

Cultural Diversity and Effective Organizational Communication

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Abstract: The significance of cultural diversity has been widely debated in the field of organizational communication, with researchers arguing that minds have cultural contributions besides cognitive ones. *Culture* is basically defined as a set of shared knowledge, behavior, views, and values, whereas *effective communication* is defined as an exchange of information that fosters relationships and outcomes. Cultural diversity can be a double-edged sword for organizations; it has long been the key to major success or the cause of great failure. Published literature and experts' observations indicate that cultural diversity can enhance organizational productivity, because often this diversity sparks competition. Sometimes, however, it can cause frustration, having a great impact on how people feel and how they respond. The topic of communication among cultures is vital, because effective sharing of information is essential for large conglomerates that operate around the globe. This paper addresses how cultural diversity and organizational communication are related. Using the content analysis method, this paper reviews the relevant published literature and deduces the main themes in cultural diversity and effective communication. The probable findings are: (a) culture is becoming more and more diverse, no matter where the organization is located; and (b) effective organizational communication is as much a cultural-oriented as it is a skill-oriented process. The paper concludes with relevant recommendations, including designing training courses for culture-oriented communication for all levels of personnel.

Key words: culture; cultural diversity; effective organizational communication; diversity training

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1. Introduction

Increased globalization has resulted in many employees interacting across diverse linguistic boundaries. Diversity is basically differences among individuals. Although some people think that diversity does nothing but create problems and barriers, it can offer remarkable benefits and aid performance. These benefits include diversity in ideas, and transformation of knowledge, expertise, and skills, which can enhance productivity and enrich experience. Recognizing and understanding differences is vital for success in any organization, but particularly large conglomerates. Experts think that labor in a workplace should fit the culture to improve workers' self-esteem and enable them to perform their jobs in the best way possible. Cultural diversification brings

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individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds together on a common platform. The number of communication filters and language barriers affecting internal and external communication processes can increase as people of different backgrounds interact. Communication, which simply means expressing ideas to others, can be verbal, written, or even a gesture. Most scholars and researchers agree that cultural diversity and communication in organization can prove fruitful. Although one researcher (Black Enterprise, 2001) has claimed that the fundamental key to workplace productivity is to manage a diverse group of people, others say that it affects the success of organizations adversely and hesitate to credit it with significant advantages. Scholars have developed a variety of lenses for identifying and investigating the culture that emanates from organizational communication systems. Diversity can be perceived as a double-edged sword (Mazur, 2010). Change can cause employee stress, negative working relationships, and poor morale, or it can offer outstanding benefits to an organization. When an organization grows, develops, and succeeds, the role of cultural diversity also expands, but this must be accompanied by proper management and training. The popular phrase “management is the art of getting work done through others” is worth noting here. Because effective communication is the backbone of every organization, cultural diversity and good communication are expected to play vital roles in the future of conglomerates.

2. The Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this study is the following:

- (1) Understanding the common facts of communication behavior that occurs in organizations.
- (2) Exploring the concept of culture and cultural diversity in organizations.
- (3) Examining the effect of effective communication on cultural diversity in organizations.

3. Effective Organizational Communication

Communication can be organizational, not only because it occurs in a structured field but also because it integrates and links the functions and interpretations of people together. Communication addresses the fact that multiple people in an organized place communicate and interact with information that can be circulated among them (Yildiz, 2013). Organizational communication enables a cluster group of employees to communicate effectively and to produce symbols that can improve motivation. Companies must manage their human resources efficiently and effectively to reach optimal levels and the objectives set by the company in a challenging global market. Good communication can synthesize multiple performances for the attainment of a common goal. For the public this means both communication within the organization and also outside, with its customers, investors, creditors, and society. Richmond and McCroskey (2009) define organizational communication as the procedure through which verbal and nonverbal signals in the context of a formal conglomerate trigger meaning in different people’s brains, a definition that reflects the true meaning of gaining effective communication better than others. Communication is also the activity of conveying information by the speech, visuals, signals, writing, and behavior between two or more persons, where one is the sender and the other is the receiver. Most organizations involve a social collectivity that handles numerous activities to achieve both individual and collective goals. In addition, many individuals within organizations carry their intended messages in traditional ways, such as in face-to-face communication, and in some other undirected channels. These messages coordinate information that can be shared productively by sending reports, emails, writing memos, talking on the phone, having meetings, video

conferencing, speeches, presentations, and by the use of nonverbal communication, such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. Communication within an organization is the transfer of information that can be a basic process that shapes our lives by creating and negotiating meanings and interpretations.

The effect of organizational communication has been a theme of many scholars and researchers. Grievies (2013) stated that communication aids employee commitment, creates more ideas and innovations, and influences working styles, all of which makes organizations more successful and effective. Effective internal and external communication helps to increase employee engagement, productivity, commitment, trust, and outcomes to make a better environment. Communication among staff members must be high quality to work effectively (Başaran, cited in Yildiz 2013). Despite its importance, however, certain barriers can exist when it comes to effective communication (Agarwal & Garg, 2012). Effective use of communication helps group members to build respect and trust, which fosters work and accomplishes goals. It can overcome differences and create an environment in which people work together. In effective communication, the correspondents must receive confirmation immediately that the recipient correctly interpreted the information, which lays the cornerstone for successful outcomes.

