# Effective Cross-Cultural Understanding

Bilal Babadagi

# INTRODUCTION

"Culture is the pattern of taken-for-granted assumptions
about how a given collection of people should think, act, and
feel as they go about their daily affairs"
-Joynt & Warner, 1996

Around 600.000 of international students and more than 80.000 (Australian Bureau of Statics, 2016) long-time arrivals, refugees and settlements move to Australia annually (Australian Bureau of Statics, 2016) . These all people from 195 different countries come with their own cultures and create an enormous diversity in Australia. However, this diversity comes up with a significant problem which is really hard to address properly.

Cultural diversity creates a difficulty as the mindset and the communication way of the people from distinctive culture are completely different. Even if the people speak the same language their perception from a conversation or any communication with other people from different nations may differs for each other, because the meaning of the words, gestures and behavior may differ. Thus, prejudices and ethnocentrism may rise as a result of the conversations due to the cultural differences beside of miscommunication and misunderstanding and this forms cultural barriers among the people. Moreover, this may destroy some cultural norms because some people feel that they need to change their communication coming from their cultures and adapt themselves to other people. Therefore, people who moved to Australia lately may have communication fear with being demotivated, stressed or even felt humiliated because of misunderstanding.

# SECTORS

The miscommunication caused by the cultural differences negatively effect three main sectors.

## 1- Business



Since the lack of effective communication in a workplace may cause demotivation of the employees or less efficiency of processes.

## 2- Education



For the new international students, the misunderstanding in the communication may make them stressed and reduce their self-confidence.

## 3- Social Life



Miscommunication in the society may result in demoralization and create communication fear for the indivuduals

# EXAMPLES

Misunderstanding due to cultural differences is not only in verbal, but also non-verbal. When the body language is considered, many types of gestures (hand or head) mean dinstictively for each culture.

## 1- Verbal



As an example, in an international business, a manager from USA may call one of his Brazilian employee and says "I need the task soon", the Brazilian employee may perceive it as he has at least one more day to prepare and mail it.

# 1- Non-Verbal

Some differences in body language around the world:

## HEAD

Nodding your head generally means agreement or approval.

But **Bulgarians** and **Greeks**, for example, are known for their unusual manner of saying yes and no: Nodding up and down signifies a negative.

## EYES

Good eye contact is expected in the **West**. Strong eye contact is most notable in **Spain**, **Greece**, and **Arab** countries.

**Finns** and **Japanese** are embarrassed by another's stare, and seek eye contact only at the beginning of a conversation.

## EARS

The **Portuguese** tug their earlobes to indicate tasty food, but in **Italy** this gesture has sexual connotations,

...and in **Spain** it means someone is not paying for their drinks.

## NOSE

A hearty nose blow into a handkerchief is typical in the **West**, while public nose blowing is frowned upon by the **Japanese**.

Tapping your nose means "confidential" in **England**, but "watch out" in **Italy**.

## LIPS

In some cultures — **Filipino**, **Native American**, **Puerto Rican**, and many **Latin American** cultures — people use their lips to point, instead of a finger. In the **West**, people often kiss when they meet or when they say goodbye; in many **Asian** countries, it is considered too intimate of an action to be displayed in public.

# AIMS

- To prevent misunderstanding in the communication between the people from different cultures

- To make people feel more comfortable into communication

- To protect cultural norms having a possibility to be destroyed

- To create more effective communication among the people in education, business and social life

- To engage people from different culture to social life

- To establish more welfare in the Australian Society

# DESIGN PROPOSAL

To accomplish the aimed purposes, I want to make a design which allows the people to learn other cultural differences in the communication and train them to make a practice. Since the issue has a considerable amount of sensibility, it requires deep research for choosing the strategy, approach and tool.

