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**Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication
Apprehension Among Professional Engineers and Architects
in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

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27 August 2024

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Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication Apprehension Among Professional Engineers and Architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Acceptance Page

This paper prepared by **JAMES EDWARD S. TARUC** with the title: “**Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication Apprehension Among Professional Engineers and Architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Program.

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Biographical Sketch

Greatness comes from within. This has been the life mantra of James Edward Taruc who was born in Valenzuela City, Philippines on November 26, 1980. He is the third child of Juan Santos Taruc of San Luis, Pampanga, and Antonina Guddaran Siriban of Pamplona, Cagayan Valley. He grew up out of poverty and was a product of public education institutions. He received some units in Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering prior to shifting to Bachelor of Arts in Management, major in Industrial Management, a degree he earned in 2004 from the Technological University of the Philippines – Manila. A year after his graduation, he became an Overseas Filipino Worker landing a job in a construction company in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to where he is based now.

His passion to become an effective communicator started upon joining a public speaking club in 2008. He then served in different leadership roles and actively participated in community building which gave him ample opportunities to dwell in a multicultural environment. He was able to extend his network and through this, he secured another job in 2014 as a procurement supervisor in one of the largest real estate companies in Saudi Arabia. He now works as a procurement category manager providing business operational requirements in the same company.

He is a Certified Professional Purchasing Manager by the American Purchasing Society, an active financial literacy advocate, a traveler who has been to 66 countries so far, and a public speaker who believes that effective communication is a key to efficient leadership and governance.

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Abstract

Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication Apprehension Among Professional Engineers and Architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The constantly evolving world through innovations and developments has diversified the society where people belong to. As more people travel to places, communication is made faster, and advancing technology that bridges gaps makes interconnectivity among humans more prevalent. These connectivity, mobility, and diversity resulted in increased intercultural contacts, as well as the increase of intercultural communication apprehension, which could hinder effectiveness and efficiency of individuals in multicultural organizations. Previous studies indicate that communication apprehension affects at least 30 to 40 percent of the general population with high degrees affecting individuals at least once in their lifetime. There have been studies measuring the communication apprehension in intercultural contexts however this is yet to be documented among professional engineers and architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which this study aimed at filling this gap.

This study explored the intercultural communication apprehension of professional engineers and architects living and working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it determined the respondent's profile, their intercultural apprehension level and their perceived factors causing this apprehension. The data were collected through an internet survey and made use of descriptive and correlational analysis. A total of 187 respondents participated in the survey.

Results indicated that professional engineers and architects have generally lower intercultural communication apprehension. Demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, years of experience and occupation were compared and analyzed. It was found that education level is inversely associated with intercultural communication apprehension. Certain factors such as their intercultural awareness, language fluency, and cultural behavior have caused this phenomenon. Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity through the national culture index of Saudi Arabia were used to provide behavioral interpretation of the results. The findings provided insights to professional organizations and multinational companies to offer programs and interventions to harness cultural understanding among working professionals.

Keywords: intercultural communication apprehension, professional engineers & architects, intercultural awareness, language fluency, cultural behavior

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Background of the Study

Oral communication skills are of paramount importance in individuals' performance in the workplace (Amogne & Yigzaw, 2013). Engaging in communication activities such as public speaking, talking to people in authority, speaking up in a meeting, and the like, make many people afraid (Lucas, 2015). Avoiding communicative activities in many careers when and where it is required can lead to the person's feeling of discomfort or anxiety which act as a serious deterrent to effective oral communication. A person's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated oral communication with another person or persons is called Communication Apprehension (CA), a phenomenon first introduced by McCroskey (1977). Anxiety is the state of nervousness, worry, and fear which is not favorable which causes individuals to feel uncomfortable (Ma, 2023). The CA theory explains that an individual with a high CA fears oral communication and at times engages in low level verbal output to skip experiencing this anxiety in any group discussion, meeting, interpersonal conversation, and public speaking.

To broaden the understanding of CA, a verbal example can sound like, "I'm afraid to talk, so I try to avoid it even though I sometimes have to talk." Fear is the emotional foundation of CA (Carr, 1996) making CA as a fear of verbally communicating with people. CA affects and occurs in all individuals (Blume et al., 2013; Adeyemi et al., 2017), at least 30 to 40 percent of the general population may experience high levels of CA at some point in peoples' lives (Hunter et al., 2014). This has the potential to negatively impact the

economic, academic, political, and social aspects of a person (McCroskey, 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, 1997).

Most people experience low levels of anxiety in their daily conversations, however between different cultural and ethnic groups, anxiety is anticipated to occur at a higher degree (van Essen, 2020). Some researchers consider cultural background as causing high CA (Jalleh et al., 2021). In 1997 to effectively capture CA degree in intercultural contexts, Neuliep and McCroskey developed a new scale as an extension of CA to reflect the intercultural and ethnic differences between people in a communication encounter. This unidimensional scale is now known as the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) which measures **Intercultural Apprehension (ICA)**. ICA is defined as the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different groups especially among cultural or ethnic groups (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). ICA is essentially an emotional process; it is a subjective feeling associated with the appraisals generated from the existential uncertainty that leads to avoidant or escaping behavior; it is a mechanism that explains why people would behave in a maladaptive manner during intercultural encounters (Ma & Hample, 2018).

ICA is a subcategory of general CA whether the difference is cultural or ethnic, it stimulates CA (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). CA is significantly more common among early career professionals (Cardon et al., 2023) and causes negative effects on an individual's personal and professional relationships (McCroskey et al., 2001). ICA has been reported to reduce the motivation to interact with others from diverse cultures (Lin & Rancer, 2003). Several communication studies have focused on CA, specifically its association with individuals' workplace abilities, however, little research explores ICA in

the workplace. Most of the studies were conducted in Europe, North America, and East Asia and most of the ICA-related studies have focused on students who neglected other multicultural spaces such as workplaces (Trisasanti et al., 2021). There is a scarcity of studies focused on ICA among local and expatriate Professional Engineers and Architects (PEAs) based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia which makes this gap a potential area of exploration. Since culture is considered communication (Neuliep, 2014), pursuing this research on ICA can enrich the understanding of this construct in the context of communication and development among PEAs as a result of an increased cultural diversity in the workplace in the past years in Saudi Arabia (Almostadi, 2019). The need to address ICA is in response to O'Reilly's and peers' findings in 1998 that differences in performing tasks and work, expectation, attitude, beliefs, and norms created by diversity might cause conflict on intercultural communication. Understanding intercultural communication is key in avoiding racial or ethnic tensions (Neuliep, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The rate of migration of Filipino workers to Saudi Arabia is definitely increasing. It cannot be denied that living in a different country with unique customs and traditions is indeed a challenge among migrant workers. The ability to integrate or assimilate in a new host country often is a function of communication. The new migrant has to be acculturated to enhance working relationship and have a conducive environment to work in.

Many migrant workers from the Philippines to Riyadh are composed of professionals like architects and engineers. Suffice to say that technical professions such as these may not appear social or at least be seen to require much communication in the

workplace. However, in a multicultural organization, it cannot be helped but to communicate with people in the organization in order to achieve common goals and objectives. Since there are different nationalities, it is but logical to feel awkward to start a conversation. Understanding the communication dynamics in a multicultural organization requires psycho-social skills and a strong sense of oneness being part of the whole organization. Thus, it is quite interesting to find out how professionals like engineers and architects who appear to be involved more in work than talking behave in a multicultural set-up.

In general, the study sought to answer the question: How do professional engineers and architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, experience intercultural communication apprehension in a multicultural workplace?

Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the prevalence of ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?
2. How are demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, education level, years of experience and occupation related to the level of ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia? and
3. What factors contribute to ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?

Objectives of the Study

In general, the study aimed to analyze the ICA experience of professional engineers and architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in in a multicultural workplace.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the prevalence of ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

2. Identify relationship of demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, education level, years of experience and occupation with the level of ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. and
3. Explain factors that contribute to ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Significance of the Study

This study has implications for future research of ICA in the Middle East and among working professionals in Saudi Arabia particularly in Riyadh city. Pursuing this exploratory study may lead to the following contributions:

1. The increased awareness among PEAs about ICA as a phenomenon will generate more interest and attention.
2. The results can increase the existing ICA body of knowledge as most research is centered on CA construct.
3. The findings may help educational institutions offering engineering and architecture courses to include intercultural communication programs.
4. Encourage professional organizations, employees' associations, and local communities to launch and adopt communication activities to deal with increased exposure to multicultural environments.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The sample size is quite small compared to the whole population of the kingdom. It excluded skilled and household service workers which limited the generalizability of the results. As well, the limited scope of distributing the questionnaire in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

and not in other Saudi cities or gulf countries. Due to the imbalance in gender distribution as well as in the respondents' nationality which has a strong underrepresentation considering that there are about 60 nationalities living and working in Saudi Arabia as per 2022 Saudi Census, there was an inability to elicit significant differences, thus the need to redo it in a larger pool of participants.

With the limitations it is acknowledged that there are several implications and recommendations that can attract the attention of stakeholders and decision makers for further exploration. In general, there is a need for more research in the areas of ICA and its relationship and impact on the future of PEAs. Future studies are encouraged to validate the finding and explore the variables used in this study. The main respondents in this study are PEAs, hence it is suggested that future research examines other occupations such as medical practitioners, household service workers, and others. The setting of the study is only in Riyadh which could be expanded to other big cities of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The fear of communication was the most often researched phenomenon in the communication discipline during the 1970s through 1990s (McCroskey, 2011) which resulted in a significant body of knowledge today. Anxiety associated with communication is inevitable as every individual experience CA at some point in their lives with a significant variance from person to person (Byrne et al., 2012; Blume et al., 2013). CA builds up the negative motivation to communicate, which potentially blocks and diminishes potential meaningful communication. Horowitz (2002), a contemporary of McCroskey defined CA as “anxiety or fear suffered by an individual of either actual or anticipated communication, with a group or a person, which can profoundly affect their oral communication, social skills, and self-esteem”. The common words present in both definitions – fear & anxiety denote negative feeling or reaction that suggests ideas of distress and discomfort.

McCroskey (1982) has identified four types of CA, each representing either a specific or generic situation which indicates potential stimuli for this anxious behavior. The first type is *Trait CA*, a personality type where an individual feels anxiety during the act of communicating in all or most real and imagined social interactions (Bragg, 2017) regardless of the situation, audience, or context (Witt et al, 2006). Second, *Audience-based CA* takes place when a specific individual or group of people (audience) triggers trouble in communication or vice versa. It can also be caused by unfamiliar faces e.g., fresh students joining speech class (Ireland, 2020). Third, *Context-based CA* which refers to a psychological response when communicating in a particular context while

experiencing no fear in other contexts (Dwyer, 1995; Carr, 1996). A person may feel confident talking to his best friend but may feel anxious when speaking in public. Fourth, *Situational CA* which refers to the general tendency of an individual to develop anxiety in a specific situation; it is a transitory orientation, usually short-lived and goes off when the situation is over (Carr, 1996), for example, a person having a job interview. Situational CA is more manageable than Trait-CA as the individual can develop coping skills to mitigate the effect (Blume et al, 2010).

Contexts of CA

Understanding the several types of apprehension can provide insight into the varied communication factors that contribute to speaking anxiety. CA has four contexts: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking (McCroskey, 1982).

Group Discussions: Group discussion is a context of communication dependent on a conducive atmosphere that allows participants to express their feelings and experiences, regardless of how others react (Hennink, 2008). Participation in this activity is considered a high soft skill, which together with teamwork, is a requirement by multiple industries. Group discussions are a vital aspect of professional and academic fields (Majid et al, 2019). Joining group discussions is important in teams as communication is an agent of interaction between members of the working team through which organizational activities scroll correctly (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017). Communicating with others helps in achieving professional goals, incurring the feeling of job satisfaction, and augmenting the overall functioning of the organizations (Kapur, 2020).

Meetings: A meeting is a communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group (Schwartzman, 1989). Team members pose more questions and elicit information during group meetings since they assume that the information is important for group's success (Sonnentag & Volmer, 2009).

