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A Paradigm for Business Communication across Cultures

Theoretical Highlights for Practice

跨文化商务沟通的范式研究

实践的理论精要

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内 容 简 介

本书构建有效的跨文化商务沟通理论模型，讨论企业商务战略、宏观社会文化、组织文化在构建企业沟通战略中的作用与影响，研究语言与文化在信息编码与解码过程中的作用，以及沟通中的有效语言策略和模糊语言策略。同时，本书结合理论模型，提出了有效的跨文化营销沟通战略、广告沟通战略和谈判沟通战略，并提供了提高沟通效率与效果的技能和方法。

Contents

Chapter 1 Defining a Paradigm for Business Communication across Cultures

Abstract Current business communication studies witness theoretical separation of communication theories from organizational strategies, culture, language, business functional activities and contextual factors whereas globalization requires that such separation and misunderstanding resulted in hereby should be surpassed to achieve effective and seamless communication among citizens in this global village. Therefore, this chapter defines all these elements first and thereby constructs an integrative and theoretical paradigm for business communication across cultures. This conceptual paradigm bridges the theoretical gaps between organizational strategies, culture, language, business functional areas, communication elements and process, and environmental factors. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach to identifying organic relations between all disciplines involves in with communication in global context of diverse cultures. The conceptual model constructed herewith defines the theoretical border of business communication across cultures and serves as a theoretical foundation of the whole book.

Keywords communication paradigm, business communication, cultures, language, cross cultural communication

The world is flat and we live in a global village (Friedman, 2007), where business activities are undertaken in multi-cultural context and business people are challenged with many culture shocks and conflicts. Shi & Wang (2014) identify eight major influential causes of culture shock, namely, business communication, language, individualism, collectivism, power distance, time orientation, religion, and tradition. They find that Chinese expatriates encountered some cultural shocks in international business context and were greatly affected by communication, language, religious and traditional issues. The study further reveals three major difficulties in the cross-cultural adaptation: poor adaptability of business communication, language barriers and heavy pressure from work duties. They point out that business communication becomes the top issue when doing business in global context. Inevitably, current business communication faces a challenge of how to understand culture, which offers a thinking framework to encode and decode messages communicated across country borders. There follows another challenge to communicate effectively in this global village, i.e.

the effective use of language as a communication tool to decode and encode messages received from other culture backgrounds. Yet, language is much more than just a communication tool. It is a thinking instrument as well as a communication tool. Moreover, business communication activities are initiated to realize business strategic intentions of global business game players and are restricted with legal regulations from home and host countries, international laws and international agreements. Therefore, business communication researches require an overarching framework to organically link together all such elements as business strategies, culture, language, legal regulations, and well-defined international business functions. In short, there is a necessity to link international business theories with communication theories to create a new paradigm for communication to carry out systematical business functions in multi-culture context.

To satisfy such necessity, this study develops the multidisciplinary linkage within an overarching paradigm for business communication in a context of diverse cultures. Overwhelming amount of literature on business communication reveals that business theories and functional activities, and cross cultural communication strategies have been separated from each other in the business communication studies. Studies in this field only focus on developing language skills in establishing intrapersonal relations in international business context. Therefore, most of academic articles and books on business communication fall into English writing, which has links with certain business functional activities in one way or another rather than in a systematical manner. In essence, they are English language studies. On the other hand, there are researches which are abstractly discussing communication theories on communication elements, process and so-called know-how for effective communication. These studies offer no organic and systematic linkage between culture and language with business functional areas either. Obviously, there is a necessity to define theoretical border of business communication in global cultural context.

1.1   Definition of Communication

This section defines communication from perspectives of both Chinese traditional culture and modern western studies.

1.1.1   Definition by Traditional Chinese Culture

Communication as a discipline can be traced back to Spring and Autumn Period of Warring States in East Zhou Dynasty. It is entitled as strategies for vertical and horizontal communication for political debates and argumentations to persuade

states to set up political alliances for survival. It is called Zongheng Strategies. The masters of Zongheng Strategies are Su Qin and Zhang Yi. The former practices such effective vertical communication strategies that he persuades six state into setting up an alliance to protect against Qing State while latter exercises so effective horizontal communication strategies that he helps Qing State to break down the alliance of six states. Zongheng Strategies are usually exercised in combination with The Art of War by Sun Zi. The focus of Zongheng Strategies is on specific skills for persuading, while that of The Art of War is on the overall strategies (Wang, 2013). The specific Zongheng strategies are as follows:

bǎihé fǎnyìng nèijiàn dǐxì fēiqián wǔhé chuāi mó quán móu
捭阖、反 应 、内 楗、抵戏、飞 箝 、忤合、 揣 、摩、 权 、 谋 、
jué fúyán
决、符 言 。

These systematic communication strategies go beyond any communication theories developed thereafter in terms of depth in thought and extension in practice. These strategies are extensively used in diplomatic and economic negotiation as well as in daily life of ordinary people. They help individuals develop effective verbal skill to develop harmonious personal relations which are beneficial to one's career development.[①]

1.1.2   Definitions by Modern Western Scholars

The term communication has been used in many ways for varied and often inconsistent purposes. Western scholars point out that there are 126 kinds of definitions of communication in the literature (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009). Sorting out these definitions is necessary for us to define well the communication in global business and culture context. Communication is the process in which information, ideas, and feelings are transmitted from person to another. That process involves not only the spoken and written words but also body language, personal mannerisms and styles, the surroundings that adds meaning to a message. The basis for communication is that an idea or message travels from sender through channel to receiver (Liu, 2007). Lustig & Koester (2007) define

