

The Value of International Communication: A Case Study Exploring the Importance and Complexities of International Communication

by

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## **Abstract**

Inequities, such as the lack of access to clean water, span the world. As organizations seek to address these global inequities, there are different methods of approach. This thesis takes a closer look at the methods employed by one international organization located in Boone, NC. The purpose of this research is to explore the topic of international communication and the value it adds when addressing global topics.

## Introduction

“Each day, nearly 1,000 children die due to preventable water and sanitation-related diarrheal diseases” (“Goal 6”, n.d.).

The global water crisis is so prevalent, that it is listed as goal six under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the website for the SDGs :

The Sustainable Development Goals are a call for actions by all countries- poor, rich and middle-income- to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. More important than ever, the goals provide a critical framework for COVID-19 recovery.

*(Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.)*

The SDGs highlight the importance of collaboration of all in the efforts to make the world a better place. As stated earlier, goal six addresses water. The aim is to “ensure access to water and sanitation for all” (“Goal 6”, n.d.). The website for the goals’ details how important access to clean water is. According to the website:

Worldwide, one in three people do not have access to safe drinking water, two out of five people do not have a basic hand-washing facility with soap and water, and more than 673 million people still practice open defecation. (“Goal 6”, n.d.)

Those are staggering numbers. Water access may not be more than a passing thought to some people most days, while other people do not have access to it at all. One thousand children die every day from something that is preventable. However, organizations have been created to

address the global water crisis, creating collaboration which is emphasized by the sustainable development goals. Wine To Water is one of the organizations that recognizes the power and importance of clean water for all people.

Wine To Water is an international nonprofit with the mission of “supporting life and dignity for all through the power of clean water” (*Wine To Water*, n.d.). Wine To Water currently supports water projects in 48 countries, and they have international offices located in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Nepal, East Africa, and the United States (Our Work, n.d.). As an international organization, Wine To Water staff communicate within their own offices and across offices located in other areas, addressing the global water crisis with a global perspective and global collaboration. With this global perspective comes international communication. The interviews and conversations that took place for this thesis examine questions along the lines of, what is effective international communication from people’s experience and perspective? This thesis examines the type of communication that is needed for an international organization to effectively function. It will also examine ways in which Wine To Water can improve their communication, as well as reflections from staff members on how this type of international communication influences communication in other aspects of their professional and personal lives. With this international organization comes international communication, across languages, time zones, and countries. As organizations work globally to address global issues, how do they efficiently and effectively communicate within their own office and across other offices to address issues, such as the global water crisis?

## Literature Review

When discussing international communication, there are two important frameworks to discuss in how people view communication styles. These two frameworks are universalism and ethical relativism. Kim (2005) explores the difference between universalism and ethical relativism which is important for this thesis because it frames how people may approach values. According to Kim, “In its most extreme form, the universalist position proposes that there is a single set of values and standards of action applicable to all cultures and that there are universally correct and incorrect ways for these values to be applied” (Kim, 2005, p. 334-335). Universalism takes a more clear-cut approach when evaluating the way to go about something. There is a right way and there is a wrong way. This right and wrong way is, as the term implies, universal, or applicable across the board. On the other hand, ethical relativism, “claims there is no way to judge moral principles as being correct or incorrect” (Kim, 2005, p. 334). Ethical relativism does not give as clear of a guide as to what is correct and what is incorrect. Kim also says, “Ethical relativists say that the activity might be wrong for them but right for others; or that the activity might be wrong for one culture but right for another culture...There is no basis to argue that people are wrong, and so it would be wrong to try and convince them to change their beliefs” (Kim, 2005, p. 335). Ethical relativism takes more of an approach that people do what is best for them. Some people may not agree with that, but addressing this would go against the core principles of ethical relativism. This piece does give a clear distinction of which framework the author supports, which is universalism (Kim, 2005). This presents a biased view of both frameworks, which could influence the way that readers interpret these two ideas and how they may align with the ethical relativism and universalism.

Paul Healy (2006) goes into more depth explaining strong and moderate universalism, which highlights the spectrum of universalism within this discussion. Healy (2006) does the same with strong and moderate relativism. While participants may not explicitly say whether or not they believe their values align with universalism or ethical relativism, similarities could be found throughout the interviews with participants. One of the questions asked in the interview has the theme of universalism and relativism to see how participants view communication. The piece by Kim also goes into depth on universalism and ethical relativism without exploring other frameworks or how frameworks can work together. The piece seems to imply that people feel either one way or the other, not that people could vary in how they view and apply these frameworks.