Interpersonal conversation: Conversation is an interactive process which requires constant listening, sharing, and asking questions and negotiations (Stone et al., 1999). It is a collective engagement whereby two or more people employ linguistic terms and nonverbal signs to relax through interaction (Adeyemi et al., 2017). Thirty percent of individuals may experience elevated levels of CA which can cause major anxiety in interpersonal communication (Carinan & Bueno, 2019).

Public Speaking: When giving a speech or presentation that requires appearing before big groups of people, most shy people classify these tasks as problematic situations since during public speaking, there is an increased focus or attention given to the speaker (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). In the workplace, employees with effective public speaking skills enhance not only their reputation but also the organization where they work (Clokier & Fourie, 2016). Low public speaking skills can limit career choices and advancement, creating barriers to career success (Arnold, 2018).

Effects of CA in the Workplace

CA influences an individual's career choices, motivation, and growth. Numerous researchers have attributed CA as a serious phenomenon deterring personal growth in

their communication; it holds power and control when experienced as it affects individual behavior and choices across a variety of social settings and activities (Shi et al., 2015). CA can pose professional challenges for individuals, teams, and organizations. Some of the workplace elements affected by CA are:

Communication Competence: There is a moderately significant association between self-perceived communication competence and CA (Muftah, 2023). High CA is correlated with lower communication competence and low CA is correlated with higher communication competence (Rubin et al., 1997). Pate and Merker (1978) cited a variety of implications for highly apprehensive employees – some individuals are less likely to be accepted into task groups because of their reluctance to communicate orally while apprehensive ones are often perceived by others as less competent. People with high CA may hinder their communication abilities from expressing their self-thoughts, ideas, and goals.

Workplace Relationships: Supervisor-subordinate relations are among the most important work relationships where subordinates expect their supervisors to effectively communicate work requirements and job instructions to achieve organizational objectives (Kramer et al., 2013). CA in supervisors could reduce the amount of critical information received by subordinates (Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Kramer et al., 2013).

Employee Performance: Researchers have shown that people with higher levels of CA are less knowledgeable, less productive, less valuable, and less successful than their peers with low CA (Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Thomas, Tymon, & Thomas, 1994). CA impacts a person's employability, affecting relationships and performance and poses an unseen barrier in achieving career success. CA handicaps a person's effectiveness

(Campagnola, 2017) and their ability to work well in teams (Blume et al., 2013). Communication-comprehensive individuals use avoidance strategies daily that could lead to unaccomplished tasks and potential conflict with co-workers (Byron, 2005).

Job Satisfaction: Individuals with high oral CA, compared to those with low oral CA, scored much lower on organizational citizenship behavior and job satisfaction (Gibbs et al., 1994). A study by Beck and his peers (2010) involved revenue managers who are anxious about speaking in various workstations and who were not evaluated by their supervisors at the same time have negatively impacted their job satisfaction. Byron (2005) linked a rising employee's level of CA results to a lower job satisfaction, a factor which triggers job transfers.

Career Motivation: Persons with high CA perceive low-communication occupations as significantly more desirable than high-communication occupations (Fidel, 2009). Low CA persons, on the other hand, perceived high-communication occupations as significantly more desirable than low-communication occupations (Daly & McCroskey, 1975). In the workplace, employees with high CA are less likely to receive job offers, obtain higher positions, and earn greater income (Ayres et al., 1998; Winiecki & Ayres, 1999). Studies indicate that there is considerable evidence suggesting that individuals who lack a range of well-developed communication skills find it difficult to advance their careers (Ellis, 2009).

Self-esteem: The group study of Campero-Oliart (2020) showed a strong relationship between general CA and self-esteem among highly anxious individuals. Communication abilities of people with high CA may hinder from expressing their self-thoughts, ideas, and goals. CA causes a detrimental impact on an individual's state of

loneliness and well-being (Chen, 2019). Individuals suffering from CA exhibit behaviors and psychological tendencies that impede their ability to explore the domains of their life competently (Campero-Oliart, 2020). Individuals with average and high levels of CA had greater decision-making confusion, commitment anxiety and internal conflict than people with low CA levels (Meyer-Griffith et al., 2009).

CA is also a vastly researched topic in education. Blume and his colleagues (2013) claimed that CA is a barrier to students' leadership, adaptability, and multicultural appreciation. Carinan and Bueno's study in 2019 indicated that the level of CA affects the communication skills of first-year college students particularly during group discussion. In another research, Bastida Jr. and Yap (2019) found that many Filipino students at higher levels of study experience some level of fear and anxiety when asked to communicate using English as a medium. Oral communication apprehension was observed as a common phenomenon in second language context (Rashidi et al., 2011). CA was found high among 614 health professions students in Brazil (de Araujo, 2022). A related study of Kakepoto (2022) revealed that Pakistani engineers manifest poor credulity or confidence, poor gestures, or purposeful use of body, and face nervousness due to CA which have impacted their oral presentation performance. Another study conducted in Kerala, India revealed that only 5 percent of teacher trainees were free from the effects of CA, mostly trainees from science education (Meera et al., 2014).

Culture as a Factor of CA

Culture is one construct with over 300 definitions of which none are the same (Neuliep, 2000). In this study, the definition from Peace Corps (2002) was adopted which

states that culture is characterized as a system of beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that guides behavior, and is shared by a group of people, that are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions. Hofstede (2011), a social psychologist also presented his perspective on culture which he described as the ‘collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.’ He also contextualized culture based on its association – tribe or ethnic groups (in anthropology); nations (in political science, sociology, and management); and organizations (in sociology and management). The term also applies to genders, to generations, or to social classes (Hofstede, 2011).

Culture can be identified as a differentiating factor among social groups as it affects various communication skills including levels of CA (Coetzee et al., 2014). CA may be influenced by cultural factors (Gardner et al., 2005) since the cultural perception, beliefs, values, and traditions of each culture have direct influence on the ways of communication among individuals and society (Ay et al., 2018). CA is also a significant predictor of multicultural appreciation (or someone's interest in participating in, contributing to, and influencing a multicultural environment (Blume et al., 2013). Since culture shapes behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, and other aspects of life, it cannot be ignored in the study of IC because of its pervasive influence on the communication process (Al-Sofi, 2015).

Intercultural Communication Apprehension

When people from two different cultures come together and exchange verbal and non-verbal symbols, intercultural communication (IC) takes place (Neuliep, 2019). IC can

be defined as a communication process which occurs between people or groups with different cultures (Neuliep & Ryan, 1998) and the result of an increasingly diverse world today (Neuliep, 2014). When individuals are confronted with cultural differences, they tend to view people from other cultures as strangers i.e. unknown people who are members of different groups (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). According to Samochowiec & Florack (2010), when individuals communicate in intercultural contexts, as the situations contain more uncertainty, they are more likely to be anxious, making them stressed and even threatening. Due to the limited interactions from other cultural groups, uncertainty increases which leads to increased anxiety (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) that could inhibit one's ability to communicate. This communication anxiety is called ICA.

The most identified effects of ICA over people are negative perceptions of cultural differences and a display of uncomfortable behavior in cases of imminent cross-cultural interaction (Mak et al., 2013). High levels of ICA could lead to unwillingness to communicate with other cultures (Lu & Hsu, 2008). A lower ICA could predict the preference for integrating individuals in a multicultural environment as well as the compromising styles to deal with conflict with the host nationals (Oommen, 2014).

Causes of ICA

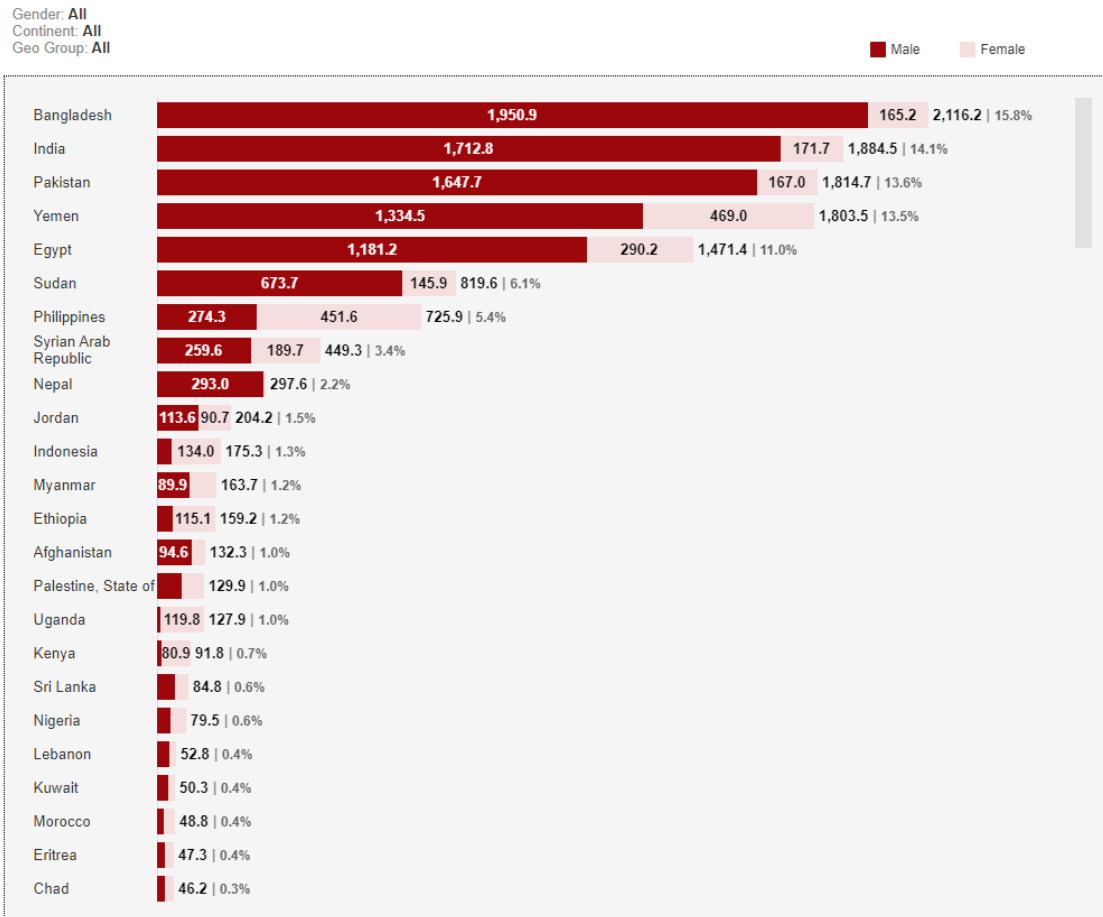
There are possible causes why ICA occurs at a higher level. Uncertainty in communication with an individual from another culture is one of the reasons that triggers ICA (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) as there is always a degree of anxiety when dealing with someone from a different culture. Neuliep (2012) posited that there is a negative correlation between one's ICA and uncertainty reduction during initial intercultural

interactions but no significant level of ICA during intra-cultural encounters. Chen (2010) found a negative relationship between ICA and intercultural sensitivity i.e. when someone's level of intercultural sensitivity is higher, they experience a lower degree of ICA. Intercultural sensitivity is composed of five dimensions which include interaction engagement, respect of cultural differences, intercultural confidence, interaction enjoyment, and intercultural attentiveness (Chen, 2010). Chen stressed that ICA is most strongly related to respect of cultural differences and intercultural enjoyment that when encouraged could potentially lessen the ICA. Differences in cultural characteristics can also increase ICA when communicating across cultures (Croucher et al., 2005). Neuliep (2012) found that perceived similarity results in a lower ICA level. How an individual feels when communicating in the English language is relevant to their ICA level (Ying, 2002).

Saudi Arabia as a Multicultural Society

Saudi Arabia has experienced rich cultural diversity, since historically, it is one of the old trade routes of ancient civilizations, which is mainly distinguished by its connection to the Islamic heritage and Arab traditions (Cultural Communication, n.d.). According to the 2022 census, the number of foreign residents in Saudi Arabia reached 13.38 million, representing 41.6 percent of the total population of 32.2 million (General Authority for Statistics, 2022).

