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Crossing Disciplines and Perspectives: Challenging Norms in Global Business Communication

David A. Victor

This issue of the *Global Advances in Business Communication* is extending our reach to include cross-disciplinary pedagogy and alongside two works intended to challenge us for more research as position papers in more customary standard research fields.

Kuok Kei Law and Bertha Du-Babcock's "A Hierarchical Perspective of Employees' Knowledge-Sharing Behaviors: An Exploratory Study" is an exploratory study of knowledge-sharing (KS) in organizational communication. Law and Du-Babcock challenge the common approach to KS studies as explaining what managers *ought* to do rather than what the employees actually think that they believe they will do. As they write, "inadequate for capturing such complexity in analyzing employees' KS behaviors because most relevant studies have been prescriptive in nature, specifying what employees *should* do based on objectified factors rather than examining how employees *would* do when sharing knowledge." Law and Du-Babcock then go on to provide initial research that should justify the broadening the scope of future KS research.

Just as Law and Du-Babcock challenge an increasingly standard norm in the field of knowledge sharing in organizational communication, Steven Sacco challenges a similarly standard norm – indeed in his words "the myth" -- in the use of English in organizational communication in a linguistically diverse workplace. As with Law and Du-Babcock's challenge to the top-down research on what employees should vs. would do, Sacco challenges the top-down assumptions that English as a lingua franca works because English is widely enough present among managers without considering the low level or absence of English within the workforce those managers oversee, even in primarily English-speaking nations such as the United States.

Sacco researches the ineffectiveness of English as a lingua franca in the US agribusiness sector. While Sacco acknowledges the reasons for adopting English on a global level, he nonetheless challenges the use of English in organizational communication on a practical level. Sacco convincingly demonstrates that that agribusiness safety and managerial communication experts research on limited English proficiency (LEP) research "focuses on employers and their assessment of their workers' English" while those most affected by the resultant policies are the migrant worker employees, who because they have inadequate or no English "have little voice in this line of research." The result of this lopsided view at the level of the migrant worker has resulted in the "unintended consequence" of semi-official use of Spanish without English, resulting in what Sacco calls "the dangers inherent in working in U.S. agriculture with minimal English skills." In this particular study,

Sacco found that employees worked “almost exclusively in Spanish” leading to a conflict between the company’s need for safety and other policy communication and the goal of using English as a lingua franca. Sacco’s article, in short, challenges the applicability of language strategies requiring English without considering the needs of a workplace where the majority of workers do not speak the required language.

The last two articles in this issue provide a challenge of a different sort. Both articles challenge the silos of traditional categories of disciplines as well as the norms of separating pedagogy, theory and application.

Margaret Gonglweski and Anna Helm’s “Crossing Disciplinary Lines to Engage Students in Cross-Cultural Learning During Short-Term Study Abroad” provides a model for effectively breaking down the concept of business studies, language/cultural studies and environmental studies as being somehow unrelated separate fields. The study abroad experience helps facilitate this since, for the student, the learning involved in going abroad is anything but limited to one specific arena. This article itself was a bit of a departure for the GABC Journal as well, as it is the first specifically teaching-based description we have published. We are, in the respect, breaking down our own self-created walls here ourselves. We felt, though, that the application of multi-disciplinary approaches here demonstrated in a pedagogical application the principles of interdisciplinary, multicultural thought on which this journal is based.

Finally, with Barker et al.’s “Global Communication and Cross-Cultural Competence: Twenty-First Century Micro-Case Studies” we likewise find the challenge of application across disciplines. Added to this are the challenge to the traditional business school case study model from a long and complex backstory and analysis to what the authors call “mini-cases.” These short, highly-focused vignettes provide examples immediately accessible for building cross-cultural communication competence. The subject matter of the mini-cases cuts across fields (although all with a business focus) and should be useful as a supplement not only in the business school classroom but also in a wide range of related fields. These mini-cases also seem particularly well-suited to the business consultant whose clients benefit from honing cross-cultural skills but are particularly unlikely to spend the time required in standard full-length business fields.

We hope that the articles here challenge you and encourage you to find more ways to continue breaking down the barriers we have artificially constructed separating our fields and applications.