Chapter VI
Culture and Communication Challenges in Virtual Workspaces

Bolanle A. Olaniran
Texas Tech University, USA

ABSTRACT

The issue of globalization is one that contemporary organizations are constantly trying to unravel. However, globalization has brought about or reinvents the concept of workspaces such that work is no longer confined to a traditional space in a specific geographical setting whereby individuals are restricted to face-to-face meetings and interactions. Rather, globalization has created the idea of virtual workspaces wherein collaborations and communication interactions occur with the aid of information and communication technologies in order to allow collaboration among workers across different geographical boundaries. Virtual workspaces, however, also bring into the foreground the issue of culture and its effect on behaviors and communication interactions. This discussion explores the role of culture and its implications for virtual workspaces. At the same time, an attempt is made to address adaptation from traditional to virtual workspaces. The objective of researching and reporting on the transition of traditional to virtual workspaces is to offer organizations and their members or other practitioners a way to address differences in cultures while fostering effective collaboration in virtual workspaces which facilitates the globalization process.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual teams represent individuals who are gathered together to perform a particular task in an environment where the communication occurs through a host of information communication technology systems, often referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC) media. The essence of a virtual team can be described in two formats: (1) those occurring in collocated groups whereby individuals and participants are in close physical proximity, and (2) global virtual

teams in which participants or members in the group interact from geographically dispersed locations and are not in the same physical proximity. It is essential to distinguish the two types of virtual teams because there is a critical variable "culture" that holds different implications for task performance and outcomes. For instance, individuals in collocated virtual teams may not have to worry about culture as much as those interacting in the global virtual team do. Thus the primary emphasis in this chapter is on the latter (i.e., global virtual team) and the role of culture in the context of global virtual interaction. This is especially important given that, in today's contemporary business environment, the norm is that business is no longer confined to national geographic borders; rather, much organizational work transcends national boundaries, and as a result, the tasks occur in global or cross-cultural virtual contexts. Notwithstanding, there is a significant oversight in the research as to the role of culture in global virtual environments. Most research emphasizes the technological effects or characteristics of the media in global virtual teams (GVTs) to the detriment of how culture influences the ensuing interactions among GVT members (Anawati & Craig, 2006; Olaniran, 2004). At the same time culture has been identified as an important variable in project management (e.g., Eggington, 1993), as well as posing a significant challenge for cross-cultural virtual teams (Dube & Pare, 2001; Olaniran, 2004, 2006). Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to explore culture, identify some challenges that culture poses for communication interaction in GVT, and attempt to offer suggestions for addressing the problems. First however, it is necessary to define culture and explore why it is important to devote attention to the idea of culture in GVT.

According to Keesing (1974) not everyone shares precisely the same theory of cultural code, and not all individuals share the same ideals about their culture; consequently, culture is viewed not just as a mere collection of symbols fitted together by an analyst, but instead as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates an "internal model of reality" (Keesing, 1974, p. 89). However, as individuals learn to maneuver within their cultures, they develop their individual implicit theories of communication that overlap with the implicit personal theories of communication that other members of the same culture use to guide communication and interaction (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Olsen, 1978). In essence, it is argued that:

Our cultures influence our behavior directly through the norms and rules we use to guide our behavior when we interact with others. Our cultures also indirectly affect our communication through individual characteristics we learn when we are socialized into our cultures. (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 16)

Therefore, if culture is germane to how individuals view themselves as a part of a unique social collective (i.e., identity) and eventual communication interaction, then it is contended that culture in essence influences any organizational activities and project management, be it face-to-face or virtual settings. This view has been echoed by Hall (1959) who argued that "culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 159). Similarly, Hofstede, contends that culture is learned rather than inherited because it is derived from "one's social environment" and as such it is described as "the collective programming of the mind" that differentiates members of one human group from the other (Hofstede, 1980). Another well-known definition of culture was offered by Kroeber and Kluckholn (1952) by relating culture to behavior. They suggest that culture represents patterns of ideas and values that shape peoples' behavior.

Culture, however, is often neglected in the virtual workspace literature in spite of its significance. Perhaps one of the key reasons for the

Related Content

Relationship Development and Maintenance in a Mediated World
Jessica L. Mooreand Elizabeth A. Craig (2010). *Interpersonal Relations and Social Patterns in Communication Technologies: Discourse Norms, Language Structures and Cultural Variables* (pp. 77-99).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/relationship-development-maintenance-mediated-world/42856

Prevalence and Associated Factors of Internet Addiction Among Male Students of Jubail University College, Saudi Arabia
Gilbert Macalanda Talaueand Ishaq Kalanther (2023). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 1-16).
www.irma-international.org/article/prevalence-and-associated-factors-of-internet-addiction-among-male-students-of-jubail-university-college-saudi-arabia/324087

Teachers' Certification on Basic Computer Skills
Christos X. Christakoudis, George S. Androulakisand Charalampos Zagouras (2012). *International Journal of Cyber Ethics in Education* (pp. 12-23).
www.irma-international.org/article/teachers-certification-basic-computer-skills/74786

Silent Voices: The Perception of Cyberbullying Among At-Risk Middle School Students
Orlin St. Surinand Rebecca J. Blankenship (2019). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 1-21).
www.irma-international.org/article/silent-voices/241847

Notification Display Choice for Smartphone Users: Investigating the Impact of Notification Displays on a Typing Task
Lauren Norrieand Roderick Murray-Smith (2019). *Multigenerational Online Behavior and Media Use: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 853-874).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/notification-display-choice-for-smartphone-users/220980