Figure 1.
Non-Saudi Population by Nationality & Split by Gender (in '000 person)
 Source: 2022 Saudi Census



Filipino expatriates account for 5.42 percent (or 725,890) of the total population. Other nationalities with huge population include Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, Yemenis, Egyptians, Sudanese, Syrians, Nepalis, Jordanians, Indonesians, etc. In the context of a large expatriate population, Saudi Arabia is considered a multicultural society. Both Saudis and foreigners from different cultural backgrounds who live, study or work in Saudi Arabia must adopt and blend into Saudi culture (Aldegether, 2020). The presence

of a large foreign workers in Saudi Arabia have resulted to several languages spoken such as Arabic (51.6%), English (16.2%), Urdu (14.8%), Malaysian (7.4%) and other languages (8.9%) (ABS Census, 2021). In an intercultural communication setting, at least one of the interacting individuals must know a second language (Samovar et al, 2010). In this context, this confirms that Saudi Arabia is a multicultural society in an IC context.

In 2021, Saudi Crown Prince HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Royal Commission for Riyadh City (RCRC) laid out his plan to transform Riyadh into a top global city which is built on four key pillars: economic growth, enhancing the quality of life, developing the talents of the city, and exponentially growing the population and infrastructure (Almoaibed, 2023). Along these ambitious plans, developing new entities, initiatives, strategies, and policies are being put in place to optimize both the hard (geography, natural characteristics) and soft (infrastructure, economy, society) (Almoaibed, 2023) elements. These transformations which will benefit Riyadh's citizens and residents, must place measures to mitigate any potential threat to the welfare of its growing professionals and address the increasing concerns of the PEAs in the context of talent mobility and workplace shifts.

The literature review exposed the need why CA and ICA in the workplace should be addressed. PEAs thriving in a complex, and multicultural environment should work to improve their communication abilities not only for employability but for global competitiveness and better career opportunities. Considering the continuous trend of cross-border talent movements, technology-assisted work settings, and ongoing societal transformation of Saudi Arabia, PEAs must be able to express their ideas with others

freely and foster harmony through increased intercultural encounters which is prevalent in the workplace. Addressing and treating ICA in general is a necessary tool to gauge competency since it is a crucial factor affecting employee's career development (Mulyati et al., 2019). Low levels of ICA are perceived as qualities of more competent and intelligent people, and an important characteristic of young professionals (Fall et al., 2013).

Influence of Socio-demographic Variables to CA and ICA

Socio-demographic characteristics were also found to affect CA. Age was found to have positive relationship with CA according to the study of Rahman and Pinky (2023). However, Mat Husin (2022) found no significant association existing between CA level and age even in different age groups. Age is a statistically relevant variable that explains the CA construct (Albuquerque et al., 2022).

Gender: Women professionals have higher state CA in public speaking, group discussions, and meetings contexts than male working professionals (Cardon et al., 2023). Women tend also to have less voice self-efficacy in work environments (Yan et al., 2022), a claim supported by the studies of Okoro and Cardon (2023) claiming that women have less confidence than men in communication situations at work. Jusoh and her peers (2018) found in their study that female respondents scored higher in a CA test (PRCA-24) than male respondents, a result similar with that of Loureiro and her peers' (2020) in which female university students showed more significant levels of anxiety in their oral and written communication than male students. Some studies, however, found no relationship between gender and CA level (Darang et al., 2015). In terms of ICA, women

are less likely to experience it since men lean more toward being ethnocentric (Lin & Rancer, 2003).

Education Level: Having a high educational background can be used hypothetically as a significant predictor towards CA levels since those who did not have advanced degrees would feel inferior which could impact their confidence to talk with others and result to higher CA (Mat Husin, 2022). However, citing the same study, no significant difference was found to exist between education levels and CA levels. While an individual's level of education plays a key role in terms of interpreting and analyzing intercultural situations, there is a gap in literature showing the relationship between an individual's education level and ICA which needs further exploration (Fall et al., 2003).

Years of experience: Newer employees tend to have a lower CA as they have the energy and enthusiasm to interact compared with employees with longer years of experience (Jusoh et al., 2018). Marcel's study on working adults in 2019 showed that higher age, more work experience, and years of management experience were all associated with lower CA. In terms of ICA, Trisasanti's study in 2019, in which she operationally used work duration (as total number of years worked) found a positive relationship with ICA which can be interpreted that the longer years of working with people from different countries and cultural background, the more experience of adaptation it gives an individual in a multicultural environment.

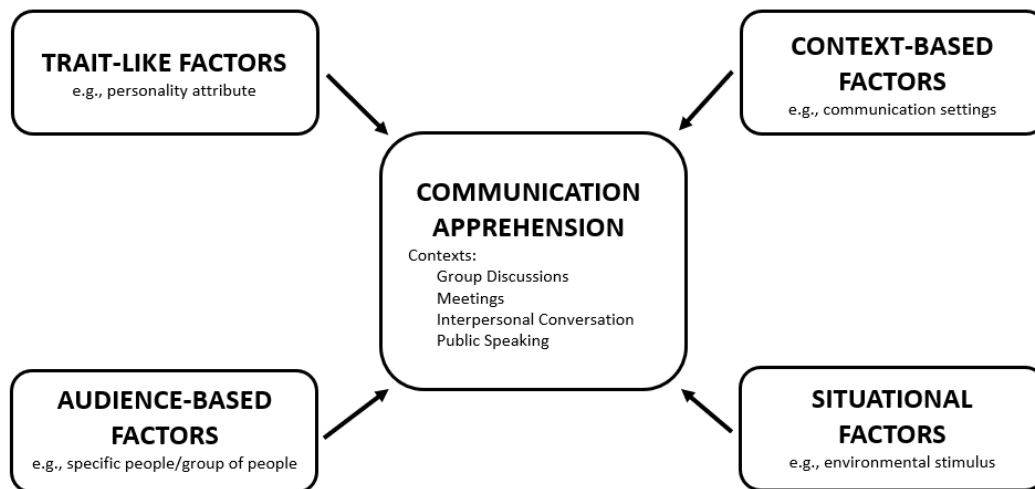
Occupation: CA level plays a significant role in the individual choice of occupation as claimed by Winiecki and Ayres (1999). Those with high CA often change jobs due to inability to cope and perform in the workplace which explains why employers seek employees with lower CA (Petry, 2016).

Civil Status: CA is a significant variable that impacts marital communication and interaction (Aida, 1993). In 2020's study of Hashemi and her peers involving 340 medical and paramedical students, unmarried students registered an elevated level of CA over their married counterparts. These findings are sufficient to say that there are many factors that influence ICA.

Theoretical Framework

No aspect of personality or situation has been identified to predict the universal behavior of all individuals (Schement, 2002) as even in life-threatening circumstances which include death, people behave differently (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). Due to this false dichotomy, CA should be viewed on a continuum ranging from the extreme trait pole to the extreme state pole (McCroskey, 1983). All individuals have some level of CA, and the body of CA knowledge is rooted in the assumption that all individuals fall somewhere in the continuum (Blume et al., 2013). ICA construct is a subcategory of CA i.e. CA is the larger classification, and ICA is subsumed by it (Jacobi, 2020), thus, the CA theory is proposed as this study's theoretical framework. The four points along this CA continuum represented in the framework as factors (trait-like, audience-based, context-based, and situational) are used as the basis for the study's theoretical foundation (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Communication Apprehension Theory (McCroskey, 1983)



Communication skills are described by McCroskey (1982) as the ability of an individual to perform the appropriate communication behavior in a given situation. The CA construct has been expanded explicitly to encompass both trait and situational views (McCroskey, 1977) and later both trait and state approaches (McCroskey, 1982).

First, CA is a lasting, personality-type orientation towards a specific mode of communication across different communication situations – CA could be about oral communication, writing, and singing with each having their own measures (PRCA – Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, WAT – Writing Apprehension Test, & TOSA – Test of Singing Apprehension) which are presumed to be trait-like measures (McCroskey, 1984; Hunter et al., 2014). This CA is more likely to endure over an individual’s lifetime. Individuals high with this CA may experience negative feelings in anticipation of, during and following social interactions and these feelings may be intrusive and overpowering (Blume, 2010; McCroskey, 2011).

Second, CA is a relatively enduring orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people over a given period (McCroskey, 1984). Specific people or groups of people may cause a reverse reaction leading to such individuals having low apprehensive reactions and responses when delivering their views and opinions (Leath, 2019). Control over this CA can be developed over time and linked with positive self-efficacy (Lefebvre et al., 2018). For example, a teacher may be apprehensive talking to his/her principal but possess no apprehension when talking to his/her own class.

Third, CA is a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward communication in each context type (McCroskey, 1984) or environment (Perrault, 2017). Some people can be highly apprehensive about communicating in one type of context i.e., public speaking while having less apprehension about communicating in another type of context (McCroskey, 1984) such as talking to another friend or family member. Communication settings are the major influencing factors in this CA (McCroskey & Richmond, 1997).

Fourth, CA is a transitory orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people as a response to the situational constraints generated by another person or group of people (McCroskey, 1984). CA can be influenced by the situation, time of communication and sharing of information (Frantz et al., 2014). For example, a student may experience little CA when asking his/her teacher about an assignment but may be terrified if the teacher instructs the student to stay after class to meet with him/her.

Due to the prevalence of communication activities of dyadic conversations, group discussions, meetings, and public presentations / public speaking in the workplace, the

CA theory which captures the specificity of oral communication in these four situations, is the appropriate theoretical foundation for this study.

Communication anxiety has been studied over the past four decades (McCroskey, 2011) and continues to inspire research, with dozens of related studies presenting associations and correlations of CA with various other constructs, and in various contexts including multicultural workplace settings. Due to its universality as a phenomenon and its theoretical strength to provide prediction and causal mechanism, CA theory is adopted as this study's framework.

Considering the expanding multiculturalism in Saudi Arabia, and the growing popularity of cross-cultural research, Hofstede's study on 'cross-national cultures' with over 54000 citations as of June 2010 remained as one of the significant contributions in intercultural studies (Tung & Verbeke, 2010). Hofstede first listed four distinctive cultural orientation dimensions, which were expanded to five in 1991, and later to six in 2010 (Hofstede, 2011). According to him, a dimension is an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures. The original four dimensions which were patterned on the four basic problem areas defined by Inkeles and Levinson in their 1969 study, and empirically supported in the data of one large multinational corporation (IBM) represent the dimensions of national cultures (Hofstede, 2011).

Cultural patterns can describe the relationship that exists between culture and communication; thus, it is important to use the dimensions of cultural variability to develop a preliminary understanding of the real differences between culture and another culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). To develop a deeper understanding of the cultural differences during IC, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) suggested to look at Hofstede's dimensions of

cultural variability (Al-Sofi, 2015). Hofstede (1980) developed an inductive approach to understand the cultural patterns of different cultures and produced the idea of national culture which covers the dimensions of individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. Thus, this study's theoretical framework is informed by both Hofstede's and McCroskey's explanation of ICA.

Conceptual Framework

Anchored on McCroskey's ICA theory and Hofstede's cultural orientation, the study assumed that there are several factors that could influence CA in a multicultural workplace. While socio-demographic factors did not form part of those theoretical grounding, it was found relevant since people in an organization come from the different countries and may have varying characteristics. Socio-demographic factors include age, civil status, years of experience, educational level, and ethnicity could have influenced individuals' CA levels. ICA is the degree of apprehensiveness of PEAs in handling intercultural engagements with other culturally different individuals which was measured using the PRICA instrument.

Multicultural settings can also be contributory to increasing or lessening CA. This includes cultural awareness, language fluency, and cultural behavior. Cultural background such as differences in cultural norms and values can cause uncertainty and anxiety in a communicational setting. Language proficiency is another influential factor because limited language skills can affect communication apprehension much more interacting with someone with another language. Cultural misunderstanding can also lead to misinterpretations which could increase anxiety. However, it can be assumed that a

culture of inclusivity and understanding can foster a more comfortable atmosphere for communication.

The cultural dimension is a critical influential factor of CA. This includes individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity/femininity. Individualism/collectivism can assess individual's information about cultural differences between countries, how to manage or overcome these differences and how these dimensions impact PEAs on their intercultural communication encounters. In this study, the Hofstede cultural dimensions were not measured however, the national culture index of Saudi Arabia (the study locale) based on Hofstede Insights 2023 was considered.

