

Final Research Proposal - CloudFruit's International Communication

Daniel Jiu Zung Lai (1010289661), Chiao Wei (Chloe) Chang (1009803973), Yiting Wang
(1009796507), Xiaohong Ren (1009022745), Yiming Guan (1009800912).

ICCIT, University of Toronto Mississauga

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Dr. Steve Szigeti and Elnaz Ziad

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1. Introduction

This proposal outlines a detailed research study in order to improve communication within CloudFruit, a multinational technology specializing in software solutions and digital infrastructure services. With products like cloud storage, cybersecurity solutions, and collaboration platforms, CloudFruit serves clients across the finance, healthcare, and government sectors. However, the company's global nature has caused communication challenges among its dispersed, multicultural teams. Our team has been hired to address these issues, including language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, time zone differences, and diverse communication styles. These obstacles cause miscommunications, reduce productivity, and misaligned project goals, impacting both short-term efficiency and long-term success in a competitive market.

2. Problem Statement

CloudFruit faces numerous challenges in communicating effectively with international teams, including language barriers, cultural differences, etc. As organizations expand their global presence, these obstacles can lead to misunderstandings, inefficiencies, and frustration, ultimately goal alignments, collaborative problem-solving, and project success. As for CloudFruit, these challenges impact the productivity and dynamic of their international teams, as well as employee engagement, innovation and adaptability in the global market. Firstly, communication is one of the essential elements to achieve effective collaboration, but even skilled teams need a clear and cohesive approach to work together efficiently. Language barriers often lead to misunderstandings or incomplete information exchanges, while cultural differences can lead to misinterpretation of messages and intentions. Time zone differences further complicate matters, making finding mutually convenient times for discussion difficult and

hindering real-time problem-solving. In addition, different communication styles are confusing, with different cultures having different expectations of feedback, formality, and responsiveness. These factors also influence employee engagement, innovation, and adaptability. To address these challenges, this proposal explores strategies to improve communication with international teams to answer the central question, “What international communication challenges does CloudFruit face, and how can we improve this communication between international teams?” We intend to unfold this question with a comprehensive literature review and data analysis for the goal of effective collaboration, increased productivity, and strengthened team morale internationally. Ultimately, this proposal presents research to improve collaboration, optimize productivity, and foster a more culturally sensitive, efficient communication framework, driving CloudFruit’s continued success on an international scale.

3. Background

Improvement of communication in international teams requires several intertwined issues: cultural diversity, language barriers, and putting technology to practical use. As stated in the White Paper on Governance (European Commission, 2008), some governance principles of openness and inclusiveness set up a basic framework for transparency and trust. Building on the above, research into multicultural virtual teams locates strategies that are identified as necessary to enhance collaboration in these diverse settings and include the development of cultural awareness, clear communication protocols, and tailored technologies (Cagiltay et al., 2015). To be sure, language management can help a team surmount problems that hinder effective communication. Notably, language diversity may have both a debilitating effect and a facilitating effect on team dynamics. For instance, while language barriers reduce trust and knowledge sharing, corporate language policies and training programs could alleviate such challenges

(Tenzer et al., 2014). Conversely, embracing multilingualism under appropriate management increases creativity and collaboration, thus suggesting that linguistic diversity, provided it is well-managed, proves to be an asset (Canestrino et al., 2022).

Building on the challenges of cultural diversity and language barriers, the role of technology in facilitating international communication becomes critical. According to Gorska et al. (2020), immediacy and accessibility are characteristics of social media platforms that form the basis for international collaboration in a virtual team. However, too much reliance on such tools may intrude into privacy matters and not solve deeper cultural or linguistic problems. Effective knowledge-sharing practices, identified by Dash (2015), further stress the need for solid communication channels to bridge gaps among culturally diverse team members. Together, these show that one is presumably applying a holistic approach, combining governance principles, cultural sensitivity, language management, and technological tools to improve communication within international teams.

