

Asynchronous Communication: Redefining Workplace Interactions in the Digital Age

(1) Dr. Zerzaihi Zoubir

University of Jijel 18000, Algeria

zoubirzerzaihi@univ-jijel.dz

(3) Dr. Moustafa Tabet

University Of Batna 1 Hadj Lakhdar, Algeria

moustafa.tabet@univ-batna.dz

(2) Dr. Abdelghani Loulou

University.Mohamed Cherif Messaadia, Souk Ahras

a.loulou@souk-ahras.dz

(4) Dr. Ziad Ismail

University of Eloued, Algeria

Ziad-ismail@univ-eloued.dz

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Abstract: This theoretical article explores the evolving nature of asynchronous communication in the context of contemporary workplace interactions, particularly in the digital age. The discussion starts with a historical overview of workplace communication, tracing the development of digital communication tools, and the subsequent emergence and rise of asynchronous communication in the workplace. The article further dissects the factors contributing to this rise, such as the growth of remote work, technological advancements, and changing workplace dynamics. An in-depth analysis of the benefits of asynchronous communication is presented, including increased flexibility and convenience, employee empowerment, the promotion of deep work and focus, global collaboration, and enhanced documentation. The challenges associated with asynchronous communication are also explored, such as potential for miscommunication and delayed responses, alongside the strategies to overcome these obstacles. The article concludes by predicting future trends in asynchronous communication, highlighting the potential role of AI and other emerging technologies, and their implications for the future workplace. Overall, the article posits asynchronous communication as a potent tool capable of redefining workplace interactions and contributing significantly to organizational performance in the digital age.

Keywords: Asynchronous; Communication; Workplace Interactions; Remote Work; Employee Empowerment; Deep Work.

1.INTRODUCTION

Asynchronous communication refers to the exchange of data, information, or messages among individuals or groups at different times and possibly in different places (Cameron & Webster, 2013). Unlike synchronous communication, which occurs in real time and requires all parties to be present at the same time (such as in meetings or phone calls), asynchronous communication allows for delayed responses, providing flexibility and accommodating various schedules and time zones (Dennis et al., 2008). Asynchronous communication represents a shift from the traditional time-bound exchange of information to a flexible and convenience-oriented approach. It enables parties to communicate without the need for simultaneous presence, instead allowing for time-delayed responses.

The digital age, characterized by an ever-increasing reliance on technology and digital platforms, has brought about significant changes in the way individuals and organizations communicate (Kapoor et al., 2018). Asynchronous communication, facilitated by numerous digital tools like email, collaborative platforms, and social media, has become increasingly important in the workplace due to its potential to enhance flexibility, productivity, and work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2019).

Furthermore, asynchronous communication has shown potential in fostering inclusivity in the workplace. It allows employees across different time zones to contribute to discussions, encourages thoughtful responses over immediate reactions, and accommodates individuals who prefer to process information at their own pace.

This article will delve into the background and history of asynchronous communication, its rise in the workplace, and the digital tools that have made this possible. It will also discuss the benefits and challenges of asynchronous communication, as well as the strategies to overcome these challenges. Furthermore, the article will look ahead to the future of asynchronous communication in the workplace, with particular emphasis on the role of emerging technologies. This article will provide a comprehensive understanding of asynchronous communication and its place in the digital age.

We will explore its history and evolution, discussing how digital tools have facilitated its rise in the workplace. We will also delve into the advantages that

asynchronous communication brings, as well as the potential challenges it presents. Notably, we will address how these challenges can be mitigated and discuss the strategies that organizations can adopt to effectively implement asynchronous communication. Finally, we will explore the future of asynchronous communication, focusing on the promising role of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

2. Background and History

2.1 Evolution of Workplace Communication

The trajectory of workplace communication has been shaped by a series of technological revolutions. From handwritten letters and physical memos to telephone and fax machines, each advancement has marked a significant shift in how businesses communicate (Leonardi et al., 2013). The advent of computers and internet technology in the late 20th century marked a significant leap, leading to the rapid digitization of workplace communication.

