

The Antecedents of Verbal Miscommunication in Culturally Diverse Work Groups

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Abstract

This study empirically examined the antecedents of verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. Data were collected from 222 employees of culturally diverse organizations currently working in organizations across the United States. Hypotheses were tested using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. The findings identified three most salient antecedents of verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups: Societal cultural values, individual cultural values, and communication openness.

Keywords: verbal miscommunication, cultural diversity, work group, language proficiency, communication openness

1. Introduction

Work groups and teams have become essential work units in all types of organizations in the last few decades. Cultural diversity in work groups in the United States reflects a cultural mosaic of work environments in organizations around the world. Interaction of multiple cultures brings the need for better intercultural understanding and developing effective communication practices (Marga, 2010). Although culturally diverse work groups and teams have become vitally important to the success of an organization (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001; Nohria & Garcia-Pont, 1991), their work processes and interactions, that now have cultural dimensions, need some improvement (Aritz & Walker, 2010).

Misunderstanding is quite common in modern organizations and is considered a major source of problems among members of work teams and organizations (Casse & Weisz, 2014). The purpose of this study is to empirically examine the antecedents of verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups to discern the salient antecedents of miscommunication in these work groups. To date, empirical research has investigated the causes of misunderstanding in the workplaces primarily from the linguistic point of view (Blakemore, 1989; Fraser, 1993; Milroy, 1984; Scheu-Lottgen & Hernandez-Campoy, 1998; Weigand, 1999). This study addresses the need to empirically examine the causes of verbal miscommunication from the organizational behavior perspective.

1.1 Background of the Problem

The topic of communication in groups and teams is a main focus of research on interpersonal interaction (Brannick, Roach, & Salas, 1993). Early research found that teams had difficulties with developing the best communication system for their interaction (Marschak, 1955). Bouncken (2004) conducted research on entrepreneurial teams in Germany and found that communication was critically important in the performance of culturally diverse teams. The openness of communication among team members impacts the effectiveness of the teamwork. Different communication styles might also negatively affect communication in culturally diverse teams (Puck, Rygl, & Kittler, 2006). Communication could be viewed as the use of a culturally-based code in a cultural framework to convey culturally-shaped content (Huang, Dotterweich & Bowers, 2012; Liddicoat, 2009). Thus, culture could be studied as the most important part of the communication system. In the intra-cultural communication, the influence of shared values, beliefs, and norms on communication may not be realized. However, intercultural communication highlighted the embeddedness of culture in a language. Liddicoat (2009) found that each grammatical and lexical item of a language was loaded with a broad and complex cultural background. Native speakers of different languages from different cultural backgrounds share similar social assumptions within their cultural groups about the communication process. Breakdowns in communication, referred to as intercultural miscommunication, stem from differences in social assumptions and cultural backgrounds (Chang, 2009). Johnson's (2009) dissertation study analyzed data obtained from several hundred World Health Organization (WHO) staff members. The data revealed a recurring theme that national and organizational "culture... prevented people from expressing themselves comfortably, making it difficult to know what behavior was acceptable or expected and suppressing the ability to be assertive when necessary" (Johnson, 2009, p. iii).

Communication is an essential part of human interaction. When a communicated message is misunderstood, either the sender or the receiver, or both may be at fault (Brewer & Holmes, 2009). Communication models have evolved through the history of social research. One of the earliest definitions of communication and communication models was developed by the Greek philosopher-teacher Aristotle (384-322 B. C.), (Mortensen, 1982). To date, all models can be divided into linear and non-linear communication models. Early linear models include the Shannon-Weaver Mathematical Model (1949), the Interactive Model developed by Weiner (1948), Berlo's S-M-C-R Model (1960), Schramm's Interactive Model (1954), and other models. Communicating face-to-face allows the sender and receiver to use and observe non-verbal and verbal communication, which provides the richness of communication. The principal communication channels are non-verbal, verbal/oral, and written. Electronic channels, such as telephone calls, text messages, email and the social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, radio and TV, utilize one or more principal channels with the help of technology. Each of these channels has certain characteristics that can either enhance or hinder communication. Miscommunication can occur at any stage of the communication process. Thus, effective communication involves minimizing potential misunderstanding and overcoming barriers to communication at each stage of the communication process. Researchers found that senders and receivers of information often misinterpret non-verbal information (Keysar & Henly, 2002), demonstrate closeness-communication bias, and often are not aware of their limitations by overestimating their effectiveness (Keysar & Henly, 2002; Woltin et al., 2012). Existing research demonstrates that face-to-face intercultural business communication is hindered by language proficiency, culture, business culture, and interpersonal context variables that lead to miscommunication (Davis, Leas, & Dobelman, 2009).

