004: 87).

According to Ting-Toomey (1999: 16) intercultural communication can be defined as «the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation». Thus, the transactional, give-and-take nature of the intercultural exchange is here emphasized, together with its use of both verbal and nonverbal symbols.

2.2. Intercultural Verbal Communication

What seems incontrovertible after examining the different ways in which intercultural communicative interaction can be conceptualized is that numerous variables need to come into play in order to guarantee its success.

Naturally, verbal aspects become all-important elements in intercultural interaction, particularly language mastery of the type that Canale and Swain (1980) term *grammatical competence*, and which is regarded by these authors as comprising knowledge of lexis, morphology, syntax, phonology, and graphology (spelling). As Gudykunst (1998: 215) stresses, «the greater our cultural and linguistic knowledge, and the more our beliefs overlap with those of the strangers with whom we communicate, the less the likelihood there will be misunderstandings».

However, in addition to linguistic aspects, an important number of verbal communication styles also need to be taken into consideration to guarantee successful intercultural communication (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Andersen, Hetch, Hooble and Smallwood, 2002; Gudykunst and Lee, 2002; Lim, 2002; Peterson, 2004). These can be articulated in terms of a series of binary distinctions, including *talk vs. silence* (silence can fulfil different functions depending on cultural beliefs); *topic management and turn-taking* (the length of the turns taken, their distribution, the organization of the topic, and the use of repetition, feedback devices, or backchannelling all vary depending on the culture); *elaboration / animation* (which refers to the degree of expressiveness, assertion, or exaggeration used); *direct vs. indirect verbal styles* (the essence of this dichotomy lies in «the extent to which communicators reveal their intentions through their tone of voice and the straightforwardness of their content message» (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 103)); *individualism vs. collectivism* and *person-oriented vs. status-oriented verbal styles* (which differ according to whether the verbal

style is more individual-centered or role-centered); ***self-enhancement vs. self-effacement*** (which deals with the extent to which a verbal style emphasizes or de-emphasizes one's achievements and skills); and ***low- vs. high-context communication*** (whereas low-context communication is characterized by being direct, explicit and open, high-context communication is indirect, subtle and understated).

2.3. Intercultural Nonverbal Communication

Culture does not only influence language, but is also believed to have an impact on nonverbal aspects of communication: «If language is the key to the core of a culture, nonverbal communication is indeed the *heart* of each culture. Nonverbal communication is omnipresent throughout a culture – it is everywhere» (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 120). Indeed, as both Ting-Toomey (1999) and Andersen, Hetch, Hooble and Smallwood (2002) stress, although nonverbal interaction has innate or cultural-universal elements, it is also affected by cultural-specific ones.

As Revell and Norman (1999: 91) point out, «Communication is *more* non-verbal than verbal [emphasis in the original]». Indeed, current NLP beliefs maintain that only 7% of what is communicated is done by means of the actual words we use, whilst as much as 55% is communicated bodily, and 38% through our tone of voice. Ting-Toomey (1999: 115) is no less emphatic: «Many nonverbal experts (e.g., Birdwhistell, 1955; Mehrabian, 1981) estimated that in every social encounter, nearly two-thirds of the interaction meaning is derived through nonverbal messages». Such nonverbal aspects become even more crucial in intercultural contexts, as Andersen, Hetch, Hooble and Smallwood (2002: 90) point out: «[...] beyond language, multichannelled problems exist in interpreting nonverbal behavior of people from other cultures».

Ting-Toomey (1999: 115) defines nonverbal communication as «the nonlinguistic behaviors (or attributes) that are consciously or unconsciously encoded or decoded via multiple communication channels». And all these channels or media need to be considered to render a complete account of intercultural nonverbal communication (Ekman, 1972; Hall, 1976, 1984; Gudykunst, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this sense, Andersen, Hetch, Hoobler and Smallwood's (2002) research reveals that the differences in intercultural nonverbal communication lie along the nonverbal codes of ***kinesics*** (or facial, bodily, and gestural movement), ***oculesics*** (eye contact), ***vocalics*** (related to speech, including accent, pitch range and intensity, volume, articulation, resonance, or tempo), ***paralinguistics*** (associated to tone), ***haptics*** (connected to touch), ***olfactics*** (having to do with smell), ***proxemics*** (the conception of space in interpersonal spatial boundary regulation), and ***chronemics*** (or the interpretation and understanding of time).

