



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6
The 6th STOU National Research Conference

การศึกษาอุปสรรคของการสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม: กรณีศึกษาบริษัทข้ามชาติ
A Study on Barriers of Cross-Cultural Communication: A Case Study of
Multi-National Company

วนิดา พรหมะวีระ (Wanida Brahamaweera)¹จันทิมา บรรจงประเสริฐ (Jantima Banjongprasert)²

บทคัดย่อ

ธุรกิจระหว่างประเทศได้เพิ่มสำคัญทั่วโลก ดังนั้นบริษัทข้ามชาติจึงต้องการคนที่มีความรู้ความสามารถ เพื่อเข้ามาทำงาน ด้วยความแตกต่างทาง เชื้อชาติ ศาสนา วัฒนธรรม ทำให้การสื่อสารทางวาจา และสื่อสารที่แสดงออกทางพฤติกรรมที่มีความแตกต่างกันนี้ อาจจะทำให้เกิดความผิดพลาดในการสื่อสาร และถือเป็นอุปสรรคของการสื่อสารอีกด้วย นอกจากนี้แล้ว ระดับความรู้ความเข้าใจในภาษาอังกฤษ รวมถึง วจนภาษา หรือ ภาษาที่ไม่ใช่คำพูด ถือเป็นปัจจัยที่เป็นอุปสรรคในการสื่อสารโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในบริษัทข้ามชาติ ดังนั้นจุดประสงค์ของงานวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาถึงการสื่อสารของสมาชิกที่มีคนต่างวัฒนธรรม และเพื่อสำรวจถึงปัญหาของการสื่อสารที่พบในกลุ่มคนที่ต่างวัฒนธรรม เพื่อทำความเข้าใจในการที่สื่อสารให้มีประสิทธิภาพ วิธีการที่ใช้ในวิจัยนี้เป็นแบบเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ผู้จัดการ และหัวหน้างาน ของบริษัทข้ามชาติแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย ที่ประสบการณ์ทำงานในตำแหน่งผู้จัดการไม่น้อยกว่า 8 ปี จำนวน 10 คน โดยผลของการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า วัฒนธรรมของชาติ ระดับความรู้ความเข้าใจในภาษาอังกฤษและ วจนภาษา นั้นถือเป็นอุปสรรคในการสื่อสารในการทำงาน

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม อุปสรรคของการสื่อสาร วัฒนธรรมประจำชาติ
ความรู้ความเข้าใจในภาษาอังกฤษ วจนภาษา

¹ นักศึกษาหลักสูตรธุรกิจระหว่างประเทศ วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ ม.ศิลปากร brahamaweera_w@silpakom.edu

² อาจารย์ ดร.วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ ม.ศิลปากร jantima_b@yahoo.com



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

Abstract

International business is increasingly important to many countries and multinational company needs to select skilled workforces from host countries to work in the company. Different nationalities, religions and culture highly likely cause the differences in verbal communication and non-verbal communication. The diversity may lead to misunderstanding which can be considered as a barrier in communication. Moreover, it should be noted that English proficiency and non-verbal languages are likely to be communication barriers especially in multinational company. Therefore, this study aims to understand how team members communicate with the cross-cultural teams and explore the communication problems faced by cross-cultural teams. To the paper also endeavor to understand how to create effective communication for cross-cultural team. Qualitative method was conducted to collect the data from 10 supervisors and managers who have been working in the multinational company more than 8 years. Analysis of the data showed that the differences in national culture, level of English proficiency and non-verbal language are considered as barriers of cross-cultural communication in a multinational company.

Keywords: Cross-cultural team, Communication barriers, National culture, English proficiency, Non-verbal language



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

Introduction

Firm strategy in global business requires an understanding of the business environment, international political and economic, international competition because many organizations are facing with complex in business environment. (Joynt and Warner, 1996) Appropriateness and effectiveness of managerial practices and organizational processes are required to be considered in cultural settings other than their own. According to the study of cross-cultural and approaches differ across cultures (Hofstede, 1983), effective communication in cross-cultural organizations is needed in order to avoid conflicts for example misinterpretation or misunderstanding. If the conflicts are not counted, cultural diversity can bring advantages to the team and company.