Another important aspect of this piece to point out is that it is intended for public relations practitioners. The overall themes of universalism and ethical relativism can translate outside of the public relations context this is written in. Again, the main themes can apply to international communication. Kim references the implications of universalism and ethical relativism for international communication and how international communication fits into this topic. Kim discusses the topic of a dialogic approach within a universalist framework for international communication. Kim writes,

In the ideal communication situation, the marginalized voice is heard and the mutual creation of meaning is possible. According to Benhabib, the dialogic approach to communication allows us to move away from “the model of goal-oriented or strategic action of a single agent intending a specific outcome to the model of communicative action which is speech and action to be shared with others.” (2005, p. 341)

Overall, the piece makes it seem like there is no middle ground between these two frameworks. It seems as if you must prescribe to one framework or the other. While Kim does hold the position of supporting the universalist framework, Kim does write,

Furthermore, those universalistic ethical standards can be strongly universalistic, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality, and rights, and at the same time remain sensitive to local particularity and the marginalized voice. (2005, p. 341)

Again, Kim gives strong arguments for universalism; however, Kim does acknowledge important values when it comes to international communication. Whether or not a person prescribes to a certain framework when evaluating their stance on communication, it is important to not get caught up in a particular framework that the work of meaningful communication is ignored. While the universalistic and ethical relativist frameworks may not apply completely to the interviews, the frameworks do give background as to how people could frame their answers.

Diving into the dialogic approach could be a solution to finding more of a middle ground approach when discussing frameworks. The dialogic approach is more of a middle ground approach because of the way that the dialogic seeks to synthesize both universalism and relativism. This is done through what the dialogic emphasizes. Healy (2006) uses the terminology of “hermeneutico-dialogical principles.” Healy (2006), explains the values of this emphasis which,

Chief among these are; a commitment to moving beyond universalism and relativism as polarized alternatives; endorsement of the comparable validity and dialogical equality of established traditions and cultures; valorization of mutual understanding and learning as the regulative orientation most conducive to yielding potentially transformative

advances across cultures in the theory and practice of human rights; and  
acknowledgment of the need for both external and internal accountability. (513)

Reframing the conversation to the dialogical approach makes the conversation more well-rounded, and not as polarized as Healy points out. This middle ground seems to give more space for moving forward and not just trying to define what is right and what is wrong among the universal and relativist approaches.

RQ1: How do members of an international organization, specifically Wine To Water, approach ideas of international communications and ethics? Is it clearly universal or relative or more dialogic?

Another important concept to define for this thesis is the concept of white privilege and white savior complex. Wine To Water operates as an international nonprofit that started in North Carolina. It is crucial to discuss the impacts of white savior complex and how this concept affects organizations. Bandyopadhyay (2019) explores the concept of white savior complex and the damaging effects of volunteer tourism. Bandyopadhyay writes in this piece about white privilege,

Whiteness or white privilege is the way in which white people benefit from a racist society, precisely it refers to unjustified advantages that are based solely on white skin color. Scholars have argued that privileged white people fail to understand their access to power while the non-whites well realize the lack of privilege. This is how originally the concept of “race” was constructed- a “property that was traditionally owned and used by whites in the society. (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p.9)



As Wine To Water operates internationally, it is imperative to recognize the inequities that are a result of white privilege and western privilege. This recognition of white and western privilege should be a reminder and guide to Wine To Water as they think through and work with communities outside of their own. Not only should Wine To Water think this through, but they should actively work and collaborate with others to avoid work that promotes the white savior complex and volunteer tourism. The acknowledgement of white and western privilege should be across all aspects of the organization. The effects of white and western privilege can be everywhere, so it is important to examine how it affects all facets of the organization. Bandyopadhyay establishes a definition that can and will be referenced throughout this thesis. Again, it is almost impossible to discuss the impact of international communication without acknowledging the inequities that are a result of a world where white privilege and western privilege prevail. Bandyopadhyay (2019) continues to discuss harmful effects of white privilege by writing,

Stuart Hall (1996, p. 258) explained this inequality of power, which is sustained by the white gaze- “the spectacle of the Other.” The white gaze always evaluates its exotic Other while retaining whiteness at the top of the hierarchy. (p. 329)

The white gaze is another important concept to recognize as an international organization when discussing how Wine To Water interacts with all of the people it partners with and works with. The white gaze alienates people and creates a power structure that is unfair. The white gaze prevents true collaboration, which is important for international communication.

