
A Study on Managerial Communication in Multicultural Workplace

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the role and characteristics of managerial communication in a multicultural workplace and, more specifically, within multicultural teams. After literature review, variables affecting communication were identified, four variables - verbal and non-verbal communication, production strategies and skills or attitudes, further researched in Indian scenario through face to face interview with a structured questionnaire. Respondents were working professionals, from various industries, working at multicultural workplace. To the end, a content analysis in thematic pattern was conducted, of qualitative data, through transcript and recording to reach results. After data analysis, the results reveal that all four variables hold importance in Indian scenario, however their order of importance may not be reached. Strategic competence and skill were reflecting more congruence with literature.

Keywords: Multicultural communication, managerial communication, verbal and nonverbal communication, strategic competence, communication skills.

Introduction:

A multicultural workforce means a workforce consists of employees from various cultures. Each culture has its unique dimension and perspective. Multicultural workforce have distinctive characteristic, consists of cultural differences among the employees, which as result bring out creativity in the organization. A multicultural workforce refers to employees' heterogeneity in many dissimilar traits but knitted around common objective of the organisation. While a number of major and minor traits were used to describe level of multiculturalism evidence, few were common to all including age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, race and sexual orientation, and many more.

"Opposites attract" was a popular relationship adage, but people with differences also tend to find more conflict in communication than people with shared backgrounds and

life paradigms. Neil Kokemuller (2007) reveals that people with cultural differences have natural barriers in communication and relationships. However, diversity management can draw out strong benefits of a multicultural workforce, including a broader and deeper pool of ideas and creative development, stronger connections to a global marketplace and better ability to adapt to marketplace changes.

Other reasons for increasing diversity were changes in employment preferences, changes in employment scenarios like mergers and acquisitions and also a globally diverse customer base. Diversity was no longer an abstraction. It has also become a part of everyday life in most workplaces which were driven by the need of search for talents at the global level. It is not only about how they perceive others but it's about how people perceive themselves. Those perceptions of stakeholders

influence the actions and reactions of an organisation. For employees to function effectively as an organization, human resource professionals need to deal effectively with issues such as communication, adaptability and change. With the passage of time, diversity may come up as an integral part of every growing organisation, due to much of its benefits.

With the increasing pace of competition and globalization it requires more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds. People no longer live and work in a restricted marketplace. Due to which, profit and non-profit organizations need diversity to become more creative and open to change. Maximizing and capitalizing on workplace diversity has become a concern for management today because employing a diverse workforce can supply a greater variety of solutions to problems in service, sourcing, and allocation of resources. With the diverse backgrounds they bring talents and experiences in suggesting ideas that are flexible in adapting to fluctuating markets and customer demands. Diversity brings multicultural workforce. Each diversified group was affected by diverse culture, generating and sustaining better ways towards survival.

Multicultural work environment has its own pros and cons. Management must be prepared to teach themselves and others within their organizations to value multicultural differences in both associates and customers level, so that everyone understands and appropriately accept changes with dignity.

Managerial communication helps managers to communicate with each other as well as with employees within the organization. Communication helps everyone in transferring of information from one individual to another. In any homogenous setup, it must be simple in the form of language, paralanguage, non verbal and facial clues but in a heterogeneous setup, it must be a challenge. Since communication plays pivotal role in transfer of information and its conduct, the research papers holds huge importance in such scenario. Effective communication at all levels of managerial and non managerial aspect was instrumental in organisation effectiveness. Thus the research throws light on important variable of managerial communication in multicultural team dynamics. It aims to explore theoretical and practical aspect of the issue.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study was to determine variables affecting managerial communication in multicultural workplaces. The covert objective was to understand issues and challenges faced by team in multicultural organisations with reference to communication.