Socio-demographic variables of respondents were observed to determine the relationship with ICA level. These variables are age, gender, civil status, education level, years of experience, and occupation. Culture influences communication and it is through intercultural encounters that provide society the necessary effect of communication – to touch each part of human life. In most scenarios, culture impacts communication, however, not all culture suits all environment since communication, as a process, is complex and multidimensional, it requires assessment of the input factors (or settings) that affects the level of CA. Unless there is understanding of the environment where PEAs thrive, including identifying the multicultural settings that influence the manner they communicate interculturally, cultural gaps and differences would often lead to miscommunication.

The multicultural settings covered in this study were cultural awareness defined as the self-examination and in-depth exploration of one's own cultural and professional

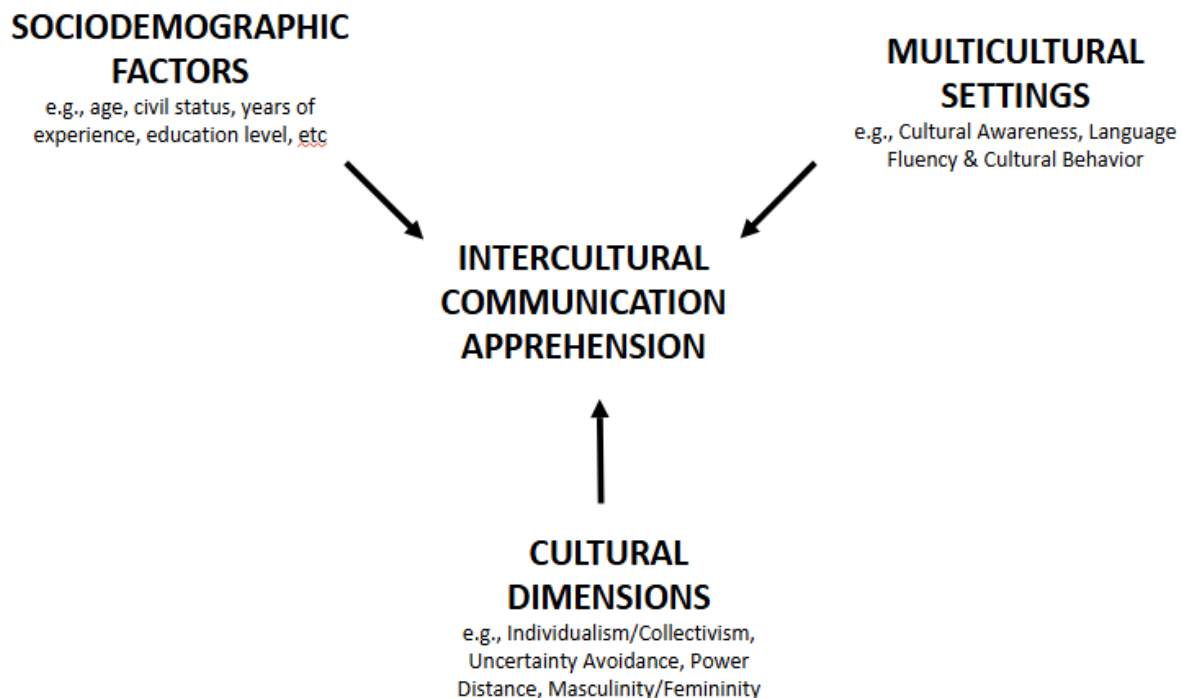
background), language fluency (the mastery of a commonly accepted lingua franca), and cultural behavior (refers to behavior patterns exhibited by individuals within a society shaped by cultural systems, including symbols, norms, and values).

Respondents were asked to rate the following 14 statements based on the level of their agreement.

1. Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of people from different cultures.
2. I am tense and nervous while interacting with people from different cultures.
3. I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from different cultures.
4. Engaging in a group discussion with people from different cultures makes me nervous.
5. I am calm and relaxed with interacting with a group of people who are from different cultures.
6. While participating in a conversation with a person from a different culture, I get nervous.
7. I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a person from a different culture.
8. Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a person from a different culture.
9. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a person from a different culture.
10. While conversing with a person from a different culture, I feel very relaxed.
11. I am afraid to speak up in conversations with a person from a different culture.
12. I face the prospect of interacting with people from different cultures with confidence.
13. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with people from different cultures.
14. Communicating with people from different cultures makes me feel uncomfortable.

CA theory explains the foundational claim that CA is a normal apprehensive response or an atypical experience that affects all facets of an individual's life. Since CA and ICA measures are self-description report of their encounters in any of the four communication contexts, it is significant in this study to look at the themes that participants can attribute their ICA to and to support or contradict the findings. By looking into the multicultural settings of cultural awareness, language fluency, and cultural behavior and how these come into play during IC encounter, PEAs can optimize their communication skills and can facilitate accomplishment of organizational goals (Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Determinants of Communication Apprehension in a Multicultural Organization



Operational Definition of Terms

Professional Engineers and Architects	are employed engineers and architects living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, age 25 to 65 years old working in an occupation specified as engineering or architectural professionals by the International Labor Organization under Class 2, Sub-major 21, Minor 214 to 216, Unit Groups 2141-2149; 2151-2153; 2161-2162 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08). The complete list of occupations is provided under Appendix C. This definition does not include PEA's dependents.
Communication Apprehension (CA)	refers to the personal fear or anxiety related to communication with persons or a group of persons and can be measured by PRCA-24 or Personal Report of Communication Apprehension.
Intercultural Communication (IC)	refers to the communication between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural Communication Apprehension	refers to the level of fear or anxiety when people interact with another individual from an unfamiliar culture or has a different background and life experiences. This anxiety is measured by Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA).
Multicultural	describes a society that has several cultural or ethnic groups.
Multicultural Workplace	refers to a work environment where employees come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Culture, race, religion, gender and nationality all mix to create a multicultural workplace. In this study, the terms "intercultural", "multicultural", and "cross-cultural" were used interchangeably and had the same meaning to keep a similar interpretation.
Intercultural	describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design with key informant interview as a triangulate measure. A survey is a research method used for gathering data from a predefined group of respondents or sample population through their responses to a series of questions to gain information and insights into various topics of interest (Check & Schutt, 2012). The survey shall contain the instrument (PRICA), the demographic questions and the instructions to participate. Responses to PRICA will be quantified using the 5-point Likert scale format to determine the level of respondent's agreement or disagreement on the statements.

After processing the quantitative survey results, the researcher employed another round of data gathering from respondents with extreme scores. Five (5) participants who registered the highest and lowest ICA scores were interviewed to seek additional perspectives through their self-description. The second round of data gathering proceeded after obtaining the respondent's consent. Thematic analysis introduced by Clarke (2006) was employed in analyzing the collected data which went through: transcribing, codes generation, listing of potential themes, reviewing themes, defining & renaming themes, and finalizing the final report. These respondents answered the following questions in relation to their most recent inter-cultural encounters.

1. Why did you feel nervous or uncomfortable?

2. What made you appear nervous or uncomfortable when interacting with people of different cultures?
3. Why do you think a person appears relaxed or comfortable when engaging with people from different cultures?
4. What do you think are the barriers of effective intercultural communication?
5. What do you think is causing intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) to professional engineers & architects?

Respondents

Despite being perceived as technically competent for possessing specialized knowledge and skill sets, PEAs face challenges when communicating. They struggle to express their ideas and often exert efforts to simplify concepts in a manner understood by others. Due to globalization-induced talent mobility, professional engineers require effective and exceptional communication abilities, thus global engineers must not only be technically proficient but also excel in non-technical skills such as communication skills (Kumar et al, 2022). It is on this premise that this study targeted PEAs working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as the main respondents of the survey. In obtaining the actual sample, an inclusion / exclusion criterion allowed respondents to be screened to ensure quality and relevance.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Male and female adults living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- Currently employed as a professional engineer or architect (PEA).
- Age 25 to 65 years old

- Proficient in English
- Computer-literate or able to operate digital devices.

Exclusion Criteria:

- PEAs who are below 25 years or more than 65 years of age
- Dependents or families of PEAs
- PEAs living and working outside Riyadh City
- Unemployed PEAs
- Skilled (blue collar) or service workers
- Undergraduate
- Participants who decline or with incomplete responses to questionnaire

Due to the scale of the study, it was initially aimed to have a minimum of 300 participants. There were personal efforts to get support from the professional groups based in Riyadh such as the Pambansang Samahan ng Inhinyero Mechanical (PSIM) KSA Chapter, the Philippine Institute of Civil Engineers – Riyadh Chapter, the Jordanian Engineers' Association, the Indian Engineers' Forum, United Architects of the Philippines KSA chapter, as well as other professional groups operating in Riyadh.

Locale of the Study

Riyadh has played a significant role in developing Saudi Arabia. The bustling city is home to 8.6 million combined locals and expatriates (Saudi Census, 2022) and also welcomes about five (5) million tourists every year. With expatriates, tourists, and locals interacting in this dynamism makes Riyadh a multicultural city, a suitable background to

explore the ICA construct, apart from the fact that Riyadh is the center of all financial, political and cultural activities in the kingdom where employment is heavily concentrated.

Sampling Procedure

Since the population of PEAs in Riyadh are known through their membership from the major professional organizations and select corporate databases, this study employed a complete enumeration approach of data collection. In complete enumeration, all members of the population are measured for a specific period, often a calendar month, to determine some statistic of interest (Food & Agriculture Organization, 1999). For this study, the link was shared to all members of the population and personal efforts were exerted to persuade members to answer the survey. The following organizations and companies with PEAs as members and employees were approached (Table 1).

Table 1.
Population of PEAs

S#	Organization / Company	No. of Invited Members
1	Pambansang Samahan ng Inhinyero Mekanikal	210
2	Philippine Institute of Civil Engineers - Riyadh	182
3	United Architects of the Philippines – Saudi Arabia	200
4	Indian Engineers Forum – Riyadh	261
5	Jordanian Engineers & Architects	25
6	Arabian Centres Company	15
7	Cenomi Centers Vendor Group	30
8	Egis Group	22
9	Systra	20
10	Parsons	15
Total Targeted Respondents		945

Research Instrument

The Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension or PRICA, developed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) was used as the research instrument. PRICA has an internal validity coefficient of 0.915 that was obtained by Neuliep & McCroskey in the same 1997 study. The scale consists of 14 items (7 half positive, 7 half negative expressions), and respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item using the 5-point Likert type scale (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree). The personal report presents statements that are “frequently made by people with regard to communication with people from other cultures” (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). The total score of the scale is calculated as follows:

Step 1: Scores of items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 12 were added.

Step 2: Scores of items 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 14 were added.

Step 3: Total score = 42 – Step 1 total score + Step 2 total score

The total score of the scale ranged from 14 to 70 points. Table 2 shows how ICA scores can be classified.

Table 2.
Degrees of PRICA scores

Score Range	Degree of ICA
14 to 32	Low ICA
33 to 52	Moderate ICA
53 to 70	High ICA

Even if the ICA scale provided insights on general CA encountered by an individual when dealing culturally with different people, PRICA does not identify variations of ethnic and cultural differences (Van Essen, 2020). A sample of the instrument is provided under Appendix B.

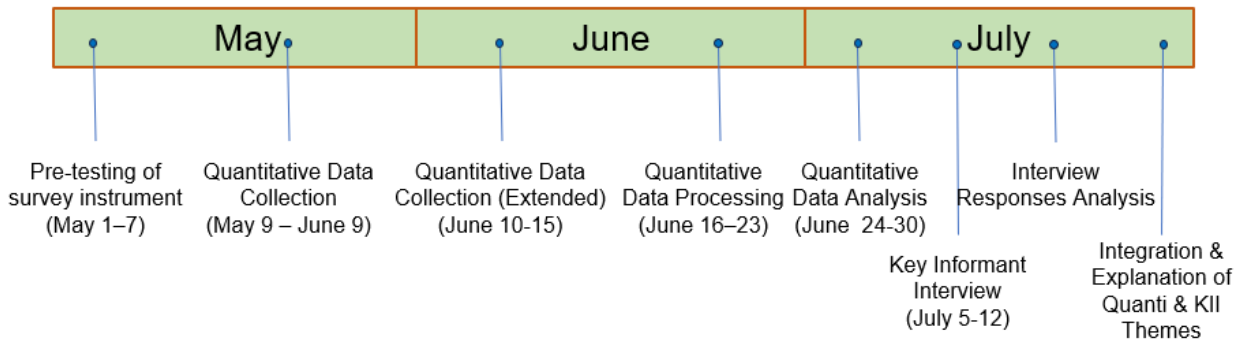
Pre-testing

The survey instrument was pre-tested among 10 respondents. The pilot test was conducted among selected Filipino mechanical engineer members of a Riyadh-based professional group. They were asked to review and provide feedback as to the duration, conciseness and ease in filling out the questionnaire. Based on the pretest result, the two-part questionnaire can be accomplished within 15-20 minutes since the statements are in English language, simple and direct to the point which suited the respondents.