1. 2 Miscommunication in Culturally Diverse Groups

Miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups is defined here as failure of sender(s) and receiver(s) from different cultures and different languages to communicate clearly and properly between/among themselves, that is when the said receiver(s) of the information do(es) not decode it as intended by the sender(s).

Huang et al. (2012) state that intercultural miscommunication is the breakdown in communication among speakers from different cultures and native speakers of different languages. The intercultural miscommunication is caused by the cultural differences and/or sociolinguistic transfer. Chick (2005) also argues that sociolinguistic transfer results in intercultural miscommunication.

Sociolinguistic transfer happens when a person continues using his/her own cultural speech patterns and/or rules when communicating with a person from another culture. Intercultural miscommunication can also occur non-verbally. Bratanic (2007) posits that non-verbal communication occurs in seven modes: (1) eye contact and movement, (2) body movement and gestures, (3) physical contact, (4) the amount of personal space, (5) response time in communication, (6) scent/smell, and (7) variations in voice pitches. Bratanic (2007, p. 86) denotes that all of these behaviors "in certain circumstances lead to cross cultural, as well as intra-cultural misunderstandings". For example, in the American culture, a closed door implies that the person is busy and prefers not to be disturbed. By contrast, Europeans interpret a closed door differently and often enter before given permission to do so (Bratanic, 2007). Chang (2009) and Dooley (2009) show that speakers of the English language with strong foreign-sounding accents are rejected as conversation partners. Non-native speakers are also blamed for any miscommunication that can result in the feelings of shame and embarrassment even if they are accepted to participate in a communication. Intercultural miscommunication occurs due to language and cultural barriers between the sender and receiver of the information, not only the non-native speakers' characteristics (Chang, 2009; Dooley, 2009).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Study Constructs

This study examines two constructs each consisting of several variables that act as antecedents of miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. The cultural diversity construct consists of cultural diversity, societal cultural values, individual cultural values, and cultural distance variables. The communication construct consists of perceived language proficiency, communication styles, and communication openness.

2.2 Cultural Construct

2.2.1 Miscommunication and Cultural Diversity

The analysis of the existing research literature reveals the two paradigms have been used to understand the diversity effects in teams and groups. The first approach is based on factors such as the types of diversity that are identified and measured. The factor approach is broken into two categories: Two-factor approach that distinguishes between visible and non-visible characteristics (Jackson et al., 1995). Further, researchers have distinguished between surface-level and deep-level diversity characteristics and their effects on group functioning (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Surface-level diversity consists of demographic differences, whereas deep-level diversity consists of differences in attitudes and beliefs. In a longitudinal laboratory study, Harrison et al., (2002) found that surface-level or demographic diversity has weaker effects on group cohesion and performance with time as compared to deep-level, or attitudinal, diversity. No correlation has been found between surface-level and deep-level types of diversity (Harrison et al., 2002). The second approach to categorizing diversity is based on proportions, or ratios of minority to majority members (Mannix & Neale, 2005). The proportion size becomes the variable of interest. Some of the most renowned researchers such as Blau (1977), Pettigrew (1982), and Kanter (1977) focus on the proportions of minority/majority membership in the group. Blau's (1977) work, *Inequality and Heterogeneity*, examines the role of proportions of minority/majority membership in the group to the quality of relations between demographically different groups. His theory posits that demographically diverse individuals will experience more interaction in heterogeneous groups. This study used the proportions' approach to measure cultural diversity as developed by Peter Blau (1977) in his most influential work, *Inequality and Heterogeneity*.

