

Effective Communication in a Diverse Workplace

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Abstract: Due to globalization, today's work environment has become diverse as people from different cultures, religions and backgrounds have come together. They bring with them, diverse skills, knowledge and expertise. They have their own views, ideas, perceptions and opinions which are totally different from one another's as they all come from different walks of life. To succeed in a multicultural society, an organization must value the differences of its workforce, respect the individuality of all employees and maintain a climate in which everyone is treated with dignity. Everyone in business today needs to better understand other cultures, as well as other age groups, gender groups, and lifestyle groups. All this can happen only if there is an effective communication among all the employees, from top to bottom. This paper explains how important is it to have a diverse workforce, what difficulties could come in the way of effective communication in such diverse workplaces and how to overcome these difficulties in an effective manner.

Keywords: Diversity, Effective Communication, Globalization, Workplace, Strategy.

Introduction

Effective communication is an important part of business success. It becomes more important, and even complex, when the workforce is multicultural, or, is diverse. Diversity makes good business sense in today's globalized world, so we cannot ignore it and cannot limit our organization to a uni-cultural environment. Building a productive workplace with employees from many backgrounds can enrich a company on many different levels—but it's not a process one can take for granted. Language barriers and cultural misunderstandings can get in the way of effective communication and create complexities in the workplace, including problems with safety. Let us see how we can overcome these complexities and can make a diverse workplace, a harmonious, enjoyable and creative place to work. For this, we shall, first of all, understand how important is it for an organization to have a diverse workforce, how can effective communication make difference within an organization, and how we can communicate effectively in a diverse workplace.

Importance of Diverse workforce

Businesses are recognizing the need and importance of investing in diversity and inclusion as part of their overall talent management practices and to continually challenge their organizations to make the connection between those principles and their corporate performance. Diversity is especially crucial in today's global marketplace, as companies interact with different cultures and clients. The payoffs touch every area of the business by potentially resulting in increased creativity, increased productivity, *new attitudes*, new language skills, global understanding, new processes, and new solutions to difficult problems. Greater agility, better market insight, stronger customer and community loyalty, innovation, and improved employee recruitment and retention. The businesses that fail to see the importance of Diversity and inclusion might find themselves unable to attract and retain the kinds of customers, employees, and business partners that constitute our changing world in 5 to 10 years. Among the advantages of diversity in the workplace are:

1. **Increased Productivity:** Diversity and Inclusion brings in diverse different talents together working towards a common goal using different sets of skills that ignites their loyalty and increases their retention and productivity
2. **Increased creativity and Problem solving:** With so many different and diverse minds coming together many more solutions will arise as every individual brings in their way of thinking, operating and solving problems and decision making
3. **Attract and Retain talent:** that add a competitive edge to any organization. Feeling included and appreciated increases loyalty and feeling of belonging. Language skills pool is increased and propels organization forward either to compete in the International global world or to increase its diverse customer base
4. **Help to build synergy in teams and enhances communication skills:** that brings in new attitudes and processes that profit the whole team
5. Applying the proper diversity and inclusion management strategies does not only save money on **litigation expenses** generated by discrimination lawsuits but is the right thing to do for the business.
6. **It increases market share and create a satisfied diverse customer base:** by relating to people from different backgrounds. It does propel the United States and its status to claim its place and success in the global business world of the 21st century.



An Internal Communications Strategy Makes a Difference

Within an organization, effective communication can make a difference by securing employee loyalty, improving or maintaining employee morale, creating mutual respect, increasing trust between employees and management, reducing turnover, reducing absenteeism, empowering employees, helping employees deal with change effectively, generating greater productivity, enabling the organization to get through a crisis, and improving the bottom line.

Communication is the lifeblood of any organization. When communication breakdown occurs, organizational performance will suffer. Poor communication is one of the top reasons why organizations fail or don't realize their potential. And while most organizations have more communication tools than ever before the question remains, "Why are we having such a hard time communicating?" Good communication practices help people at all levels in the organization improve their understanding of, and response to, the organization's and each other's needs. It helps people make effective decisions that are aligned with the organizations' goals and objectives. And, it can motivate performance by linking individual and team efforts with the bigger picture and by recognizing desired behaviors and effort throughout the organization. When employees are poorly informed or communication is neglected, people become cynical and lose their trust and respect for the organization and its leaders. As a result, they may consciously or subconsciously undermine the success of the organization. At best, they will simply be hindered from reaching their potential or performing in the best interests of the organization.

How often have you heard people say: "There was a communication break-down", "The problem was due to a mix up in communication", "One hand just didn't know what the other hand was doing", and "It was a case of poor communication." How often have you heard managers speak with frustration about good initiatives in their organizations that failed because employees were cynical and skeptical of the intentions or the potential for results? Organizations will say employees are their greatest resource, but often employees are bitter and demoralized – one of the outcomes of poor communication.

Poor **top-down communication** can result in employees failing to understand organizational expectations, initiatives, or directions, which will result in a communication vacuum. Any time there is a gap in communications, it's likely it will be filled with speculation and rumor, which can only hurt the bottom line.

Poor **bottom-up communication** deprives business leaders of information about customers, the impact of their policies and programs, the effectiveness of their systems, as well as the opportunity to learn about simple changes that might improve performance.

Internal Communication Tools

In every organization, the internal communication tools are essentially the same. The difference is how the tools are used. Is there a plan? Do you have clear objectives? Can you measure the effectiveness of your efforts? This is where a strategic approach to research, analyze, communicate, and evaluate comes in. Part of developing a solid plan, is determining which communications vehicles are appropriate for your message and your audience.