Data Gathering

The survey questionnaire was encoded using web-based Google Form. The link, along with the introduction and instructions were shared through Outlook and Gmail, group messaging apps like Messenger and Whats App as well as through in-person requests. By using Google Form, it allowed the responses to be viewable in real-time. Answered survey forms in PDF (portable document format) were received from the respondents who faced access issues or security blocks of online links. Anonymity was reassured for all respondents and confidential treatment of information. No participants were forced to answer the questionnaire. The following timeline explains the data collection journey:

Figure 4.
Study timeline



The online survey link was available for one month and was only accessible through the invitation link. One hundred ninety-four (194) participants answered the online questionnaire while seven (7) shared their answered document form for a total of two hundred and one (201) responses. Among them, 14 answers were removed after applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria. These were due to non-residency in locale (11 responses), unemployment status (1 response) and the current job is not matching the required occupation (2 responses). The data collected was tabulated in a spreadsheet and transformed to the statistics software for analysis and evaluation.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the collected quantitative data, a subscription-based, modern statistical software called DataTab was used. Descriptive statistics tools used are mean, mode, median, and standard deviation to show data frequency. For the correlational assessment, the tools used were independent t-test, Spearman correlation, and Kruskal Wallis test. The data reflected in this study were also verified by a local statistician.

Ethical Considerations

General ethical considerations were followed including imposing no harm, respecting participants, stating the truth, and gaining informed consent. The privacy of the respondents was considered. No potentially harmful information was collected, and the narrative of each interviewed participant was presented with accuracy. No participants were forced to provide their responses.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 201 individuals have responded to the survey that sought to investigate the occurrence of communication apprehension in interpersonal and cultural contexts among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, however, 14 responses were excluded due to non-compliance to inclusion criteria set. Frequencies and percentages of demographic information were used to describe respondents. Statistical analysis was performed on collected data that resulted in significant findings which answered the research questions.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Almost all respondents were male (187 or 98.9%). This indicates that engineering and architecture are male-dominated professions as supported by Saudi Arabia's 131st ranking in 2023 Global Gender Gap Index. More than a third (69 or 36.9%) belonged to the age group between 31-40 which is relatively young. This implies that PEAs in Riyadh are still in their prime and may continue to work in gulf companies longer. A great majority (137 or 73.7%) are married implying that PEAs are financially capable of starting families.

In terms of educational attainment, a bulk of participants (153 or 81.8%) possess a bachelor's degree as their professions require a licensure as well as certification from the local council of engineers and architects. Ethnicity showed that more than the majority (111 or 59.4%) were Filipinos, followed far by Indians (25 or 13.4%). Other nationalities in the study consisted of Jordanians, Saudi, Pakistani, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, Sri Lankan, Lebanese, and American. The diversity in cultural representation indeed poses

a challenge in terms of how to communicate and behave in the presence of different cultural groups.

Table 3.
Socio-demographic characteristics of PEAs

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	185	98.9%
	Female	2	1.1%
Age	21-30	25	13.4%
	31-40	69	36.9%
	41-50	52	27.8%
	51-60	33	17.6%
	61+	8	4.3%
	Civil Status	Single	42
Married		137	73.2%
Preferred not to Mention		8	4.3%
Education Level	Bachelor's degree	153	81.8%
	Graduate degree	34	18.2%
Nationality	Filipino	111	59.4%
	Indian	25	13.4%
	Jordanian	17	9.1%
	Saudi	11	5.9%
	Pakistani	6	3.2%
	Palestinian	5	2.7%
	Syrian	4	2.1%
	Egyptian	3	1.6%
	Sri Lankan	3	1.6%
	Lebanese	1	0.5%
	American	1	0.5%
Occupation	Civil Engineer	50	26.7%
	Mechanical Engineer	46	24.6%
	Electrical Engineer	24	12.8%

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
	Architect	21	11.3%
	Manager	14	7.5%
	Computer / Systems Engineer	7	3.7%
	Electronics Engineer	6	3.2%
	Telecommunications Engineer	6	3.2%
	Other Engineers / Designer	13	7.0%
Professional Experience	0-5 years	39	20.9%
	6-10 years	33	17.6%
	11-15 years	62	33.1%
	16-20 years	31	16.6%
	21-25 years	8	4.3%
	26+ years	14	7.5%

The Level of ICA of PEAs

After calculating the respondents' PRICA measure, the scores were categorized as low, medium, or high. As shown in Table 3, the majority of the PEAs were found to have a low ICA (76.5%, n = 143). Almost a quarter of total respondents have a moderate ICA (22.5%, n = 42, M = 36.6), and only 1.1% (n = 2, M = 55.5) have a high ICA. The data skewness for low and moderate ICA is -0.7 and 1.1 while kurtosis is -0.8 and 0.3. According to Hair et al., (2010), the data is considered to be normal if skewness is between -2 to +2 and kurtosis is between -7 to +7.

Table 4.
ICA scores and classification levels of respondents

		Frequency	%	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Skew	Kurtosis
ICA Score	Low ICA	143	76.5%	24.3	26	14	31	-0.7	-0.8

	Frequency	%	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Skew	Kurtosis
Moderate ICA	42	22.5%	36.6	34.5	32	50	1.1	0.3
High ICA	2	1.1%	55.5	55.5	54	57		

The ICA levels of PEAs are generally at low level therefore *there is a high prevalence of low ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*. It can be inferred that the respondents do not have a significant concern in terms of communicating with people from different cultures. The majority of the PEAs experience a low ICA with a mean score of 24.3. According to Trisasanti and her cohorts (2021), lower ICA levels are beneficial in cooperating mode, which is the most effective style to deal in environments with most conflicts. Cooperating mode is the integrated problem-solving mode used in multicultural workplace which requires information exchange between parties to increase cooperation. It is conducive for groups to lower their ICA to achieve a state of cooperation among the group members. In cooperating mode, discussions are open and encouraging, participants can demonstrate preferences, address the needs of all parties, and establish a solution that mutually benefits all (Harinck & De Dreu, 2004).

IC is a communication process which occurs between people or groups with different cultures where intercultural contacts are expected (Neuliep & Ryan, 1998); it is a concept much like the CA's four contexts of interpersonal communication, group discussion, meeting & public speaking. To determine instances or situations in which PEAs demonstrate either low or high ICA, the means of positive and negative impressions of PRICA were examined. According to the proposal of Khumsikiew et al. (2015), for a five-point Likert scale (which PRICA uses), mean scores can be interpreted as very low (ranging 1.0 – 1.80), low (1.81 – 2.60), moderate (2.61 – 3.40), high (3.41 – 4.20) and

very high (4.21 – 5.0). Table 5 presents the mean scores of all the positive statements as well as the interpretation derived following the above criteria.

Table 5.
Mean of Respondents' Positive statements (n = 187)

	Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of people from different cultures.	I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from different cultures.	I am calm and relaxed when interacting with a group of people who are from different cultures.	I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a person from a different culture.	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a person from a different culture.	While conversing with a person from a different culture, I feel very relaxed.	I face the prospect of interacting with people from different cultures with confidence.
Mean	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.1	4	3.8	3.8
Interpretation	Very High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Std. Deviation	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9

With a mean of 4.3 (equivalent to 'very high'), it is suggested that the respondents are generally comfortable interacting with a group of people from different cultures. The prospect of getting involved and speaking up in a conversation along with the statement "I am calm and relaxed interacting with a group of people from different cultures" both got a mean score of 4.1 (equivalent to 'high'), however, when starting a dyadic interaction, the mean scores suggest that PEAs appear to be apprehensive, with a mean of 3.8, which is comparatively lower than other positive impressions. This is because communication with someone from an unknown culture can be terrifying and can be worsened by uncertainty (Neuliep, 2015). Due to the difficulty of predicting a stranger's responses, it is common to experience a higher degree of uncertainty, the main factor that affects IC. The tendency during an IC encounter is to gather information from the other participant, when

this fails, it becomes more challenging to predict or explain other's behavior (Novinger, 2001). However, if the average mean score of all the seven PRICA positive statements is examined, a score of **4.03** is obtained which is equivalent to 'high'. This finding suggests that PEAs are open, willing to engage and optimistic in communicating with people of different cultures. If individuals have self-confidence in communication, they experience less anxiety in IC (Su, 2021).

For the seven (7) negative PRICA statements, the average mean score obtained is 1.93 (equivalent is 'low'), with a common standard deviation of less than 1 can be interpreted that PEAs are not concerned or worried about interacting with people of different cultures. The experience "*Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a person from a different culture*" is the most negated statement with a total mean of 1.8. The impression that describes the situational effect of ICA, "My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with people from different cultures" obtained the highest mean score among negative statements of 2.1. It may be inferred that PEAs are willing to communicate with other nationalities with less hesitation particularly in large groups than in dyadic interactions since there is less pressure to respond or talk, and participant can hang back and let others talk if they get drained or anxious.

Table 6.
Mean of Respondents' Negative statements (n = 187)

	I am tense and nervous while interacting with people from different cultures.	Engaging in a group discussion with people from different cultures makes me nervous.	While participating in a conversation with a person from a different culture, I get nervous.	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a person from a different culture.	I am afraid to speak up in conversations with a person from a different culture.	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with people from different cultures.	Communicating with people from different cultures makes me feel uncomfortable.
Mean	1.9	2	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.1	1.9
Interpretation	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Std. Deviation	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8

The prevalence of low ICA among PEAs can be attributed to many observable factors. All surveyed respondents are professionals; therefore, a degree of professionalism is anticipated in their actions, behaviors, communication styles, and adaptation. Professionalism was found to support exceeding adaptation processes in intercultural transactions i.e. being professional is likely to decrease potential misunderstanding which can cause conflict (Trisasanti, 2019).

Majority of the respondents are married (73%) and most of them are joined by their family members in Saudi Arabia. For PEAs and their families separated by distance, due to advanced mobile technologies, married PEAs can stay connected with their families back home. According to Oomen (2014), ICA was found lower among people who had strong perceived social support from families and friends. 81.8% of the respondents are degree holders and the rest have post-graduate degrees. A related study in CA by Rahmani and Croucher (2017) provides insight into this in which individuals with education levels higher than BA were found to have low CA in the context of meetings.

Neuliep's research in 2012 involving perceived similarity can also help explain why PEAs have lower ICA in the workplace. When engineers interact, regardless of field, a presumed level of similarity in terms of technical competence is expected. This presumed similarity lowers ICA. When one perceives another culture as different, it could lead to high levels of anxiety due to potential fear of not understanding the culture and its habits (van Essen, 2020). Another perceived similarity is the cultural group. Filipinos represent 59.4% of the sample and have the potential to influence the ICA based on Neuliep's proposition.

If the locale of the study is looked at, Riyadh is a bustling, globalized city of close to 8 million people (about the population of New York City in 2023), hence it is inevitable and unavoidable to encounter people from diverse cultural backgrounds every day. Whether in a coffee shop, hospital, schools, markets, and other spaces where social interactions are quite normal, In the CA study of Rahmani and Croucher (2017), frequent social encounters and at the same time confidence to communicate drive individuals to be less apprehensive.