2.2.2 Miscommunication and Societal Cultural Values

The societal cultural values variable is another variable of the cultural diversity construct in this study. A culturally diverse organization encompasses individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This is the main source of dissimilarity that employees perceive in a culturally diverse organization as compared to a homogeneous organization since cultural backgrounds are mainly characterized by their values (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Cultural values are important to members of societies because they have been developed within cultures to give meaning to questions of existence and to handle problems in regulating human behavior (Schwartz, 1992). These cultural values are deeply engrained in the self-concepts of employees and have a strong impact on their behaviors in general.

Some of the well-known cultural values frameworks and measures include cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (2001), the GLOBE project on cultural dimensions and culture clusters (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), and World Values Survey by Inglehart (1997). Based on subsets of 220 university students and primarily schoolteachers in 73 countries (Schwartz, 2006), Schwartz and colleagues conducted a number of studies to validate the structure of individual-level and societal-level values models (Fischer, Vauclair, Fontaine, & Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2006). Schwartz and others (Schwartz, 1994, 1999, 2006; Fischer et al., 2010) consistently found support for the theorized cultural values model using exploratory analytic techniques.

The current Schwartz Values Survey (SVS) data have been taken from samples of business managers and professionals across 50 culturally and socioeconomically diverse societies. Ralston et al. (2011) examined the internal validity and within-group agreement of SVS dimensions to evaluate their appropriateness for business research. Societal- and individual-level dimensions are "two sets of measures that can be used as referencing points and predictor variables for future multilevel, as well as single-level, cross-cultural research in international business" (p.19). Societal cultural values in this study were measured using societal-level values dimensions from the Schwartz Values Survey (SVS; Schwartz 1992, 1994, 2006).

2.2.3 Miscommunication and Individual Cultural Values

The individual cultural values variable is included in the cultural diversity construct in this study. The issue of culture and its measurement is one of the cornerstones of cross-cultural research. Culture has been defined as a combination of deep level values and assumptions about all aspects of life in a society shared by an interacting group of people (Adler, 2002; Aritz & Walker, 2010). Culture is traditionally measured by indices of cultural values. Value systems consist of beliefs, norms and assumptions that form the core elements of culture (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural values are acquired in childhood and are quite difficult to change (Aritz & Walker, 2010).

Hofstede (2001, p. 9) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another", with "programming of the mind" combining the values, rituals, heroes and symbols embedded in a culture. Adler (2002) further elaborates on the definition of culture as a pattern of deep-level values and assumptions concerning societal functioning shared by an interacting group of people. Cultural values are learned very early in life as people are socialized into their respective environments within particular societies and are very difficult to relearn or change (Hofstede, 2001). As such, culture is viewed primarily as a value system, presents a deep, inner, usually unconscious influence on individual mentalities and social behaviors (Adler, 2002; Schwartz, 2006). Individual cultural values in this study were measured using individual-level value dimensions from the Schwartz Values Survey (SVS; Schwartz 1992, 1994, 2006).

2.2.4 Miscommunication and Cultural Distance

Cultural distance is defined here as a difference in cultural values between and among individuals working in a group (Simonin, 1999). Cultural distances between members of culturally diverse groups may have damaging effects on group processes and outcomes. Negative effects of cultural distances on collaboration, ranging from cross-cultural negotiations to joint venture performance and failures, have been reported in the literature (Mjoen & Tallman, 1997; Pariche, 1991; Simonin, 1999). In international strategic alliances, cultural differences produce additional difficulties and challenges for managers, who must allocate more time on communication, design and compatible work routines, and development of common managerial approaches (Olk, 1997). Meschi (1997) posits that most of the problems encountered in international joint ventures can be traced back to national or organizational culture. Lyles and Salk (1996) also find that conflicts and misunderstandings caused by cultural differences can inhibit information exchange and learning. Cultural distance in this study was evaluated by an instrument adapted from the two-item measure developed by Simonin (1999).

2.3 Communication Construct

2.3.1 Miscommunication and Perceived Language Proficiency

Linguists use the term “misunderstanding” to denote “miscommunication.” Misunderstanding occurs when a receiver decodes a message the way that seems to be complete and coherent from his point of view, but this interpretation is different from that intended by the sender. Blakemore (1989, p.37) ascribes misunderstanding to “the sender’s choice of a certain stimulus, which increases, reduces, or even makes it impossible to access the intended interpretation.” Yus (1998, p. 82; 1999 p.219) states that all types of miscommunication can be classified into "the combination of three pragmatic continua: (1) the intentional vs. unintentional continuum; (2) the verbal vs. nonverbal continuum; and (3) the explicit vs. implicit continuum".