4. Procedure

4.1 Methodology

A mixed methods methodology will be most effective in this study. It has the benefit of mitigating potential biases, as qualitative data could accidentally give opinions that skew results, while quantitative could validate these claims or challenge them. A mixed methods approach allows us to consider factors like cultural nuances that would be missed by a survey while also having concrete evidence. Communication is complex, especially in international teams (Tenzer et al., 2014). This covers most stakeholder needs and experiences by looking at various sections of the value chain. Overall, mixed methods can provide a deeper understanding of the topic while providing empirical evidence that could give proper recommendations for improvement.

4.1.1 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with team members and managers will allow for deeper insights into factors such as communication barriers, cultural challenges, and effective practices; we can record and gain clarity on particular issues that participants face in the organization (Cagiltay et al., 2015). Adapting Dash's (2015) use of focus groups to be online could allow multiple teams from different areas to give opinions regarding their experience and discuss what has or has not worked for them. As international teams are separated geographically, online accessibility is needed for international staff working at Cloudfrit. Qualitative components such as interviews and focus groups could allow for a greater understanding of cultural differences and communication challenges by allowing participants to hear their personal experiences.

4.1.2 Quantitative Methods

For quantitative, surveys using ranking questions, frequency scales, multiple choice questions, and Likert scale questions can give numerical data on the frequency of certain communication issues, preferred communication methods, and perceptions of communication effectiveness among team members. Surveys allow researchers to visualize the results and help us to better investigate the pattern of participants' answers. This is crucial for the analysis phase of the research. Quantitative data in the form of surveys would quantify how widespread certain issues or preferences are, enabling us to assess whether qualitative insights are common across different teams or regions (European Commission, 2008).

4.1.3 Sample Size

Cloudfruit has about 1000 staff on international teams. We selected 78 people for our study in the focus group, 10 for the interview, and about 200 for the survey. Nonresponse bias may occur; a small sample size ensures we can reach a portion of the population with responses. We divide participants into 13 focus groups, with 6 people in each group (8 people, including one moderator and one note-taker). For the survey, we will select the departments we desire to study, and the number of people each department gets will be random for the survey.

4.1.4 Qualitative Method: Judgemental Sampling

We decided to use semi-structured interviews with judgemental sampling. Semi-structured interviews can record the interviewees' concerns with many open-ended questions, which Cagiltay et al. (2015) found helps researchers better determine the communication issues in the international team. Judgemental sampling is the sample that is based on expert suggestions. In this case, experts are the senior managers of the organizations. Expert advice ensures that selected representatives reflect diverse perspectives in the workplace. Expertise is suggested when using indicators such as a key performance index to determine the qualified interviewees. Research from Gorska et al. (2020) and Cloudfruit's internal metrics show that some departments in the company communicate more with international teams. They are:

1. Marketing Department
2. Human Resource Department
3. Client Relationship Department

In the interview, we will ask participants a set of open and closed questions that relate to the issues in communication as an international team (see Appendix C for the interview question sample).

In addition, we are going to conduct a focus group study. We will appoint one note-taker and one moderator. We seek commonly reported issues and find possible solutions to our findings. The results will not be referred to any individuals but will be categorized into their positions, managerial positions, experienced staff, or internships.

4.1.5 Quantitative Method: Disproportionate Random Sampling.

We also used the quantitative method for the study, which used disproportionate random sampling and survey methods. Again, we will contact the departments mentioned above and request that all employees in the abovementioned departments complete our survey. The survey will ask the type of communication issues they faced. For example, communication breakdowns, cultural differences, and online difficulties are common. The survey also consists of screening questions, open questions and closed questions. The closed questions include multiple choice, Likert scale of frequency, ranking questions, etc. These data generate numerical values for the study, and we can look at the overview of the communication challenges employees face in the workplace. In addition, we produced a small portion of open questions. For example, in each of the multiple choice questions, we will have a selection of “others, please specify” in case none of the scenarios apply to participants.

4.2 Recruitment

4.2.1 Recruiting Method

Recruitment is done through email and phone calls. Email is the primary method as the organization's internal network makes sending emails to work accounts efficient. We also use phone calls to ensure participants receive the message if they missed the email (See Appendix A for the email template).

4.2.2 Target Participants

Our target participants are employees in the departments as mentioned above, including the department of marketing, human resources, and client relationships, and managers within the company.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Interview and Focus Group

For the interview, the interviewer will obtain the consent of the participants and record it. This is intended to ensure that the interviewer and interviewees will focus during the interview and for further analysis by researchers. Researchers will take notes about participants' answers and analyze the patterns participants answered to produce results.