# Finding out the Differences

## Secondary Research

- How many refugees do settle to Australia , annually
- Which cities to they generally prefer to settle
- Determine the countries from where they move
- Determine their occupation and Profession

## Surveys

To local people and refugees who are related to education, business and society
Ask:
- The difficulties they have while communicating with each other
- The possible source of the problem
- Which one of other nations you feel comfortable to communicate

## Consulting the Experts

- How could it be more effective
- Which one of these differences should be taught
- Which methods of training and practices should be used for the campaign

Use their findings and observational results

## Determination

- The time frame of the design
- Necessities, requirements and limitations for the campaign
- The channels (media, face to face, etc) to run the campaign
- The tools (role play, books, catalogues, etc) to reinforce the teachings

## Demo

- Start with a small group of refugees
- Observe the changes in their educatonal, business and social life
- Evaluate the findings

## Rebuilt and Develop

- All requirements and the limitations
- The tools
- The channels

## Implemention

- Teach and make them practice
- Encourge the people to share their cultural differences
- Inform the educational, social and business organization about the findings
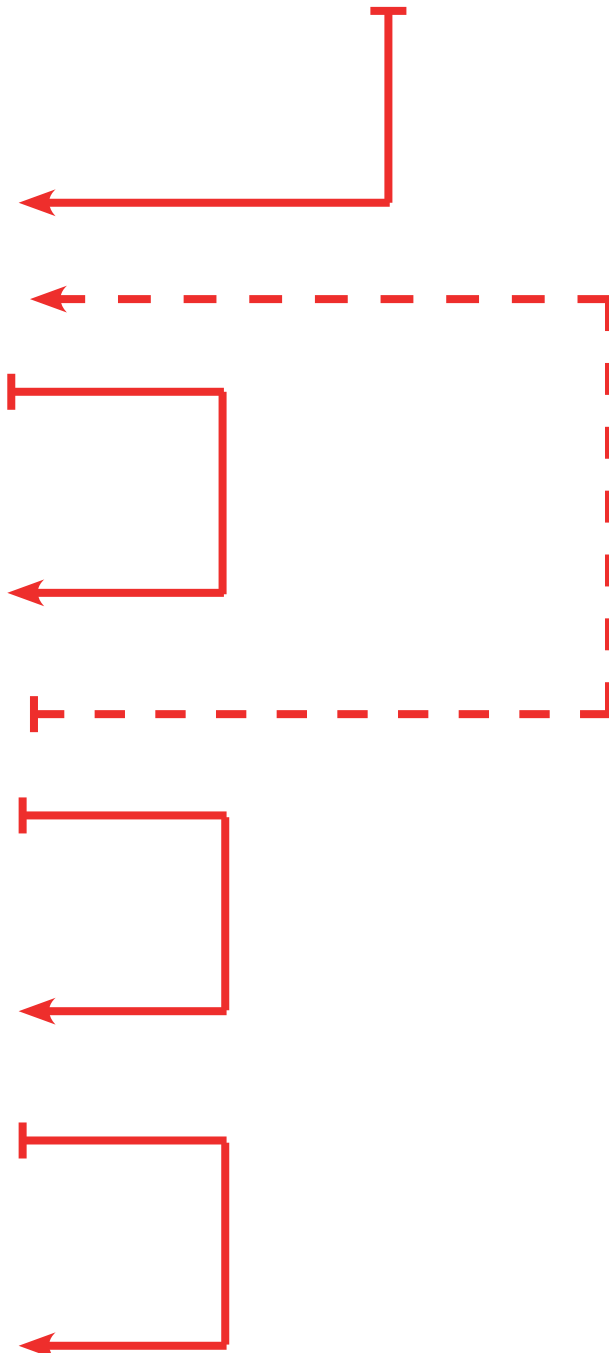
# DESIGN STRATEGY

New people in Australia from different nations has been accustomed to learn and adapt the local communication way to interact with other people. However, as mentioned, until they become accustomed it, their phycology, social interaction willingness and cultural communication ways could be harmed. Rather what has been happening so far, they could be learnt new way to communicate each other. Therefore, they need to **unlearn** the keep the track as always for cultural adaptation in communication when they move to Australia at the first time, and **learn** new way which allows not only the settlements and refugees but also the local people to understand each other regarding to their own culture.

