

When Culture Becomes Capital: Intercultural Communication in Global IT

Emmanuel Echeverria

Lancaster University, UK

Email: e.echeverria@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract:

In an increasingly globalized economy, the Information Technology (IT) sector operates as a critical site of cross-cultural collaboration, where geographically dispersed teams must coordinate in real time across linguistic and cultural boundaries. While technical expertise is often prioritized, this paper argues that Intercultural Communication functions as a strategic driver of organisational performance and value creation rather than a mere “soft skill.”

Drawing over 17 years of industry experience, this study examines two contrasting organisational contexts: a Mexican technology firm and a Swiss multinational enterprise operating across multiple regions. Adopting a comparative, practitioner-informed approach, the analysis identifies recurring intercultural challenges, including different approaches to leadership and negotiation, culturally embedded ways to conflict resolution, and misalignments rooted in high- and low-context communication styles. These dynamics are further shaped by differences in cultural values, such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, which influence decision-making, communication flows, and team coordination. When neglected, such differences generate hidden inefficiencies that constrain collaboration, delay execution, and weaken client and supplier relationships.

In response, the paper proposes a novel, practice-based model of Intercultural Communication grounded in three core principles: active listening, empathy and trust. This framework operates through structured communication practices, escalation mechanisms, and culturally adaptive decision-making processes. Preliminary implementation within global IT operations suggests that this approach enables organizations to turn intercultural complexity into a form of strategic capital, enhancing collaboration, fostering innovation, and strengthening service delivery.

Finally, the study explores the economic implications of Intercultural Communication, positioning it within broader debates on globalisation, competition, and communication. It argues that effective Intercultural Communication contributes to measurable business outcomes, including reduced project churn, faster integration into international markets, and increased client retention. By reframing culture as a productive organisational resource, this paper highlights how Intercultural Communication can function as a source of sustainable competitive advantage in the global IT industry.

Keywords: intercultural communication, culture, globalization