2.4. Strategic Competence

The previous heading has evinced that nonverbal interaction is a powerful resource (and not merely linguistic aspects) to convey messages. It is part of *strategic competence*, yet another element to be borne in mind within communicative interaction. Initially, its definition is narrow in scope, as Canale and Swain (1980: 30) characterize this component as comprising the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which are activated in order to compensate for breakdowns in communication caused by either performance variables or insufficient competence. However, Canale (1983: 10-11) subsequently expands this definition by adding that strategic competence can also be called into action in order to «enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g. deliberately slow and soft speech for rhetorical effect)». This broader conception is upheld by Tarone and Yule (1989) and by Brown (1994: 228), who defines strategic competence in a comprehensive manner as «the way we manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals». *Communication strategies* (Brown, 1994; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1993; Oxford, 1990) or *production strategies* (Skehan, 1998) can, in turn, be subdivided into *achievement strategies*, which range from code-switching or literal translation to paraphrasing and appeal for repair and confirmation; and *reduction strategies*, which involve topic avoidance and nonverbal communication (Johnstone, 1989; Bygate, 2000).

2.5. Skills

Finally, as Ting-Toomey (1999: 141) indicates, «Mindful verbal and nonverbal communication requires the application of flexible, adaptive interaction skills». These skills are well summarized by Gudykunst (1998) as directly related to managing uncertainty and anxiety. They involve six main abilities which are in line with important attitudes that are necessary to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts.

The first of them is the *ability to be mindful*, which involves being able to put oneself in the interlocutor's position and to display sensitivity to other frames of reference. The second ability mentioned by Gudykunst (1998) – *tolerance of ambiguity* – is directly related to the third one – *management of anxiety* –, since the greater the tolerance of ambiguity, the less anxiety experienced in intercultural communication. The attitudes of sensitivity, understanding, and learning to truly listen all come into play in the *ability to empathize*, while adaptability and flexibility are at the core of the *ability to adapt our communication*. All the afore-mentioned skills

and attitudes – empathy, adaptability, mindfulness – need to come together in order to master the *ability to make accurate predictions and explanations*.

3. The ICOPROMO Project: the Study, and the Sample of Subjects²

The study reported on here – still ongoing – is framed within the large-scale investigation of the 2003-2006 ICOPROMO Project, a European Commission Leonardo da Vinci programme. ICOPROMO, Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility, aims at facilitating the development of intercultural competence in students and professionals within the social sciences, working or willing to work in multicultural teams. At the time this study was conducted, the ICOPROMO team was made up of four academic partners in Portugal (Universidade de Coimbra, coordinator), Germany (Universität Göttingen), Austria (Universität Linz), and Spain (Universidad de Jaén); and three business partners in Finland (International Management Education), Austria (Voes-Alpinen Industrieanlagenbau), and Portugal (Centro de Estudos e Formação Autárquica). The German partner was replaced in 2005 by a partner from the United Kingdom (Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge).

The first phase of the project, which was roughly developed in the first year of the whole three year period, consisted in the analysis of current multicultural teamwork in Portugal, Germany, Austria and Spain in terms of intercultural competence. With this purpose, two rounds of interviews were conducted from February to July, 2004 in each country, among members of multicultural teams in the following three fields: intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, and business. On average, the duration of the interviews ranged between 25 and 40 minutes.

In Spain, the sample amounts to sixteen men and women, both Spanish and non-Spanish individuals working in multicultural teams in Spain, and Spanish interviewees working or having worked in multicultural teams abroad. The sample comprises both men and women in their 20s, 30s and 40s, from different nationalities: French, Colombian, Dutch and Icelandic, although the number of Spaniards interviewed is clearly superior. The first round of interviews includes the whole sample and is based on seven questions approved by the whole ICOPROMO team. On average, the duration of the first round of interviews ranged from 25 to 40 minutes. The table below presents such a sample in greater detail:

2. We would like to thank all the informants for their time, patience, and the valuable data with which they provided us. We would likewise like to thank the institutions they work or have worked for: Valeo (Jaén), Cruz Roja Jaén (Red Interlabora), Sun Microsystem (Madrid), Granada Acoge, European Commission (Brussels), European Space Agency (Frankfurt), CEAR (Madrid), ONU (Mexico), UNICEF (Madrid), Linares Acoge, ACNUR (Madrid), and Braun Medical (Barcelona).

