Cultural and Communication Issues that Impact Global Business

June 29, 2017

Offered by: Aperian Global
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Moderator

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Global
Find Labor and Employment Law Expertise Wherever You Do Business

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If you need another copy of the power point slides, open a new window, go to the ELA homepage (www.employmentlawalliance.com) and click the webinar title.

Human Resource Executive magazine has named 11 Employment Law Alliance (ELA) attorneys to its 2017 lists of “The

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Today’s Facilitator

Lisa Kieffer

- Director of Consulting, 10+ years with AG, focus on Global Teaming & Distance Leadership
- Masters in Intercultural Relations & Cross-Cultural Consulting from Lesley University
- Lived 5 years in Singapore working in Sales & Marketing; 3 years in-country global project work in Australia, China, Denmark, France, HK, India, Indonesia, and Mexico
- Consulting work globally for fortune 500 companies
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**Leadership Development**
Developing individual and organizational capabilities to lead in a global business environment

**Global Mobility**
Preparing and supporting employees and families for international assignment success

**Team Effectiveness**
Improving virtual team collaboration & performance

**Global Mindset**
Developing global mindset and country-specific preparedness

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Our Areas of Expertise
Our mission is to enable individuals, teams and organizations to work effectively across boundaries.

Aperian Global integrates Global Reach, Thought Leadership & Technology in a way that provides uniquely compelling & innovative solutions for our clients’ globalization needs.
# Overview of Session

## Culture and Communications Issues that Impact Global Business

### Setting the Scene

- Typical Global Project Issue

### Why & What to Do?

- Cultural Awareness: Understanding the Influences at Work
- Building Strategy: Five Keys to Getting Clear Agreement

### Using GlobeSmart as a Learning Tool

### Closing
Setting the Scene
You are a project team leader in the US & have been working with globally dispersed counterparts over the last six months. As time has progressed, you are starting to notice the following:

- There seems to be a different sense of urgency from team members in each country
- Project milestone dates are being missed
- Agreements are being misconstrued
- There have been communication breakdowns and signs of blame

Why are these things happening?
The Lens of Culture

Culture A

Behaviors

Drives & Shapes Behaviors

Attitudes
Assumptions
Beliefs
Values

Culture B

Behaviors

Attitudes
Assumptions
Beliefs
Values

Visible

Less Visible
Concept: View of Time - Polychronic

Polychronic

1. Time is relative and fluid - an elastic concept viewed conditionally
2. Ability to handle competing tasks simultaneously

- Time commitments desirable but not promises: always consider other contingencies
- An environment with constant stimulation and multiple competing demands from family, friends, colleagues, vendors, clients etc.
- Jump from task to task/topic to topic, interruptions accepted

Business Implications

- Respond to the request that is most immediate, loudest, or from person whose relationship is closest.
- Managers manage through distribution of tasks
- In order to be successful, need to have consistent presence, strong relationship and persistently relay urgency in order to keep your needs as a priority.
Interdependence

1. In business working only with people already known and trusted
2. Work is rarely seen as an independent task

Business Implications

- Relationships through large extended family and family obligations always receive highest priority.
- Interdependent employees depend on one another and enjoy working together. Present leadership and co-located teams work best.

- A well-connected employee, strong reputation and local/regional credibility is important in higher level roles.
- A person’s family background, class, education, regional background and language capabilities impact their ability to build relationships and be successful.
- Matrix structures with remote colleagues and managers is challenging. Need a strong local leadership presence.
Concept: The Role of Hierarchy

Hierarchy

Position, title, age, education, class, language, family standing, relationship – all plays a role

- Social distance between people can be very large
- Prestige is important - pay attention to ranks
- Hierarchy permeates roles in society (family, business, government) and is reflected in language, greetings, seating arrangements, status symbols
- Status of companies depends on size, market share, brand image, charismatic/connected leader

Manager Expectations

- Manages process of projects and leads the communication
- Provides solutions for problems
- Direct and corrective feedback to subordinates
- Assumes responsibility for employees’ careers and regularly socializes with team members outside work

- Hierarchical reporting lines
- Structured chain of command based on roles
- Information = Power
Key Dimensions of Culture

How do I make decisions in uncertain or ambiguous situations?