There are two sources of miscommunication: external sources and participant-related sources. Among external sources of miscommunication she identifies "disturbing background noise and/or troubles related to the use of a foreign language". Regarding participant-related sources of miscommunication, Yus (1998; 1999) identifies two subcategories: sources related to the speaker (speaker-related sources), and sources related to the listener (listener-related sources). Speaker-related sources are related to ambiguity. The speaker either holds information necessary for the listener to interpret the message, or the speaker may think that the cues he/she provides are sufficient enough for the listener to interpret the given message. The listener-related sources may be phonological (e.g. mishearing, international contours), lexical (e.g. misrecognizing the meanings of some words), syntactic, or pragmatic (e.g. the context, grammar, and lack of cultural background). Language proficiency is quite complex as it “involves the paralinguistic cues, gestures, facial expressions, body movements and cues provided by the physical environment that accompany verbal messages” (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000,p. 106). The high number of tasks in the comprehension process may affect language comprehension. As a result, the message is decoded not as intended by the sender thereby causing misunderstanding. Perceived language proficiency is a self-reported proficiency in a foreign language (Gee, Walsemann & Takeuchi, 2010). A three-item instrument developed by the researchers was used to evaluate perceived language proficiency of this study's participants.

2.3.2 Miscommunication and Communication Styles

A communication style is a manner in which an individual communicates with others (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011). Individuals display a preference in the manner they present information. Some studies have found that most individuals behave in predictable ways, which helped them generalize communication styles in four categories: analytical, driver, amiable, and expressive (Mok, 1975; Alessandra & Hunsaker, 1993; Merrill & Reid, 1999). Each of these styles has four dimensions: assertiveness, responsiveness, priority (task vs. relationship orientation), and pace (fast vs. slow). Communications styles may vary under physical or mental stress. A situation itself might be stressful, or several minor stress situations may result in a highly stressed mode for a person (Cole, 2011). High-pressure, uncertain, and stressful situations affect a person's ability to process all received information as intended by the sender and cause misunderstanding. Further, managers under pressure often do not communicate their thoughts clearly, which also results in miscommunication. In stressful situations, managers may omit negative information in order to reduce its effect on employees' performance thereby increasing the ambiguity in communication (Field, 2005). Today's workforce is comprised of employees from several generations. Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, are actively getting integrated into the workforce. Their communication styles differ from those of other generations. Millennials are multi-taskers and they like working in teams (Tyler, 2007). Further, they expect fast feedback and praise; like structure and dislike ambiguity (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011); may become aggressive when criticized (Tyler, 2008); have high expectations and a desire to be sought after (Alsop, 2006); and use technology as inseparable part of their lives (Beckstrom, Manuel, & Nightingale, 2008). Managers, working with employees from different generations, should possess better communication skills crucial in achieving organizational goals. In this study, an instrument developed by Hartmand and McCambridge (2011) was used. This instrument was an updated and modified version of Mok’s (1975) Communication Style Survey. The inventory has been empirically tested and used by the authors for the last 10 years to evaluate participants from several generations (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011).

2.3.3 Miscommunication and Communication Openness

Communication openness is the willingness of a group member to have open and honest communication, and to be receptive to the communication of others (Ayoko, 2007).

Researchers have found that subordinates' perceptions of communication openness are positively related to their satisfaction with supervisors and to the subordinates' job satisfaction (Dansereau & Markham, 1987). It has been also found that communication openness in superior-subordinate dyadic relationships is two-dimensional, which is the openness in sending a message and the openness in receiving it (Dansereau & Markham, 1987; Redding, 1972). The nature of communication openness may further be identified as task-relevant or non-task-relevant (Baird, 1974; Stull, 1975). One of the most important findings is the difference in perceptions of subordinates at different levels.