FIRST ROUND				
Nº	NATIONALITY	SEX	AGE	AREA
1	Spanish	Female	34	Business (VALEO)
2*	Spanish	Female	35	NGO (RED CROSS)
3*	French	Male	32	Business (SUN MICROSYSTEMS)
4	Spanish	Female	41	NGO (GRANADA ACOGE)
5*	Spanish	Male	35	Intergovernmental Relations (EUROPEAN COMMISSION)
6	Spanish	Male	28	Business (SUN MICROSYSTEMS)
7*	Spanish	Male	37	NGO (CEAR)
8	Spanish	Male	31	Business (EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY)
9	Colombian	Male	32	NGO (CEAR)
10	Spanish	Male	34	Intergovernmental Relations (EUROPEAN COMMISSION)
11*	Spanish	Female	36	Intergovernmental Relations (UNITED NATIONS)
12	Spanish	Female	31	NGO (UNICEF)
13	Spanish	Female	49	NGO (LINARES ACOGE)
14	Spanish	Female	29	Intergovernmental Relations (ACNUR)
15*	Dutch	Male	24	Business (BRAUN MEDICAL)
16	Icelandic	Male	29	Business (BRAUN MEDICAL)
*have been interviewed twice				

The questionnaire comprised the seven questions below:

1. Can you briefly characterize the multicultural teams you have been involved in? Which cultures were represented in the team/s? How long were the teams working together?
2. How do/did you communicate and coordinate your work?
3. Which multicultural teams were the most efficient and why? In case you have only worked in a multicultural team, did you find it efficient and why?

4. If conflict arises in your multicultural team, which do you think are the main reasons, according to your experience?
5. What did you do as an individual / as a group to solve these problems or conflicts?
6. Have there been any members in your multicultural team/s who have been more influential than others? If so, why?
7. How could team members be prepared to improve teamwork?

The second round of interviews, with three general questions and two to three individual country questions, was conducted among six of the sixteen interviewees (two in each of the fields expressed above), with a view to confirming some of the most outstanding findings in the first round. Due to this fact, the interviews conducted in this second round were much shorter, with an average duration of 20 minutes.

The interviewees were questioned on the six aspects portrayed below:

1. Question specific to the interviewee and derived from his/her first interview.

Two national questions. The Spanish ones were:

2. Here, in our immediate context, it was found that some of the interviewees detected national or cultural differences in multicultural teams. They considered them «easily perceivable», while others did not consider they existed. What is your point of view in this respect?
3. Most interviewees in the first round mentioned that their experience in working in a multicultural team had been extremely enriching. Has this been your case? How has working in a multicultural team helped you to acquire knowledge, change attitudes and develop specific skills or abilities?

Three transnational questions (again agreed upon by the ICOPROMO team):

4. If you had the chance to choose the participants in your multicultural team, what qualities or features would you prioritize in selecting them?
5. Do you consider that effective participation in a multicultural team requires a democratic attitude? Can this raise issues regarding human rights, women's rights, and the like? How do you think that we can deal with them in a work context?
6. In your experience, do native or native-level speakers of the language used for communication in the multicultural team have a privileged position in debates and discussions? How could non-native speakers help solve these problems?

4. Intercultural Communication in Multicultural Teams: The Case of Spain

4.1. Introduction

Although the interviewees provided valuable insights into the role and features of intercultural communication within multicultural teams throughout the course of the interviews conducted, their answers were particularly eloquent in response to questions 2, 4, 6, and 7 of the first round, and 2, 3, 4, and 6 of the second round, which are thus the ones on which we have laid greater stress in obtaining our outcomes.

The interviewees' response to these queries shows the paramount importance of intercultural communication in multicultural teamwork and accords with the previous theoretical framework in terms of the factors or variables it involves.

