

CULTURAL CODE SWITCHING

My research on cultural adaptation has focused on the challenges and outcomes associated with long-term adaptation to a foreign culture. Little has focused on the dynamics of cultural adaptation within single interactions, which are the building blocks of these long-term patterns. I fill this gap by introducing the concept of cross-cultural code-switching and providing an account of the psychological challenges people face in successfully adapting their behaviour in foreign cultural interactions. In the last years, the tide of globalization has reached an unprecedented degree as firms increasingly expand beyond their national borders. The success and failure of these companies is dependent on more than just management of economic and legal barriers but also cultural ones. Firms are increasingly aware of the necessity of intercultural communication. Recognition of the importance of developing intercultural skills is closely tied to the need of the corporations to succeed globally and the demand of managers with the capability of interacting with people from countries other than their own. With a globally interdependent economy, differences in cultural traits and backgrounds often cause misunderstandings and unintentional sights. Clearly, the diversity and dynamism of today's market place calls for managers with diverse skills to lead teams beyond national boundaries (Gudykunst, 2005; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Landis, Benett & Benett, 2005).

According to Jandt, characteristics of an effective communicator are: "Self awareness (using knowledge about yourself to deal with difficult situations), self-respect (confidence in what you think, feel and do), interaction (how effectively you communicate with people), empathy (being able to see things from different points of view), adaptability (how fast you can adjust to new situations and norms), certainty (the ability to do things opposite to what you feel), initiative (being open to new

situations), and acceptance (being tolerant or accepting unfamiliar things)". Cross-cultural code switching competency is an indicator of an effective communicator. Specifically, encompasses more or less the above named characteristics and expands on the role of emotions when switching. Molinsky's model of psychological toll illustrates the determinants of cross-cultural code-switching and the psychological challenges faced by an individual during performance. The model provides an excellent foundation for investigating how international organizations can tailor trainings for global leaders.

In this paper, I refer to global leaders as expatriates in management positions. A case study on the movie *Outsourced* exemplifies how organizations can foster and create leaders who can cope with the complexities of cross-border relations.

Cultural knowledge is gained from cross-cultural training or experiences in living in a foreign culture. For individuals to be successful in code switching, they must have knowledge and understanding of the foreign culture's norms and values. There are varieties but related types of knowledge. Namely: linguistic competency – 1) how cultures compose their messages (Chen & Starosta, 1996); 2) reading, speaking and interpretation of the foreign culture (Redmond, 2000); 3) ability to interpret and predict behaviour of foreign culture; and, 4) knowledge of effective communication in the business context. The higher the level of one's cultural knowledge, the easier it is to perform an effective switch.