Successful intercultural communication largely depends on one's awareness of cultural differences. Since Riyadh is a melting pot of various cultures, to further understand the prevalence of low ICA among PEAs, Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory was assessed to provide additional perspective. To develop a preliminary understanding of the real differences between one's culture and another culture, the dimensions of cultural variability can be used particularly when communicating with people from other cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Gudykunst &

Kim (1997) stated that “we can make reasonable interpretations of their behavior if we understand the dimensions of their cultural variability”.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions refer to the degree to which people are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 2011). These dimensions are individualism / collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity / femininity. Individualism entails a loosely coupled social structure while collectivism entails a tightly coupled one (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Arab countries are generally collective and that they work together for the group (Al-Sofi, 2015). Saudi Arabia scored 48 on the individualism index which makes this country a slightly collectivistic society rather than individualistic (Hofstede Insights, 2023). People in collectivistic culture value the needs of their groups and in the Arab context, developing a polite and personal relationship is more important than tasks (Al-Sofi, 2015). This explains why other people are seen as members of their group in which harmony must be maintained and sustained.

Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations (like community or professional organizations) and institutions (like companies) accept the idea of power and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2011). Saudi Arabia scored 72 in the power distance index (Hofstede Insights, 2023) which indicates that people in Saudi Arabia accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and where subordinates are expected to be told what to do and how to do it (Hofstede, 2011). In Arab culture, hierarchy and authority are important in which elders or most senior persons are addressed first and respected (Al-Sofi, 2015). People from high-power distance cultures rarely question their superior’s orders (Singh and Alshammari, 2021) because of this set up, PEAs, rather than arguing or questioning

the authority of their superiors, follow orders instead, this lessens potential conflicts in communication within the office environment.

Uncertainty avoidance deals with society's tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011); it expresses how uncomfortable people are with uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede & Bond, 1984) or how certain cultures adapt to change and cope with uncertainties (Al-Sofi, 2015). In 2023, Saudi Arabia scored 64 in the index for avoiding uncertainty (Hofstede Insights, 2023) which implies that Saudi society has more formal laws that compel citizens to follow order and comply with the behavior codes, avoid anxiety, and desires frequently to be busy and engaged (Singh & Alshammari, 2021). In a high-uncertainty-avoidance culture, there is an emotional need for rules – both written or unwritten as well as more familiarization and standardization (Al-Sofi, 2015). PEAs scoring low ICA tend to be rule-bound and more formal in engaging with others.

Masculinity / femininity, as a societal norm refers to the distribution of values between the genders (Hofstede, 2011). Femininity represents a consensus-oriented society while masculinity represents a competitive society (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Saudi Arabia scored 60 in the 2011 Hofstede index, as compared to Western countries making it a high masculine society (Singh & Alshammari, 2021). This is also evident in the large disparity between male and female survey participants because in the Arab culture women are expected to stay at home doing housework (Al-Sofi, 2015). In a masculine workplace, there is expected appreciation for people who are assertive, decisive, and people have tendencies to oversell themselves (Al-Sofi, 2015). PEAs are perceived to be assertive and ambitious, providing them with more confidence in interacting with others.

ICA and Respondents' Demographic Variables

The study aimed to explore the relationship that exists between the respondents' ICA scores and their demographic variables. The researcher looked at the respondents' age, gender, education level, civil status, years of experience, and occupation. The link between ICA and respondents' nationality was also verified. It is important to look into the relationship of these variables to satisfy the definition of Jackson (2017) who described IC as an interpersonal communication between individuals or groups who are associated with different cultural groups or have been socialized in different cultural ways by age, class, gender, ethnicity, language, race, nationality or physical or mental ability.

Table 7.
Associations between ICA Score and Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Coefficient	p-value
Age (years)	-0.02	0.77
Education	-0.17	0.02
Civil Status	-0.06	0.41
Experience (years)	-0.02	0.81

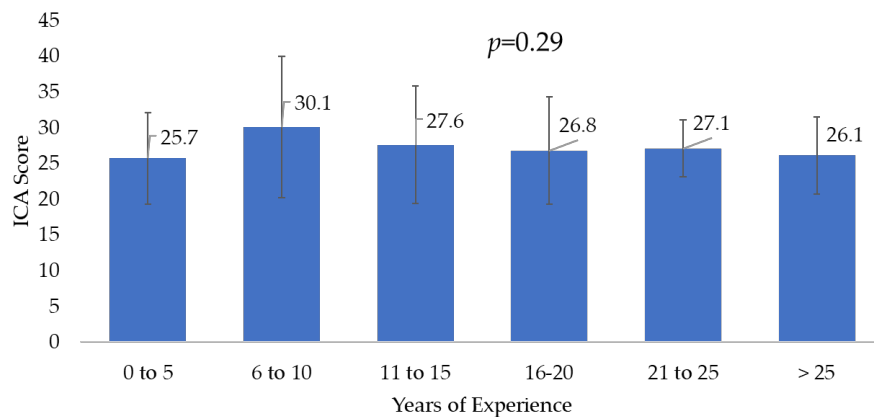
Note: Data presented as coefficient (R); significant at $p < 0.05$.

Using the Spearman correlation test, it was found that a strong significant inverse association exists between education level and ICA score ($r = -0.17$; $p = 0.02$) which can be interpreted as the higher the education level of PEA, the lower the ICA score. Inverse associations were also found in all demographic variables, but not significant. Post

graduate degree holders are required to possess additional sets of specialized knowledge, additional years of learning and consider opportunities to do research (thesis or dissertation) a process in which extensive communication activities and oral presentations are expected to be performed which contribute to making PEAs more communicative, expressive, and competent. In a vast era of talent mobility and competitive markets, companies may be more likely to recruit candidates with an advanced degree.

A Kruskal Wallis test was used to verify the relationship of variable 'years of experience' with ICA. The result was $p = 0.29$ which suggests that there is no association between the PEAs' years of experience and ICA. This may be attributed to the fact that people spend so much of their lifetime at work that their jobs influence several aspects of their identities (Morales, 2023). Due to a large disparity in gender distribution among participants, it was difficult to subject the result to correlational analysis which needs more tests with a larger pool of participants to obtain generalizable conclusions. However, previous studies revealed that no significant difference between ICA levels and gender exists, nor gender is considered a significant predictor of ICA (Zeybek & Sari, 2024; Kocak, 2022).

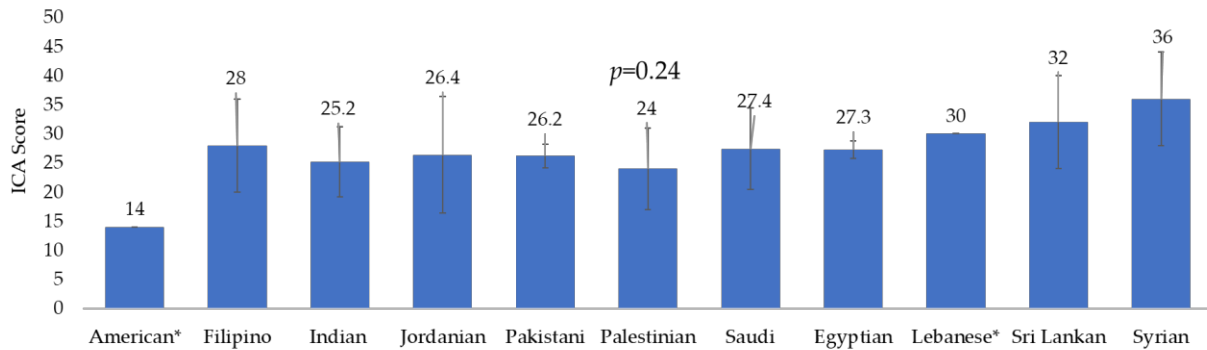
Figure 5.
Years of Experience and ICA Scores



The distribution of ICA among respondents' nationalities was also explored. Among the nationalities, Syrians have the highest mean ICA score (36 ± 7.9) while the only American respondent had the lowest ICA score of 14. Compared to other nationalities, no significant differences were seen ($p = 0.24$). There is a scarcity of studies linking ethnic origin or nationality with ICA. However, in the context of CA, the findings of Aly and Sterling Gowing (2001) presented a notion that ethnic origin does not affect one's CA level. Further research on the variable and ICA link should be done for more validation.

Figure 6.

*ICA Score according to nationality (note: *denotes only one respondent)*



Reviewing if *there is a significant relationship between the demographic variables of age, gender, education level, civil status, years of experience, and occupation and the level of ICA among PEAs*, it was found that there is an inverse trend of associations between age, years of experience, and civil status but more significant association exists between education level and ICA, however this assumption needs further exploration on a bigger sample and extensive scope. The association between ICA and age (due to large disparity) and occupation (being ordinal values) were not known and this is recommended for future undertaking.

Key Informant Interviews and Themes

The quantitative findings suggest that PEAs in Riyadh typically have a lower ICA, not only it is important to know how they differently perceive ICA but also to determine key influences as to why a portion of PEAs experience moderate ICA. To find out what *multicultural factors contribute to the ICA experience of PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*, participants with the lowest and highest ICA scores were asked about their understanding of ICA, and their experience in actual intercultural settings. After reviewing the responses

gathered during the second data collection and performing thematic analysis, three themes emerged as possible drivers of ICA among PEAs.

Communicating with people from different cultures or ethnic backgrounds causes many individuals to experience apprehension (Neuliep, 2012) more specifically within workplaces since ethnic diversity is continually changing the organizational composition of global cities such as Riyadh. Neuliep added that when one perceives another culture as very different, it could lead to a much higher level of anxiety due to the potential fear of not understanding the culture, and often, the lack of knowledge and cultural knowledge results in uncertainty, which triggers ICA to occur. Four (4) out of ten respondents cited the lack of cultural awareness or in other respondent's words - limited cultural awareness or unfamiliarity with culture, which caused them to interact uncomfortably with people of different cultures. A participant with a low ICA has this to say,

"Sometimes, having limited cultural awareness or knowledge about other people's cultures makes me feel uncomfortable when interacting with them."

Participant A, July 12, 2024

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is a significant component of being a global citizen (Lina et al., 2023). The lack of awareness or the insufficiency of cultural knowledge create a tendency among interlocutors to suffer intercultural miscommunication, anxiety, and uncertainty due to differing cultural frames of reference (Awang et al., 2017). Past experiences frame individuals who they are, what their beliefs are, what they know, and even how they see things which become the basis of how people interact with others. These frames of

reference may include race and ethnicity, gender, religion and other traits significant enough to relate someone to the culture of a specific country which allow them to interpret, evaluate and draw conclusions about their respective perspectives or world views. These framed references are creating potential gaps, triggering more unfamiliarity and uncertainty which leads to high levels of anxiety among communicators (Neuliep, 2015).

Cultural awareness as defined by Campinha-Bacote (2002), is the self-examination and in-depth exploration of one's own cultural and professional background. She added that this process involves the recognition of one's biases, prejudices, and assumptions about individuals who are different, that is because Intercultural communication takes place in the backdrop of preconceptions and stereotypes derived from initial contacts with other cultures (Shah, 2004).

Cultural awareness, as a process, is being cognizant, observant, and conscious of similarities and differences among and between cultural groups. Being culturally aware means understanding how people have acquired their culture, and this plays a significant role in their personal identities, ways of life, mental and physical wellbeing. In the workplace, it could mean being conscious of organizational culture and its climate. When people from different cultures communicate and the recipient does not have the same cultural variables and social values, cultural awareness is crucial to achieve mutual understanding (Beamer, 1992).

Dodd (1998) metaphorically stated that, 'Culture is like the luggage we carry', and when we open each pocket of our cultural suitcase, we explore an interrelated set of group identities, beliefs, values, activities, rules and customs, institutions, and communication patterns arising from our daily needs. This cultural baggage is brought to

the cultural workplace and adds more heterogeneity in the workplace. In the workplace, there is a need to assess cultural differences as it is considered to hinder employees' performance and often to be a source of dissatisfaction (Gut et al., 2017). The lack of appropriate intercultural responses results in unrealistic expectations, frustration, anger, and failure to establish friendly social relationships (Dodd, 1998).

Individuals who have better understanding of cultural differences can easily adapt themselves in intercultural communication (Chen, 2010). Understanding is the first step towards acceptance and the biggest benefit of accepting cultural differences is that cultural diversity enriches people (Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015). When an individual is more culturally aware, such as in a workplace or community, that person becomes less anxious to communicate, and it starts by being aware of its necessity. A judgment-free perception allows individuals to observe freely, without prejudices and labels. For intercultural encounters to take place, both interlocutors are expected to be open minded, and willing to engage. This is what one respondent thought,

“I believe that a person is relaxed and comfortable when engaging with people from different cultures because they are curious about the culture of others. They are ***open-minded***; open to different perspectives and being confident to face others.”

