

# A study of the issues in technical writing e-collaboration and methods to enhance collaborative cooperation with a focus on global collaboration

**Katherine Wertz**

Department of English



## Abstract

Research on issues in technical writing e-collaboration is still in its early stages. While several studies touch upon various aspects of these issues, ranging from technical issues to psychological ones, few of them refer specifically to intercultural technical writing e-collaboration issues. In particular, of the few that refer to this topic, fewer still address how to resolve and/or prevent these issues. In this pilot study, I sought to discover what kinds of issues professional writers currently encounter in international e-collaboration and how these issues were dealt with. Through this, I found that while culture clashes were common, only one out of eleven participants had been provided with formal training on how to deal with these potential issues by his or her employer. Further research on this topic could potentially aid professional writers and the companies they work for to more effectively e-collaborate internationally.

## Methods

In this pilot study, I used a brief surveymonkey.com survey which I posted on technicalwritingworld.com and a tech writing listserv. It contained the following questions:

### Background Information

1. What is your current job title?
2. What does your current job entail (in general)?

### General E-Collaboration

1. How much of your job involve collaboration?
2. Of the time you spend collaborating, how much of it is spent e-collaborating?
3. What technologies do you use to e-collaborate?

### Global Collaboration

1. As part of your job, do you collaborate with international teams?
2. What form does this collaboration usually take?
3. What issues come up due to cultural differences?
4. How do you handle these issues?
5. What do you think would have been useful knowing before you had to handle these issues?

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## For Further Information

Please contact me at [wertz1889@live.missouristate.edu](mailto:wertz1889@live.missouristate.edu).

## Results

Eleven people responded, all of whom had some sort of “technical writing” in their job title and most of whom had some sort of global e-collaboration as part of their jobs. Their responses were as follows:

- Respondents believed that time zone and cultural attitude differences were the biggest cultural issues in their jobs, particularly where deadline expectations come in.
- Respondents recommended being as explicit as possible with expectations in order to avoid these issues.
- Only one mentioned having formal training provided to them by their employer on how to deal with culture clash issues.

## Conclusions

Few of the studies directly addressed global collaborative issues. Fewer still proposed any systematic solution.

According to my pilot study, many of the issues the participants experienced had either to do with a mismatch of business culture expectations or technological or temporal issues such as coordinating schedules and the like. While the latter set of issues could be resolved largely using traditional e-collaboration strategies, the clash of cultural expectations is more complicated.

Hall states that people operate under the implicit assumption that all other cultures think and behave the way their culture does; only having had exposure to other cultures and observing other individuals struggle with adjusting to foreign cultural nuances did he himself become aware that there were different cultural systems (1976, p. 39). In other words, without either some sort of training to give people that awareness or having some sort of intercultural exposure, technical writers would most likely not be properly equipped to smoothly deal with the sorts of issues that arise through culture clashes. Technical writers working with global e-collaborative teams need to first become aware of the root of the culture clashes before they would be able to properly deal with them in order to carry on with their projects.

## Prior Research

Many of the articles discussed the general issues and solutions in e-collaboration, but often skirted or outright avoided the additional complexity of global collaboration. However, many of the methods could still be applied to global collaborative situations.

Topics commonly addressed in the sources:

- Issues with the lack of nonverbal cues in e-collaboration
- General e-collaboration issues
- Successful general e-collaboration practices
- Communities of practice
- Personality traits of successful e-collaborators
- Synchronous vs. asynchronous collaboration
- Trust formation models
- Resolving conflicts
- Stasis theory

## Areas of Future Research

Some potential future areas of study:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of existing technical communicator employer-provided training programs
- Developing a set of qualities defining effective international technical writing e-collaboration training programs

Ideally, these training programs would be individualized for specific companies, dealing only with those countries the company deals with. This would allow the technical communicators to avoid the majority of the pitfalls commonly associated with international e-collaboration without being bogged down with trying to learn too many cultural nuances at once. These training programs would likely save companies and organizations both time and money and allow technical communicators to focus more on their projects with fewer culture-clash inspired issues. At this time, however, this topic has yet to be fully explored.