4.2. Verbal Communication

In line with what is theoretically propounded on this score, the results of our study reveal that *language mastery* is indeed deemed essential for successful communicative interaction to take place. The inadequate mastery of the team's language of communication can result in a «communicative haze» (1.3), which requires more time to arrive at a clear interpretation. Misunderstandings and confusion can accrue from the incorrect use of certain expressions (1.2, 1.3, 1.14, 1.15). This clearly corroborates Marquardt and Horvath's (2001) view of language as a barrier for intercultural communication, and Goodall and Roberts' (2003) research on language as a source of intercultural misunderstanding. In addition, once a *lingua franca* (normally English) has been established within the team, its mastery becomes both a source of power (Méndez García and Pérez Cañado, 2005) and the key to success (Méndez García and Pérez Cañado, forthcoming).

In multicultural teams there are also differences between *verbal communication styles*, of which the Spanish sample is acutely aware: the interviewees point to the existence of low- vs. *high-context communication* (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Andersen, Hetch, Hoobler and Smallwood, 2002). Whereas some cultures (e.g. the Spanish one) tend to adopt communication patterns of direct verbal mode, with more assertive greetings and linear logic (low-context), others (e.g. Mauritania) expected communicants to read between the lines, following a more spiral logic, and contemplating non-verbal subtleties. Our sample thus confirms DiStefano and Maznevski's (2000) view that the divergence in values and beliefs is generally hidden and can have strong effects on individuals' interaction.

You can have a number of initial misunderstandings simply because of the way that messages are communicated or even, indeed, because of lack of communication of certain messages, which would be perceived as inappropriate or even insulting by some cultures while some other cultures would expect those messages to be indeed thrashed out in detail. (1.5)

Differences between *direct and indirect verbal interaction styles* (Ting-Toomey, 1999) are also detected (1.2 and 2.1). What is acceptable and appropriate in a particular community (for example, speaking quickly to save time or starting a conversation by getting to the point in Spain), may be rude, inappropriate, and unacceptable in another (for example, in Mauritania there is a protocol to be followed before introducing the main topic). Hence, as Henderson (2005) points out, the ability to recognize routines and rituals in the speech of co-workers becomes paramount.

Ellos tienen un protocolo antes de empezar a hablar un tema [...] Y yo un día le pregunté, «¿qué estáis hablando que no habláis de nada?» Y él me dijo «Es que sois muy maleducados, porque yo antes de hablar con una persona, sea de lo que sea, le pregunto, “¿cómo está tu padre?”, “¿cómo está tu madre?”, “¿cómo está tu hermana?”, “¿y tu finca?”, “¿y tu coche...?”». Es un protocolo que yo me río [...] Y X opina que yo soy muy agresiva [...] ¿cómo llegas a una persona y la miras así a los ojos? (1.2)

Finally, awareness of when, how, and whom to *interrupt*, and knowledge of the conventions governing *turn-taking* across cultures are also necessary to guarantee successful functioning of global teams. The sample's perceptions point to a greater tolerance of interruptions on the part of Spanish or French team members vs. a more notable respect for turn-taking in the case of the English and German ones:

[...] no levanta la mano; el español va a estar ahí, se va a quedar un poco aparte, un poco al fondo, pero corta la palabra y dice «¿Y esto?, ¿Y esto?» (1.3)

4.3. Nonverbal Communication

As we saw in the theoretical section, communication does not exclusively depend on language, indeed, the interviewees highlight the importance of such **nonverbal factors** as paralinguistics (tone), oculesics (eye contact), haptics (touch or contact), or proxemics (space).

The tone in which we express ourselves has importance with members of different languages: the Spanish and French are held to speak much more loudly

or passionately than the English or Dutch (1.3, 1.7, 1.14). However, even for native speakers of the same language, the tone used in its different varieties (such as the Spanish of Spain, Mexico or Argentina) differs greatly, being more conciliatory and lower in some, and more assertive and higher in others:

No es agresivo el español, sino que lo parece [...] te das cuenta que, con respecto a otros miembros del grupo que también forman parte de otra cultura distinta, las personas que tienen esa aproximación menos agresiva, más tranquila, menos chillona, con unas maneras de decirlo más rebuscadas pero intentando pedir más permiso y ser más conciliador. (2.3)

Otra cosa importante es las diferentes costumbres, la manera de expresar tus opiniones: una vez que todo el mundo habla el idioma, lo domina más o menos con el mismo nivel [...] porque yo tenía grupos de trabajo formados puramente por hispano-parlantes, o sea, chileno, mejicano, cubano y española. Todos hablábamos español, pero a la hora de expresar tu criterio, dicen que los españoles somos muy vehementes. (1.11)

