Emotion and Intercultural Communication

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we examine the role of emotions in intercultural communication, and suggest that the ability to regulate emotion is one of the keys to effective intercultural communication and adjustment. Previous work on intercultural communication effectiveness has generally focused on its cognitive components, including cultural knowledge, language proficiency, and ethnocentrism. Instead, we focus on emotion in intercultural communication episodes, and particularly on the skills necessary for the resolution of inevitable intercultural conflict. We argue that emotion regulation is a gatekeeper ability that allows people to engage in successful conflict resolution that leads to effective, long-term intercultural communication.

We first describe the role of culture in the communication process, and then the concepts of intercultural communication, adaptation, and adjustment. We describe factors that previous research has identified related to adjustment, and then discuss strategies for engaging in successful intercultural communication, focusing on the role of emotions, but also highlighting the importance of critical thinking and openness/flexibility. We discuss a growth model of intercultural adjustment potential that has at its core the ability to regulate emotions. We review empirical support for this importance of emotion regulation to predict intercultural adjustment, and then review literature examining possible cultural differences in emotion regulation. Throughout, we blend literature from both communication and psychology in producing a unique perspective on this topic.

Key Words: Emotion, emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, critical thinking, intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural adaptation, intercultural adjustment