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[①] This part is translated from the following. The source language is provided for readers' reference.
沟通作为一种学问可以追溯到中国古代春秋战国时期，即纵横术。它是一门关于是权谋策略及言谈辩论之技巧的学问。其代表作《鬼谷子》为纵横家所推崇，广泛运用于春秋战国时期的外交与政治联盟的构建。其杰出代表苏秦和张仪。前者凭其三寸不烂之舌，合纵六国，配六国相印，统领六国共同抗秦。而张仪又凭其谋略与游说技巧，将六国合纵土蹦瓦解，为秦国立下不朽功劳。《鬼谷子》精髓在于"潜谋于无形，常胜于不争不费"。它常与《孙子兵法》配合使用，前者侧重于总体战略，而《鬼谷子》则专于具体技巧。具体沟通策略包括：捭阖、反应、内楗、抵戏、飞箝、忤合、揣、摩、权、谋、决、符言。这一系统的沟通策略体系，无论是在深度还是广度上，远远超过后世的中文沟通理论。它被广泛运用于国家的外交、经济谈判等国家层面的利益获取，同时其所提出的言谈辩论策略也广泛运用于个体的日常生活中。言谈技巧也关系到一人之处世为人之得体与否，并因此构建广泛而有益的人际网络，促进个体的职业生涯发展。王光普. 2013. 读透《鬼谷子》. 北京：中国纺织出版社.

that Communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meaning. It has six characteristics, such as, symbolic, interpretive, transactional, context, process and shared meaning. The following are what is defined by Lustig and Koester (2007), which fits in with the purposes of this study.

Symbols are central to the communication process because they represent the shared meanings that are communicated. A symbol is a word, action or object that stands for or represents a unit of meaning. Meaning, in turn, is a perception, thought, or feeling that a person experiences. A message refers to the package of symbols used to create shared meanings. Communication is always an interpretive process, because whenever people communicate they must interpret the symbolic behaviors of others and assign significance to some of those behaviors in order to create a meaningful account of others' actions. Yet, people's behaviors are frequently interpreted symbolically, as an external representation of feelings, emotions, and internal states (Lustig & Koester, 2007). They are all defined by cultures, which work as communicative context. Therefore, communication is contextual. Communication takes place within a setting or situation called context, which is defined as a place and occasion where people meet, the social purpose for being together and the nature of the relationship. A context includes physical, social, and interpersonal settings within which messages are exchanged. Physical context includes the actual location of the integration, while social context refers to the widely shared expectations people have about the kinds of interaction that normally should occur given different kinds of social events (Lustig & Koester, 2007)

Communication is transactional. A transactional view holds that communicators are simultaneously sending and receiving messages at every instant that they are involved in conversations. Such view recognizes that the goal of communication is not merely to influence and persuade others but also to improve one's knowledge, to seek understanding, to develop agreements, and to negotiate shared meaning. It also recognizes that at any given instant, no one is just sending or just receiving messages, and therefore, there are no such entities as pure senders or pure receivers. Rather, all participants are simultaneously interpreting multiple messages at all moments (Lustig & Koester, 2007).

Communication is a process. A process is a sequence of many distinct but interrelated steps in which people, relationships, activities, objects, and experiences can be described in a dynamic manner rather than in static terms. Viewing communication as a process implies that things are changing, moving, developing, and evolving. Therefore, identical experience can take on different meanings at different stages of the communicative process (Lustig & Koester, 2007).

The outcomes of communication are shared meanings created. The first outcome is that the communicators understand what others try to communicate, and have similar or shared interpretations about what the messages actually mean. The second outcome is reaching agreement on particular issues. Agreement

means that each communicator not only understands the other's interpretations but also holds a view that is similar. The interpretative and transactional nature of communication suggests that correct meanings are created and shared by groups of people as they participate in the ordinary and everyday activities that form the context for common interpretations (Lustig & Koester, 2007).

1.2   Purposes and Principles of Communication

1.2.1   Purposes of Communication

Communication is usually modeled as a process involving individuals and organizations from different cultures for different purposes. Individuals are always communicators on behalf of their organizations, thus the purposes to communicate involve goals of both individuals and organizations. However, these communicators send messages mainly to perform certain business functions on behalf of their organizations. So the purposes of communication should, to a large extent, be related to the goals of organizations. These purposes can be classified into task-oriented and relationship-oriented categories. The task-oriented functions include instructing, directing, informing, reporting, eliciting information, opinions and authorization, generating enthusiasm, resolving conflicts, analyzing situations and problems, motivating, negotiating, selling, persuading, agreeing, granting requests, proposing, transmitting other messages (documents). This task-oriented communication follows the goals of the organization.

In contrast, the purposes to contribute to nurturing relationships include: praising, expressing concern or sympathy, encouraging, coaching and mentoring, thanking, rejoicing with the receiver, warning about possible problems, guiding away from pitfalls, apologizing, expressing hope, congratulating (Beamer & Varner, 2003). All these purposes involve the personal goals of individuals communicating.

Effective communicators are those who can keep balance between task orientation and relation orientation. The priority of task orientation to relation orientation or vise visa is really cultural dependency. Western communicators practice task oriented communication much more than relation oriented one emphasizing efficiency of doing things while Chinese communicators attach importance to relation oriented communication rather than task oriented one focusing on building up harmonious interpersonal relations when performing tasks.

The purposes are the reasons for business communication. They exist in all business cultures, although goals vary. Agreement across cultures about how the purposes are accomplished is rare. However, it involves the way messages are organized and encoded. Due to the difference in languages and cultures, the