Employees at a lower level of their organizational ladders perceive to have significantly less openness in communication with their supervisors than subordinates at a higher level (Falcione, Sussman, & Herden, 1987; Jablin, 1987; Krone, Jablin, & Putnam, 1987). Ayoko's (2007) study is among the few that have investigated the impact of communication openness on culturally heterogeneous workgroup members' reactions to conflict, workplace bullying and emotional reactions to bullying. The study is conceptually based on social identity theory. Communication openness is proposed as an antecedent to group members' reactions to conflict events. High/low levels of communication openness served as moderators to high levels of productive reactions to conflict or increased emotionally destructive reactions to bullying in culturally diverse workgroups (CDWs). The hypothesized relationships have been tested using multiple regression analysis. Study findings reveal groups with low levels of communication openness experience increased levels of emotional reactions to bullying, destructive reactions to conflict and bullying behaviors.

Further, high levels of communication openness have served as moderators to high levels of productive reactions to conflict and have decreased bullying behaviors in culturally diverse workgroups. Study limitations include the lack of control for the impact of gender, age, and other types of diversity. The study results imply that destructive reactions to conflict could be prevented by increasing communication openness. Communicative openness in superior-subordinate relationships is essential to effective communication in organizations. The amount of disclosed information may vary based on similarity or dissimilarity to an employee's supervisors, which may result in discomfort, discrimination, and conflict in the workplace (Wanguri, 1996). Housel and Davis (1977) argue that the concept of communication openness is probably the most significant factor in the investigation of upward communication distortion. The openness of upward communication in an organization involves peoples' perceptions of how freely they feel they can communicate upward. The more openly people communicate upward; the less likely they will be to distort information. This study utilized the measure for the open intra-team communication of Puck et al. (2006) originating from the work of Earley and Mosakowski (2000) on transnational team functions.

2.4 Study Hypotheses and a Proposed Study Model

The study tested the following two main research hypotheses with several sub-hypotheses each. A proposed study model graphically depicts hypothesized relationships (Figure 1).

H1: Cultural diversity construct is significantly related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H1a: Cultural diversity in a work group is positively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H1b: Diversity in societal-level cultural values is positively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H1c: Diversity in individual-level cultural values is positively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H1d: Cultural distance among members of a culturally diverse group is positively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H2: Communication construct is significantly related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H2a: Perceived language proficiency in English is negatively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H2b: Communication style is positively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

H2c: Communication openness is negatively related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The study sample was comprised of 222 members of culturally diverse work groups employed at organizations with culturally diverse workforce based in the United States. The sample was drawn from companies listed on Diversity Inc. (2013) and *Black Enterprise Magazine* (2013) lists that represent cultural diversity well.

The sample respondents were invited to participate voluntarily. A computerized structured questionnaire was used to gather data from respondents.

3.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test and refine the instrument. Sixty-five individuals were selected who work in culturally diverse organizations in various sectors of industries in the metro Jackson area in the state of Mississippi. Drop-off and face-to-face survey methods were used for survey distribution and collection. Data from returned surveys were checked for completeness of responses. The final set of fifty usable surveys was retained and analyzed further with exploratory factor analysis.

3.3 Survey

The survey was electronically delivered to 870 participants who were assured of the anonymity of their responses with a consent form presented at the beginning of the survey. The collected data yielded a sample size of 375 and a response rate of 43.10 percent. The data was further cleaned, which yielded a final usable sample of 222 observations.

3.4 Reliability and Validity Analysis

The scales used for this study were proven to show high levels of reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Internal consistency can be measured by a number of indicators. The most commonly used one is Cronbach's alpha coefficient that should be above .7 (Pallant, 2007). The measures of this study attained excellent item-specific and overall reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall model construct was .97. Further, a factor analysis was used to further reduce the number of items in the miscommunication construct in order to produce a parsimonious model. Due to a large number of variables in the study items, each antecedent of miscommunication was transformed into a factor score. The final set of miscommunication construct variables contained all variables as proposed. This study utilized instruments that had been empirically tested by researchers in the past to measure the same variables of interest to this study. These instruments exhibited high content and construct types of validity, and therefore were included in this research (Campion, Papper & Medsker, 1996; Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; Gee, Walsemann & Takeuchi, 2010; Hartman & McCambridge, 2011; Mok, 1975; Simonin, 1999; Schwartz 1992, 1994a, 2006). External validity requirement was satisfied by choosing the appropriate sample size for the statistical techniques used in this study (Hair et al., 2006). An appropriate sample for the multiple regression analysis is 15 to 20 observations for each independent variable. The sample of usable data $n = 222$ met the size requirement to detect suitable R^2 values for this study. Examination of the adjusted R^2 revealed little loss in the predictive power when compared to the R^2 value (.572 vs. .566 for hypothesis 1). These results indicated a lack of over fitting of the model to the data and demonstrated that the results were generalizable to the population.