Exploration and understanding of this concept in relation to Wine To Water and the interviews is important. Wine To Water does operate as an international organization, but it was first started

in Boone, North Carolina. Wine To Water operates even across different areas of the United States, and differences across these areas is important to acknowledge and discuss as well. The interviews analyzed will explore this relationship and what it means for those operating within this organization, whether within the United States or outside of the United States.

Bandyopadhyay (2019) adds, “This study argues that we should not lose the sight that the history of colonialism and capitalism are inextricably intertwined and their hegemonic connotations of privilege pervade the structures and institutions in society” (p. 340). It is a disservice to avoid discussing the true and very real effects of colonialism and capitalism and how those affect the work that people participate in today. Providing clean water to people around the world is dignifying, but the methods and intentions in which people approach this subject is imperative.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire (1970), explores this idea of “false charity” and “true generosity” in relation to the oppressed and the oppressors, and the overall concept can apply to topics related to this thesis. Freire writes,

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the “rejects of life,” to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world. (1970, p.45)

Freire brings up an important point about the nature in which people present help. Is someone’s help there to empower other people or is it to perpetuate the harmful cycles that create harmful situations? Are people and organizations promoting false charity or true generosity? The

lack of water access available to some people throughout the world is staggering and unfair. As people seek to address the world water crisis, it is very important to consider the way people approach this, as false charity is harmful and oppressive.

Freire also discusses the importance and transformative effects of dialogue. Freire writes,

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them as a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.” (1970, p.88).

Before this one quotation, Freire brings up this action-reflection idea. Freire writes that both parts, both action and reflection are needed within dialogue, and effective dialogue cannot be accomplished with just one of these parts. This action-reflection framework creates genuine, effective dialogue, according to Freire (1970). Freire writes this about the action-reflection setup,

An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a world is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.

On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter- action for action’s sake- negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms

of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy.” (1970, p.87-88)

RQ2: How does Wine To Water approach complex topics like the white savior complex in relation to their international work? How does this inform their methods and what can be learned from this?

Another important term to define is cognitive bias,

Cognitive bias is a general term that many psychologists and other behavioral experts use to describe a systematic error in how people perceive others or their environment...

When an individual constructs their own subjective social reality based on their past perceptions and not on objective input, we classify their behavior as being cognitively biased. (Galowich, 2018, para. 3)

This term is necessary for this thesis because some of the interviewees discuss how working in international settings has expanded their worldview in various ways. Some of the interviewees also shared how Wine To Water was working as an organization to combat cognitive bias. The step of recognizing and understanding these biases is an important one. In a piece from the *New York Times* about implicit bias, it says this about these biases, “Studies have shown that these subtle biases are widespread and associated with discrimination in legal, economic and organizational settings” (Yudkin and Bavel, 2016, p.1). One of the concluding statements in the piece is, “...our research suggests that people have the capacity to override their worst instincts-if they are able to reflect on their decision making as opposed to acting on their first impulse” (Yudkin and Bavel, 2016, p.2). It is imperative that organizations and the people working for

organizations understand the biases that they hold. This recognition is important so that these biases do not become implemented in the work an organization is doing.

RQ3: How do international organizations recognize and address biases they may hold?

### **Methodology**

The method chosen for this thesis in order to explore the concept of international communication was qualitative interviews with members of the Wine To Water staff. Qualitative research and interviews were chosen for the detail that people can provide about their experiences with an international organization and international communication. After the interviews were conducted, the frameworks associated with grounded theory were utilized to identify common themes. Grounded theory is a concept that can be applied to this type of research. Grounded theory (GT) is an approach to research which,

The meticulous application of essential GT methods refines the analysis resulting in the generation of an integrated, comprehensive GT that explains a process relating to a particular phenomenon. The results of a GT study are communicated as a set of concepts, related to each other in an interrelated whole, and expressed in the production of a substantive theory. A substantive theory is a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a studied phenomenon. Thus the hallmark of grounded theory is the generation of theory ‘abstracted from, or grounded in, data generated and collected by the researcher. (Chun Tie et al., 2019, para. 15)