Research methodology

The research was drawn on Meta inferences collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources contributed in identifying the variables, which were further used to prepare a questionnaire, conducted face to face interviews, recorded and transcript to reach to conclusions. Four variables identified were – Strategic competence, Verbal Communication, Non verbal Communication and skills. The questionnaire consists of three questions under each variable. Due to uniqueness of the study, data was collected through face-to face interview with structured questionnaire. The interview happened to be of 45 minute approximately wherein each question was explained and response was recorded. Respondents were categorically chosen from multicultural team to address the issue in right perspective. Content analysis of response was used in thematic manner to reach out to results.

Literature Review

• Background

General Systems Theory (GST) perspectives will be applied to analyze linguistic competencies. The analysis is conducted using two components of communication competency: 1) linguistic competency, regarded as the sounds, words, and sentence structures in a form that may be understood, and 2) sociolinguistic competency, the appropriateness of the exchange with respect to whom, what, when, where, and why. Through the use of the state-of-the-art matrix analysis, components of communication processes will be identified (Kittleman S and Calvo J, 2015).

Communication management was postulated as a strategic management function within which the internal influence as well as the power of

communication management. Strategic communication management can therefore be understood as communication management which deliberately creates such decision-making situations in which several alternatives of action were evaluated leading to effective organisation (Raupp and Hoffjann, 2012)

There were five factors considered important for successful inter cultural communication. These factors enhance competencies at individual as well as organisational level - self-reflection, awareness of other's culture, personality, identity in that particular situation and various other factors (2008).

"Communication" has great influence in the language teaching world that's not only because of its high frequency appearance in the research world but due gradual globalization in the past century. Communication competence affects all other sphere of business and economy (Xin Z, 2007).

After Hymes (1972) who have developed and extended the notion of communicative competence, which attempts to include all these dimensions: the grammatical, the social and the psychological. However, this was not just some developments in linguistic theory, but an impetus to an establishing concept for language learning and teaching which was further applied to management and business.

The three aspects of communicative competence in multicultural workplace include organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence. Organizational competence concerns communicative ability of people intra and inter work groups. Pragmatic competence means rules, procedure and functions in alignment of multicultural setup. And strategic competence could be regarded as a technique or a tool to make the most effective use of available abilities to carry out verbal or non-verbal tasks.

- **Verbal Communication**

Verbal communication refers to the use of language to relay a message. It serves as a vehicle for expressing desires, ideas and concepts. In combination with nonverbal forms of communication, verbal communication acts as the

primary tool for expression between two or more people. Words act as symbols, and signs are secondary products of the underlying message and include things like tone of voice, blushing and facial expressions (TingToomey, 1999; Andersen, Hetch, Hooble and Smallwood, 2002; Gudykunst and Lee, 2002; Lim, 2002; Peterson, 2004). These can be articulated in terms of a series of binary distinctions, including talk vs. silence (silence can fulfil different functions depending on cultural beliefs); topic management and turn-taking (the length of the turns taken, their distribution, the organization of the topic, and the use of repetition, feedback devices, or backchannelling all vary depending on the culture); elaboration / animation (which refers to the degree of expressiveness, assertion, or exaggeration used); direct vs. indirect verbal styles (the essence of this dichotomy lies in the extent to which communicators reveal their intention through their tone of voice and the straightforwardness of their content message).

It relies on both language and emotion to produce the desired effect that can be used to inform, inquire, argue and discuss topics of all kinds.

- **Non Verbal Communication**

Literature reflects sufficient evidence to reveal that there exists a strong connection between language and non verbal codes in order to create an effective communication, since they both share symbols and behaviours learnt over a period of time. 93% of meaning is conveyed through nonverbal communication channels (Mehrabian, 1982). The differences in intercultural nonverbal communication lie along the nonverbal codes of kinesics (or facial, bodily, and gestural movement), oculosics (eye contact), vocalics (related to speech, including accent, pitch range and intensity, volume, articulation, resonance, or tempo), paralinguistics (associated to tone), haptics (connected to touch), olfactics (having to do with smell), proxemics (the conception of space in interpersonal spatial boundary regulation), and chronemics (or the interpretation and understanding of time) (Andersen et al., 2002)

• Strategic Competence

Strategic competence was considered as a vital part of all communicative language use (Bachman, 1990). Researches include three components in strategic competence: assessment, planning, and execution. These types of competence strategic competence could be utilized to compensate for the deficiencies in other competencies. Therefore, strategic competence is considered as a general ability for the individual to make the most effective use of available abilities to carry out verbal or non-verbal tasks. Strategic competence also includes organisation culture and dynamics which support individual competency to communicate effectively.