Risk
- Prefer rapid decision-making and quick results
- Place great importance on flexibility and initiative
- Value speed over thoroughness

Certainty
- Spend significant time on background research
- Establish proper procedures before starting a project
- Value thoroughness over speed
High & Low Context Communication

* Source: Edward T. Hall: Understanding Cultural Differences

**High Context**
- Burden is on receiver to infer intended meaning
- Burden is on sender to provide sufficient context

**Low Context**
- Burden is on sender to make message clear
- Burden is on receiver to ask clarifying questions
Presenting Information

**Bullet Points**

- Provide high level overview up front. If you want more information, ask questions

**Background**

- Solid foundation up front provides needed context for the main point

*Where is the depth? Why so simplistic?*

*But what is your point?*
Key Dimensions of Culture

How do I communicate requests, tasks, and feedback?

**Direct**
- Come to the point quickly
- Be forthright in asking questions in most settings
- Be comfortable making requests, giving direction, or disagreeing with others
- Give negative feedback directly

**Indirect**
- Spend time explaining the context before coming to the point
- Avoid asking questions in public settings
- Express disagreement in subtle ways
- Give negative feedback indirectly
## The Multiple Meanings of Yes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Dignity</td>
<td>“Yes” = I don't agree with you but will tell you &quot;no&quot; in an indirect way if you listen carefully to my explanation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Hierarchy</td>
<td>“Yes” = I don't agree with you, but you are the boss, so perhaps you indeed know what's best. I may try to express my initial disagreement in an indirect manner, but will probably wait to see if your answer is the right answer after all (Passive Resistance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy &amp; Good Manners</td>
<td>“Yes” = I really mean “No”. I don’t want to be the bearer of bad news because developing a relationship is important to me. So I’m telling you what you want to hear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Obvious</td>
<td>“Yes, but …” = You are obviously an intelligent person I don’t need to directly tell you “no”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Hello, Azim. I was wondering if you have any feedback about the two candidates I recommended, Ravi and Sujesh?

3. So, do you think we should go with Ravi or Sujesh? I liked them both but was very impressed by Ravi’s ideas and I’m leaning towards him.

5. Right. I got an email about that. I told him that Ravi didn’t but that I don’t see that as issue if we think he is the right guy.

7. So, do you have any other feedback or are we ready to move forward?

2. Yes, thank you. We met with them both yesterday.

4. Yes. My boss, Bhavesh, was wondering if Ravi has any experience with the Platinum project from last year.

6. Silence

8. Yes, we also think it is best if we have the right person. I will ask Bhavesh if there is any other feedback.
Strategies for Communication with Indirect Colleagues

Ineffective questions
• Did you get what you needed from the meeting?
• Are the new procedures useful for you?
• Will you and your team be able to optimize production now?

Effective open-ended questions
• Who could help you learn more about the procedures?
• What additional information can I give you?
• Where do you see potential challenges?
• When do you think you can try these new tactics?
• How can I, as your manager help you?
GlobeSmart® Dimensions

Your goal:
To know the profile of you and your colleague in order to leverage similarities and bridge gaps

Remember:
- Dimensions are on a continuum
- There is no “right” or “wrong” style
- Profile result is not a predictor of success
How to Get Clear Agreement?

Five Keys to Getting Clear Agreement

▪ Feel free to chat in the chat box any best practices you have seen.
Build Alignment
Understand the context of your project members and make efforts to understand how the project fits into their world and their priorities. Then find a way to connect that project to their priorities. Map out their activity/deliverable in the whole process, so that responsibility is created.