The digital transformation has fundamentally changed the dynamics of communication in the workplace, ushering in a new era of increased connectivity, speed, and flexibility (Leonardi et al., 2013). From the era of handwritten letters and memos to telegrams and faxes, each development has induced a paradigm shift in organizational communication. With the advent of personal computers in the 1980s, the transition from analog to digital communication began, drastically reducing the time required to send and receive messages. The internet revolution in the late 20th century marked a significant milestone, enabling global connectivity and leading to the rapid digitization of workplace communication. (Leonardi et al., 2013).

The story of workplace communication is a testament to human innovation and adaptability. From simple, handwritten notes and letters delivered by messengers to more complex telegrams and faxes, communication methods have continuously evolved to match the pace of business.

With the rise of the internet, the possibility of global and instant communication became a reality. This dramatic expansion in the reach and immediacy of communication opened up new possibilities but also introduced new challenges, such as information overload, issues of data privacy, and the risk of miscommunication due to the absence of physical cues.

2.2 Development and Growth of Digital Communication

Digital communication has grown exponentially with the rise of the internet and advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Initially, digital communication in the workplace was dominated by email, which offered a

quicker, more efficient means of conveying messages compared to traditional methods (Dabbish et al., 2012).

Over time, the scope of digital communication expanded with the introduction of new technologies such as Instant Messaging (IM), video conferencing, collaboration platforms, and social media. The proliferation of smartphones and other mobile devices further accelerated this growth, enabling constant connectivity and making digital communication an integral part of the workplace (Isaacs et al., 2002). The rapid growth of digital communication has been driven largely by the rise of the internet and the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The introduction of email in the early 1990s revolutionized workplace communication by offering a quicker and more efficient mode of conveying messages than conventional methods (Dabbish et al., 2012).

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the proliferation of the internet, digital communication underwent a significant transformation. The first wave of digital communication was characterized by email, which offered faster and more efficient communication than traditional methods (Dabbish et al., 2012).

The early 21st century saw the advent of novel digital communication technologies that further diversified the communication landscape. Instant Messaging (IM) enabled real-time textual and emotive communication. Video conferencing tools broke down geographical barriers, and collaborative platforms and social media networks transformed how teams worked together (Isaacs et al., 2002).

The explosion of mobile technologies, particularly smartphones and tablets, created an era of ubiquitous connectivity, cementing digital communication as a permanent fixture in the modern workplace. Workers were no longer tied to their desks and could communicate with their colleagues anytime, anywhere.

2.3 Emergence of Asynchronous Communication in the Workplace

Asynchronous communication has been a part of workplace communication since the inception of the letter and memos. However, its prominence has increased with the rise of digital communication tools. The advent of emails, followed by digital collaboration platforms like Slack, Asana, and Microsoft Teams, among others, have made it easier than ever to communicate asynchronously (Birnholtz et al., 2013).

The rise of remote work and global teams has further emphasized the importance of asynchronous communication. The geographical and time barriers that once constrained collaboration are being diminished, allowing for a flexible and inclusive communication environment (Kossek et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly expedited this trend, as businesses worldwide have had to adjust to remote work, thus highlighting the utility and necessity of asynchronous communication (Bapna et al., 2020).

Asynchronous communication, though not a new concept, has gained significant prominence in the digital era. The birth of email marked the beginning of digital asynchronous communication, offering the convenience of time-delayed responses that accommodated individual schedules (Birnholtz et al., 2013).

The rise of digital collaboration tools like Slack, Asana, and Microsoft Teams has further facilitated asynchronous communication by providing platforms where team members can collaborate at their own pace. In addition, the advent of remote work and the global dispersion of teams have underscored the importance of asynchronous communication. This form of communication has proven critical in bridging geographical and time barriers, allowing for more flexible and inclusive work environments (Kossek et al., 2019).

The global shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of asynchronous communication. With teams working across different time zones and home environments, asynchronous communication tools became crucial to maintaining productivity and team cohesion (Bapna et al., 2020).

Though the concept of asynchronous communication dates back to the days of courier-delivered letters, its modern digital form took root with the advent of email. Email allowed time-delayed responses, offering individuals the flexibility to respond to messages at their own pace and convenience (Birnholtz et al., 2013).