4. The Concept of Culture

The word *culture* carries a certain meaning for many scholars, especially within an institution or a group of people. Originally it meant individual human customs and skills, and different ways of living in different parts of the world. Taylor (cf. Rong, 2013) defines culture as “a complex whole for social traditions and as essential for one to be a member of the society” The phenomenon of culture is complex when interpreted by one age group or another. Parvis (2003) claimed that the term *culture* is the knowledge transmitted to help and organize actual views from one generation to the next. A clearer concept comes from researcher Geert Hofstede, who refers to culture as “the software of the mind”. His sense is that culture works through a collective program in the mind. Thinking, feeling, acting, and other actions are learned during childhood, and then as a person grows and develops, learning new patterns becomes more difficult.

5. Cultural Diversity within an Organization

Today, when the pace of globalization and technology has increased so rapidly, cultural diversity in organizations is vital to the workplace (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007). Globalization has removed barriers, allowing a free flow of products, services, skills, and ideas all over the world. In the past, people lived and worked within the same framework and places, but now people are part of the global economy, with different cultures coming at them from every side. Cox states that cultural diversity is “the representation, in social systems, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance”. Obviously, diverse or different cultures bring social changes, and different affiliations affect employees, exposing them to aspects of ethnicity, national origin, race, and religion. Diversity is a collective mixture of humans with differences and similarities. Diversity in a workplace can have remarkable benefits. Recent studies have shown that a diversified company can demonstrate innovation and creative problem solving, because of new ideas and perceptions. This processing is typically lacking in more homogenous groups (Diaz-Uda, Medina & Schill, 2013). This finding also shows that diversification is a better opportunity for obtaining good results.

Another general goal that has been recognized and identified in a diverse environment is improvement of

communication. Better communication skills are essential in a diverse working environment; they facilitate dealing with other employees. The interaction of individuals in a workplace can establish authority and facilitate responsibility within the organizational hierarchy. Communication has a dual effect on organizations: the interactions that occur among different countries and cultures through communication has made these countries more socialized and better recognized, promoting the exchange of new concepts and knowledge.

Multicultural organizations have succeeded in attaining (and retaining) the best talent, owing to their different thinking styles (Mazur, 2010). Although some researchers have argued that diversity has its advantages and can affect an organization's functioning (Milliken & Martins, 1996), others have noted that some workers prefer interactions with employees of similar backgrounds to avoid controversy. Barriers in language and communication can cause misunderstandings and create dislike among people using different modes and styles of communication. These communication breakdowns among workers of different cultures can end in clashes or conflict. When employees are forced to understand diversity and deal with it, they can maximize benefits and minimize risks. Fortunately, training programs can be a positive method for increasing awareness of diversity issues in the workplace. Many organizations prefer to handle their difficulties by offering training programs or courses for their employees, but these situations must be dealt with properly.

6. Managing Workplace Diversification

Most people in management settle cases of cultural divergence as soon as they occur, or they basically overlook them. Organizations that actively monitor cultural divergence can be expected to achieve the most success in a competitive global market. To enhance workers' performance, small and medium-sized organizations should have as their goals understanding cultural diversity and the methods to handle it efficiently. Diversity training therefore consists of leading participants to integrate innovative global perceptions into problem solving and decision making (McGuire & Bagher, 2010). According to Pendry, Driscoll, and Field (cited in Bezrukova, Jehn & Spell, 2012), *diversity training* is defined as "a distinct set of programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to interact with diverse others". Diversity training can actually create a healthy work environment and improve employee output. These programs can also build a stronger and better workforce, and help to develop new skills. A progressive change throughout the organization, at both individual and team levels, ultimately can result. Although many organizations attempt to apply diversity training, some argue that diversity is not really something that can be trained (DuPont, 1999). When it comes to managing diversity, however, employers must pay proper attention to training programs, because they are the starting point for valuing and managing diverse groups. The researchers, Greenberg & Baron (2000) claimed that training can be divided into two types: (a) awareness training, which concentrates on creating and understanding the needs and meanings to be managed and to value the diversity; and (b) skill-building training, which concentrates on how employees are educated in cultural differences and the way they react to differentiation in the workplace. New employees need to understand that they are working for a company where they can develop better attitudes to achieve and contribute value to the organization, and where interactions among groups are clear and fairly handled.

7. Conclusion

The world is headed toward globalization, where the business activities of organizations are multinational. In

such a complex environment, the issues of cultural diversity and communication in organizations must be treated carefully and effectively so that healthy environment is created and maintained in the workplace. Diverse cultures give workplaces the chance for personal growth and support innovative thoughts and cultures. Different opinions can assist employees to reach out intellectually, offering a more transparent vision of their environment and their place globally. A diverse work team is more likely to bring value to companies, but differences can cause stress among employees when it comes to interactions and contributions. That is why managers must understand diversity and be able to handle it to maximize benefits and minimize risks. When such companies are faced with diversity and communication problems but overcome them, the organization flourishes and succeeds in today's competitive world. Production, commitment, and motivation among employees rise when diversity training is successfully introduced and implemented, and the result is that everyone profits.

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