

Chapter 61

Assessing Multilingual Multicultural Teachers' Communication Styles

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ABSTRACT

As many educational institutions become more globally competitive, and the number of diverse teachers increases, it becomes even more imperative to avoid what some cultures might deem as inappropriate and unprofessional verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Those behaviors are sometimes interpreted in different ways, depending on the cultural perspective. Any unwanted verbal and non-verbal actions often increase stress, unwelcomed job pressures, and hinder a positive work environment. At the institutional level where teachers are very diverse, understanding verbal and nonverbal behaviors must be addressed. The researchers propose a methodology which will help multilingual, multicultural teachers' communication styles within the workplace and how to improve cross-cultural team collaborations. Additionally, the information provided in this study allows educational leaders to make inferences about their teachers' team performance and expectations based on their motivation, experiences, and skills used when working with a multicultural team.

INTRODUCTION

Mannix and Neale (2005) assert that diversity (e.g. demographic, cognitive, or personality) “reduce[s] discrimination and increase[s] access to career opportunities, and enhance creativity and quality of team performance” (p. 32). At the same time, Mannix and Neale indicate that this diverse environment may also negatively affect people through “social integration, communication, and conflict in groups” (p. 32). Educational institutions must address teacher satisfaction by supporting and encouraging successful team performance to meet positive expectations. Teachers must learn how to address the challenges (e.g.

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deal with coordination and control issues, maintain communication richness, and develop and maintain team cohesiveness) that arise when working with team members from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds (Hong, 2010; Matveev & Nelson, 2004). Some cultural differences, such as verbal and non-verbal mannerisms and gestures should be avoided. Speaking in a neutral tone and being aware of cultural differences when interacting can help to foster effective multilingual teachers' communication styles on multicultural teams.

This study assesses multilingual, multicultural teachers' communication styles, highlights advantages and disadvantages of those communication style differences within the team, and encourages the application of knowledge gained from this study to enhance team performance within an educational setting. The study compared how teachers, from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds, built and developed strong relationships while working as a team.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The lack of knowledge regarding multicultural communication style differences impact on team performance is an essential factor affecting educational settings. As a result, the lack of knowledge will cause an ineffective work environment in multicultural team situations, and the educational workforce may suffer. Educational institutions often fail in this step because they cannot control teachers' motivation. Schools are spending time and resources recruiting broadly talented teachers who will succeed at a diverse educational institution. However, many cultural variables, such as inappropriate team structures, weak team integration, and less confidence and interest are implicated as significant causes of problems in teachers works/projects.

Teaching people to adapt to a new cultural environment is not an easy task. Most diverse workforces are suffering because they continue to receive insufficient training/orientation programming related to different cultures or, in some cases, no training/orientation programs at all. These challenges present a serious problem to educational institutions as they seek to improve their presence in the multicultural arena. Educational administrators are strongly encouraging their teachers to improve their skills in order to be more successful on multicultural teams. In order to become more global, educational institutions must provide training that offers strategies and resources for improving cross-cultural team collaborations.

Research Questions

1. What effect do multicultural communication style differences have on teachers' approaches to multicultural team environments within an educational setting?
2. What multicultural team experiences are educators reporting?
3. What resources or strategies could improve team performance on a multicultural team within an educational setting?

Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Setting

Educators are simultaneously teachers and students, who are considered lifelong learners. Lifelong learners often share a common space and are encouraged to learn from one another. Learning from one another is easier said than done. As the world becomes more diverse and more complex, the work of perform-

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