As the digital revolution progressed, more tools supporting asynchronous communication emerged. Collaboration platforms such as Slack, Asana, and Microsoft Teams provided organized spaces where teams could interact, share information, and collaborate on their own schedules.

With the rise of remote work and geographically dispersed teams, asynchronous communication has become an essential aspect of workplace communication. It has facilitated flexible work arrangements, enabling employees to contribute to discussions and make decisions regardless of their physical location or time zone (Kossek et al., 2019).

The importance of asynchronous communication was highlighted during the global shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. As employees worked from their homes in different time zones and schedules, asynchronous communication tools became critical for maintaining team collaboration, productivity, and cohesion (Bapna et al., 2020).

3. The Rise of Asynchronous Communication in the Workplace

3.1 Factors Contributing to the Increase of Asynchronous Communication

Asynchronous communication has grown to become a fundamental component of modern workplace interaction. Several factors have contributed to this growth:

Remote work and Global Teams: As businesses expand globally and remote work

becomes commonplace, asynchronous communication has become crucial for maintaining effective and cohesive team interaction. Teams distributed across different time zones need the flexibility to communicate at times that work for their schedules, which asynchronous communication allows for (Kossek et al., 2019). With globalization and the rise of remote work, businesses today often operate across different time zones and cultures. Asynchronous communication provides a means to facilitate seamless interaction among these distributed teams. It allows team members to contribute to the discussion and decision-making processes in their own time, thereby ensuring inclusivity and comprehensive participation. This has been particularly notable during the COVID-19 pandemic, where a sudden shift to remote work necessitated a robust asynchronous communication framework for businesses worldwide (Kossek et al., 2019).

Technological Advancements: The proliferation of digital communication tools has significantly facilitated the use of asynchronous communication. Tools such as email, collaboration platforms (e.g., Slack, Asana, Microsoft Teams), project management software, and social media have provided numerous channels for time-independent communication (Birnholtz et al., 2013). The expansion of digital technology has been instrumental in the rise of asynchronous communication. Tools such as email, project management software, social media, and various collaboration platforms have provided the means for asynchronous interaction. Moreover, the advancement in mobile technology means that these tools can be accessed anytime and anywhere, further boosting the use of asynchronous communication (Birnholtz et al., 2013).

Changing Workplace Dynamics: The modern workplace is becoming increasingly flexible and diverse. Asynchronous communication accommodates this shift by allowing for time-delayed interaction, which can be beneficial for those juggling multiple responsibilities or working unconventional hours (Bapna et al., 2020).

3.2 The Role of Digital Tools in Asynchronous Communication

Digital tools have played a vital role in the rise of asynchronous communication in the workplace:

Overview of Digital Tools Used for Asynchronous Communication: Various digital tools facilitate asynchronous communication. Email remains a fundamental tool, allowing for detailed, time-independent conversation. Collaboration platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams offer organized spaces for team interaction, while project management software like Asana provides platforms for asynchronous task management. Social media platforms and forums also offer spaces for informal, asynchronous interaction. A variety of digital tools have made asynchronous communication more practical and efficient. Email has been the cornerstone of asynchronous digital communication.

Case Studies on How Different Companies are Utilizing these Tools: Companies across industries and sizes are utilizing these tools in unique ways to facilitate

asynchronous communication. A notable example is Automattic, the company behind WordPress.com, which employs a fully distributed team across 70 countries. They heavily use tools like P2 (a WordPress-based platform for asynchronous collaboration) and Slack for team communication. GitLab, another all-remote company, employs a comprehensive handbook and GitLab issues for most of their asynchronous communication. Companies are employing asynchronous communication tools in innovative ways to maximize their effectiveness. Automattic, the company behind WordPress.com, operates with a fully distributed team and uses P2, a WordPress-based platform, for team collaboration and project tracking, demonstrating how asynchronous communication can be effectively utilized even in a large, dispersed team. GitLab, another completely remote company, uses its own platform in combination with a comprehensive handbook for maintaining clear and efficient asynchronous communication among its employees.