For the interviews, I interviewed staff members who agreed to participate in this research. Questions for the interviews were set before the interviews to create structure and an outline for the interviews. The interviews were conducted on Zoom for the purpose of recording the

interviews for review later in the thesis process. One interview was done face-to-face with a voice memo recording taken on an iPhone. If participants requested, the interview questions were sent beforehand. Otherwise, participants heard them for the first time during the interview. I sent out this message into the organization-wide announcements board system to ask for participation in the interviews (Appendix A). This message led to four people expressing interest in being interviewed. I reached out back to them individually to set up an interview time. Three of the four responded to set up an interview time. One of the other interviews was set up through word-of-mouth using the snowball effect for obtaining interviews.

Triangulation was also used in the research for this thesis. According to “The Uses of Triangulation in Qualitative Research”(2014), “Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena” (Carter, et al, 2014, p.545). While interviews were the main method of research for this thesis, exposure and time spent with the organization firsthand led to a deeper understanding of the work of Wine To Water. This firsthand experience additionally led to the topic of the thesis.

I spent time during the summer of 2021 as the stewardship intern for Wine To Water, and transitioned to become the Filter Build® intern during the fall semester. During the process of this thesis, I interviewed, was offered, and accepted the position of Filter Build® Coordinator within the organization. The time that I spent with the organization over the summer sparked the idea for this research. Every Wednesday, all of the teams from all over the world meet together on a Google Meet to discuss their highs, lows, and how their work is going. This is a time of connection and community. This virtual meeting, where people from all over the world can talk,

is what brought about my questions regarding the value of international communication, which led to this becoming the topic of the thesis. The original question surrounding international communication for this thesis was about the idea of how international communication influences your local communication? However, as I continued with research and learning, the main question was analyzing the value of international communication for an organization such as Wine To Water when addressing a global issue. The questions for the interview asked participants to draw from their personal experiences with international communication.

This thesis was on a short timeline, so extensive interviewing and analysis was not possible due to the time restraint. While not every aspect of ethnographic work was employed, the main ideas behind ethnography and qualitative work were used. Ethnography synthesizes different sources of information to produce a comprehensive illustration of the subject of the research.

Genzuk (2003), puts it this way,

Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. This narrative often includes charts, diagrams and additional artifacts that help to tell “the story” (Hammersley, 1990). Ethnographic methods can give shape to new constructs or paradigms, and new variables, for further empirical testing in the field or through traditional, quantitative social science methods. (p. 1)

In this situation, interviews are the primary source of data collection. I was able to use some aspects of observation, as both an intern and part-time employee of the organization.

A topic to address to contribute to the context of these interviews, is acknowledging my own limitations as the interviewer. I am a white, female-identifying individual who has primarily had interactions with the staff in Boone, NC. Bandyopadhyay (2019) addresses limitations of interviewers and says,

He benefited being a non-white researcher as scholars have argued that “any white researcher is camouflaged by white methods and, therefore can only ask ‘white questions’ - i.e. questions that privilege and normalize the position of white researchers and white respondents as they do not realize that for much of the time they speak only for ‘whiteness.’” (Carrington, 2008, p. 432 as quoted in Bandyopadhyay, 2019,p.334-335).

I am limited by these white methods and the “whiteness” by which the questions and interview are framed. This piece contextualizes the work done in the interviews for this study. The interviews were analyzed individually to find key takeaways, and analyzed in relationship with the other interviews to look for themes within the interviews.

The interview questions were intended to be as open-ended as possible (Appendix B), allowing the interviewees to draw from their personal experiences. These questions brought about different answers in each of the participants, but themes were found throughout. These interviews provided the main content for analysis about the value and importance of international communication within this organization.

It is important to note that due to research limitations, this research is specific to the Boone office and can be used for internal purposes. This research is not meant to be scaled to the organization as a whole, but for internal purposes only. Further explanation is discussed later in the thesis.



## **Findings**

The first set of analysis is the individual analysis of each interview finding the key takeaways. These were findings in each of the interviews that were particularly unique in their responses.