As a design strategy, 'Relearning' is chosen. With the combination of unlearning the accustomed way and relearning a new way, the people are brought in **avoiding** being misunderstood, **demoralized** and demotivated; **protecting** cultural communication ways rather than damaging the cultural norms, and creating welfare and stronger bond in the society and higher efficiency and motivation in the business and education.

## Unlearn
Using own cultural words and gestures when communicating with someone from different cultures

**+**

## Learn
Other cultural differences in communication not to misunderstand or misrepresent yourself

**=**

## Avoid
Misunderstandings, demoralizing and demotivating

**+**

## Protect
Cultural communication ways

**+**

## Create
Welfare and stronger bond in the society. Peace, higher efficiency and motivation in education and business

# DESIGN TOOL

With respect to effectiveness, the tool used for the implementation of the design has a paramount importance. To achieve the design purposes, it is required that to have an efficient tool for the people to teach them about the different cultures. In order to determine the best one, four different tools which are commonly used for informing and teaching people are chosen and evaluated with respect to the informativity, cost, time, reproductivity and updateability.

Since the effectiveness and the amount of information provided to the people refer to 'Informativity', it is an important factor for a tool to teach. Cost and time required to implement the design are essential factors for all product or services. The cultural differences are limitless and it is impossible to teach all of them to the people. The information meant to be given to the people must be eliminated properly and accumulated adequately. It must be able to be updated with the new information produced. Therefore, two keys are also significant for the tool decision: Reproductivity and updateability.

According to the chart, 'training' has the highest score after the evaluation regarding to the features. Scores of the informativity and updateability are much higher compared to the others, because the new information can be easily feed into it, the changing in the implementation can be done quicker and the transmitting the information is more effective through 'training' compared to publishing a bulletin or brochure and realising an interactive app.
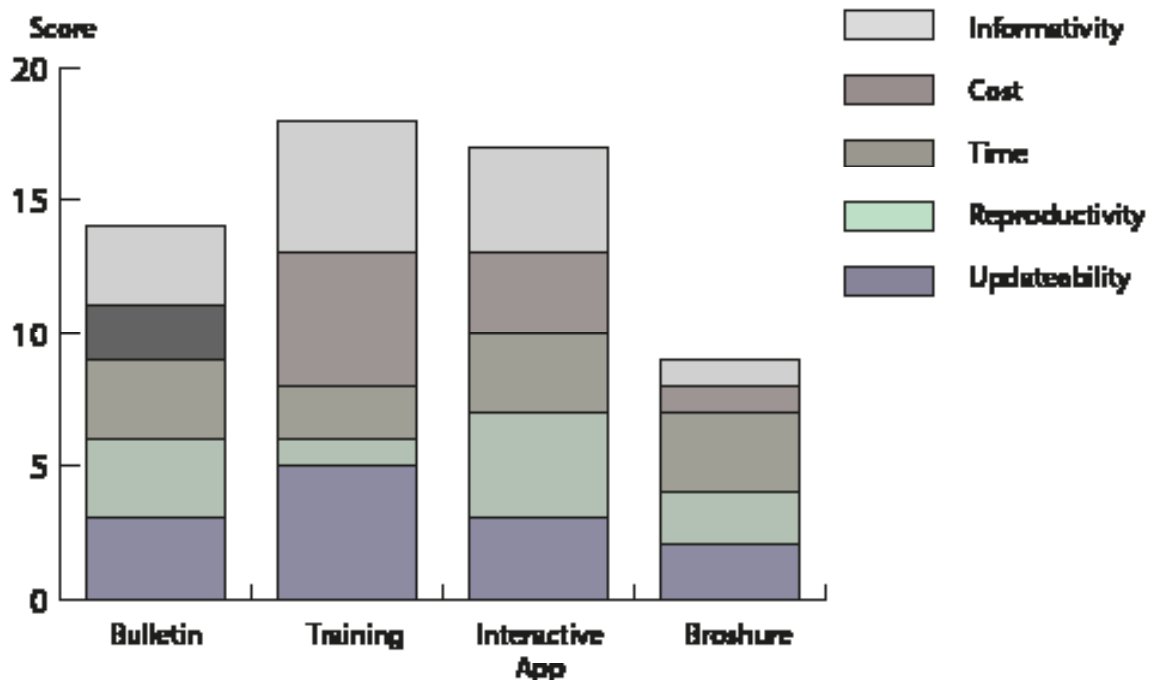
# DESIGN APPROACH