Research background

In the global business workplace, there are many issues of cross-cultural barriers in communication. Workforces who came from different cultures, different countries, different background are working in the same organization or the same team so they may express emotions and behaviors differently. The differences on cultures and practices that followed in each countries effect on the businesses. People from one country entered to another country must adjust himself to culture of another country. (Groeschl, 2003) culture is an important factor influencing the understanding and interpretation of the appraisal process, its development, implementation, and other appraisal related aspects. The ability to manage cross-culturally is an important factor for multinational corporate survival and success. (Hooker, 2008) also supported that business practices are shaped by deeply-held cultural attitudes toward work, power, trust, wealth and communication. (Pheng and Yuguan, 2002) explained that ignoring and mishandling can caused an inability to retain and motivate employees. When successfully managed, differences in cultures can lead to innovative business practices, faster and better learning within the organization and sustainable sources of competitive advantage (Hoecklin, 1996). Indeed, there is no reason why the complex whole of culture should not also include history, economics and politics.

To explore the barriers of cross-cultural communication in the literature, language is one of the cross-cultural communication barriers (Penn, 1981; Swarthout, 2016; Rosenthal, 2012). The global marketplace creates many opportunities for business development but ineffective cross-cultural communication can harm others. It is important to understand the barriers of cross-cultural communication and know how to overcome them.



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

English is the common international language in global business. To communicate between people who speaking the different languages is not easy because English is not their own language. Employees may have more difficulty when communicating in English. Misunderstanding and lost in translation can be occurred when English is not your own language. The meaning of the same word can be the different meaning to people from different cultures so the potential for misunderstandings would be increased so that they may check for real understanding by asking others to summarize what they just heard you say. Each culture has its own rules about proper behavior which affect verbal and nonverbal communication.

Non-verbal communication is also important in business communication because people try to understand when non-verbal language is involved. The differences in cultures regulate the expression of emotion differently. Some cultures get very emotional when they are debating an issue. The way they exhibit their anger, fear, frustration, and other feelings openly while the other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden, exhibiting or sharing only the "rational" or factual aspects of the situation. The differences in the understanding of non-verbal communication can contribute to misunderstanding while differences in interpretation may lead to conflicts or escalating existing conflicts (LeBaron, 2003) or you may damage your professional relationship. It is important to understand these differences to show the respect for other cultural when communicating with professionals from other cultures.

All of these differences tend to lead to communication problems. If the people who involved are not aware of the problems, they would even more likely to fall victim to them. If you are to work effectively with people who are difference in culture, you need to become aware of your own culture and how that impacts on others. (Brewer, 2008) found that the effectiveness of cross-cultural knowledge flows, the provision of training and education services to international students must be one of the most evident. (Hooker, 2008) explained that communication is fundamental in business because business is a collaborative activity. Goods and services are created and exchanged through the close coordination of many persons, sometimes within a single village, and sometimes across global distances.

In business, cross cultural communication plays a critical role in successfully business outcome. When the communication is effective, everyone benefits from increased bandwidth, institutional knowledge, and competitive advantage. However, ineffective communication can confuse or send a misconstrued message which could lead to broken relations with customers, partners, vendors, and employees.



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

Dimensions of National Culture

(Hofstede, 1991) developed four dimensions of culture based on survey conducted among IBM managers in over 50 countries for work values and subsequently developed those dimensions of culture compatible in a sense to the business practices. Hofstede's model has four dimensions.

- Power distance, which refers to the social stratification within a society such that higher status individuals/groups are accorded more power and authority by those of lower status.
- Uncertainty avoidance is a society's fear of the unknown or ambiguous situations;
- Individualism (in-group collectivism), which refers to the identity of self as based either solely on the individual or on the individual as part of a group or collective.
- Masculinity (assertiveness), which refers to a society's preference for competition and outcomes (masculine values) as opposed to cooperation and process (feminine values).