### **Individual Findings**

#### *Interview A*

Interviewee A is a full-time staff member located in the Boone, NC office. Interviewee A is a part of the international programs (IP) team. Interviewee A has spent a lot of time living overseas, which has informed a lot of Interviewee A's perspective on the topic. When asked question eight, Interviewee A's response gave insight into how Wine To Water, the IP team in particular, is working to emphasize collaboration. For the context of the interviews and the organization, collaboration is the true partnership between an organization and the people they are working with. It is coming alongside them to truly address the topics they are addressing. The organization should not project what they believe to be the solution. Question eight asked how the interviewee believes that collaboration can be emphasized over the white savior complex as the Boone office works to improve their collaboration. In response to this question, Interviewee A said,

So, I would say number one, and this is something we've kind of decided this over the course of the last year, is eliminating that word headquarters... We don't want to be in charge, we want to be part of the solution, but not in charge of anyone" (16:12-16:36).

As a member of the IP team, Interviewee A has spent a lot of time learning the ways that are best for the implementation of water projects that emphasizes this collaboration. In response to question eight still, Interviewee A talked about the process of collaboration in these projects that

is so crucial. Interviewee A discussed three parts that are imperative to the process. The three aspects are participation from the community from the beginning, the administrative team within the community that makes the decisions about the water project, and the buy-in to the water project (16:38-18:55). These three aspects emphasize collaboration, and the lack of these three aspects can lead to the white savior complex, as Interviewee A described (18:44-18:54). An extremely important part of the water projects are the administrative teams that govern them. These teams, which are made up of members of the local community, work to make decisions about the water project that will be in their community. The buy-in to the water project prevents it from becoming a handout. Wine To Water has found throughout their years of operation that the water projects are taken care of long-term when the communities are active participants in making decisions about their water project and working to maintain their water project. Interviewee A gave insight into how this international organization is working to emphasize collaboration instead of the white savior complex. Interviewee A gave tangible ways that the IP team and Wine To Water are working to emphasize collaboration.

Another common theme in Interviewee A's interview was on the time it takes to cultivate good communication. Interviewee A said,

So effective communication, first of all, it takes time. And so, if you don't have the time, I don't think you can experience it effectively (5:15-5:22).

Interviewee A went on to talk about the importance of relationship building (5:26-5:37). The main takeaways from Interviewee A's interview were the focus on the time it takes for intentional communication, and the efforts that are needed for collaboration. Interviewee A works closely with the staff around the world and is well versed in the water projects happening

in the different locations. This experience has led to the understanding of the importance of the collaboration that is needed in order for the water projects to be successful and sustainable.

Interviewee A gave insight into what communication looks like for members on the IP team.

### *Interview B*

Interviewee B is a part-time staff member located in the Boone, NC office. Interviewee B was a part of internal resources for the organization, and now works with the volunteer side of the organization. Interviewee B was able to speak into a lot of the internal communication within the organization and how internal communication has been effective, while also having to navigate obstacles. Interviewee B described the various platforms and systems that Wine to Water uses to create communication between people, whether that communication is between one office or across offices. Interviewee B described how the majority of their time within the organization was during the pandemic, which resulted in a lot of remote work. Interviewee B was able to acknowledge that there are challenges that come with remote work and not being able to work with people face-to-face.

Another aspect of internal work that Interviewee B was able to address were some of the action steps that the Boone office is taking in addressing the white savior complex. Interviewee B said,

I think just having your staff, something we do regularly is like our noontime knowledges, a time to learn and grow. Another thing we do is often read books together. And so I feel like we could, we could, probably do some continuing education on the topic...But then also just to the public eye, just being specific about how we post things on social media and what our writing looks like on our website and just being sure

that it is focused on the people that are doing the work and not “how cool are we?”  
(18:14-18:33).

Interviewee B talked about noon time knowledge in their interview. Noontime knowledge is an event hosted internally at the Boone location. This is within the organization during lunch time where people within the organization or not part of the organization can present on different topics for the staff to learn more. Noontime knowledge is a time for growth and a time for discussion. Noontime knowledge is an example of internal work that the organization is taking part in to grow their understanding of different topics. Interviewee B alluded to the potential of continuing the learning that the staff takes part in surrounding the topic of the white savior complex. Interviewee B talked about not only the work that staff has done internally, but also being intentional about how the work of the organization is portrayed to the public. Interviewee B brought up themes of the duality needed to address communication both internally and externally within the organization.