4. Benefits of Asynchronous Communication

4.1 Increased Flexibility and Convenience

The inherent flexibility of asynchronous communication supports employees' needs to balance their professional and personal lives. By enabling communication to occur at any time, asynchronous tools allow employees to respond at their convenience, taking into account their work schedule, time zone differences, and personal commitments. This increased flexibility can lead to improved work-life balance, reduced stress, and enhanced job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2013). Unlike synchronous communication, which requires all participants to be available at the same time, asynchronous communication allows individuals to send and receive messages at their own pace. This flexibility is especially beneficial in a world where work is increasingly distributed across different time zones (Allen et al., 2013). Moreover, it gives employees the freedom to structure their workdays around their peak productivity hours and personal commitments, improving their work-life balance.

4.2 Empowerment of Employees

Asynchronous communication empowers employees by allowing them more control over their communication and work schedules. It enables employees to manage their tasks and interactions according to their productivity cycles, leading to greater autonomy and a sense of empowerment (Hill et al., 2018). Asynchronous communication can also empower employees by providing them with greater control over their workday. Rather than being expected to respond to messages instantly, employees can take the time to thoughtfully craft their responses. This ability to manage one's own time can enhance self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

4.3 Promotion of Deep Work and Focus

Asynchronous communication can contribute to more focused and deep work. With less need to respond to real-time communications, employees can concentrate on complex tasks without frequent interruptions. This allows for greater productivity and

creativity (Newport, 2016). The non-immediate nature of asynchronous communication can lead to improved focus and productivity. Constant interruptions from real-time communications can fragment attention and disrupt "deep work," a state of concentration where employees can produce high-quality work. By reducing these interruptions, asynchronous communication can contribute to a more focused work environment and higher quality outputs .

4.4 Facilitation of Global Collaboration

By removing the need for real-time presence, asynchronous communication facilitates global collaboration. Teams can work together across time zones and geographical locations. It also promotes inclusivity by ensuring that every team member, regardless of their location or working hours, can contribute to discussions and decisions (Hinds et al., 2015).

4.5 Documentation and Traceability

Asynchronous communication tools often provide a record of conversations and decisions, offering documentation and traceability. This can support accountability, clarity, and learning within organizations. It also serves as a valuable resource for new employees who can refer back to these documented conversations to understand project histories and decisions (Majchrzak et al., 2013). Another significant advantage of asynchronous communication is the automatic documentation of conversations and decisions.

5. Challenges and Solutions

Despite the numerous benefits of asynchronous communication, it is not without its challenges. However, by understanding these potential pitfalls and employing strategic solutions, organizations can optimize their use of asynchronous communication:

5.1 Potential Pitfalls of Asynchronous Communication

Miscommunication and Misinterpretation: With the absence of immediate feedback, non-verbal cues, and tone of voice, messages can be easily misunderstood in asynchronous communication. This can lead to misinterpretation, confusion, and potential conflict (Lebie et al., 2021). Asynchronous communication often lacks the nuance of face-to-face conversations. Tone of voice, body language, and immediate feedback, which often clarify ambiguous statements, are absent.

Delayed Response Times: Since responses in asynchronous communication are not instant, there can be significant delays. This can slow down decision-making processes, lead to feelings of isolation, and reduce the sense of team cohesion (Neininger et al., 2020). Because responses in asynchronous communication aren't immediate, waiting for a response can cause delays. This may slow down decision-making processes and contribute to feelings of isolation among team members, potentially reducing team

cohesion and morale.

Lack of Instant Feedback: Asynchronous communication does not allow for real-time clarifications or instant feedback. This can sometimes slow down the learning process or lead to prolonged misunderstandings (Mark et al., 2012).

5.2 Strategies to Overcome These Challenges

Establishing Clear Communication Norms and Protocols: To minimize misunderstandings, organizations can establish and communicate clear guidelines around their use of asynchronous communication. This could include clarity on what should be communicated asynchronously versus synchronously, expected response times, and use of specific digital tools (Rosen et al., 2013). Implementing clear communication norms can mitigate many of the issues associated with asynchronous communication. Guidelines can include clarity about what type of information should be communicated in what format, expected response times, and proper use of different digital tools.

Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication: While asynchronous communication has many advantages, it is not meant to replace synchronous communication entirely. A balance of both forms can ensure more effective collaboration, with asynchronous communication used for tasks that require deep work or when teams are dispersed across time zones, and synchronous communication used for brainstorming sessions, team building, or when immediate feedback is needed (Bosch-Sijtsema et al., 2011). Striking the right balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication can optimize team collaboration. For example, synchronous communication might be more appropriate for brainstorming sessions or urgent discussions, while asynchronous communication is ideal for complex tasks that require undivided attention or when dealing with time zone differences.

Training and Education: Providing training on the effective use of asynchronous communication tools can help minimize miscommunication and maximize their benefits. This could involve training on how to write clear, concise, and effective messages, and how to best use the different features of digital tools (Andres, 2002). It's crucial to provide training on effective usage of asynchronous communication tools to ensure everyone can navigate the digital landscape confidently and competently.

6. Future of Asynchronous Communication

6.1 Predicted Trends and Developments in Asynchronous Communication

As remote and flexible work arrangements continue to grow, asynchronous communication is likely to become increasingly prevalent. The future may see the further development of tools and platforms designed specifically to support asynchronous communication, with features designed to minimize the challenges associated with it (Savolainen et al., 2022). Another trend could be the growing recognition of asynchronous communication's role in supporting employee well-being and work-life balance, leading to more organizations consciously integrating it into

their work cultures (Kossek et al., 2021).

6.2 Role of AI and Other Emerging Technologies

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies are poised to significantly impact asynchronous communication. For instance, AI could be used to analyze communication patterns and provide insights to optimize collaboration and productivity (Mirkovic et al., 2021).

It could also be utilized to translate languages in real-time, enabling smoother cross-cultural asynchronous communication. Furthermore, the integration of AI with digital communication tools could allow for automatic transcription and summarization of meetings, facilitating asynchronous follow-ups (Chui et al., 2022). As Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies evolve, their role in asynchronous communication will likely grow. AI can be used to provide real-time insights into communication patterns to optimize team collaboration, and could also facilitate smoother cross-cultural communication by providing instant language translation

C. Implications for the Future Workplace

Asynchronous communication, enabled by advanced digital tools and AI, could help shape the future of work. Organizations might become more distributed, with employees collaborating from different parts of the world. Asynchronous communication could also play a key role in creating inclusive work environments, where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute, regardless of their location or working hours. Moreover, as organizations recognize the benefits of asynchronous communication - such as enhanced flexibility, improved work-life balance, and increased productivity - it could become a standard part of workplace communication norms and policies (Kossek et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This article has traversed the journey of asynchronous communication from its inception, examining its rise due to various factors such as remote work, technological advancements, and changing workplace dynamics. We discussed the beneficial aspects of asynchronous communication, such as increased flexibility and convenience, empowerment of employees, the promotion of deep work and focus, facilitation of global collaboration, and enhanced documentation and traceability. We also delved into the challenges it presents, such as the potential for miscommunication, delayed response times, and lack of instant feedback, and offered strategies for overcoming these issues. The potential future of asynchronous communication, marked by further integration of AI and other emerging technologies, was also explored.

Asynchronous communication, in its ability to transcend geographical and temporal boundaries, redefines the concept of a traditional workspace. It facilitates a level of flexibility and inclusivity that were previously unattainable, allowing for truly global collaboration and catering to a diverse range of working styles and personal schedules.

However, to harness its full potential, organizations must invest in the necessary infrastructure, establish clear communication protocols, and provide training and education to their employees. As technology continues to evolve, businesses should stay abreast of new developments in this area to ensure they can adapt and integrate these tools effectively into their operations.

. In conclusion, asynchronous communication in the workplace, when appropriately managed, stands as a powerful tool that could greatly enhance operational efficiency, employee satisfaction, and overall organizational performance in the digital age. It's not just a temporary solution for remote work during a pandemic, but rather a long-term strategy that could define the future of work.

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