Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue
Communicating Beyond the University: The Asian Workplace

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Workplace communication has been studied and discussed by academics and practitioners for decades. However, since the 1960s and 70s, technological advancements have transformed the way we communicate. While letters were once the primary form of workplace communication, we have transitioned to emails and, more recently, a combination of emails and social media.

Technology has indeed made communication faster and more efficient. Generative artificial intelligence (genAI) tools, in particular, have introduced a new dimension to how we approach drafting workplace correspondence. Many people now rely on these tools to brainstorm, draft, and revise their workplace documents. Additionally, there are applications available to support presenters in creating presentations. These advancements raise questions about the essence of workplace communication and the reasons for teaching it to students.

New technologies and applications are not the only sources prompting inquiry into the role of workplace communication within higher education curricula. Dubinsky and Getchell (2021) trace the development of disciplines like business communication and technical communication in the context of U.S. universities. They highlight the challenges and complexities in defining the boundaries of these courses, which may have contributed to their disappearance from English departments, where they have traditionally been offered.

More than two decades ago, when the teaching and learning of professional communication in higher education were on the rise, Faber (2002) called for a review of its definition. He argues that we need to "carefully define what is professional about professional communication and how professional communication is distinguished from other forms of workplace writing" (Faber, 2002, p. 307). He further contends that for research in this field to hold a significant place in university curricula, robust theoretical frameworks and foundations must be established. This would ensure that the identity of professional communication is distinct and clear, subsequently informing practice.

In the Asian context, these courses are typically included in the curriculum offered by ESL/EFL and ELT departments, or, in some cases, by business schools. The rationale for ELT and related departments offering these courses likely stems from their focus on the teaching and learning of English. Students who enrol in these courses prepare themselves for the demands of working in a globalised environment where English is commonly used as the language of communication. Consequently, intercultural communication and understanding cultural nuances have become important considerations for effective

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workplace communication, as has communication within teams of individuals spread across diverse parts of the world in the increasingly internationalised corporate context.

How can workplace communication educators appropriately and effectively develop, enhance, and revise their courses while engaging in upskilling to remain relevant, especially in today's globalized, multicultural, and AI-driven environment? For clarity, in this special issue, the terms professional, business, workplace, and technical communication refer to interactions that occur in the workplace or within various industries.

This special issue opens with a conceptual essay by Lam (2025) which focuses on instructors of workplace communication courses. Lam highlights the crucial role these instructors play in maintaining the relevance of course content amidst rapidly evolving workplace changes. Using Boyer's framework, Lam provides concrete suggestions on how instructors can participate in iterative processes of learning, discovery, internalization, and the transfer and sharing of newly acquired knowledge with their students, facilitated by effective onboarding and in-service training programs.

Expanding on the concept of the important role instructors play, Koo (2025) conducted an interesting investigation to determine whether instructors' backgrounds influence their expectations of students' use of non-verbal communication cues in oral presentations. Her findings suggest that instructors should take into account a diverse range of indicators when teaching classes comprising students from different cultural backgrounds with varying ideas of what constitutes effective non-verbal cues. Koo's study reinforces Du-Babcock's (2018) contention that research in Asian workplace communication should consider cultural factors, power dynamics in language use, and the demands of international business organizational communication.

Approaching workplace communication from a different perspective while continuing the focus on preparing students for the workplace, Du-Babcock and Wu (2025) conducted a longitudinal study examining students on internships. Findings from multiple stakeholders indicate that although the interns demonstrated competency and readiness for effective integration into the Asian workplace, supervisors desired a higher degree of confidence in decision-making communication, as well as the development of mindsets and attitudes reflective of workplace professionals. Du-Babcock and Wu conclude that the internship experience is invaluable for enculturating students into the workplace.

Concluding this special issue is Lee's reflection on assertive communication, particularly in preparing students in an Asian context to actively participate and have their voices heard in an international workplace (2025). To encourage her students to articulate their views in difficult conversations and ask insightful questions, Lee utilised a scenario-based approach. This method allows students to address both the content and the affective aspects involved in such communication. While the scenario-based approach has been well-received, Lee plans to pilot role-playing and scenarios derived from students' own experiences. She remains convinced that assertive communication is a valuable competency for students and can be effectively learned through scenarios.

For future research on preparing students in Asian higher education for workplace communication, we contend that it should be contextualized with consideration for socio-economic, political, and cultural nuances, as well as strong alignment with industry needs. In the coming decades, we envision several areas of research gaining prominence, including the impact of AI on workplace communication, inter-generational communication, and discussions on well-being, work-life balance, and empathetic communication.

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