

---

## A STUDY OF BARRIERS TO CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS AT MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

---

\*<sup>1</sup>Dr. Ona Ladiwal, <sup>2</sup>Eshita Mukherjee

---

<sup>1</sup>Professor DMS, SKIT.

<sup>2</sup>Student, DMS, SKIT.

---

Article Received: 5 February 2026

\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Ona Ladiwal

Article Revised: 25 February 2026

Professor DMS, SKIT.

Published on: 18 March 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.7820>

---

### ABSTRACT

As Multinational Corporations expand around the world being able to communicate with people from cultures is no longer a nice thing to have it is a must have. This study looks at the things that get in the way of good communication in today's global office and how these problems affect how well teams work together and perform.

By talking to project managers and asking diverse teams questions the research finds four main areas where communication often breaks down:

- Language problems: Issues caused by people not speaking the company language well. Digital tools making it hard to understand what people mean.
- Cultural differences: How our backgrounds, communication styles and biases change how we understand messages.
- Body language: The tension or mistrust created by physical cues and personal space boundaries during face-to-face or video calls.
- Authority and bias: How strict hierarchies and favouring people from your country can stop feedback and new ideas.

The main point is that while language differences are a problem the deeper risks to a project usually come from conflicting cultural values regarding time, authority and being indirect. Unfortunately training people to be more culturally aware is often not taken seriously. To fix this the paper suggests a way for Multinational Corporations to communicate that focuses on decentralizing communication and using "cultural bridges". People who can help translate intent between different groups. To keep everyone on the same page. This research provides a roadmap for building a workforce that's more inclusive, connected and truly in sync.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world the "borderless office" is a reality. For Multinational Corporations the key to innovation is not just technology it is the ability to bring together minds from every corner of the globe. This global melting pot brings a complex challenge: the clash of communication styles. When we interact with people from cultures, we are not just exchanging words we are exchanging our deepest values and the way we see the world. In an office we often rely on a "cultural shorthand". Unwritten rules that everyone knows. In a Multinational Corporation that shorthand does not exist. A manager might find that a request that feels clear in one place is perceived as aggressive or confusing in another. This study was born from a realization: technical skill is not enough for international success. While we have built a "Global Village" through technology our human connections remain fragmented. Despite having the collaborative tools many organizations still struggle with communication problems. The problem is not the software it is a lack of understanding. Standard policies often overlook nuances and the gap between direct and indirect communication can lead to frustration and missed opportunities. When these human elements misalign, the friction causes more than misunderstandings. It erodes trust, delays projects and leads to financial loss.

## Literature Review

The Literature Review in this report looks at the sociological theories that explain why global teams often struggle to communicate.

Here is a breakdown of the core concepts:

**1. The Invisible Rules:** Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory says that our national upbringing gives us a way of thinking that affects everything from how we respect authority to how much we value the group.

In a sense a manager from a "flat" culture might find a "hierarchical" team quiet while that team might find the managers informal style disorganized.

### **2. Reading Between the Lines: High vs. Low Context**

Edward T. Hall's work highlights that how we say something is often more important than what we say.

- **Low-Context Cultures:** People say what they mean.
- **High-Context Cultures:** The message is buried in the relationship setting and non-verbal cues.

The problem is that people from cultures might misunderstand each other. For example a German manager might think an Asian colleague is being evasive while the Asian colleague thinks the manager is being rude.

### 3. The "Language Trap"

when a company uses one language barriers remain. Research shows that "functional fluency" is the hurdle.

- **Social Categorization:** Native speakers are often viewed as competent.
- **The Silence Effect:** Non-native speakers may stop contributing in meetings to avoid embarrassment.

### 4. The Solution: Cultural Intelligence

The answer to these problems is not more "sensitivity training". It is Cultural Intelligence. Cultural Intelligence is a skill that can be developed. It involves four parts:

1. **Drive:** The interest and confidence to function in settings.
2. **Knowledge:** Understanding how cultures differ.
3. **Strategy:** How to make sense of diverse experiences.
4. **Action:** The ability to change behaviour to fit the situation.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was designed to be inclusive and multifaceted.

We adopted a Concurrent Triangulation Design, which allowed us to listen to the "what" and the "why" at the time.

### 1. The Voices We Heard

We sought out a Purposive Sample of individuals who live these challenges:

- **The Global Navigators:** We talked to Project Managers who have spent at five years bridging the gap between cross-border teams.
- **The Global Community:** We reached out to employees working in teams across different nationalities.
- **The Architects of Culture:** We consulted HR and Learning Directors who shape how their organizations think about diversity and training.