3.5 Test Statistics

The assertion of hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 was that both cultural diversity construct and communication construct were significantly related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. To apply multiple regression analysis with stepwise estimation procedure, Miscommunication was selected as the dependent variable to be predicted by the following seven independent variables: Cultural Diversity, Individual Cultural Values, Societal Cultural Values, Cultural Distance, Perceived Language Proficiency, Communication Styles, and Communication Openness. Examination of the correlation matrix pointed out that the independent variable Communication Openness had the highest bivariate correlation with the dependent variable (.697) followed by the Societal Cultural Values (.505) and Communication Styles (.478). Multicollinearity diagnostics was performed and it was concluded that 3 out of 32 correlations were higher than .5 but still less than .7 and that there were no very highly correlated variables. The VIF was examined to further analyze whether multicollinearity among the independent variables was present.

The VIF values were less than 10. The independent variables had the desirable characteristics, and therefore, all variables were retained for further analysis.

4. Analysis

Multiple regression analysis (Table 1) indicated that the model was found statistically significant with $F = 97.252$ and a p -value $= .000$ ($p < .05$). The adjusted R^2 was $.566$, which indicated that 56.6% of the variance in miscommunication among culturally diverse work group members was accounted for by the variables included in the model. Results (Table 2) of the multiple regression analysis revealed that only the linear combination of the Individual Cultural Values, Societal Cultural Values, and Communication Openness were significantly related to verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

Further, results indicated that the Individual Cultural Values, Societal Cultural Values, and Communication Openness variables each had a statistically significant relationship to miscommunication with a p -value $= .000$. The results of testing hypothesis 1a indicated that culturally diverse work group members, where culturally diverse members accounted for a range from 21 to 60 percent of the group, did not experience significant verbal miscommunication ($\beta = .011$, $p = .821$). Hypothesis 1a was not supported by the data. The next two sub-hypotheses were lent support. Specifically, hypothesis 1b and hypothesis 1c explored whether higher diversity in societal-level and individual-level value dimensions were positively related to miscommunication.

As postulated, the testing of these sub-hypotheses demonstrated significant positive relationships, as shown in Table 2 ($\beta = .295$, $t = 4.371$, $p = .000$ and $\beta = .203$, $t = 3.543$, $p = .000$, respectively). Hypothesis 1d stated that higher cultural distances among members of a culturally diverse group were positively related to miscommunication. The data did not support hypothesis 1d, as presented in Table 2 ($\beta = -.045$, $t = -.845$, $p = .399$). Perceived language proficiency in the English language is negatively related to miscommunication, as suggested by hypothesis 2a. Participants stated that the primary language used at work was English. The data showed a negative relationship but did not support the hypothesized relationship ($\beta = -.040$, $t = -.673$, $p = .502$). Hypothesis 2b tested whether communication style might be positively related to miscommunication. Again, opposite to the expected outcome, the data did not reveal a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .016$, $t = .219$, $p = .827$) between communication style and miscommunication among members of culturally diverse groups. As expected, the findings for hypothesis 2c, that tested whether the communication openness was negatively related to miscommunication, were significant ($\beta = -.545$, $t = -9.531$, $p = .000$). Past research found communication openness to be an important variable for work group processes. The present study confirmed those findings.