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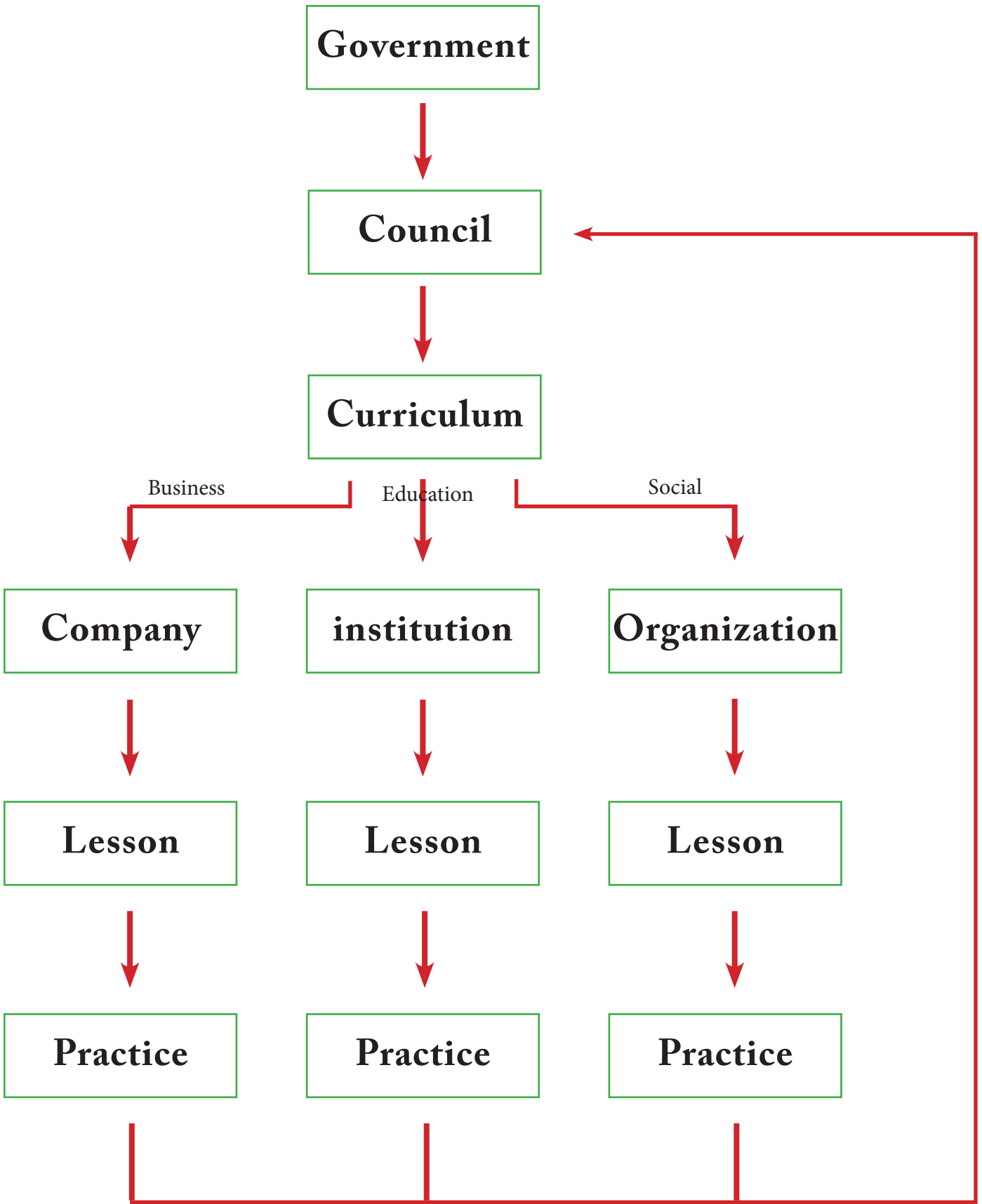
# DESIGN PROCEDURE

