

KEY FACTORS OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Communication difficulties in an international context often stems from fundamental differences in cultural values. Communications in Latin American, Mediterranean and Asian cultures are often embedded in as much facial expressions and voice tones vis-à-vis words in Germanic cultures. The value of time and emotional feelings also act as bridges to levels of communication in many cultures around the world.

Keywords: Business Communication, Latin America

INTRODUCTION

Personal and institutional communications in business, government, formal social events and academia in Latin America are very formal. They reflect the Iberian roots of the cultures of the Latin American countries, as well as several aspects of the Latin American societies, like their rigid socioeconomic structures, acute economic inequalities and respect for elders. A common manifestation of the formality of the oral and written communication in Latin America is the use of the *usted* or *vos* forms, which are the formal versions of the singular of the second person. Also, common manifestations of this formality are the use of academic titles and the use of the social titles, which express reverence: *don* and *doña*. The formality in the communications, oral and written, is *de rigueur* when the communication goes from the lower to the upper levels. The formality is also *de rigueur* when the communication is between two individuals or two groups, of the same socioeconomic level, but who have not yet developed a comfortable relationship. When the communication is from the upper levels to the lower levels, it may not be as formal and could, in some cases, be mildly or visibly disrespectful. Due to its formalities, oral and written communication in Latin America is never as direct as it is in Northern Europe and the U.S. Among the Latin Americans, there is full awareness that this slows down the pace of development of relationships across society, as well as the pace of operations in business and government. Yet, the Latin Americans are also fully aware that in their societies, it is better to go slow and spend more time getting to know the partners in any kind of a relationship, than to accelerate the pace of the business or social relationship and increase the risk of having to use the legal system; which, in general, is quite inefficient and can be manipulated by the person or persons in the relationship who have more power. Non-verbal communication, body language, is more animated and more visible but, in general, less significant than in Northern Europe and the U.S. For Latin Americans, besides gestures and the tone of voice, body language also includes the presentation; that is, for Latin Americans an important part of body language is attire and personal grooming, especially among women. With the exception of Venezuela, all Latin American nations have been slowly but steadily increasing their participation in the global economy. This

participation, albeit still small, has been enough to start inducing Latin Americans to adopt practices that facilitate their communication with non-Latin Americans. Among these practices is the learning of foreign languages, including Mandarin. Despite these efforts, oral and written communications in the Latin American nations will continue to be, in the foreseeable future, far more formal and less direct than in Northern Europe and the U.S. This is assured by the absence of economic and social policies that, through economic and social progress, would effectively erode the rigid socioeconomic structure of these societies.

Key Elements of the Latin American Culture

There are marked cultural differences between the 19 countries of Latin America. However, these 19 nations have few very noticeable cultural similarities that also have a strong influence in the oral and written communications of the Latin American societies. Three of these important and very visible cultural similarities are: Respect for elders and a social and individual life centered on the family [1]; rigid, racially influenced, socioeconomic structures; and highly educated upper classes but poorly educated majorities [2]. Also, due to limited economic progress, big differences in education and deeply rooted, albeit denied racist convictions, there is very little social mobility and very little interaction between the classes. Hence, perspectives and views on economic, social and political issues are not exchanged between members of the different classes. This means that communications between members of the social classes are, in general, limited to work situations. The land of "*mañana*", the land where there is no need to do today what can be done tomorrow; the land where punctuality is optional. This is one of the most typical stereotypes of Latin America. While there is some true in this stereotype, it also true that due to globalization, Latin Americans are not as relaxed about deadlines, schedules and in general about the misuse of time as they used to be.

CONCLUSIONS

Globalization has increased the awareness in Latin societies that their oral and written communications need to be less rigid, more agile, especially in the area of business. So far, however, this growing awareness has not generated a visible softening of this rigidity. The persistence of this rigidity has one solid reason: The economic and social policies that would lessen the acute inequalities, social and economic, across the Latin societies have not been implemented. Thus, until such policies are implemented, progress in making the oral and written communication in Latin America more agile would be quite slow.

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