

Intercultural communication in the workplace

Guiding Research Question:

The goal of my research is to study intercultural communication in the workplace. My study will focus on first-generation Indian immigrants working in the United States--The decision to study immigrants in the U.S. has specific intent: Indian immigrants have been raised/socialized in the Indian cultural context, but must adapt to the newer/different cultural context of the United States. They provide a prime opportunity to study the intersection of communication styles.

It's important to note that this study's intended focus is on communication, not *miscommunication*. The goal of this research is not simply to highlight the differences between Indian and American communication styles: Hopefully, this data can shed light on techniques for improving business interactions between the two cultures.

This study focuses on India specifically because of its role in the global marketplace: In a globalizing world, the outsourcing of back-office work has become increasingly common. According to the Indian Dept. for Industry and Internal Trade, 55% of the world's IT outsourcing goes to Indian call centers--The majority of that outsourcing originates from the United States. Studying the common communication misunderstandings between the U.S. and India can help in business interactions between the two countries, but can also help the immigrant community in the U.S. to succeed.

Research summary and outline

For the duration of the summer research period, I plan to conduct my research in three phases. The first phase will be my pre-research phase. During this phase, I plan on conducting my literature review, and using this review to inform my interview questions. In addition, meeting with Professor Yuan, my faculty mentor, will be important in order to ensure that my research timeline is realistic, and that my proposed interview questions will lead to useful information. Finally, I plan to get my research approved through the Cornell IRB process.

During phase two, I will seek out interview participants through various sources, including immigrant career coaches, Facebook groups, and LinkedIn. These participants must meet the criteria for the demographic group I intend to study--female professionals working in the United States, who have immigrated to the U.S. from India as adults. I then plan to begin conducting my interviews. These will be recorded interviews (that I will later transcribe) asking participants both surface-level demographic questions (age, education level, duration of time in the U.S.), as well as questions pertaining to their career path (their level of satisfaction with career trajectory, possible miscommunications that have arisen in conversations with multi-generational Americans, whether they have received feedback on their communication style--and if so, whether they subsequently altered it because of said communication). All participants will sign a consent form giving

permission to collect basic demographic information and their responses to career-related questions, but immediate identifiers will not be documented in the final paper--they will not be required to disclose their first or last names or the names of companies they work for. In total, I plan on conducting about 20 video interviews.

During the third phase of my summer research, I plan on conducting an analysis of the interview responses to highlight any patterns that emerge--this will be a thematic analysis, in which I will sort the transcribed responses into a variety of themes (i.e. "frustration with being misconstrued, accent barrier, (un)willingness to integrate, etc.). After categorizing the interviews into primary themes, I will then be able to analyze their relevance/connection to intercultural communication and the varying communication styles between the U.S./India. Ultimately, I hope that the patterns that emerge will serve as guidance/pointers for where intercultural communication occurs most effectively, as well as where it doesn't.