The training made up of two different parts. First one is lesson and the second one is practice. Not only the people moved Australia as refugee, student or long time arrival but also the local people are required to be trained, because the local people are also definitely suffering from these cultural differences in their workplace or daily life.

In order to establish a proper education, all processes in the flow chart given the previous page must be completed. Since the all communication words and ways are different for each business, education and social life, the classes for each must be executed and the curriculum for each sectors must be prepared separately. After the researches and the other processes are done, an authorized council is established by the government which manage the classes and decide which one of the cultural differences will be taught in which sector (business, education and social).



After the curriculum is determined by the authorized council, the lessons start for each sectors separately. The foundation can be found for each sectors from different source. For business, the companies may contribute to the lessons, in fact many companies have been giving these kind of lessons within the workplace. For the education, the educational intuitions may supply fund for the training since they want their students to be more effective in the classes and their social life to get more popularity with these students' accomplishments and their word of mouth. For the social life, there are many cultural non-profit organizations and some governmental organizations executing many projects for the benefit of the other cultures or the people from different nations. These organizations would probably support this design.

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With the curriculum determined, the lessons will start for the people. Each class will include around 25 people to be more effective which has been already followed by the educational intuitions in Australia. For the business, the class time will be organized by the company. On the other hand, each international student is involved to an orientation program by their educational institutions and this takes 5 days. For these students, 2 days of training about the other cultures are interpreted as enough in these orientation days, because the students who just arrived to the country shouldn't be bored with all other staff but helped them to cope with the cultural shock they experience whenever they arrive with the training. Besides, since these students are expected to speak English enough, their understanding of the cultural differences in communication will be quick. However, for the refugees and the settlements who are not related to neither business nor the education, the class time must be longer, because their English may not be enough.

After the class, the participants will attend to practice groups. People from different nations are teamed up as 15 – 20 members. They will organize weekly meetings during 2 months to practice what they have learnt from the class and share their own knowledge and cultural differences with each other. The meeting will be done with the investigation of a supervisor.

Within the class and the practice, the lecturers and the supervisors take note that they learnt from the participants as a difference in the other cultures or the problems they have face with in order to report it as a feedback to the authorized council. After the council evaluated the information and feedbacks accumulated, they will update the curriculum and proceed it. The reason to update the curriculum always is make it more efficient, because there could be some useless information which is taught to the participants or there is a lack of an important information which is given by a participant. Therefore, elimination of these all information can be done and determined which of them is more beneficial for the participants.

# COMPARISON WITH OTHER PROJECTS

There are some projects and experiments aimed the same purpose executed in different areas and countries beside of Australia. However, these all projects are different from the design that I want to make, because these projects are generally designed for a business and creating more effective communication in the workplace is aimed. There are also many training program executed by the companies for the employers and the managers to solve the misunderstanding program. With the training programs, they are able to make their workers more socail and motivated for their job. Therefore, they can increase their efficiency and show their full potential. On the other hand, in my design, the communication barrier due to cultural differences is aimed to solve for not just only the business but also the education and social communities. This is the biggest goal differing my project from the others. Moreover, since it is aimed for the other sectors, it would be easy to find support for the implementation of the design.