Later he incorporated Long-term orientation based on Confucian work dynamics. His work was validated by (Hoppe, 1990; Smith, 1994) who accepted the overall implication of Hofstede's cultural model and its influence in global scale. (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1998) observed that when the person perceive and interpret the behavior of another person, they must communicate your feelings or reactions to what took place which is an extension of the ethical base to appraise performance and preference. They further add that this difference truly explains how stereotypes often represent distinctions but interacts with one another. (Amba-Rao, 1993) argued that global organizations explicitly build corporate responsibility by inculcating values into business strategies. Nevertheless global organizations operate in many different countries, where cross-cultural practices are essential to maintain the business process.

Cross-cultural team

As the global businesses are expanding, cross cultural team is going to increase. Cross cultural teamwork is people from diverse backgrounds interact and work together as a team. Many of large companies have people who work across multiple countries and they are looking for integrated global solutions. The cross cultural team has advantages to be able to understand the needs of their clients better. Focusing of the team objectives is the key to make the cross-cultural team work well. The objective is an output for the team and it is better when there is multi-experience among team members to create the innovative thinking and solutions. Cultural barriers also exist such as ignorance of cultural conventions, status differences, and differences in the definitions and expectations of friendship (Peltokorpi and Clausen, 2011). Cultures are



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

based on unseen values and assumptions which created by shared experiences and events. When faces with the same situation, different cultures might react in different ways. The problems and conflicts would be occurred in cross cultural team so the goal should try to build the strengths and minimize conflicts or miscommunication. (Caligiuri, 2000) explained that sociability and openness/connectivity to people are underlying individual differences that moderate the relationship between contact and adjustment. Misconception can lead to interpersonal conflicts and inappropriate organizational behavior (Ting-Toomey, 1985)

Communication

Communication is to transfer information or message from one to another and it can be sent by verbal, non-verbal language, written, images or tone of voice. To communicate information effectively, it is involved with an appropriate use of language simply and clearly. Good communication is a key feature of successful construction projects (Dainty et al., 2006). Avoid something unclear to minimize confusion and misunderstanding. It is important for the message of sender seeks feedback to check that their message is clearly understood. The message receivers can also provide feedback on how the message is understood and attempted to correct it if misunderstanding or confusion is occurred. Good communication skill is necessary in every businesses to make sure that everyone both internal and external company are operating on the same thing. The communication degree will allow you to build awareness how to communicate information to diverse receiver effectively with the business goal.

Effective communication is the ability to convince people among team requires comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategy. Communication involves in understanding the message from sender to create team knowledge to avoid confusion and conflict that may occur. Communication helps organization to design and monitoring impact on cross-cultural team and create sense of partnership among team to become successful.

Cross-cultural communication

Cross cultural communication is not easy to make people from different background understand each other. Culture can influences how people approach the problems and how people participate in groups. The potential misunderstanding is likely to happen when the cultural is different between communicators and it may lead to conflict. Emotions are endemic in a cross-cultural situation and can create volatility (Nicolini, 2002). Nonverbal communication is important when



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

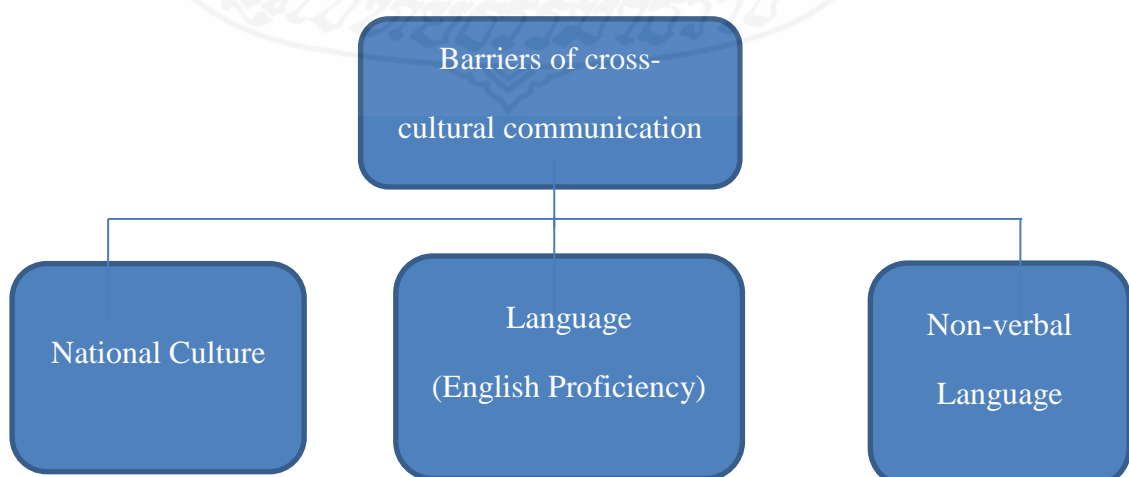
interact across cultures. Sometimes the meaning of non-verbal message is unclear and the way to understand the messages would be different depends on the receiver's background.