### *Interview C*

Interviewee C is on leadership for Wine To Water. All throughout Interviewee C’s interview, they emphasized the teamwork within this organization and how they are constantly learning from the people they work with and the other people on the team. Interviewee C’s response to question ten brought up the concept and importance of trust. Question ten was about if the interviewee feels heard when speaking to other members of their team, specifically in the Boone office. A statement that Interviewee C made about trust was,

If we really trust each other. I trust you, you trust me. In the end, no amount of miscommunication will derail us from our mission, if there’s that trust. But the world

really does a good job with all the fear and all the finger pointing to try to get us to distrust each other. And the second there's a little seed of distrust, is when miscommunication happens (21:15-21:34).

Interviewee C turned the question from being purely about themselves and being heard, to about the importance of trust in creating a smooth communication process between people. Interviewee C made it seem like poor communication can be worked through when people are working toward a common goal. However, these issues will not be worked through effectively when there is a trust issue between people. This brings up the idea that even if an organization had perfect communication skills, there would still be issues if trust was not a part of the people's relationships with one another. This brings up something deeper than just communication skills, this brings up the aspects of human connection and relationships that are crucial for an organization like Wine To Water to run.

Interviewee C brought up a new idea surrounding the topic of communication, which is trust. Interviewee C spoke to the importance of trust in creating a healthy communication environment and how mistrust is harmful and disrupts healthy communication patterns. Interviewee C also spoke to communication as a way to expand your views outside of yourself. Interviewee C said,

The value of it for me and for this organization is that it makes us better, it's that simple. If we only communicate in a certain style, the way westerners communicate, the western world, Americans, southerners, whatever you want to pick as your bubble, you will always stay in that bubble and you'll never grow (21:56-22:12).

Interviewee C spoke about expanding your communication as a method of growing yourself. This theme of growing outside of yourself was one of the themes that was common among multiple interviews, and it was a strong theme within Interviewee C's interview.

#### *Interview D*

Interviewee D works on the fund development team at Wine To Water. Interviewee D provided insight on another aspect of communication within the organization, as fund development focuses a lot of time on donors, donor engagement, and communicating the stories of Wine To Water and their work to the donors. A main idea from Interviewee D's interview was about communicating the stories from the organization's work to other people. Part of the fund development team's job is to inform donors on the projects and what is happening with the money they are donating to the organization. Interviewee D said about this topic,

I think what I know, is from fund dev [fund development] it's very difficult to learn all the projects that they are working on because they're all so different, all the areas are different. And you can see the people that have traveled there, they speak more eloquently about the programs, but I think it's because they know the areas (1:08-1:31).

This point brought up by Interviewee D discusses the impact of seeing the projects around the world first hand and how that affects how people communicate about them. Interviewee D mentioned that at the time of their interview, they had been working for Wine to Water for eight months. This meant that Interviewee D started working at the organization while COVID-19 resulted in different restrictions surrounding travel.

Interviewee D also brought up an interesting point when discussing people's different approaches in communication. Interviewee D described two communication styles as "the painter" and "the pointer." Interviewee D explained these two communication styles,

So the pointer is somebody when they talk to you, it's all bullet points. And I was brought up that way because when you're in fundraising and you're meeting with big organizations, they're like you've got 10 minutes, you better point that stuff out to me.

They do not want to hear the whole story (18:22-18:37).

Interviewee D explains how "the painter" is someone who tells the story filled with details (18:38-18:59). Before the explanation, Interviewee D talks about how they identify as a pointer and they do not necessarily need to know the "why" behind things. Interviewee D tells that this is different from some of the people that they work with because the people they work with do need to know the "why" behind things (18:08-18:18). This is an important distinction to make and know about the people you work with. If you do not communicate the same way, then it is important to know and understand how other people around you communicate so that you can effectively communicate with each other. It is also important to know how you personally communicate so you can communicate that with other people.

### **Overall Themes**

The second set of analysis is the group analysis of the interviews to find common themes.