• Skills

Finally, many researches justify that it may not be language but also application of language which makes difference. Mindful verbal and nonverbal communication requires the application of flexible, adaptive interaction skills (Ting Toomey,

1999). These skills were well summarized by Gudykunst (1998) as directly related to managing uncertainty and anxiety. They involve six main abilities which are inline with important attitudes that are necessary to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts. The first of them is the ability to be mindful, which involves being able to put oneself in the interlocutor's position and to display sensitivity to other frames of reference. The second tolerance of ambiguity - is directly related to the third one - management of anxiety - since the greater the tolerance of ambiguity, the less anxiety experienced in intercultural communication. The attitude of sensitivity, understanding, and learning come into play in the ability to empathize, while adaptability and flexibility were at the core of the ability to adapt communication (Pbizez Caradom et al.)

Results

On the basis of data collection through interview, a thematic pattern of answer was created to further code and give meaningful results. As mentioned in table below

Questions	Response	Coding	Thematic	Outcome
Q 1. Can you characterize the multicultural team in your organization? What you think which was the most dominant?	Respondent 1 – I worked with a US process initially and later shifted to UK. However, I have experience of working with New Zealand, Australia and India. <u>UK</u> was most dominant culture. Respondent 2 - As my previous organization was in Chennai all the teams were multicultural. <u>Aged teammates</u> were dominant with high work experience. Respondent 3 - My team was multicultural. Dominant culture was <u>US</u> .	>Teams >Age group >Dominant >Work experience >UK,India,America, Australia, New Zealand	Demographic setup builds foundation for multicultural dynamism like age, nationality, ethnicity etc.	Strategic Competence
Q2. Do you ever found any difficulty in communicating & coordinating your work?	Respondent 1 - I didn't find any issues and difficulty while communicating with my teammate, but yes at time it does happen that I had to <u>repeat</u> my <u>statement</u> because of the <u>accent</u> we are carrying. Respondent 2 - Sometimes I found it difficult to interact with other team mates as there were <u>language barriers</u> and they prefer to speak in their <u>mother tongue</u> .	>Communication >Language barrier >Mother tongue influence >Accent	Language, Use of words, tone, speech, distance, body language and semantic barriers holds high importance in multicultural team because of heterogeneity.	Verbal and Non Verbal Communication
Q3. As per your opinion which multicultural team you found the most efficient & why?	Respondent 1 - I found my team as one of the most efficient team, the reason for the same is that we used to have a <u>lot of conversation</u> when we were <u>off the job</u> and our team lead knows how to keep a <u>comfortable environment</u> with in the team. Respondent 2 - American team was most effective to various reasons - <u>Flexibility in working hours</u> . Did not look down on anyone. For their other team member they win over them by covering their work during their festive <u>holidays</u> . Respondent 3 - There was a team called money In which was more efficient because the <u>tenure</u> of the team mates were more than two years in the same team which increased the coordination among them.	> Lots of conversation >Comfortable environment >Flexibility >Working hours >Holidays >Tenure >Off the job events >Coordination	Many initiatives must be practiced to make multicultural team effective. A lot informal engagements plays important role in building coordination and trust among members	Skills
Q4. Did you found any conflicts arise due to working in a multicultural team? If yes, what are their main reasons?	Respondent 1 - Honestly I spend enough time with my team members but I never had conflicts with them, as we used to <u>spend time together</u> as a team even when we were not on the job, we used to have <u>lunch and dinner together</u> that really helped us to <u>understand each other</u> , and hence didn't have any conflicts ever. Respondent 2 - I felt the reasons were • <u>Communication</u> • <u>Imposing set of your values to others</u> • Variety of viewpoints Respondent 3 - • Yes there are conflicts between team mates because of <u>experience</u> , <u>age</u> and	> spend time together > lunch and dinner together > understand each other > Communication > Set of values > Experience > Age > Communication	Conducive culture along with <u>communication</u> <u>hassles</u> , strategic formation of team may lead to better conflict resolution.	*Culture *Strategic Competence