Participant B, July 10, 2024

Jacobi (2020) stated that exposure to different cultures would certainly provide an opportunity to trigger familiarity and communication to take apprehension under control. By being open-minded in exploring others' culture, it indicates a positive attitude towards

gaining new experiences – which can contribute to one’s development of new interests, ideas or learning. Being familiar means getting excited to discover one’s culture. This positive curiosity in learning other cultures results in more novel experiences which could lower ICA tendencies as supported by previous CA studies. Positive attitude towards individuals from different cultural backgrounds influences the motivation to communicate with them (Arasaratnam, 2006).

The key to appreciating cultural differences is to acquire intercultural knowledge and develop intercultural skills (Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015). Being culturally aware can be transformed into a skill called cultural competence. As Saudi Arabia is transitioning to a globalized economy and set to become a regional and global economic power, it will continue to transform workplaces into multinational, multicultural environments, hence cultural competence can play important roles in fostering harmony in office relationships and mitigating potential intercultural conflicts by encouraging fluid communication flow among PEAs.

Some participants were asked what caused them to appear nervous or comfortable when interacting with people of diverse cultures. Six (6) out of ten respondents mentioned a distinct player in an intercultural interaction - language. A participant with a low ICA shared his thoughts.

“I’m usually comfortable when interacting with people of different cultures, maybe sometimes I feel uncomfortable due to the language issue.”

Participant G, July 11, 2024

Language Fluency

A common denominator in any communication is language. Language is itself, a culture; one cannot exist without the other (Jiang, 2000). Knowing a language is an important factor in understanding culture since it leads to making sense of the messages (Lopez-Rocha, 2016). However, researchers recognize that language anxiety or apprehension occur when people are expected to perform in the target language (Macianskiene, 2020).

Communication issues are possibly associated with the lack of knowledge in non-native language (Trisasanti, 2019). Language proficiency is a prerequisite for understanding the important cues of IC (Inoue, 2007). This is supported by the notion that in the process of intercultural communication at least one of the interacting individuals must know a second language (Samovar, 2010). English is considered as the main language of most countries as it remains to be the most widely spoken language in the world. With its global usage, English has earned the status of second language in almost all countries including Saudi Arabia. It has become the global language of international affairs, law, trade, and business. Learning to communicate in English among PEAs in Riyadh appears to be a must-have competency as most technical bodies of knowledge in which PEAs deal with are in English.

Being fluent in English and having cultural sensitivity are important for adapting to different cultures (van Essen, 2020). People with more English language competence are apt to manage intercultural situations better, have higher adaptability, and attain more communication satisfaction (Lina et al., 2023) however ICA is influenced by how individuals feel when communicating in the English language (Ying, 2002). Non-fluency

in English can increase their insecurities and doubt their competencies, and at times their self-efficacy. ICA is a dynamic construct influenced by various factors including exposure to diverse cultural contexts, language proficiency, and cultural sensitivity training (Cherdchoopong, 2020).

PEAs are expected, if not necessary to maintain an acceptable level of English proficiency in all forms of communication. Three (3) out of ten respondents felt anxious communicating because of their lack of confidence in their English language proficiency. A participant with low ICA professed,

“The different language maybe, sometimes makes me nervous due to my English language as not fluent.”

Participant G, July 11, 2024

The perception of the inability to speak English for PEAs, locals and expatriates is likely to increase the anxiety to speak with people who are perceived to be excellent English communicators. For some PEAs who are fluent in English language, the inability of others to communicate in English is a growing concern which prevents interactions.

“It’s uncomfortable for me when they are unable to speak in English language.”

Participant H, July 9, 2024

In fact, for most engineering graduates, technical communication skills are essential as part of the qualifications searched by most employees to meet the high market demand in job industries (Kassim & Ali, 2010). The format of engineering and architectural communications ranging from design blueprints, as-built drawings, load

schedules, calculations & analysis reports, product specifications, bid proposals, and other technical documents are produced, distributed and referred in English thus requiring PEAs to maintain a concise and clear usage of the English language. The requirement of being able to understand, interpret and replicate technical communications in English are also causing an increase in ICA among PEAs. These were captured in the following response.

“Technical language barriers are one factor causing us to be anxious with people from other culture since working with different nationalities often leads to misunderstandings of technical explanations and justifications.”

Participant A, July 12, 2024

In particular, the lack of comprehensive understanding of technical communications that use a special set of vocabulary may cause other PEAs to become more anxious to communicate. One participant supports this claim.

“Technical jargons have specialized vocabulary and technical terms that may not (be) easily translate(d) across cultures. This can create confusion and hinder effective communication.”

Participant B, July 10, 2024

When foreigners feel confident in conversing in the host’s language, and expose themselves to the local culture, their communication anxiety could be reduced. Learning the host’s language signifies that the guest values the host’s culture, it is one step further to understand their values, traditions, and beliefs. It makes the integration for PEAs much

easier since they get to engage through meaningful interactions, conversations, and other social activities.

Language is an essential element in any intercultural communication because language proficiency, along with cultural background, and past experiences is considered a player in shaping an individual's apprehension towards IC (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Knowing the language is not enough until it is supported by cultural knowledge (Shah, 2004). The mastery of a commonly accepted lingua franca such as English, which is considered as a business language in most countries such as Saudi Arabia can enhance the standard or quality of intercultural interaction among PEAs. PEAs are global citizens as characterized by their English fluency and as global citizens, PEAs are expected to care about and accept cultural diversity while advocating for social justice and sustainability (Akçay et al., 2024).

Human behavior changes during intercultural communication; it is significant to acknowledge that these changes are influenced by an individual's attitude, manner of interaction, or communication style. But how should an individual behave during intercultural interactions? A respondent hinted something – cultural behavior.

“If they value my opinion by listening carefully when I’m trying to say makes me comfortable to continue my communication.”

Participant I, July 8, 2024

Cultural Behaviors

In the above feedback, it implies the behavioral preference of the communicator with another person from different cultural backgrounds. Six (6) out of ten respondents

have highlighted that they prefer to interact with another person who behaves favorably based on personal criteria set by the interlocutors. Three (3) respondents mentioned that arrogance – the feeling of being superior, intimidating, and being too proud of accomplishments are some of the attitudes that would make them assess their responses whether to continue or abandon the discussion. On the positive side, some respondents prefer conversations with people valuing their opinion, who listen carefully, who are kind, and respectful while few look at the person's body language and their communication style. ICA provides a mechanism on why individuals would behave and react in a certain, sometimes maladaptive way in their intercultural encounters – it is like an emotional construct that triggers how people think, feel, and behave in intercultural contexts.

It is important to remember that culture shapes an individual's communicative behavior and understanding of other people's communicative behaviors (Jandt, 2010). When we understand when to shake hands, greet someone with a local greeting such as "Salamulaikum" which means "peace be upon you", bow heads or, avoid pointing a person using the index finger, sign "ok" using the hand, or tip a waiter, it not only shows respect but signifies a sense of belonging to that culture. A prominent ICA scholar, Chen (2010) asserted that ICA is strongly related to the respect of cultural differences. Knowing why, when and how to act by focusing on appropriate behaviors in any intercultural encounters increases an individual's competence which facilitates adaptation to certain cultures. This is pivotal in understanding and exhibiting cultural behavior. To gain intercultural competence, one should be aware of the differences between cultures, recognize cultural values, and be culturally sensitive, accepting differences and incorporating them into the learning process (Matveev & Merz, 2014). Individuals who

have more intercultural interactions gain more experience about the world, making them more appealing in the job market as recruiters are often on the look for global talents.

Cultural behavior refers to behavior patterns exhibited by individuals within a society shaped by cultural systems, including symbols, norms, and values. It encompasses actions, beliefs, and interactions influenced by cultural contexts, such as gender roles, social norms, and moral values (Wright, 2015). It is important how these cultural contexts at the locale have been influencing the IC situations of PEAs. Cultural behavior describes the way people behave, interact with others, communicate and understand the world around them. In understanding other cultural norms, the scope of prejudices and distance could be limited (Overbay, 2023).

Gender Roles: With only two female PEAs participated in this study, a great disparity exists between female and male participants that is because at some point in Saudi Arabia's education history, women were not allowed to take up engineering courses (Mobaraki & Soderfeldt, 2010) which is culturally regarded as purely masculine. The fields of engineering and architecture are mostly dominated by men in Saudi Arabia, however the government's ambitious economic blueprint – Vision 2030 promises equal opportunity in the labor market by engaging and empowering women which drove women employment to records high compared to previous years (Almoaibed, 2023). In some Arab countries, culture imposes distinct roles based on gender i.e. men work and provide for the family while women nurtures and cares at home (Al-Sofi, 2015). Arab society is dominated by males in public (Al-Sofi, 2015), using the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension, there is much assertiveness and sense of accomplishment in the communication style of male PEAs.

Social Norms: People around the world have accumulated a rich stock of cultural traditions and customs but are not aware of the cultural rules governing their own behavior until they encounter behaviors different from their own (Lui, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015). Local examples could be the requirement of women in Saudi Arabia to wear abaya, a long black coat that conceals their body figure, and often accompanied by hijab, a head covering that hides their face and hair. Saudi men, on the other hand, must wear the national dress thawb when visiting and doing government transactions. The wearing of their dresses is not only compulsory by law but mainly born out of traditions and customs. As Saudi Arabia is predominantly Muslim, walking in front of someone praying is considered offensive. Dressing up with a degree of conservativeness is appropriate in public places. Taking pictures of some government offices and military facilities is prohibited. Gambling and alcohol are banned activities. As PEAs, being culturally aware enables them to navigate differences that could avert potential culture shocks, preventing them from offending others in the end.

Moral Values: Just like in any other culture, respect is one of the values embedded in Arab culture which preserves the integrity of intercultural relationships. That is, developing a polite and personal relationship is important in the Arab context, as relationships are paramount, even more important than tasks (Al-Sofi, 2015). In any communication encounter, since intercultural communication is often interpersonal, the intercultural value of respect keeps conversations in a more pleasant, courteous manner and eases out potential tensions or conflicts among PEAs. Respect begins in listening and in listening, one can reflect the degree of interest and excitement in a discussion as focus on the content and meanings is vital in intercultural communication. When ICA

increases due to anxiety, it leads to increased disrespect and decreased tolerance toward culturally different individuals (Trisasanti, 2019). Listening makes an interlocutor comfortable to continue interacting. In any communication encounter, since intercultural communication is often interpersonal, the intercultural value of respect keeps conversations in a more pleasant, courteous manner and eases out potential tensions or conflicts among PEAs. Team meeting behaviors and processes are predictors of both team and organizational outcomes (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012) which eventually leads to strengthening organizational culture. Individuals who continuously immerse themselves in another culture benefit by seeing another world from another perspective. This enhances their personal values or respect and empathy for others.

When people of two different cultures interact, cultural fluency is the appropriate application of respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, the willingness to suspend judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, and sense of humor (Inoue, 2007). The lack of intercultural values in any communication process often leads to conflicts and misunderstandings that could trigger avoidance among responding PEAs. Attitude, as well as difference in beliefs were found to create conflicts in multicultural environments (Trisasanti, 2019). Since communication is a process involving multiple messages sent via multiple signal systems, culture has a pervasive influence on the encoding of both verbal and non-verbal signals and in the decoding of those signals, misunderstanding, and conflict is inevitable in IC (Matsumoto, Leroux, & Yo, 2005).

Riyadh continues to position itself in the regional and global stage by organizing forums and events that draw in global attendance (Almoaibed, 2023) such as the Saudi Green Initiative Forum, the Green Building Forum and the International Social Innovation

Forum and many others which are primarily set in English language. With this trend in offering Riyadh as a top choice for international events, exhibitions, and dialogues, it is expected that more intercultural communication engagements are expected.

With Saudi Arabia's transitioning to a global society, workplaces in Riyadh exhibits multiculturalism, hence PEAs must increase their tolerance of perceived differences, move out from their individual zones, and cross borders to understand the language and culture of workplace peers. PEAs must be observant, to a certain degree cautious of their dealings with other cultures. The goal of intercultural communication is to be familiar with the cultural backgrounds of PEAs who belong in the same workplace culture. Afterall, how people behave everyday reflects their workplace culture (Morales, 2023).