A common theme among the interviews came about in questions 12 and 13 in particular, but among other questions as well. Questions 12 and 13 are two questions focused on asking people the biggest thing they have learned in international communication and the biggest thing they wished other people knew about international communication. While none of the answers were

identical, they did have common threads. One of these common threads was based around the idea of cognitive bias, which ties into RQ3 of how organizations recognize and address the biases they have. The interviewees discussed how we live in a culture in the United States that upholds a lot of ideology that we are better than other people and that we have things we can teach other people. However, time living overseas and working for an international organization showed them the opposite of this mentality. This relates to both RQ2 and RQ3 as participants discussed expanding their worldview and perspectives. The interviewees discussed that so often we are quick to assume that we are the ones going somewhere to help, when in reality, we have so much to learn from other people. This is something to consider with Interviewee A's response about collaboration. Instead of assuming that they have all of the answers, Wine To Water works to collaborate and learn from the people they are working with. This is a point that Interviewee C emphasized. Interviewee C said about their time in Sudan and the approach of Wine To Water since the beginning,

When I finally got to somewhere like Sudan, I didn't feel like I had all the answers. I didn't come into all this with like 'I know what I'm doing, I'm an engineer, I have all the answers.' So, I literally came with questions. 'Like hey, how would you do it? How would you fix your water issues? What would you guys do? And is there anyway I can help accomplish that?' So, we started out Wine To Water from day one looking at the problem very differently that there's a problem without water and there's probably 5,000 different ways to solve it, but why don't I focus on the ways that makes the most sense to the local community, not the ways that make the most sense to an American, or an engineer, or a westerner [1:34-2:11].



Another common theme was about how the interviewees experienced their minds being opened to the world around them when they worked for an international organization.

Every person interviewed brought in a different aspect of communication about the organization. These different perspectives helped form a more comprehensive view of communication within the organization. The views shared in the interviews do not speak for everyone within the organization. They are from four different people who have four different perspectives. While there are different perspectives within the organization, everyone is working toward the same goal- providing clean water to people. This could be a helpful reminder for people working in different departments within an organization. Sometimes it could be difficult to understand why different departments make different decisions, but the understanding that everyone is working towards the same goal could help people understand the various ideas. If everyone understood where every person was coming from, this could help overall communication within an organization.

Another commonality among the interviews was about how important global collaboration is in solving the global water crisis. This relates to RQ1 in how people choose to approach communication. A lot of the responses about this came in response to question five, which asked about whether or not they believe there is a “right” way to communicate with people. There was an overall attitude among some of the interviewees that you cannot define a “right” way to communicate, but that “right” can be in terms of learning how other people communicate, being open-minded, and knowing that you are not going to be perfect at communication. This brings up an interesting discussion of what is universally seen as “right,” such as an open mind or

dedication to learning how other people communicate, but that leaves it up for change according to each new situation.

Appreciation for what they have was another common topic among the interviews, Interviewees A and B in particular. In regards to question seven, Interviewee A talked about this appreciation for what they have, as well as the importance of education, and wanting to work to give other people access to these things. Interviewee A talked about how it is so much more than clean water (12:36-14:21). In response to this same question, Interviewee B also shared an appreciation for what they have. Interviewee B shared that they sometimes remember how amazing it is to have access to running water when they take a shower (14:44-15:14).

### **Organizational Findings**

While this thesis does specifically examine Wine To Water in relation to international communication, some of the findings could be applied to other organizations. The discussions about frameworks and approaches to communication could be applicable across organizations. However, some of the findings in this research are specific to Wine To Water, as no organization will be exactly identical to the next. Other organizations may have similar goals, but may choose to approach these goals through other methods.

### **Future Research**

The research done for this thesis is the start to digging deeper into international communication and what that means in general as well as what that means for this organization specifically. As discussed earlier, the interviews and research done for this thesis is not a full picture and does not speak for everyone within this organization. While the research provided many insights, there are a lot of limitations to the research that are important to discuss.

The first limitation to this research is time. First of all, the interviews were all under forty-five minutes, with the majority of them under thirty minutes. The style of interviews was more structured, which did not lead to conversations about the topic, rather it was a question-and-answer style interview. This meant that the responses from the participants were related to the questions, and the interviews did not lead to more of a conversational approach to the topic. The time frame for this research project was confined to the Fall 2021 semester at Appalachian State University. Because of this time constraint, multiple interviews with the same participants over a longer span of time was not feasible. Future research could work to interview the same participants working at an international organization over an extended period of time focusing on a more longitudinal study approach. The interview process could find ways of seeing if their views of international communication change over time, or if they become more solidified. Another limitation to this research was the amount of interviews. Again, due to the time constraint, only a few people were interviewed for this research. A more comprehensive approach to this topic could include interviewing every staff member of the organization. More research could include talking to people in the communities where Wine To Water serves to hear how the communities perceive the work and communication of the organization. All of the interview participants worked from the Boone, North Carolina office. This is another limitation because perspectives from other parts of the world are not included in this research. Further research could include a deeper look into the other offices within the organization and what international communication means to them. This research is missing large portions of the organization. Since the research was confined to the Boone office, this research could be used internally as a tool for reflection within the Boone office about their communication within their