English is the international language of business and more people are learning English because it is become necessary in impact to your career. Most multinational companies require a certain degree of English proficiency in order to get a position with a top company because English is not only important but the companies are choosing person who able to communicate at a global level includes communication via e-mails, phone conversation and speaking with clients and coworkers. Language is the greatest mediator allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007). The workforce who expecting to get promoted in the multinational company, they are required to have skill to understand English in business.

English proficiency is the level of how you understand English. But if workforce has unequal of English proficiency, misunderstanding or lost in translation can be occurred. When English is not your own language for workforce who came from different parts of the world, the meaning of the same word can be translated to the different meaning and it can lead to increasing of misunderstanding. Moreover, while the most technologies are based on English words, workforce should be able to understand English so they can work well with technologies.

Nonverbal communication is a flowing rapidly back-and-forth process requiring full concentration and attention (Jeanne et al, 2016). Nonverbal communication is the way to communicate without wording for example facial expression or tone of voice. The message receiver needs to understand the emotions behind the nonverbal message in order to react or understand the message from sender. Nonverbal communication can create misunderstanding because people from across culture may react differently.

Conceptual framework





การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6
The 6th STOU National Research Conference

Research Objectives

The purposes of this study are

1. To study how team members communicate with the cross-cultural teams.
2. To explore the communication problems faced by cross-cultural teams.
3. To understand how to create effective communication for cross-cultural team.

Propositions

1. Difference in national culture can be barrier to the cross-cultural communication in a multinational company.
2. Proficiency in English can be barrier to the cross-cultural communication in a multinational company.
3. Non- verbal language can be barrier to the cross-cultural communication in a multinational company.

Research Methodology

This research was designed to use qualitative method. The strength of qualitative research is to provide description of experience, opinions, emotions and relationships for better understanding of given situation. Researcher decided to use qualitative method because researcher needs the interviewees to share their experience so interviewees are free to respond in their own words and have opportunity to respond more in detail than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.

The data will be collected from managers and supervisors who are working in multinational company A. Researcher expected to be shared and helps to develop ideas by their experiences. The 10 managers and supervisors were selected bases on service years with the company and position in the 4 different departments. Author sent e-mails to interviewees and asked for the available date and time to schedule one on one meeting. The answers were recorded in the voice clips. The duration for all interviewees, 10 managers and supervisors, took around 3 weeks. The interview questions were in form of paper distributed to all interviewees before the scheduled time.

Result

Managers and supervisor are agreed that the differences in culture, differences level of English proficiency and non-verbal language can be the barriers in communication. The working style on individual supervisors and managers would different but the issues and problems are



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

the things can't be avoided. For example, the criterion to choose the workforce for cross-cultural team may depend on their working style. Some managers chose the staffs from their skills, abilities, previous experiences and performances while some preferred to choose their staff from the weak point to let them learn something new. Being consultant and good advisor is needed for managers in order to encourage their staffs to feel open and ask for support from them when they faced with problems or issues. Some Thai managers are concerning about the position of person who dealing with the virtual team. Managers will focus on the level of position when meeting with the virtual team in the different time zone. If he has to deal with managers who is in the higher position, he will follow that person's time zone while some managers caring about the number of participants. If the number of participants is higher than the other side, he will follow the time zone on most people.

