

Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: Overcoming Barriers to Communication

Main Title

Introduction

The global village that is today's workplace will only continue to increase in size and diversity. Unfortunately, research into the problems caused by cultural diversity, from lower productivity and morale to communication barriers, has so far been both general and sparse. Reflecting that immaturity, the literature reviewed in this report defines the overall problem and offers some solutions. However, further research is needed to more clearly categorize the difficulties caused by cultural diversity and to develop effective training programs to address these challenges for tomorrow's workforce.

Thesis Statement

Defining the Problem

Level 1 Subheading

Cultural diversity has long been recognized as a potential problem in the workplace that deserves serious attention. As far back as 1996, Fine stated that cultural diversity of the U.S. workforce is perhaps the most pressing challenge of our times. However, research on this issue had produced general overviews on diversity. Missing were research studies of diversity in specific organizations. Research to document different voices in the workforce, especially those that have been marginalized, was needed. Fine challenged academics to demonstrate to the public the worth of their studies on cultural diversity and multicultural discourses.

Body Paragraph Topic Sentence

Fine's call to action was heeded by numerous researchers and resulted in studies of geographically dispersed cultures. For example, Frisoli (2010) uses a series of interviews conducted with a West African man to study communication between two people of culturally diverse backgrounds. Frisoli found that communication on the Internet can be easily distorted due to cross-cultural barriers. Frisoli also found that people of diverse backgrounds often bring different sets of ethical attitudes toward technology, which can further skew communication. Frisoli highlights the importance of understanding differences in order to improve

Body Paragraph Topic Sentence

Source summary. Focus is on content of source.

Source summary.

communication. Frisoli's findings were replicated on the opposite side of the globe by Icten (2010) who looked at the impact of culture on communication for migrant workers in Australia.

Transition sentence to paragraph's next source

Presentation of paragraph's second source.

The twelve workers had mastered English before moving to Australia. However, they encountered significant communication barriers despite their mastery. Icten suggests that the barriers were based on cultural differences, not language skills. Icten describes an "Innovative Communication in the Workplace" program that helped workers overcome these cultural barriers and to communicate more successfully.

These international findings were replicated in the U.S. in a 2010 study by Sweeny and Zhu, who observed 14 native speakers of English in intercultural business negotiations to measure how they accommodated 13 nonnative speakers of English. The results suggested that native speakers used a wider range of linguistic devices than nonnative speakers. The majority of the native speakers were challenged to accommodate nonnative speakers and did so with varying degrees of effectiveness. The study concluded that native speakers lacked an understanding of the issues of intercultural communication and were unable to effectively accommodate nonnative speakers.

Body Paragraph Topic Sentence

Source summary

Searching for Solutions

Level 1 Subheading

A variety of specific techniques have been suggested to address the problem of overcoming the impact of cultural diversity on communication in the workplace. For example,

Body Paragraph Topic Sentence

Barker and Gower (2010) examine storytelling as a way to increase effective communication in a diverse workplace. The authors present a form of storytelling as an organizational communication tool and discuss how to apply it in the work environment. This approach may not be suitable for all organizations, it but can be used to develop alternative strategies. When cultural and linguistic differences are at play, the role of translators can become important to

Source summary

Transition sentence to paragraph's next source

maintain effective communication. Teodorescu (2010) addresses the need for translation in culturally diverse communications by highlighting the negative affect that poor translation can have on communications and offering strategies for effectively sharing ideas in culturally diverse environments.

Source
summary

Regardless of the specific techniques employed, it has become clear that the best outcomes are achieved with a formal program of diversity training that fosters a culture of acceptance and accommodation in the workplace. Lopez-Rocha (2006) addresses communication conflicts through diversity training, providing evidence that increasing cultural awareness in the workplace improves relationships, organizational procedures, and productivity. Managers must be aware of the main factor that causes conflicts: the differences among individuals from different cultural groups. These differences involve discrepancies in language and communication style, values, attitudes towards authority, and time—all of which can be addressed in diversity training.

Body Paragraph
Topic Sentence

Source
summary

Preparing for Tomorrow, Today

Level 1 Subheading

Conclusion

The global village that is today's workplace will only continue to increase in size and diversity. Unfortunately, research into the problems caused by cultural diversity, from lower productivity and morale to communication barriers, has so far been both general and sparse. The literature reviewed in this report reflects that immaturity. Particularly needed is a way to categorize the challenges caused by cultural diversity in the workplace and to develop effective training programs to address them.

References

- Barker, R., & Gower, K. (2010). Strategic application of storytelling in organizations: Toward effective communication in a diverse world. *Journal of Business Communication, 47*(3), 295-312. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost. doi:10.1177/0021943610369782
- Fine, M. G. (1996). Cultural diversity in the workplace: The state of the field. *International Journal of Business Communication, 33*(4), 485-502. doi: 10.1177/002194369603300408
- Frisoli, P. (2010). Assumptions, emotions, and interpretations as ethical moments: Navigating a small-scale cross-cultural online interviewing study. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE), 23*(4), 393-405.
- Icten, E. (2010). Communication barriers at work. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, Series IV: Philology & Cultural Studies, 3*(52), 211-214.
- Lopez-Rocha, S. (2006). Diversity in the workplace: Issues, strategies, and perspectives. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities & Nations, 5*(5), 11-18.
- Sweeney, E., & Zhu, H. (2010). Accommodating toward your audience. *Journal of Business Communication, 47*(4), 477-504. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost. DOI: 10.1177/0021943610377308
- Teodorescu, A. (2010). Translation and cultural diversity. *Petroleum - Gas University of Ploiesti Bulletin, Philology Series, 62*(1), 175-178.