

Communication in a Global Workplace: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The paper highlighted the role of communication in the growth of the global workplace and revealed many benefits of the global workforce among which are fostering deeper connections among customers and employees, leveraging on cultural differences to better understand customers in countries outside an organization's core business. It also brought to bear pertinent issues such as the need to effectively incorporate communication technologies, address cultural diversity as well as adopt effective cross-cultural communication styles. Challenges that workers in the global workplace grapple with such as stereotypical perceptions, language barriers, technological dependencies, and limited face-to-face interactions were also identified in the paper. Consequently, the paper advocated the need to be well equipped with communication skills such as defining clear roles and responsibilities, establishing clear channels of communication as well as leveraging technology to surmount these challenges and survive in the multicultural global workplace. The paper adopted the Communication Accommodation Theory which emphasizes the tendency of humans to adjust their behavior while interacting (communicating).

Keywords: Global workforce, Communication, Globalization, Cultural Diversity, Organizational communication.

Introduction

When in (1998) Townsend and his colleagues wrote on *Virtual Teams: Technology and the Workplace of the Future*, they were foretelling the global workplace. According to them, a group of technologies including desktop, video conferencing, collaborative software, and internet/intranet systems will converge to forge the foundation of a new workplace. This new workplace will be unrestrained by geography, time, and organizational boundaries; it will be a virtual workplace where productivity, flexibility, and collaboration will reach unprecedented levels. The global workforce is becoming increasingly prevalent due to this potential.

There is no gain saying the fact that global workspaces are brought about by globalization. Globalization is described by Tomlinson (1997) cited in Miller (2006) as the rapidly developing processes of complex connections between societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals. Changes in business practices, development of modernization

programs to help meet new challenges, and liberalization of markets, are in Miller's (2006) view, the outcomes of globalization.

Further, the nature of work has undergone a transformative shift, transcending geographical boundaries and cultural landscapes. The advent of a global workspace has brought about a paradigmatic change in the way communication is perceived and practiced within organizations. As the multifaceted realm of organizational communication is considered, the scholarly works of Antos (2011), Cheney (2011), and Keyton (2010, 2011) provide a rich foundation for understanding the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics, the impact of globalization, and the role of communication in shaping an organizational culture of the global workspace.

Moreover, the organizational communication landscape within a global framework is intricately discussed by scholars such as Cheney (2011) and Canary (2011). The issues and reflections presented in these works shed light on the evolving nature of communication structures and practices, emphasizing the need for adaptability and a nuanced understanding of cultural contexts. Keyton's (2010, 2011) invaluable insights, presented in case studies and discussions on organizational culture, offer a lens through which we can examine real-world scenarios and their implications for communication strategies in a global workspace. As we navigate the complexities of modern organizational dynamics, Keyton's work becomes an essential resource for unraveling the multifaceted interplay between communication practices and the development of organizational culture.

Statement of the Problem

In the contemporary landscape of globalized work environments, the intricate dynamics of organizational communication present significant challenges that demand thorough investigation. Despite an extensive body of literature on interpersonal communication, organizational culture, and leadership, there remains a conspicuous gap in understanding the specific issues and challenges inherent in the context of a global workspace. This study addresses several key problem areas to illuminate the complexities of communication in the globalized setting. As the hiring sphere becomes increasingly global, businesses and their managers must accommodate their practices to ensure a successful partnership between remote and in-office teams. Effective relationship between members of these multicultural, geographically dispersed teams is a priority for cultivating a positive and productive global workforce.

Consequently, the study delves into the implications of technological integration, examining how rapidly advancing tools and platforms shape and disrupt communication structures in global organizations. These and more constitute the focus of this paper which seeks to ascertain the issues involved in communication at the global workplace as well as the challenges faced by participants in the communication process globally.

Research Questions

The Study has the following research questions.

- i. What is the nature of communication in the global workspace?
- ii. What communication issues does the global workforce face?

iii. What challenges do members of the global workplace face?