The answers about impact of the diverse workforce in the organization were all "Yes". The company is aware on this problem and be prepared by providing training to managers and supervisors to get ready with the conflict or problem that may happen. The person who came from different culture may react differently and the translation process of individual may different depend on their background. The company's policy which is called "harassment policy" is refreshing to all employees on annual basis to prevent problem or conflict in culture different.

The business language in global business is English and all managers confirmed that the difference level of English proficiency can cause on miscommunication. In the hiring process, the company has standard required score of English proficiency testing to make sure that the person who going to join with the company will be able to communicate in English. The required score of English proficiency testing may be higher than normal for some specific positions.

Non-verbal language is one of the barriers in communication. Misunderstanding and conflict are occurred because sometimes it's hard to understand the meaning of the message sender and to protect this kind of problem, managers suggested to check back for the meaning with the message sender to make sure that the message receiver will react and able to communication in the same direction.

When misunderstanding is happened, managers suggested to discuss with their subordinate to avoid any further miscommunication. Most of the time, the staffs will learn from their mistake and chance for the mistake in the same problem is reducing.

The way that managers used to motivate and encourage their team to get the expected results was to create teamwork among team. Creating good attitude to the team is also an



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

effective way because when they need help, they will be able to help each other to solve the problem and manager will be advisor and supporter to push the team to the expected target.

Conclusion

Managers and supervisors are aware about the problem or conflict that may happen and company has already had a plan to deal with the problems. The plan may be applied depend on the manager's working style. Effective communication in organization is essential so the barriers that found from this research can be raised in order to avoid conflict and problem in the organization.

- The team members communicate with the cross-cultural teams by check back the message from sender to make sure that they understood correctly. If they faced with unclear message, they would ask for more detail to avoid confusion and using appropriate tone of voice to communicate the message to team

- The communication problems faced by cross-cultural teams were related to cultural differences, English proficiency and non-verbal language.

- Cross-cultural team created effective communication by listen the team members and encourage them to open up and show how they feel among team. Sometimes they use presentation because pictures and sounds can help them understand message easier. Using simple words to make sure that everybody can be on the same page.

Suggestion and Implication

The suggestion and implication of this study is that managers and supervisors could encourage the workforce to enhance their problem solving skill to increase the performance. Since supervisors and managers are having awareness of global issues and issues of diversity, they are expecting their subordinate to having skill to build relationships among team and community. Moreover, the organizations need to think about the training like cross-cultural training and workshop among cross-cultural team and also English language training. In order to manage the diverse workforces, it is something affects to policies, behaviors and work practices that have to be in an effective way.



การประชุมเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช ครั้งที่ 6

The 6th STOU National Research Conference

References

- Joynt, P. and Warner, M. (1996). *Managing Across Cultures*. London: International
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Nicholson, J. D. and Stepina, L. P. (1998). *Cultural Values: A Cross-National Study*.
- Hooker, J. (2008), *Cultural Differences in Business Communication*. Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University
- Penn, S. (2016). *Cultural communication barriers in the workplace*. Retrieved Apr 01, 2016 from <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/cultural-communication-barriers-workplace-13888.html>
- Swarthout, D. (2016). *What Are Cultural Barriers to Communication in the Workplace - Definition & Examples*. Retrieved Apr 01, 2016 from <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-are-cultural-barriers-to-communication-in-the-workplace-definition-examples-quiz.html>
- Rosenthal, B. (2012). *Barriers to Cross-Cultural Business Communication*. Retrieved Apr 01, 2016 from [http://info.communispond.com/blog/bid/243299/Barriers-to Cross-Cultural-Business-Communication](http://info.communispond.com/blog/bid/243299/Barriers-to-Cross-Cultural-Business-Communication)
- Jeanne, S., Smith, M.A., Boose G., and Jaffe Jaelline, (2016) *Non verbal communication: Improving Your Nonverbal Skills and Reading Body Language*. Retrieved Apr 30, 2016 from <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/nonverbal-communication.htm>