In terms of eye-contact, whereas in Spain looking people in the eye is a sign that you are interested in the interlocutor and his/her message, in other countries, such as Mauritania, you would not do so unless you were given permission:

Comunicación no verbal [...] X opina que yo miro a las personas a los ojos sin que me den permiso. (1.2)

In turn, as regards haptics, touching the interlocutor may be possible and frequently done in certain cultures (for instance, touching or tapping people on the shoulder in Spain), whereas it constitutes an inappropriate act in others (for example, Germany). As to proxemics, the space allowed between speakers is worth being given consideration, since the «space bubble» is bigger in certain cultures (for example, Germany) than in others (like Spain), and this causes speakers of the former to feel their space encroached on and to move constantly backwards. That is to say, the sample shows the difference between «high contact» and «low contact» cultures (Gudykunst, 1998: 187).

Los españoles se tocan mucho más [...] se miran mucho más. El límite del espacio físico es distinto [...] Los españoles tampoco se saludan con la mano, pero nosotros los franceses lo hacemos mucho. (1.3)

A los alemanes no te puedes poner a darles en el hombro [...] porque es su espacio físico. (1.6)

4.4. Strategic Competence

Strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) also seems to come into play in the intercultural communication of global teams. Indeed, given the heterogeneous command which team members have of the *lingua franca*, it is sometimes necessary to resort to such strategies as drawing, writing, rewording, or asking for clarification in order to make oneself understood. Thus, it seems that both reduction and achievement strategies are highlighted as helpful in the sample:

El idioma era el inglés en estos tres casos y había muchos momentos en los que había que hacer las cosas por escrito porque la comunicación oral no era suficiente. Vamos, había muchas veces en las que había que dibujar las cosas porque había malinterpretaciones. (1.6)

Eso generaba problemas y muchas veces había que escribir las cosas y repetirlas o intentar decirlas de otra manera porque tu veías que la gente no te había entendido o veías que no estabas entendiendo lo que estaba diciendo la otra persona. (1.6)

4.5. Skills

The skills cited by Ting-Toomey (1999) and Gudykunst (1998) as necessary for mindful verbal and nonverbal communication are again explicitly mentioned in the Spanish sample, indicating that an important number of skills, attitudes need to be fostered in multicultural teams to guarantee their success. This circumstance corroborates the findings of Chevrier (2003: 147) in her comparative study of European project groups: «More generally, almost all interviewees have stated that cross-cultural teams could not be effective without special personal qualities of their members, namely “openness”, “patience”, “self-control”». These attitudes include zero tolerance of racism – there is no place for it particularly in NGOs – and elimination of prejudice:

[...] hay que establecer unas normas básicas de comportamiento, de actitud, de trato y, sobre todo, no tolerar en ningún caso, tolerancia cero con el racismo y la xenofobia. (1.7)

[...] sería absurdo, si trabajamos con estos colectivos, que haya problemas entre nosotros, entre los mismos compañeros. No le encontraría lógica. [...] imagínate: yo trabajo en una organización para inmigrantes y tengo problemas con mi compañero porque es árabe o latinoamericano; es decir, estoy donde no debo estar. (1.9)

Such indications of racism or prejudice can be overcome by fostering another important attitude, namely, by getting to know the other members of the global team (1.11) and by delving deeper into their reality (1.12, 1.13) and way of working (1.16):

Intenta conocerlo [...]. (1.11)

Profundizar más en lo que es el conocimiento de las realidades de cada uno, de cada ámbito de trabajo. (1.12)

[...] es un poco saber la manera de trabajar de cada uno y ya que la manera de trabajar de una persona extranjera es diferente de la manera de trabajar de una persona de aquí, [...] simplemente adaptarse las dos partes y ya está. (1.16)

Alternatively, overcoming prejudices can be attained by observing others and being sensitive towards their mood (1.9); and by not taking anything for granted, striving always to see a specific problem or situation from the other person's perspective, and to put yourself in his/her position by showing empathy (1.2, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9):

Yo observo mucho, estoy muy pendiente de estas cosas. (1.9)

Y eso es muy importante, la comunicación, que no se den cosas por hecho porque las damos y no son. (1.6)