Theoretical Framework

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was used as the theoretical anchor for this study. Developed by Howard Giles, CAT explores how individuals adjust their communication styles in response to perceived differences or similarities in their interlocutors. Communication accommodation is a communication theory that emphasizes the adjustments that people make while communicating. The factors that lead to the accommodation activity are adjustments which can be through verbal communication or gestures. The theory evolved from speech adjustment theory, which demonstrates the value of psychological concepts to understanding the dynamics of speech. But the theory encompasses more fields such as non-verbal and gestures.

In addition, the theory elaborates on the human tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting. The reason behind this behavior is explained as to control the social differences between the interactants. People accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image in front of the interactant. The environment in which they are interacting also affects their communication behavior. There are two types of accommodation processes explained in this theory namely, convergence and divergence.

Convergence is a process where people tend to adapt the other person's communication characteristics to reduce social differences. On the other hand, divergence, which is the process contradicts the method of adaptation and in this context, the individual emphasizes the social differences and nonverbal differences between the interactants. The two processes usually are dependent on the characteristics of the interactant. People accommodate their communication while interacting with a person who has higher standards and other characteristics that they believe are better than them.

The divergent exhibits an opposite characteristic as it emphasizes the difference among the close relations with each other.

Communication accommodation theory is influenced by social psychology and is guided by four major assumptions: first, while communicating there will be similarities and differences in speech and behavior. The characteristics that people exhibit are based on our experiences and the cultural backgrounds that we grew up in. Second, a conversation is evaluated by understanding the perception of the speech and behavior of the other. Third, social status and belonging are determined by language and behaviors. While people communicate they tend to accommodate the behaviors of those who are in a higher social status than them. Fourth, norms guide the accommodation process which varies in the degree of appropriateness. Norms define the behaviors of people and they are expected to act accordingly.

In the context of a global workspace, where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds collaborate, CAT provides a theoretical framework to understand how communication may be used to bridge cultural gaps. The theory recognizes that communication is dynamic, and individuals may converge or diverge in their communication behaviors based on social and cultural factors. CAT can illuminate how interactants in global workspaces adapt their communication styles to accommodate the

diverse cultural backgrounds present in a global workspace. It addresses the study's objective of exploring the peculiarities of communication in such a context. CAT acknowledges the role of awareness in communication accommodation. CAT also provides insights into challenges related to communication. It can help analyze how members of the global workforce navigate language barriers, different communication styles, and other challenges, which aligns with the study's objective and examines issues and challenges related to communication in a global workplace.

Methodology

The researcher relied essentially on library resources such as books, journals, internet sources, and responses from web pages of online resource persons to gather insights that helped in addressing the concerns of the paper.

Literature Review For this paper, the review will highlight communication and its usefulness in the global workplaces, the concept of the “global workplace” as well as globalization. The essence is to identify the relationship between these concepts and their role in helping us establish how they address the issues and challenges of communicating in the global workplace.

Communication

Communication is a process of creating and sharing ideas, information, views, facts, and feelings from one place, person, or group to another. Communication is also described as the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, and attitudes through verbal or non-verbal means between two or more than two participants. It is fundamental to the existence and survival of humans and organizations. Members of an organization must communicate effectively if work must be done. A manager must communicate his direction effectively to the subordinates and the subordinates must understand the directions for organizational goals to be met.

Effective communication is critical to doing business. According to a study by Hart Research Associates, 93 percent of employers consider good communication skills to be more important than the major of a college graduate. HR Magazine reported that, in a survey of 4,000 employees, participants estimated they lost 40 minutes of productivity each day trying to interpret unclear directions.

Communicating effectively is an art and must be practiced effectively at the workplace for better output and achievement of the goals of an organization. Communication is a major challenge for administrators because they are responsible for providing information that results in efficient and effective performance in organizations. The study of communication is important because every administrative function and activity involves some direct form of direct or indirect communication.

Whether planning, organizing, leading, or monitoring, administrators communicate with and through other people Within the global workspaces, communication embodies the dynamics unfolding of relations between actors and organizations embedded in a set of social and cultural constraints and opportunities that transform individuals and group actions

into organizational consequences, (Stohl, 2001).

Balbinot *et al* (2022) citing Daim, *et al* (2012) stresses the need for seamless communication as it is essential to accomplishing day-to-day operations in companies as well as enabling the development of a healthy, trusting work environment.