In the focus group, participants will be directed by the moderator in conversations. The note-taker in each group will record details about the conversation. Similar to interviews, the note-taker will focus on and record the pattern of the participants' responses.

4.3.2 Survey

We plan to use Google Forms to deliver our survey. After participants had submitted their responses, we could see the quantitative data analytics about the proportion of participants' responses. Then, we will identify the problems and create solutions based on their frequently selected options on closed questions. Similar to qualitative research, we will analyze the pattern participants answer in the open question, find the common pain point of participants, and then come up with solutions.

4.4 Procedures for Analysis

4.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis will involve categorizing data collected from interviews and focus groups to identify recurring themes and patterns related to international communication challenges. Responses will be grouped by language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and preferred communication methods. Key insights will be extracted to highlight the causes and effects of these issues, ensuring an in-depth understanding of participant experiences.

4.4.2 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys will be analyzed using statistical tools to determine the frequency and distribution of communication challenges. Descriptive statistics will summarize issues such as response times, communication tools used, and satisfaction levels. Moreover, cross-tabulation will identify correlations between variables, including department type and communication preferences, ensuring data-driven recommendations for improvement.

4.5 Limitations

This study will focus on the current high-impact communication challenges international teams face without attempting to address every complexity. It will examine major communication channels, including email, video calls, and instant messaging, and will not investigate emerging or niche platforms a few teams use. This approach may improve efficiency through more uniform communication practices but could overlook the unique needs of teams that depend on specialized platforms for their tasks. A data analytics team may rely on Tableau and Microsoft Power BI platforms to collect and share data insights. It may prevent effective data sharing, and decision-making is limited to using generic business intelligence communication tools (Canestrino et al., 2022). By not addressing these niche tools, the company may miss valuable innovations developed within smaller teams that could improve communication if applied company-wide.

This study will address cultural barriers but may not capture all regional nuances. Surveys may not account for regional and cultural norms related to work communication, such as power dynamics, directness, and punctuality. For example, in Japan, communication is more indirect and sensitive, while Western countries favour direct and collaborative communication, with numerous differences between regions being present (Tenzer et al., 2014). Due to time constraints, data collection will be based on a representative sample, so the findings may reflect general patterns and be representative but will not include specific individual experiences. Thus, our organization may not fully understand niche issues or meet specific needs, potentially ignoring valuable practices that promote team cohesion or effective cross-cultural communication. Overall, a representative sample is logical and practical but may exclude some cultural and regional differences in communication.

5. Significance of Study

This study is significant because it addresses CloudFruit's challenges in maintaining effective communication among its international teams, which is essential for global success. CloudFruit relies on team collaboration to achieve strategic goals, drive innovation, and stay competitive globally. Tenzer et al. (2014) research demonstrates that communication barriers such as language differences, cultural nuances, time zone discrepancies, and varying communication styles disrupt day-to-day operations and negatively impact broader outcomes, including employee engagement, innovation capacity, and long-term adaptability. Examining these issues provides actionable insights into creating a cohesive communication framework for multicultural teams. Furthermore, it contributes to the understanding of global team dynamics, offering strategies that can be applied by other organizations facing similar challenges (Dash, 2015). This research highlights how closing communication gaps can boost morale, improve decision-making, and enhance CloudFruit's global competitiveness. By investing in solutions to improve international team communication, the study aligns with the company's vision of fostering innovation, adaptability, and sustainable growth.

6. Budget

6.1 Fixed Cost

Fixed costs for conducting the research:

1. Compensation for participants:

The compensation breakdown for participants is as follows:

- a. \$20 cafeteria coupon per person for focus groups (78 people total).
- b. \$50 gift card for interviewees (10 people total).

- c. \$10 gift card for each survey participant (200 people total).

Total for compensation: $78 \times 20 + 50 \times 10 + 200 \times 10 = \4060 .

2. Salaries of assistant researchers (note-takers, interviewers, etc.):

- a. \$1500 per person. (10 people in total)

Total for salary: $\$1500 \times 10 = \15000

Total for fixed cost: $\$15000 + \$4060 = \$19060$.