Yo pienso que uno tiene que ponerse siempre en el lugar del otro. Yo creo que, de verdad, hay una cosa importantísima que te he comentado, que es la empatía. Si no nos ponemos en el lugar del otro, nunca le vamos a llegar a entender. (1.7)

Establishing a fluid two-way communication is equally essential to deal with conflict and to attain its resolution. This involves, on the one hand, learning to truly listen, a capacity which, in the interviewees' opinion, is increasingly being lost:

[...] el encontrar simplemente a alguien que te escuche, por absurdo que pueda sonar, [...] simplemente tocar en la puerta y que alguien te escuche, yo creo que eso es [...] con eso ya hay una manera [...] de paliarlo, porque yo creo que estamos perdiendo cada vez más la actividad de escuchar. (1.9)

Secondly, it implies being open to dialogue and conversation (1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 1.9, 1.13, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16):

Las soluciones son [...] el diálogo hasta el extremo, hasta el agotamiento [...]. (1.4)

Well, the main tool to solve these problems is communication [...]. Communication to understand what each other's point of view is [...] is absolutely the key to everything. (1.5)

This willingness to listen and to talk things through, coupled with the attitude of tolerance and openmindedness (Chevrier, 2003: 145), flexibility (Lagerström and Andersson, 2003: 91; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999: 422), and adaptability on both sides (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 1.7, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16, 2.5), leads to the desired compromising (especially in the business sector: 1.4, 1.7, 1.14) or conciliating (particularly in NGOs: 1.9) spirit:

Entonces, tienes que ser una persona flexible y adaptarte a lo que te va viniendo, [...]. (1.1)

Hay que tratar de encontrar un camino medio. A los ingleses les cuesta muchísimo adaptarse. Ésa es una característica del inglés que hay que tomar con cuidado [...]. (1.3)

This negotiation, compromise, or conciliation should be carried out with goodwill on the part of the participants involved (1.5) and lots of respect (1.5, 1.7, 1.11, 1.13), perhaps one of the most outstanding attitudes for cross-cultural communication and understanding, as Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: 9) stress in their proposal of a model of intercultural competence:

And, finally, always trying to make the team members understand that solutions are there to make the system more efficient and in full respect of their tasks and also in respect of their opinions, [...]. (1.5)

O sea, que el trabajar con grupos multiculturales te enseña mucho a respetar las diferentes culturas, a convivir con ellos y a tener un respeto. (1.11)

[...] tú como asociación tienes unos objetivos muy claros, que son el respeto a todo [...] el respeto a otras culturas y a otros valores, nos parezcan bien o nos parezcan mal. (1.13)

Thus, the sample clearly corroborates the significance of the abilities cited by Gudykunst (1998), particularly the *ability to be mindful*, the *ability to empathize*, and the *ability to adapt our communication*.

5. Conclusion

The present article has allowed us to explore the factors involved in successful intercultural communication in global teams from both a theoretical and a practical viewpoint. Practically all of the theoretical aspects examined in the introductory section have been corroborated by the outcomes of the study carried out in Spain within the scope of the international research project ICOPROMO, perhaps more so than on any other specific aspect which has thus far been analyzed in relation to this general study.

Indeed, both the theory and practice on this issue confirm that there is a clear-cut set of elements which need to be considered in order to guarantee successful intercultural communication in the multicultural workplace. These include variables of verbal communication (involving especially *language mastery, talk vs. silence, turn-taking and topic management, direct and indirect verbal interaction styles*, and *low- vs. high-context communication*), factors affecting nonverbal communication (particularly *paralinguistics, oculesics, haptics*, and *proxemics*), communication or production strategies (of both *reduction* and *achievement* types), and certain skills or attitudes (involving above all the *ability to be mindful*, the *ability to empathize*, and the *ability to adapt our communication*).

Although being aware of all these elements may seem a tall order indeed, given the considerable number of variables involved, it is well worth rising to the challenge of mastering them: first of all, because successful communicative interaction in global teams depends on these factors, and learning to adequately work in multicultural teams is fast becoming «the sine qua non for global success» (Marquardt and Horvath, 2001: 4); secondly, because the ability to communicate effectively with other cultures will have positive repercussions on a personal level. As Ting-Toomey (1999: 8) puts it, it will «help us to uncover our own diversity and “worthiness”» and will «ultimately enrich the depth of our own life experiences».

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