Global Workplace

Global workplaces are organizations that identify with the global system rather than any particular nation. It is an organization with a global workforce- a team of employees who work, collaborate, and communicate across different countries, regions, and cultures, often with the help of technology-enabled communication tools. Whether it is sales staff located in multiple countries, customer service agents working from different time zones, or remote staff sharing global processes, a global workforce is a diverse mix of people who work synergistically to ensure the success of the enterprise.

The global workforce consists of workers across countries and cultures in our increasingly interconnected world. With these workers come a variety of perspectives, expectations, and advantages.

In a global workplace, organizational membership takes precedence over national allegiances. Other types of workplaces worthy of mention include; domestic workplace- an organization that identifies with a single country and predominant culture; multicultural workplace- one that identifies predominantly with one country, but recognizes the needs of a culturally diverse workforce and diverse contacts outside the company. Also on the list is the multinational workplace. This identifies with one nationality while doing business across several or many nations. The international workplace is an organization that identifies with two or more countries with distinct cultural qualities. Distinct national interests are assumed to exist within the company's management, clients, customers, and institutional environment, (Miller 2006).

The global workplace is an offshoot of globalization. The economic and political impetus towards globalization has been held along by many technological factors. Foremost among these, in Miller's (2006) opinion, are the ease at which travel can now be undertaken and the advent of advanced communication technologies. Globalization has completely transformed the modern workplace. Hence, Akken Cloud (2023) identifies the advantages of a global workforce as increased diversity, access to resources, business expansion, increased efficiency, and improved flexibility.

Globalization and Organizational Communication Globalization is defined as the widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of social life. Globalization is produced and maintained through communicative action. Political, cultural, social and economic events are no longer bound by time and space. Globalization has brought in its wake an increasing democratization of many world governments as well as rapidly developing processes of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals worldwide. Miller(2006) highlights the implication of globalization on organizational communication when she opines that

globalization results in time and space compression, changing communication patterns and perceptions and everything, according to her, moves quickly.

Another impact of globalization on organizational communication is that it enhances our sense of global consciousness and reflexivity. This is explained as being aware of both the cultures of others and our own attitudes, beliefs and behaviours while working in a global, multinational or multicultural organization. Cultural consciousness engenders organizational well-being as well as individual wellbeing.

Other scholars have researched the outcomes of globalization and its implications for organizational communication. For instance, Stohl (2001) looked at it from the perspectives of convergence and divergence. Stohl's convergence approach emphasizes the need for an organization to adapt its practices to the global marketplace wherein flexibility, responsiveness, speed of knowledge production, and knowledge dissemination are the criteria for survival. The divergence approach by Stohl emphasizes the cultural distinctiveness found around the world. This approach is concerned with how meaning is constructed in various cultural settings. It also explores the impact of organizational norms and functioning in meaning construction in the organization though it is less interested in exploring strategies for organizational effectiveness.

The onus therefore is on managers and communication consultants to adopt Miller's (2006) submission that communication in these global organizations will depend largely on balancing the forces of convergence (making us more alike in the search for workplace efficiency) with forces of divergence (making us appreciate the cultural differences we find throughout the world). The above also sets the tone for the discussion in the next section that highlights the various issues managers and workers in the global workplace will need to pay more attention to in order to achieve greater success in their global organizations.

Communication Issues in a Global Workplace

In this section, the discussion shall centre around the various areas that communicators in the global workforce need to pay greater attention to, the essence being that these concerns or issues are pivotal to the success of the global workplace.

Communication Technologies

Communication technologies have come to stay and are an integral part of organizational processes (Eisenberg & Goodall 2001). Notable among them are computer-assisted communication technologies used for image transmission such as Electronic mail, Instant messaging (IM), Voice mail, Facsimile (fax), Audio and video conferencing, Computer conferencing, Management information system, Group decision support system (GDSS), Internet and World Wide Web (WWW), Networked computing, Wireless networks, (Miller, 2006).

The need for robust technological infrastructure is stressed by several scholars such as Miller (2006); Eisenberg, and Goodall (2001); Sterpu (2017). These scholars seem united in the notion that communication technologies are a sine qua non in global workplaces. Communication technologies facilitate the building of an organization's online presence. Sterpu (2017) advises that organizations should utilize social media and other online

resources which will help implement online campaigns and the development of web marketing.

