

Intercultural communication and ICT in the management of multicultural organizations

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Abstract

Ah millal see oli ah millal
mis keeles me teineteist viimati kuulsime?

When was it and in which language
we recently heard each other?

These final lines in famous Estonian pop ballade “Tunnete keel” (Language of feelings) from 1980s, performed by Kare Kauks always remind me when I see people who are working towards the same goal but act in complete disharmony. You can well speak in same language but not understand each other at all.

In my presentation I will focus on intercultural communication aspects and issues related to management of multicultural organizations. For last 20 years I have worked actively in research and adoption of information and communications technologies to the daily processes of different organizations, governments and societies.

We have been working with the same technology around the globe, addressing similar goals and in most cases speaking the same language but the outcome of these activities differ a lot. It's not language that matters in these cases but understanding the culture of practices - social, cultural, political and regulatory aspects. “I'll be late” is different length of time in different latitudes and we accept that as part of intercultural contextual communication.

We carry different meaning to the similar phenomena also depending on our professional domain. The word “information” has different meaning in international diplomacy, military operations, educational environments or data communication. When adopting ICT in education we should invest more time in understanding the common goals - otherwise we will wonder one day as the pop ballad asked:

“When was it and in which language
We recently heard each other?”

Paper

I am truly honored for this opportunity to speak in front of such and outstanding audience - professionals dedicated to better understanding each other. I would focus my keynote on falling walls between the different domains of knowledge and competence creation and dissemination and would love to look on ICT enabling aspects of this among the others.

Two nights ago, visiting the concert of famous Spanish band MARLANGO at Catalan Music Palace in Barcelona the two only persons who did not know the next song band just started was me and my wife. MUSIC, among other arts as human expressions has also been cross-boarder and cross-cultural.

Among the first questions we exchanged with participants at EUNOM symposium was - how is your economy doing? It seems that ECONOMY is also cross-boarder and cross-cultural issue.

ICT

Let's come back to one phenomena that seems to connect us more than anything else in mankind history - information and communication technologies. There is great hope in ICT embedded to our development agendas worldwide on enriching individuals, organizations and societies worldwide. There is also as much broken promises in ICT about it's ability to deliver the hope. Human beings tend to overestimate the short term impact of technological innovation, including ICT in short term and underestimate it's impact in long term. Present hype around tablet based e-learning tools and opportunities is comparable to what Edison proposed in early years of 20th century on east coast of United States when cinematography was introduced and new dimensions of mass learning was introduced. Cinematography never became the educational technology but it certainly has made strong impact on the culture of all societies worldwide. Well known trivia asks - name the biggest University on Earth.

The answer is either *Zhōngyāng guǎngbò diànshì dàxué - China National Television and Radio University with almost 3 million students and 100.000 staff* or Indira Gandhi National University with over 3 million students and 800.000 postgraduate students. Both of the were established before Internet era - 1979 and 1985 respectively and pay huge attention to distant learning enabling technologies (radio and TV), cross-language and cross-cultural content.

Recent Past

In 1997 ZDNET University hit the market with buffet price of USD 4.95 per month you can eat (sorry - learn) as much as you can. Online. No classroom, no tight schedule, no formalities. ZDU was "instructor lead online learning-

community". Hype or reality but at the moment zdu.com and zdu.net are domains for sale, global online learning is where global online trading - polarized among the huge number of players and still dominated by "brick and mortar" players. Serious education and serious business have smell of sweat and touch of brick. Why is it so?

Ziff Davis founded in 1927 in [Chicago](#) by [William B. Ziff, Sr.](#) and [Bernard G. Davis](#) is an American publisher and Internet company. It was. Throughout most of its history, it was a publisher of hobbyist magazines, often ones devoted to expensive, advertiser-rich hobbies such as cars, photography, and electronics. However, since 1980, Ziff Davis has primarily published computer and technology related magazines, and its growing number of websites, spun off from its magazines, have established Ziff Davis as an Internet Information company that filed for bankruptcy in 2008.

Story of Ziff Davis is just another in the history of technology, entertainment, media and education where short life cycle of technology collides with long life cycles of education.

LIFE CYCLES

Good moment to thing about the life cycles and time on market of the technologies in living societies.

LISTENING AND UNDERSTANDING

Ah millal see oli ah millal
mis keeles me teineteist viimati kuulsime?

When was it and in which language
we recently listened each other?

These final lines in famous Estonian pop ballade "Tunnete keel" (Language of feelings) from 1980s, performed by Kare Kauks always remind me when is see people who are working towards the same goal but act in complete disharmony. You can well speak in same language but not understand each other at all. Listening is the prerequisite for understanding - in information rich and noisy environment not only the message but also the context gets lost.

For last 20 years I have worked actively in research and adoption of information and communications technologies to the daily processes of different organizations, governments and societies.

I have attended to the opening ceremonies of the websites dedicated to the revolutionary change in the SME value chain, solutions that are promised to

deliver similar returns on investment and changes in productivity than original markets. Yes, there are superb examples of success and yes - there are even more great examples of failure.

Learning from success, best practices and learning from the mistakes - your own mistakes is fundamental question on innovation capacity and management.

There are no shortcuts when you want to establish innovation culture in your organization. You have to take your own learning curves and manage your failures and those that learn from mistakes and failures and survive are in the end the success stories - worth nothing but admiration for the rest of us.

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