



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

This case study was written as a part of the Erasmus+ Project Grant ID: 2019-1-UK01-KA203-061672)



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS?

A Phone call from French Colleague (Renard) . Emre was answering...

Renard:

- *Hi Emre, I hope you are well. I'm very disappointed as I learned that you have already communicated all the details of the issue with the customer. Igor called me yesterday. I told him that we were currently working on the problem and we were going to inform them; however, he said that they have already been informed about the issue by your side. What is going on? Have we confirmed the problem? No! How can you share such information with the customer without our approval?*

Emre:

- *Okay, Renard, calm down. I wasn't aware that the issue was forwarded to the client. I will find out the details of the situation and call you back.*

Renard:

- *Come on, how could you not know? Aren't you the department manager?*

Emre:

- *Okay, Renard. Please calm down. We'll soon find out what happened.*

Renard:

- *I know exactly what has happened. What's done is done.*

Emre and Renard were two managers working for *LEOVA*. It is a global automotive supplier headquartered in France. The multi-national company has three production plants in Turkey/Bursa and one Research & Development Center, including a Design Center, meeting the highest quality standards and global OEM quality requirements. The Turkish unit produce clutch, wiper, air conditioning and electrical systems in the automotive supply industry. They have been operating for the past 30 years, with 60% of their products being exported, mainly to Europe. Emre has been the Head of the Research and Development Center for the last ten years. He was at the top of the R&D activities for the Turkey location and led many international projects working with their foreign partners.

Emre works with thirty-six highly competent engineers in his team. He trusted each of them so much that he gave the team high autonomy in their decisions. Together they had overcome many complicated projects. The team had just completed a project in Russia, which they carried



out jointly with their French colleagues. However, just after they finished the Project, a problem occurred. The team in Turkey had been working on the issue with their French colleagues. Finally, the Turkish team found out that the issue was to do with a problem with the assembly of parts. The related customer in Russia was also pushing Turkey to learn about it. Thus, when the Turkish team found out the problem, they didn't hesitate to share it with the client directly. However, that morning Emre had the call from Renard. He was angry about the direct communication of the problem with the customer. He also stated that they hadn't officially confirmed the leading cause of the problem yet, so it should not have been reported to the customer in this way. Emre's team thought it was right to openly and directly discuss the issue with the customer, however Renard disagreed.

Tensions between the French and Turkish parties increased in the following days. While Emre was trying to explain and persuade the customer from one side, he was also trying to relieve the tension with Renard. Emre thought, no matter what happened, they had to act together with France, calm the customer and complete this Project. However, he found Renard on the opposite side supporting the customer rather than working with them. Emre thought that it was not fair. He felt as if they were not a partner in the same Project.

Questions

- ✓ *What is the main problem in this case?*
- ✓ *What is the difference between the two teams (Turkish-French) in terms of communication style?*
- ✓ *Do you think that different working styles cause problems between cross-cultural partners? How can one cope with these differences?*
- ✓ *Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?*
- ✓ *What do you think about Renard's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Renard?*
- ✓ *What do you think about Emre's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Emre?*

Recommended Reading

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You cantake it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125.



Arora, R., & Rangnekar, S. (2015). Relationships between emotional stability, psychosocial mentoring support and career resilience. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 11(1), 16-33.

Bajaj, B., Gupta, R. & Sengupta, S. (2019). Emotional stability and self-esteem as mediators between mindfulness and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20, 2211-2226.

Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2001). Emotional stability as a major dimension of happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31(8): 1357-1364.



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS? – TEACHING GUIDE

1. Synopsis

The case happened in the R&D department of a multinational company in the automotive supply industry. There was a problem with one of the company projects in Russia. Turkish and French colleagues were working together on a solution to the problem. The Turkish unit found the problem and decided that it should be communicated to the customer directly; however the French team found this way of communication very inappropriate. A significant conflict has occurred between the two partners.