However, interactions in virtual teams (workplaces) using electronic communication tools could breed unpleasant outcomes. As Keyworth & Leidner (2002) cited in Eubanks, Palanski, Olabisi, Joinson & Dove (2016) notes, problems related to the types of technology used (infrastructure), technological level as well as members' level of mastery of the technology are factors that can directly affect communication which may be viewed as a transactional process of sharing meaning. It is this paper's position that adequate skills in the operation of these hardware and software are key to leveraging the benefits of the global workplace.

Cultural diversity

Global organizations increasingly face issues bordering on cultural diversity. As Eisenberg & Goodall (2001) submit, globalization does not eliminate differences in languages and cultures. Consequently, success in communication across national borders requires highly sophisticated global communications skills ranging from the ability to speak customers' and suppliers' language and understanding the subtlety of other cultures. Important aspects of clients' and customers' cultures must not be overlooked. Escobede, Jett and Lao (2012) believe that cultural diversity portends goods for organisations when they opine that organisations that embrace diversity are able to bring unique talents and ideas that will serve their client's needs. This aligns with Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) earlier advice that global organizations will do well if they employ a culturally diverse workforce as well as engender effective organizational communication that addresses a host of multicultural and multinational concerns.

Bhawuk (2009) also recognises the increased interconnectedness amongst nations occasioned by globalization noting that people are much more interdependent than they were in the past. This interdependence, according to him, has enabled collaborations with people from different cultures because they are required to live in cultures far away and quite different from their own. He advocates intercultural training to prepare workers to have meaningful dialogues with people from different cultures to help each other solve problems and also to learn from each other.

Further, Li *et al* (2017) in their study *Effects of a Dyad's Cultural Intelligence on Virtual Collaboration* noted that when members of the global virtual teams (GVT) have a better understanding of cultural diversity, there is more cooperation between members and this influences the team's satisfaction thus emphasizing the need for members of a global workspace to understand cultural diversity and its attendant benefits or otherwise to an organization and buttressing Eisenberg & Goodall's (2001) earlier observation that researchers were increasingly concerned with the effects of cultural differences as organizations respond to global competitions.

Cross-cultural communication styles

In an increasingly globalized world, building relationships, social ties, and business partnerships relies on being able to communicate effectively across cultures. Wood's (2006)

asserts that the social community or culture's values and norms are reflected in the content style of its communication has implications for global workplaces. Managers and employees in these workplaces should recognize the fact that each of us acts, speaks, and interprets others from distinct perspectives of the culture and the social communication that we identify with. Wood, therefore suggests two ways by which we can minimize misunderstandings and engender effective communication while communicating in global workspaces; viz resisting the ethnocentric bias which has to do with reflectively using our home culture as a standard for judging other cultures. The other is recognizing that our response to diversity will not happen automatically but will require time.

Dealing with diversity in Wood's opinion is a gradual process that takes time, experience with a variety of people, and a commitment to participating in a world that includes a range of people and communication styles. Cross-cultural communication styles, from direct to indirect, add complexity to global interactions.

Cultural sensitivity

Another crucial issue to consider in global communication effort is cultural sensitivity. This refers to a person's acceptance and inclusion of people with cultures and cultural identities that differ from their own. This phrase is sometimes interchangeable with the term cultural awareness. Cultural sensitivity in the workplace is represented through the organizational and interpersonal recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity among professionals.

A person or organization's success in developing a culturally sensitive workplace is dependent on its policies and behaviours. There seems to be a strong correlation between the position of Eisenberg & Goodall (2001) and Matteson & Stage (2001) submissions. While the former submits that globalization does not eliminate differences in language and culture, success across national borders requires highly sophisticated global communication skills ranging from the ability to speak customers' and suppliers' language and understanding the subtlety of other cultures. On the other hand, Mattson & Stage (2001), are of the view that cultural shifting involved in globalization can pose unique intercultural tension which sometimes creates intense ethical dilemmas for employees. To mitigate the above scenario, Stohl's (2001) assertion that to succeed in managing a workforce that is increasingly diversified and multinational, managers need knowledge about cultural differences and similarities among nations is apt; Stohl adds that they also need to be sensitive to these differences which can contribute to their effectiveness in cross-cultural communication.