The main projects and studies are listed below:

**1- Managing Cultural Diversity, Training Program Resource Manual by Australian Multicultural Foundation and Robert Bean Consulting**

**2- Cross Cultural Training by Victoria Interpreting and Translating Services**

**3- Guidelines to Overcome Cultural Barriers by Coping with the Power Distance for the Successful Project Implementation in China by Student Umeå School of Business**

**4- The Impact of Language Barrier & Cultural Differences on Restaurant Experiences:**
**A Grounded Theory Approach by The School of Hospitality Management, The Pennsylvania State University**

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# Research Journal for Effective Cross-Cultural Understanding

The post "How to Overcome Language and Cultural Barriers in the Workplace" by Mac McIntire, who is the President of Innovative Management Group, in LinkedIn addresses the problem caused by language barrier between managers and employees from different nations which comes up with a difficulty to manage, expressing the expectations, or give a feedback about performance to those whom you cannot communicate in different way. McIntire also suggests some techniques and hints based on his knowledge and experiences to cope with the problem. McIntire points out that some of the employees can't demonstrate their full potential because of cultural differences and some of them may manipulate the manager by claiming a failure due to their cultural differences. He gives an example that illustrates the problem. Once McIntire was irritated by one of his new employer because she didn't correct him even if she knew he was wrong. McIntire asked her the reason why she never interfered, and she replied this was because of their culture. According to her cultural rule, a woman never disagrees with a man, elder or superior. When he learnt that, he decided to change his expectations. The hints advised for the managers by McIntire are determining which cultural differences can be acceptable in workplace and which are not, identifying whether or not you can reasonably accommodate the cultural difference, determining how best to accommodate the cultural difference, learn about other cultures not to be surprised when they face with a different cultural communication skill and asking your employees for insight into how best to manage them. He also indicates that some employees hide themselves behind their culture and manipulate the situation to their advantages when the orders don't suit their books. According to him, this must be also prevented to create a workplace with high efficient.

Misunderstanding due to cultural differences in communication may cause many paramount problems such as depressing, demotivating, demoralization and even humiliation for the people who are from different nations. These may effect three sectors: Education, Business and Social life. In the reading, it is pointed out that how considerable the problem is for the business and what can be done to handle them. When the example given by McIntire is considered, it can be revealed that there is a massive possibility for many other situations that brings in decrease in efficient of staff due to the cultural communication differences. This issue has significance especially for the international companies in multicultural countries, because they employee many of people from diverse culture. The motivation and moralization is one of the most important factor for the companies to provide high efficiency of their employees, and thus, profit. Therefore, it is really essential to determine which cultural behavior can be accommodated in the workplace which cannot. In relation to the third suggestion given by McIntire, revealing the best way to accommodate the cultural differences could be complicated, since some cultures group-centric instead of individually focused and it may be hard to determine a particular and standard way to communicate. Rather, it would be easier to make the people adapt to the way that has been followed. As the last two clues, learning about the other cultures and the asking the employees for insight are the best way to create a healthier communicative community in the workplace and this is what my project actually aims. However, rather than reading many books and searching for the other cultures on internet and trying to learn employees' experiences about the communication difficulties caused by cultural differences, it would be more efficient to teach the people and train them about the different cultures besides encourage them to participate with their cultural communication differences with a class environment which is the

combination of these two clues. Therefore, all employees would communicate more effectively with each other and their managers and the information about these differences would be accumulated continuously and can be elected, updated and standardized for the following lessons. For the small companies, it is easy to implement this design and thus, all effectiveness of the workers can be improved with better communication skills. On the other hand, although these companies are able to adapt their employees from different culture into general language anyway by investments on educating and training them, it is not so straightforward for the sector of education and social life that the people can be adapted simply. There are many more considerations for these two sectors for the implementation of design to acquire effective communication, because these factors are more sensitive. The possible issues that can appear in the design and implementation processes are these that some people may not want to spend more time to the class and trainings because they may think that there is no social or economical profit and no foundation can be found and maybe government may not support. Even though these possible issues make it a bit more complicated, these interpretations allowed me to approach the situation with more sensitive and helped me to find powerful solutions.


**Bilal Babadagi**