Manage the Hierarchy
Take into account the hierarchy in the situation – the local staff may not be able to say no to the boss. Ensure local manager is included as an ally to your assignment.
Best Practices: Working with their Hierarchy

Making Sure Your Hierarchy and Your Counterparts’ Hierarchy are Working Together

- Introduce your hierarchy to your counterpart
- Learn about their hierarchy
- Build relationships at each level of the hierarchy
- Work through your counterpart
- Escalate issues as a last resort
Five Keys to Getting Clear Agreement

Communicate Effectively
Listen actively to team member’s voices to listen for “weak signals” and possible misunderstandings due to vocabulary or words chosen. If you detect a hesitance, follow up afterwards one-on-one. Make the implicit explicit – state dates clearly and reinforce them. Send written documents in advance, with history and context.

Request Feedback Proactively
Ask team members to email 5 key clarifying questions or critical issues that you need to know about. Give examples i.e. What holidays or vacations are coming up and how long will people be out? What infrastructure issues do I need to understand? Respond to these via email or during meetings with appreciation and by building a contingency plan when necessary.

Build Relationships
Make it safe to say "no". This means building a relationship away from the task, listening well, asking questions about the context and not being 'scary' or confrontational when you get negative news.
Quotes from the Field - FRANCE

In e-mails, North American project team members tend to confirm reception of e-mails & provide response dates & times. French may not confirm reception, although they are diligently working on detailed responses. Mutually agree upon how this communication difference will be handled to reduce frustration.

For example: “I’m lost in fog – can you give more details about the new process you suggest?” or “I understand that it’s a new way of doing things, but think of it as trying on a new jacket – and then deciding whether the style and color fits you.” OR “OK who will be our lighthouse, our guiding light for this part of the project?”

Make things concrete by using examples, stories, metaphors, visuals. This gives “color” to your voice and narrative.

A French “It’s OK!” means it’s very good (but stated in a not-so-positive way). This expression tends to be misunderstood by foreigners as meaning: “It’s mediocre and somewhat acceptable” but it’s actually the equivalent of a euphoric, North American: “That’s good/great!” Project Leaders need to teach team members not to get “stuck” on single words that could “color” the message; ask for clarification instead.
Agreement is a process in China, not a one-time event. It requires one to consistently return to the agreement to ensure it is still relevant and working. And the agreement is always within the context of a relationship so that if the relationship is maintained, then all things are possible and a solution will be found.
Quotes from the Field - INDIA

Getting Clear agreement in India is hinged to Accountability and Responsibility. Ensure that at the end of the discussion, there is no ambiguity in ownership of action items, and that there is a clear understanding of who is dependent on what to deliver their part. Have a follow through action plan.

Create excitement for the project/action that you are seeking agreement on, bringing them into the larger picture. Do listen for cues/words that may suggest a no

India, being a hierarchical and relationship oriented country, it is important to understand the power that you may or may not have in the relationship. For this purpose, make sure that you let the person know how important the job is, and determine whether they can do it by the allotted time. To verify post group meeting, in a one to one oral or written format, is important, and make sure to check in from time to time.
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✓ GlobeSmart Profile

✓ Quizzes and Case Studies of actual business scenarios

✓ Social Media where global business professionals share experiences
Communication Styles

Diversity factors
- Religious
- Linguistic
- Regional
- Socioeconomic
- Generational
- Gender

High context
Communication in India is high context, meaning a great deal of contextual information is known about the people with whom one interacts and does business. Indians will not usually state what is considered obvious.

Indirect
In India, direct statements are rare. Indians tend to tell you what you want to hear, especially if you are higher in position or not well known to them. Obscuring the truth through indirect statements is not seen as being evasive or untruthful. The tendency to talk around an issue without answering directly is especially true if an Indian would have to say "no" in response to a question or request.

Indian people try to avoid using the word "no." As a result, it is possible that Indians will agree to a request that they do not intend to honor. Or they may answer in the affirmative but be deliberately vague about any specific commitment. Thus, you are forced to look for other, more subtle clues that help you determine whether an Indian will follow through on a commitment.
Five Keys to Getting Clear Agreement

- Build Alignment
- Manage the Hierarchy
- Communicate Effectively
- Request Feedback Proactively
- Build Relationships
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