2. Teaching Strategy and Teaching Objectives

Students /learners will be able to:

- ✓ Understand what is “emotional stability” in a cross-cultural context and how they can learn to cope with negative/difficult emotions.
- ✓ Understand how cultural differences affect the success of cross-cultural team performance.

3. Target Audience

- ✓ Undergraduate students in all business-related disciplines

4. Questions & Answers for Case Analysis and Teaching

- ✓ **Open the discussion**

What is the main problem in this case?

- ✓ **Advance the discussion**

What is the difference between the two teams (Turkish-French) in terms of communication style?

Do you think that different working styles cause problems between cross-cultural partners? How can one cope with these differences?

Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?

- ✓ **Close the discussion**

What do you think about Renard's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Renard?



What do you think about Emre's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Emre?

5. Recommended Reading

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125.

Arora, R., & Rangnekar, S. (2015). Relationships between emotional stability, psychosocial mentoring support and career resilience. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 11(1), 16-33.

Bajaj, B., Gupta, R. & Sengupta, S. (2019). Emotional stability and self-esteem as mediators between mindfulness and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20, 2211-2226.

Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2001). Emotional stability as a major dimension of happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31(8): 1357-1364.



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS? – TEACHING NOTES

1. Summary of case study

The case happened in the R&D department of a multinational company in the automotive supply industry. There was a problem with one of the company projects in Russia. Turkish and French colleagues were working together on a solution to the problem. The Turkish unit found the problem and decided that it should be communicated to the customer directly; however, the French team found this way of communication very inappropriate. A significant conflict has occurred between the two partners.

2. Suggested methodology for ‘solving’ case study

✓ Open the discussion (15 min)

The discussion can be started with asking,

What is the main problem in the case?

✓ Advance the discussion (45 min)

The discussion can be deepened by the following questions.

What is the difference between the two teams (Turkish-French) in terms of communication style?

Do you think that different working styles cause problems between cross-cultural partners? How can one cope with these differences?

Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?

By the help of these questions, participants can be encouraged to think about different communication ways in different cultures, and their consequences. After this awareness, the emotional stability concept can be defined and introduced as a key ability to solve these kind of communication problems.

✓ Close the discussion (15 min)

At the end of the discussion, participants can be asked to find their own solutions by the help of following questions.

What do you think about Renard's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Renard?

What do you think about Emre's attitude towards the situation? What would you do if you were Emre?



3. Possible answers

In a multinational company, R&D teams from Turkey and France were working together on a project for Russian customers. However, just after they finished the project, a problem had occurred. When the details about the problem were shared directly with the customer by the Turkish team, a great tension arose between the Turkish and French teams. Because such a communication style was not considered appropriate by the French team.

While it was the right way to communicate with the customer directly on the Turkish side, the French side thought that it would create problems and it was wrong to communicate the issue as it was. Moreover, another important problem was that the French team weren't informed about the information given to the customer. Thus these different working styles caused problems between the cross-cultural partners.

Renard, the head of the French team, interpreted this simple communication problem as a power issue and got angry by the fact that they were seen as an underappreciated partner, and his attitude has been to react sharply rather than find a solution. Renard was so angry that his next attitude was to act on the client side and tried to punish the Turkish team.

On the other hand, Emre, the leader of the Turkish team, couldn't see France's need to be informed and couldn't understand their different communication style, so instead of finding a common way, he acted emotionally and thought they had been stabbed in the back by their partner.

Emre and Renard have strong negative feelings that can hinder effective communication and the partnership between the Turkish and French teams. More importantly, this problem can affect customer satisfaction and put the company in a difficult position. Thus to cope with these difficult feelings, emotional stability is an essential cross-cultural skill.

Empathy can be a useful way to improve the ability of emotional stability. When we understand the need of the other side it is easier to accept the situation objectively and find a solution. Mindfulness practices may also help to improve this skill. It is defined as an ability to be aware of what is happening at the present moment by evaluating those experiences without judging. The one who has this ability can interpret current experiences and current emotions without being biased; thus expression of feelings and communication may be conducted in a healthy way.