Table I: Internal Communication Tools and Their Employment

Communication tool	Some common uses	Top down- management driven	Bottom up- employee driven	Lateral- management and/ or employee driven
Employee publications- paper or electronic	Keep employees informed of business information, direction, progress and goals. Encourage quality improvement, increased efficiency, improved service and greater social responsibility. Information about company programs and initiatives. Recognize employees' achievements/successes.	●		
Employee Intranet	Document philosophy, values, guiding principles, history, awards, founders, organizational successes. Info on benefits, pension, profit sharing, safety, recreation programs, training, policies and procedures. New employee orientation.	●		●



E mail	Ongoing day- to- day communication. Updates on important issues or changes. Crisis communications.	●	●	●
Memos/ Letters	Important announcements. Employment agreements. Documentation of policy or procedural or other significant changes.	●		
Inserts/ Enclosures	Payroll stuffer or insert in publication. Important notices regarding changes in benefits or procedures or other significant changes.	●		
Large group meetings	Company vision. State of the nation address. Major change initiatives. Culture building.	●		
Small group meetings	Team building. Work planning. Status updates.	●	●	●
Bulletin board	Upcoming events. Notices about changes. Promotion of company programs.	●	●	●
Social media	Brand/ reputation management/ profile announcements. Crisis communications. Conversation	●	●	●
Grapevine	Fast and effective way to disseminate information about company happenings and issues. Often inaccurate.		●	●
Video	To promote brand. For major organizational initiatives. For training and orientation. To celebrate milestones such as anniversaries.	●		
PowerPoint slides	For major organizational initiatives. For training. To communicate the company vision/ mission/ goals. To communicate benefits information.	●		



Webinars	New initiatives/ programs. Working meetings. Information sessions.	●		●
Face- to- face	Reinforcement of all communications	●	●	●
Displays/ Exhibits	Highlight company or program information. Generate inquiries for more information. Get feedback. Recruit personnel.	●		

Workplace Communication and Cultural Diversity (Overcoming the issues)

Cultural diversity is commonplace in businesses today, but it is important to ensure that your managers and employees are effectively communicating when cultural differences exist. Poor communication practices create personal conflicts, missed deadlines, incorrect goal assumptions and contribute to employee turnover. Really effective communication establishes trust and rapport, helps you to act on risks and opportunities, and promotes productivity and alignment.

Language barriers are important to address because messages can easily be misconstrued. A worker may pretend to understand a directive when they really don't if they are embarrassed or frustrated with the language problem. There are many cultural differences that affect communication and different ways of viewing them. One way is to consider context. High-context cultures are those that rely less on verbal communication and more on nonverbal communication, actions and settings to find meaning. Japan, India and the Middle East are examples of high-context cultures. Low-context cultures place a great deal of emphasis on verbal communication and don't pay as much attention to other contextual clues. Examples of low-context cultures are the US, the UK and Germany.

One thing to keep in mind when managing cross-cultural communications is to avoid stereotyping. Even though a culture may be defined in a particular way, that doesn't mean such things are true of each individual and regional differences are also key. An Asian employee from Malaysia, for instance, has a very different background than someone from Japan.

Other cultural issues that affect communication in the workplace are roles and status, personal space and body language. The roles and status of men and women, for instance, can affect how a male employee relates to a female supervisor or how comfortable a female worker feels when addressed by a male manager.

It's important for you to tailor your management according to such cultural differences by ensuring that communication is clearly received and understood. One way is to use reflective listening, that is, have employees explain to you what it is that they understand goals and objectives to be.

Other tools for improving cross-cultural communication:

1. Learn how different cultures best receive information. Some cultures don't trust information that comes from a manager and would rather take direction from a shop foreman or team leader. And employees differ in whether or not they appreciate praise for their efforts in front of a group or in private.
2. Prepare all of your employees with cultural awareness and diversity programs. Teach empathy and mutual respect. Also provide ongoing acculturation training to new employees so that they can truly understand your company's overall culture: your goals and the behavior you expect.
3. Assign mentors to employees so that integration is facilitated and employees have someone that understands them to turn to.
4. Avoid using slang, common jargon or metaphors when you address employees of different cultures. These can make no sense at all to someone from a different culture.
5. Use graphics whenever possible in explaining goals and processes to employees of different cultures.
6. Ask for feedback but be prepared to use an intermediary if necessary.

"Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you,
For everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find, and the door will be
opened to those who knock." Matthew 7:7



The Twelve Secrets to Success

Acquire cultural knowledge by studying national cultures
Study role behaviors of different cultures relative to communication & decision making
Know and have an in-depth understanding of the language of context

Sell your ideas to your team
Engage in teaching active listening
Encourage impromptu and casual team interactions to build trust & respect
Know and have an in-depth understanding of the language of time

Know and have an in-depth understanding of the language of space
Negotiate from the proper cultural perspective
Open up to new ideas, be optimistic and appreciate cultural differences
Challenge yourself and your team by providing educational and training opportunities
Keep the faith and be patient!

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Conclusion/Results

From the above discussion we can conclude that communicating effectively in a diverse workplace due to the recent rapid increase in globalization can put a challenging job in front of the organization. Without effective internal communication in an organization, it is just not difficult but is impossible for that organization to communicate with its external parties like customers, government, society, suppliers, etc. leaving the organization becoming a failure. So, to be a successful organization with a diverse workforce a business firm should concentrate on improving its internal communication and making it effective.

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