

Digital communication in professional contexts: Video meetings in multilingual workplaces in Sweden

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In this talk, we present a research project that we plan to launch in late 2023. The aim of the project is to investigate professional communication in video meetings, which is justified given their growing importance in the modern and post-pandemic workplace. The setting is workplaces in Sweden where English is used as a lingua franca, due to the increasing societal impact of multilingual workplaces. In the specific context of study, communication is embedded in several layers of complexity: It takes place in an institutional setting; it is digital and takes place in video mode; it is done across cultures and marked by diversity; and it is done partly in English as a lingua franca. The project focuses on internal communication within the workplace and does not consider external communication, for example involving customers. The overarching research question is: What factors contribute to (un)successful digital intercultural interactions in multilingual workplaces, specifically in video meetings? To map the characteristics of video meetings, we compare them to in-person meetings. We thus ask: (a) What (perceived and actual) differences and similarities are there between digital and in-person workplace meetings? To map the video meeting as a genre, we ask: (b) What are the key structural, linguistic, and interactional patterns of the video meeting? Given the central role of English as a lingua franca in these workplaces, we ask: (c) To what extent and how does English language proficiency—including participants' beliefs about and attitudes to English language proficiency—affect workplace communication in digital intercultural interactions? Finally, we adopt a critical intercultural communication approach, seeing 'culture' as a dynamic concept (e.g., Hua et al., 2022), which employees may attribute to self and others, and (dis-)align with in different ways. We ask: (d) To what extent and how is culture seen as relevant in multilingual workplaces? Participants will be interviewed about communication practices in the workplace both individually and in focus groups. We will also record and analyze samples of (i) video and (ii) in-person meetings, to enable triangulation of different types of data. We conclude by discussing how the project's findings can be used as a basis for best practices and for developing workplace communication training materials.

References

Hua, Z., Jones, R.H. & Jaworska, S. (2022). Acts of distinction at times of crisis: An epistemological challenge to intercultural communication research. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 22(3), 312-323.