6.2 Variable Cost

Variable costs for conducting the research:

1. Accessibility devices: devices for employees with none for focus group study sessions.

- a. \$3000 in total

Total variable cost: \$3000.

7. Timeline

Week 1: Preparation

- Finalize research objectives, survey and interview questions, and focus group discussion guides.
- Obtain approvals (e.g., ethics, consent).
- Finalize online survey platforms, schedules, and focus group platforms.

Week 2: Recruitment

- Send out email invitations (Appendix A).
- Follow up with phone calls to those who haven't responded to emails.
- Confirm participation in focus groups and interviews.

Week 3: Surveys

- Send out the online survey link (Appendix D)
- Monitor response rate and send reminders to non-respondents.

Week 4: Focus Group Setup

- Schedule and confirm participants for online focus groups.
- Send out reminders with date, time, and platform information for the focus groups.

Week 5: Focus Groups

- Hold online focus group sessions
- Record focus groups and gather notes on key insights.

Week 6: Survey Finalization

- Close the survey and begin preliminary data analysis.
- Ensure survey data is compiled.

Week 7: Interview Recruitment

- Email or call participants selected for interviews, confirm scheduling and send interview guidelines.

Week 8: Initial Data Analysis

- Begin analyzing survey and focus group session data.
- Identify key themes and trends for further exploration in interviews.

Week 9: Interviews

- Conduct interviews
- Record and transcribe interviews

Week 10: Data Analysis

- Analyze survey responses, focus group data, and interview transcripts.
- Synthesizing results to draft conclusions.

Week 11: Finalization

- Finalize data analysis and draft the final report, including key findings, implications, and recommendations.
- Prepare a presentation summarizing the results and insights.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email for recruitment.

Dear [name],

Hello.

I am emailing you to invite you to be part of my research project to figure out how we can improve communication with an international team. The research aims to discover the factors and reasons associated with ineffective and inefficient communication within an international team. If you participate in my project, you will be asked to do a survey and a focus group study. Participating in the research will take 10 minutes (for survey) or 30 minutes (for focus group). In this part of the research, we only invite employees from the marketing, human resources, and client relationship departments, which are associated with more communications and international opportunities. By the end of the research study, we will collect the survey's feedback about participants' thoughts about communication in international teams and some results generated from the focus group. Ultimately, we will develop some solutions to the problem in CloudFruit.

Risks associated with the study are:

1. **Confidentiality Risk.** As we need to conduct the study about communication issues as an international team, we might ask participants specific questions about their workplace experience, and the research team will collect and analyze them. However, it is up to the participants whether they choose to share their thoughts. We will not store personal data after finishing the study, and we kindly request participants not to lie about the data provided; otherwise, there will be bias.

Benefits associated with the study are:

2. **Performance Improvement in Team.** If the study is successful, the research team will develop insightful solutions to the recent issues about communication as an international team in CloudFruit. This can improve the performance of the organization as a whole.

Participation is voluntary, but we would appreciate your participation in this study. All participants will be rewarded with \$20 company cafeteria coupons. Let's improve Cloudfruit's performance together! For more information, please contact our research counsellor, Xiaohong Ren (xxxxx@mail.utoronto.ca). Here is the sign-up link for the research.

<http://cct203/communicationasresearhteam.ca>.

Thanks,

DEM Research Team in CloudFruit

Appendix B: Focus Groups Prompt Questions.

1. What is your department in the company?
2. Did you face any communication challenges in the workplace?
3. Are the issues related to working as an international team?
4. What specific issues have you experienced? Please provide specific examples with context.
5. What do you think are the possible solutions to it?

Appendix C: Interview Questions.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your department in the company, and what are the specific positions?
3. What is your daily routine as a [position]?
4. Have you ever faced communication challenges?

5. If yes, are any of these challenges caused by communicating as an international team?
6. What factors do you think caused this to happen?
7. What are the possible solutions to reduce this issue?

Appendix D: Survey Questions.

This Google form is our template for conducting surveys regarding communication issues as an international team. The survey consists of multiple choice questions, screening questions, Likert scales question, and some open questions.

Link: <https://forms.gle/ioqod1qhLfEZWAA3A>