Q5. What are you and your group initiative to resolve those problems?	Respondent 1 - We have started the <u>fun activity</u> session during the working hours to reduce the gap between the team mates. Respondent 2 - Encouraging teams to <u>express their ideas and opinions</u> and attribute a sense of equal value to all. Respondent 3 - Well as mentioned earlier we never had issues within the team, and any how it took place within the team the <u>team leader</u> used to fix it then and there so it may not affect rest of the team members.	> Fun Activity > To remove gap > Express ideas > Effective Team leader	Open conversation wherein both verbal form and non verbal form communication are practiced must be initiative by an effective team leader.	* Verbal and Non Verbal Communication * Strategic Competence
Q6. Do you found any individual who is more influential in your team and why do you think so?	Respondent 1 -Yes, I did found one of my team members who is more influential than others, reasons are he was very <u>good at his work</u> but at the same time he used to keep the team members intact by doing certain thing which <u>entertains the members</u> . Respondent 2 - Make every team member <u>feel valued</u> - <u>Welcome</u> comments, questions and suggestions from all team members - Facilitate conversation, idea-sharing and team brainstorming - Provide <u>ongoing coaching</u> , training and mentoring opportunities and support to team members - Recognise and reward good teamwork Respondent 3 - My work group leader was the most influential person in the <u>team</u> as he was <u>guiding</u> us in every problem we face.	> Performer > Good behaviour > Value team > Open for feedback > Guides > Keeps Team	Team members prefer to work with individual who have skills to understand others, control situation and make everyone feel valuable.	Skills
Q7. What are your suggestions to improve the team work?	Respondent 1 - <u>Swot analysis</u> of the team must be done and <u>employee participation</u> . Respondent 2 - Suggestion would be quite obvious, to bring some <u>informal fun at work</u> it will keep the employee motivated, which in turn will establish a <u>strong bond</u> among them.	>Swot Analysis >Informal fun at work >Relationship Building	Organisations must create platform for frequent interaction at formal and informal level to strengthen team with strategic orientation.	*Strategic Competence *Skills

Conclusion

The research paper has allowed us to explore the factors involved in successful intercultural communication in global teams from both a theoretical and a practical viewpoint. Practically all of the theoretical aspects examined in the introductory section have been corroborated by the outcomes of the study carried out in Indian parlance within the scope of the multicultural teams. Indeed, both the theory and practice on this issue confirm that there is a clear-cut set of elements which need to be considered in order to guarantee successful intercultural communication in the multicultural workplace.

Various challenges may occur when using verbal communication to express oneself. Misunderstandings can arise because of poor word choice, differing perspectives and faulty communication techniques, and subjective opinions regarding acceptable language may result in breakdowns in communication. Language barriers are a major cause of confusion when communicate verbally and non verbally.

But with strategic competence and skills of building a friendly culture, the barrier may be converted into strength. Also the multicultural workplace must apply skills of adaptability, flexibility, training and monitoring

to reduce differences. The study also revealed an important factor Culture.

Further Discussion

The study can be further discussed in reference to traditional industry of India. As the sample was drawn from BPO, telecommunication and Consultancy, it was more inclined towards service industry. This may be further seen on manufacturing sector as well. The discussion may further be carried to other elements as well.

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