Virtual collaboration

In simple words, virtual collaboration is the method of communicating and working together with people in a virtual environment. Parties or teams involved in virtual collaboration do not interact physically but communicate through technology-based communication channels despite being in different locations or at different times. Holding the usual schedules of team meetings and brainstorming sessions through video calls or other digital means will help to contribute to this balance. Virtual collaboration should be seen as an

opportunity to interact more effectively with team members and appreciate their efforts to build a productive atmosphere. With virtual collaboration, virtual teams can share information and get work done by communicating virtually through visual, verbal, written, or other digital means. Virtual collaboration is greatly enhanced when proper tools or platforms are implemented to improve collaboration, teamwork, and operations. Workers in the global workplace must understand the intricacies of collaborations in order to succeed and communicate effectively.

Our discussions so far have buttressed Mattson and Stage's (2001) notion that the cultural shifting involved in globalization can pose unique intercultural tensions which sometimes create intense dilemmas for employees communication. The way forward, in this papers stance is communicating effectively because individuals from different countries, ethnicities, languages, cultural attitudes and other variations must understand one another and express themselves to another effectively to work together. It is also pertinent to note that while available of communication technology infrastructure are key and skills in their use no doubt inevitable, care must be taken to avoid over-dependence on them.

Finally, communicators in the global work place must pay particular attention to cultural intelligence as this helps in mitigating conflicts arising from cultural diversity which is the hallmark of global organization.

Challenges associated with communication in the global workplace

Scholars have identified several challenges facing effective communication in global space. Notable among them are; stereotypical perceptions, language barriers, technological dependence, limited face-to-face interactions and so on.

Akinlua (2022) asserts that language may create issues among multinational teams because of a poor understanding of the cultural undertone of language. He cites the Nigerian case where respect is communicated through gestures and languages. He continues that with the advent of globalization and its attendant benefits to organizations, care must be given to language issues so as not to damage the profitability of global relationships. Moreover, limited face-to-face interactions are capable of making members of the global workforce appear distant from other team members because of excessive reliance on technology to mediate communication thereby hurting output,(Hinds and Bailey,2003).

Another challenge worth mentioning is technological dependence. This could create isolation (a situation where colleagues are no longer available for colleagues and family members). Griep *et al* (2021) identified two variants of isolation namely social isolation which refers to a lack of availability of colleagues for casual interactions, camaraderie, or developing friendships, the other variant-professional isolation refers to a feeling of being deprived of work-based support and information from both supervisor and the organization.

Similarly, Leonardi *et al* (2013) recognize stereotypical perceptions as another challenge facing workers in a global workplace. He asserts that coordination problems associated with cultural differences have proven more difficult to solve than problems arising from differences in space and time. This differential in cultural profile assembled by team members can create tension both good and bad that may undergird global interactions in the workplace. Finally, Thakkar (2022) adds that noise and cultural differences pose obstacles to

improving communication in global organizations. He further submits that to mitigate these obstacles, communicators in the global workplace should define clear roles and responsibilities, establish clear channels of communication, leverage technology as well and be mindful of cultural differences.

Conclusion

In the light of the prevalence of global workplace occasioned by globalization and its attendant positive effects, this paper x-rayed the communication issues that arise thereto such as communication technologies, cultural diversity, virtual collaboration etc and also identified certain obstacles that could hinder effective communication in this global organization such as cultural differences, language barriers, stereotypical perceptions, technological dependence, etc.

Finally, it must be stated that since the global workforce is a powerful asset for businesses that want to remain agile and competitive in an increasingly interconnected world, the right technologies must be adopted, effective communication skills are of essence too while cultural intelligence cannot be glossed over.

Recommendations

Organizations should create training programs to help employees understand and navigate cultural differences, improving their awareness of diverse cultural nuances and communication styles. In addition, to tackle challenges arising from language barriers and other cultural issues, effective communication is advocated. Companies can use technological tools and platforms that facilitate effective communication, making it easier for teams spread across various locations to collaborate. Finally, organizations should actively work against cultural stereotypes, fostering an environment that values diversity by establishing policies that promote cross-cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

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