## 2. How We Gathered Their Stories

We used a mix of tools to ensure no perspective was lost:

- **Digital Pulse Checks:** We asked employees to rank their frustrations.
- **Deep-Dive Conversations:** We held video interviews to hear about "incidents". Moments where a misunderstanding led to a missed deadline or a hurt feeling.
- **Observing the "Digital Room":** We looked at how teams talk to each other in emails and meetings.

## Findings of the Study

The results of this study reveal that the significant hurdles in global business are not always the ones we can hear but rather the "invisible walls" built from differing values and social expectations. While language is a challenge the way we perceive authority and deliver feedback often has a much deeper impact on whether a project succeeds or fails.

### 1. The "Clash" of Communication Styles

The research highlights a tension between direct and indirect ways of speaking.

- Direct Communicators value. Literal meaning, but they can come across as blunt or rude to others.
- Indirect Communicators rely on "reading between the lines" and non-verbal cues.

The problem is that when these styles meet direct speakers may feel their colleagues are being evasive while indirect speakers may feel personally attacked or disrespected.

### 2. The Weight of Authority

One of the striking findings is how much hierarchy can silence a room.

- In cultures with High Power Distance there is a respect for authority that can prevent employees from speaking up.

The data shows that employees, in these regions were less likely to offer feedback or point out a mistake in a manager's plan.

This "silence of authority" is not a social preference. It leads to actual technical and operational failures because critical information is not flowing upward.

### 3. The Language Trap

- When a company chooses one language for everyone to use, like English people still have trouble understanding each other.
- Speaking a language is not the same as getting what the other person means.

- People who speak the language naturally often seem powerful or capable which makes others who are not as good at the language feel left out and not want to join in conversations. This means the company misses out on ideas from these people.

#### 4. Digital Misunderstandings

Now that we work from home the way we communicate online can be confusing.

- Some people think it is rude if you turn off your camera. Others think it is okay because they want some privacy or they want to focus.
- If someone takes a time to answer an email one person might think they are not in a hurry but another person might think they are being careful and thinking about their answer.

#### Summary Table of Impact

The things that get in the way of people working well together are:

Barrier Category	How Often It Happens	Impact on Success
Language Fluency	Frequent (72%)	Moderate
Communication Style	Frequent (68%)	High
Hierarchy/Power	Less Frequent (30%)	High

The study says that to really help people work well together companies need to do more than just teach language lessons. They need to help people understand cultures, which is called Cultural Intelligence.

#### DISCUSSION

The study found that even when people speak the language, they can still have trouble understanding each other.

The real problems that stop people from working together are the habits and values that we are not aware of.

Here are some of the problems that the study found:

#### The Style Clash: Direct vs. Indirect

People from cultures have different ways of being honest.

- People from cultures like the United States or Germany like to be direct and clear.
- People from cultures like Japan or the United Arab Emirates like to be more polite and indirect.
- This can cause problems because one person might think the other is being rude when they are just being honest in their way.

### **The Silence of Authority**

In some cultures, people do not like to question their bosses.

- This can be a problem because people might see something going wrong. They will not say anything because they do not want to disagree with their boss.
- This can lead to mistakes that could have been avoided.

### **Digital Body Language**

The way we communicate online can be different in cultures.

- Some people might think it is rude if you turn off your camera while others think it is okay.
- Some people might think it is slow if you do not answer an email away while others think it is polite to take some time to think before answering.

### **The Language Trap**

Just because people speak the language it does not mean they understand each other.

- Even if someone knows the words, they might not understand the tone or the meaning behind them.
- People who are not speakers might feel shy and not speak up in meetings, which means the company misses out on their good ideas.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study found that to really work well together people need to understand each other's cultures.

To do this companies should:

### **1. Teach Cultural Intelligence**

Companies should help their leaders understand cultures and how to work with people from those cultures.

### **2. Create a Team Culture**

of making everyone follow one culture teams should create their own culture and way of working together.

### **3. Use Cultural Bridges**

Companies should find people who are good at understanding cultures and can help others understand each other.

### **4. Make the Hierarchy Flatter**

Companies should make it easier for people to talk to their bosses and share their ideas so that everyone can work better.

## REFERENCE

1. Adler, N. J., & Gundersen, A. (2007). *International dimensions of behaviour* (5th ed.). Cengage Learning.
2. Ang, S., & Van Dyne, L. (2008). *Conceptualization of intelligence: Definition, distinctness and nomological network*. M.E. Sharpe.
3. Beamer, L., & Varner I. I. (2011). *Intercultural communication in the workplace*. McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
4. Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Books.
5. Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
6. House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, leadership and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Sage Publications.
7. Livermore, D. (2015). *Leading with intelligence: The real secret to success* (2nd ed.). AMACOM.
8. Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the boundaries of global business*. PublicAffairs.
9. Neeley, T. (2017). *The language of success: How a common tongue transforms multinational organizations*. Princeton University Press.
10. Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (2012). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity, in business*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.