office and with the other offices. The limitation to the Boone office prevents an understanding of how this office works as a piece to the larger organization. While the research helps understand how one branch of the organization works, it does not give a full picture of the whole organization. As someone who put out the information about this research before I became more involved in the organization, it does make sense that I was only contacted by people within the office I worked. I would like to build relationships with people in all of the offices, which could lead to conversations on this topic with people located in the other offices. The research done in this context could be a way for the Boone office to understand each other better, but it does not give that full picture. Again, no one can speak for everyone. This research scratches the surface of the complexities of international communication and how that works into things, such as the global water crisis. These limiting factors provide avenues for further research on this topic. This research did not employ a full ethnographic process, but it did open up further questions for how this topic can be explored in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The interviewees in this thesis touched on many topics, thus showing the complexities of international communication. The responses showed that the value of international communication is one that is personal. While people have common experiences, one can only speak to what they have individually experienced. This personal component also makes it more complex, as the value to something so vast and so personal cannot be put into one category.

This thesis by no means answers all of my questions about international communication and its value, but it does continue the discussion and it brings up new questions. The analysis from the interviews in collaboration with the literature accompanying the thesis can help organizations

like Wine To Water reframe their thinking about international communication or even use the findings as a type of check to analyze their approach to international communication. The topic of international communication should not be a one-time conversation among people or organizations, but it should be an ongoing, living conversation. If we know that our communication is not perfect, then we should be willing to learn, change, and adapt our forms of communication to best communicate with other people.

Entering into this research, I expected to come out with a much more concrete understanding of international communication. I think the concrete takeaway I have found is that exploration of international communication and its value is a living and frequently evolving discussion, not one that should remain stagnant. All too often I find myself desiring to fully understand something so I know how to do something “right.” I think that when we approach complex, intricate topics, such as the value of international communication, our goal shouldn’t be to be “right.” I think our goal should be to remain curious, open-minded, and open to learning from others and their experiences. This collaboration can lead to discussions among people on topics like the global water crisis.

A quotation from Interviewee A sums up a lot of the work of this organization well. Interviewee A said, “...we’re doing more than just providing water. We’re bringing a path towards a better livelihood, and that’s our real goal, and it starts with water” (14:12-14:21). As organizations learn to grow their communication styles to more efficiently and effectively address issues, there seems to be power in the staff members understanding the importance of the mission they are all working toward.

## **Appendix A- Participant Invite**

“Hello everyone!! If I haven’t met you yet, I am the current filter build intern, and I am a senior at App State. I am in the process of writing a thesis, and my thesis is exploring the topic of how international communication influences our communication styles within our local communities. The work of Wine to Water has inspired this topic. For my thesis, I would love to interview any of you who would be interested in discussing this topic. If you are interested but do not want to commit yet, I can send you the questions or give you more information. You will also remain anonymous in the written thesis. Thank you!”

## **Appendix B- Interview Questions**

- 1- What is your experience working for an organization that does international work?
- 2- How have you seen effective communication across this organization?
- 3- What aspect of communication in this organization has been the most challenging or difficult for you?
- 4- In your opinion, why is international communication important when addressing the global water crisis?
- 5-As a communicator, do you believe there are overall “right” ways to communicate, or that there is no way to define that?
- 6- In your opinion, how has international communication improved your communication skills?
- 7-How has working in these communities changed your perspective of your own culture and local community?
- 8- A lot of the research talks about collaboration instead of this “white savior complex,” as HQ is looking to improve their communication, how would this collaboration be emphasized in your opinion?
- 9- How do you see yourself involved in the communities that you serve?
- 10- When you speak to HQ, do you feel like you get your point across and are heard?
- 11- In your opinion, what is the value of international communication?
- 12- What is the biggest thing that you have learned working for an international organization?
- 13- What is the biggest thing that you wished other people knew about international communication?

14- Is there anything else that you would like to share

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