5. Discussion

This study sought to fill the gap in the literature and to provide managers and other practitioners with first-hand data analysis of the antecedents of verbal miscommunication through the examination of the relationships among cultural diversity, communication and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups in organizations in the United States. Present study findings identified three most salient antecedents of miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups: Societal cultural values, individual cultural values, and communication openness. The study found some relationships between the cultural diversity and communication constructs and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. At the practical level, these findings mean that differences in societal-level and individual-level cultural values among members of culturally diverse groups may lead to verbal miscommunication in these groups. Communication openness was also found to be a significantly important antecedent of verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups, while perceived language proficiency was found to be insignificant. The findings indicate that a lack of communication openness, rather than insufficient knowledge of the English language, more likely results in verbal miscommunication. Managers need to be aware of cultural norms which vary from culture to culture and may dictate the degree of openness in communication. Thus, managers and practitioners need to promote an awareness and understanding of cultural differences that may affect verbal communication in this type of work groups. Study findings reveal that higher cultural diversity in work groups may lead to verbal miscommunication in these work groups. Higher degrees of assimilation to the country and organizational cultures may mitigate the effect of cultural diversity on verbal miscommunication.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited in that it used the self-reported measures of variables of interest to this research. However, as behavior in organizations is partly governed by employees' perceptions, it is important to examine perceptions of culturally diverse work group members about the factors that contribute to verbal miscommunication. Another limitation of the study is the examination of relationships among only one type of miscommunication - verbal - in culturally diverse work groups. Although investigating whether miscommunication occurs when members of culturally diverse work groups use non-verbal and written types of communication presents a great academic and practical value, this examination would be beyond the scope of the present study and would have made it too complex. Future studies need to examine whether work group members have developed a shared group identity that can help them minimize verbal miscommunication. Next, the role and impact of organizational culture on the variables of interest to this study may provide a broader framework for analysis and may result in interesting findings. Further investigation on how cultural diversity affects miscommunication in superior-subordinate relationships in organizations would be also beneficial to academic research and managerial practice.

5.2 Conclusion

This study empirically investigated the relationship among cultural diversity, communication and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. The study revealed three most salient antecedents of verbal miscommunication in these groups. Other proposed antecedents of miscommunication in culturally diverse workgroups received some support as well. Thus, further empirical investigation is needed to confirm or reject the possible existence of relationships between the other four antecedents of cultural diversity and communication constructs and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups in organizations across the United States.

Table 1: Regression Model Summary

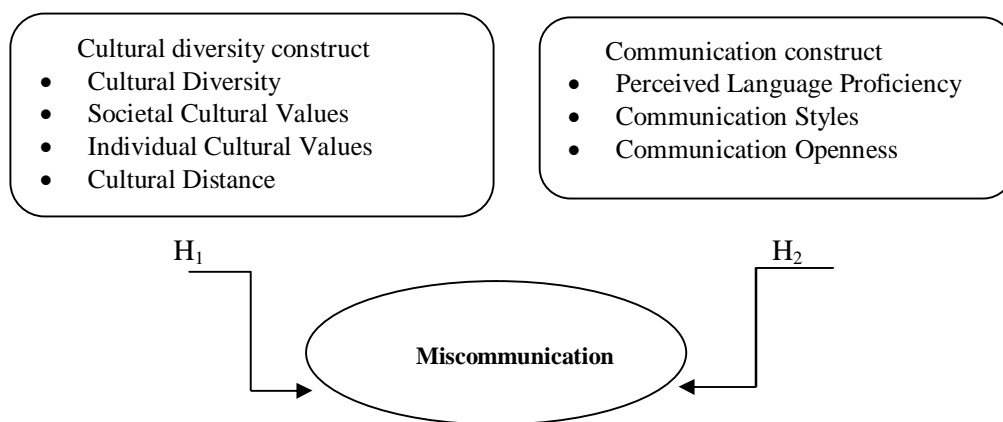
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	df	F	Sig.
1	.757	.572	.566	.65843737	3	97.252	.000*

*p < .05

Table 2: Regression Model Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.409E-17	.044		.000	1.000
Cultural Diversity	.011	.047	.011	.226	.821
Societal Cult. Value	.295	.067	.295	4.371	.000
Individual Cult. Value	.203	.057	.203	3.543	.000
Cultural Distance	-.045	.053	-.045	-.845	.399
Perceived Language Proficiency	-.040	.059	-.040	-.673	.502
Communication Styles	.016	.072	.016	.219	.827
Communication Openness	-.545	.057	-.545	-9.531	.000

Figure 1: Relationships among Cultural Diversity, Communication and Verbal Miscommunication in Culturally Diverse Work Groups



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