When people are in a new environment where intercultural encounters are frequent, language barriers, and insufficient cultural knowledge about prevailing culture result in difficulty in adapting. In analyzing the collected data, it is worthy to mention that the interview findings supported the quantitative data that ICA is not prevalent among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia due to the broad cultural awareness of respondents, English language fluency, and the exhibition of appropriate cultural behaviors which allow PEAs to thrive in multicultural environments. Intercultural communication is of great value to every individual particularly for PEAs who aspire to be successful in their chosen field of work. Being culturally aware and non-apprehensive in communicating with people from different cultures can increase opportunities for growth as new learning is unveiled in every intercultural encounter.

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Communication skills are an important element in the career development of working professionals. This research provides a deeper understanding of communication apprehension (CA) in cultural context known as ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The sampled PEAs experience low to moderate ICA with low ICA being prevalent. The findings support the ICA theory of Neuliep & McCroskey (1997) that uncertainty in communication with people from another culture can cause this phenomenon. The study found an inverse association trend between the respondents' age, civil status, and years of experience with ICA but most significantly in terms of education level that implies that PEAs with advanced degrees tend to have lower ICA scores. There is no significant relationship found between ICA and nationality in which the variables of gender and occupation were not tested and needs further exploration on a bigger sample and an extensive scope.

Based on the result of key informant interviews, it was found out that cultural awareness, language fluency and cultural behaviors affect the ICA levels of PEAs. A broader sense of cultural awareness can reduce ICA as it disperses racial prejudices and acts as stimuli to create intercultural engagements. Non-mastery of the English language can cause increased anxiety among PEAs because of the fear of making mistakes. Certain cultural behaviors and values must be observed and learned by PEAs in

managing intercultural situations. Further communication research should be performed to have a more thorough understanding of how PEAs view and experience ICA.

Conclusions

Success does not depend on the individual possessing the crucial skills, one must develop confidence in those skills that they are learning (Kurbanoglu, 2003). The need to gain intercultural awareness, language fluency, behavioral competence and appropriate communication style while mitigating ICA is essential to the continuous professional development of PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This study investigated how interculturality the PEAs of Riyadh are and what insights can be derived. Using the standard test measuring ICA, it was determined that PEAs have generally low ICA. A trend leaning towards inverse association was also determined to exist between ICA and PEA's age, civil status, education level and years of experience with education level showing a strong inverse relationship. PEAs who have advanced degrees are less apprehensive when dealing with people of differing cultures.

It also confirmed the previous study that one's ethnic origin or nationality does not influence ICA level while further and broader studies must be conducted in determining the relationship between the variable of gender and occupation. It is also discovered that PEAs are more comfortable communicating interculturality in group discussions rather than dyadic conversations. With these significant findings and effort to increase the ICA literature among PEAs in Riyadh, the objectives set earlier were successfully met.

Recommendations

The outcome of this study will benefit specifically the PEAs, and in general the locals and expatriates living and working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia because it sought to determine ICA as potential impediment of a healthy, multicultural work environment. As the subject respondents in the study experience low to moderate ICA, the researcher presents the following recommendations were presented.

1. Review, revise, or expand existing onboarding programs in companies employing workers of mixed ethnic background to maintain sound intercultural dynamics among their employees.
2. Develop communication programs that promote intercultural communication among members of locally established professional organizations and community support groups since IC is important in establishing integration in a nation in which community standards are the starting points in any integration process.
3. For communication scholars to develop new or adjust existing communication models that are designed for PEAs to more accurately reflect the variables affecting the experiences of living and working in a multicultural environment. Also, to update the Personnel Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension to include the other cultural measures such as Hofstede's.

This investigation attempted to fill in the gap of communication research literature that are focused solely on engineering professionals and architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and contribute to the current body of knowledge by validating certain factors that could influence the occurrence of ICA among PEAs.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Survey & Cover Letter

Questionnaire/Survey

Google Form Link: <https://forms.gle/LYvMA15S9cvBGxDv7>

Cover Letter

Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication Apprehension among Professional Engineers and Architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

This is a survey developed to determine the intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) levels of Professional Engineers & Architects (PEAs) living and working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I would be grateful if you could help participate in my survey by answering the succeeding questions.

All information provided in this survey will be kept confidential and will be used only as a research tool in fulfillment of master's thesis course under the Master of Development Communication (MDC) by Mr. James Edward Taruc of University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU). For any questions or clarifications, please send an e-mail to jstaruc2@up.edu.ph and to jamesedward.taruc@outlook.com.

In general, this study aims to determine the intercultural communication apprehension (or speaking anxiety toward other nationalities) levels among Riyadh-based professional engineers & architects.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the prevalence of ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
2. Establish if demographic variables of age, gender, education level, years of experience, civil status, and occupation affect the ICA level of PEAs.
3. Determine the factors that cause ICA among PEAs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

I assure you that the information provided will remain totally confidential and will only be used for the purpose of my study. Thank you very much for your time in answering this survey!

**Thriving in a Multicultural Workplace: Intercultural Communication Apprehension among
Professional Engineers & Architects in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

(Instructions: Please fill out the questionnaire completely and correctly. Your support is appreciated.)

Name: _____ **Gender:** Male Female
(FAMILY NAME) (FIRST NAME) (M.I.)

Age: ____ y/o **Email Add 1:** _____

Work Mobile #: _____ **Other Mobile #:** _____

Highest degree of education completed:

- Graduate (Masters/Doctorate) Bachelor's degree
 College Undergraduate Others, please specify: _____

What is your current nationality?

- Saudi Filipino Indian Pakistani Jordanian
 Egyptian Sudani Yemeni Syrian Bangladeshi
 Sri Lankan Others: (please specify) _____

Civil Status: Single Married Others _____

Are you currently Employed? Yes No What industry are you presently in? _____

What is your current occupation?

- Industrial and Production Engineers
 Civil Engineers
 Environmental Engineers
 Chemical Engineers
 Electrical Engineers
 Electronics Engineers
 Telecommunications Engineers
 Other type of engineer, please specify: _____

Total no. of years working in KSA: _____

No. of years living in your current city: _____ **Total no. of years living in Saudi Arabia:** _____

APPENDIX B

Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA)

DIRECTIONS: This measure was developed to address communication apprehension in the intercultural context. The fourteen statements below are comments often made by people regarding communication with people from other cultures. Please write down how much you agree with these statements by marking a number representing your response to each statement using the following choices:

Strongly disagree = 1 Disagree = 2 Undecided = 3 Agree = 4 Strongly agree = 5

There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly, just record your first impression.

- _____ 1. Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of people from different cultures.
- _____ 2. I am tense and nervous while interacting with people from different cultures.
- _____ 3. I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from different cultures.
- _____ 4. Engaging in a group discussion with people from different cultures makes me nervous.
- _____ 5. I am calm and relaxed with interacting with a group of people who are from different cultures.
- _____ 6. While participating in a conversation with a person from a different culture, I get nervous.
- _____ 7. I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a person from a different culture.
- _____ 8. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a person from a different culture.
- _____ 9. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a person from a different culture.
- _____ 10. While conversing with a person from a different culture, I feel very relaxed.
- _____ 11. I am afraid to speak up in conversations with a person from a different culture.
- _____ 12. I face the prospect of interacting with people from different cultures with confidence.
- _____ 13. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with people from different cultures.
- _____ 14. Communicating with people from different cultures makes me feel uncomfortable.

APPENDIX C

International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) Index

Class 2, Sub-major 21, Minor 214 - 216,

Unit Groups 2141-2149; 2151-2153 & 2161-2162

2

Professionals

21 Science and Engineering Professionals

211 Physical and Earth Science Professionals

212 Mathematicians, Actuaries and Statisticians

213 Life Science Professionals

214 Engineering Professionals (excluding electrotechnology)

2141 Industrial and Production Engineers

2142 Civil Engineers

2143 Environmental Engineers

2144 Mechanical Engineers

2145 Chemical Engineers

2146 Mining Engineers, Metallurgists and Related Professionals

2149 Engineering Professionals not elsewhere Classified

215 Electrotechnology Engineers

2151 Electrical Engineers

2152 Electronics Engineers

2153 Telecommunications Engineers

216 Architects, Planners, Surveyors and Designers

2161 Building Architects

2162 Landscape Architects

APPENDIX D:

Survey Permission from the Author

Source: [James C. McCroskey \(jamescmccroskey.com\)](http://jamescmccroskey.com)

Dr. James C. McCroskey

Dept. of Communication Studies, University of Alabama-Birmingham, Birmingham, AL 35294

Phone: ; FAX: 205-934-8916; LMCCROSK@csulb.edu

We regret to announce the passing of Dr. James C. McCroskey on December 27, 2012.

If you wish to make a donation to the James C. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond Undergraduate Scholars Conference Fund, Please contact Karhie Casa at: eca@kocmemberservices.com.

Welcome to my website! This site had been designed to provide information about me and my research programs. All material on this site is provided free-of-charge and may be used at no cost so long as it is appropriately cited. There are five categories of information: biographical data (the usual vita information), publications (listings of published books, book chapters, monographs, periodicals, and book reviews); communication research measures (various scales which have been developed for use in communication research), electronic publications (papers which were presented at professional conventions and published here for the first time), and current information for students in my undergraduate classes.

All of my published journal articles are available (Periodicals) and can be downloaded. There is a listing of papers presented at conventions (Convention Presentations), but the text of those papers is not available (I do not even have a copy of many of them). However, many have been published as journal articles and are available for downloading (Publications). I am in the process of identifying unpublished convention papers which may be of particular interest to some researchers but have not been published. These will be published here for the first time (Electronic Publications). There is a listing of my published books (Academic Books and Textbooks). Some of these, which are not currently in print or do not have a later edition in print, will be made available on this site (free) as time permits. Only one is now available. Many research measures that I (and/or my colleagues) have developed are available (Communication Research Measures). Each instrument is provided along with its scoring and the appropriate citation for where it has been published.

A brief list of Monographs is provided. Two of these have been requested frequently--my Carroll Arnold Lecture presented at the 1997 NCA convention, and a monograph reporting 13 research studies relating to the use of evidence in persuasive communication. The former was distributed to all the members of NCA as a monograph by Allyn & Bacon. The latter was originally distributed as a monograph by the Speech Communication Research Center at Michigan State University, which no longer exists. These 13 studies were summarized in an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1969), but have not been available as a full report until now.

I have also added my doctoral dissertation to the list of Publications. A recent increase of interest in research on evidence as well as attitude and belief measurement has resulted in several scholars contacting me to find out how they might access this dissertation. Now, a full downloadable copy of the dissertation is available by clicking on it under "Publications." This is the original source of my earlier measures of source credibility and the Generalized Attitude Scale.

I would appreciate any comments (good or bad) that you might have concerning this website. The easiest way to reach me is at my email address noted above. I would particularly appreciate it if you find something that is "messed up" and let me know about it! Several people have done this in the past and this has helped me make several improvements on the site.

1.) Biographical Information

- a.) [Brief Biography](#)
- b.) [Education](#)
- c.) [Areas of Specialization](#)
- d.) [Professional Employment](#)
- e.) [Honors](#)
- f.) [Professional Association Activities](#)
- g.) [Editorial Activities](#)
- h.) [Convention Presentations](#)
- i.) [Graduate Committee Experience](#)
- j.) [Biographical Listings](#)
- k.) [Guest Lecturer Appearances](#)
- l.) [Media Appearances](#)
- m.) [Administrative Experience](#)

2.) Publications

- a.) [Periodicals--Articles in Professional Journals](#)
- b.) [Doctoral Dissertation--J. C. McCroskey \(1966, Penn State U.\)](#)
- c.) [Books--Academic Books and Textbooks](#)
- d.) [Original Book Chapters](#)
- e.) [Monographs--Longer writings which are neither periodicals nor books](#)
- f.) [Books--Instructional--Workbooks](#)
- g.) [Book Chapters Reprinted From Elsewhere](#)
- h.) [Book Reviews](#)

3.) [Communication Research Measures](#) (Instruments which may be used free-of-charge by researchers)

4.) [Electronic Publications](#) (Articles which are published for the first time here)

5.) Current class information

- a.) not available