COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS ACROSS DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS: INSIGHTS FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AT TWO LEADING COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the communication dynamics happening in the two institutions chosen by the researchers. The study aims to identify if the age differences of the workers of the respective institutions have an impact on how the employees and employers communicate with each other.
The researchers selected two participants using a convenience sampling technique, one participant per institution. The use of semi-structured interviews as an instrument enabled to gathering of data and information needed for this research as a basis for assessing the research topic. The gathered data was then interpreted using thematic analysis. This approach ensured the credibility and relevance of the participants' claims and enabled the researchers to explain further the results of the study.
The study found out that the Baby Boomers working in Company 1, and the Millennials working in Company 2, have their own way of communicating inside the workplace. The study revealed that the two generations have their own communication preferences, communication processes and how they consider other elements in communicating, and conflicts in communication and its solutions.
In line with this, the study suggests improvement and insights on how the institutions, and other organizations as well, to improve and maintain the communication dynamics between the workers inside their company. This study recommends further exploring the diversity of the different generations to better understand each and every one. Harmony of the people leads to the success of a company or organization.

Keywords: Generational Differences, Communication, Institutions, And Workplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

"*Effective teamwork begins and ends with communication,*" said a former college basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski. Interaction with other people is part of one's daily life basis. In a community, the folks exchanged information, which can be transferred via communication. In a workplace context, ***how does communication affect the performance of the workers?***

Communication was defined as giving meaning to and ascribing a text (Giffin & Patten, 1976, as cited in Fatimayin, 2018). It is an act where the information are being transmitted. Communication is pivotal for a group of people, such as in schools or universities, companies, society, etc., to function and operate. In this study, two institutions were involved, in which the researchers would like to assess how communication helps operate the two organizations and compare the communication dynamics within the two institutions.

In these chosen institutions, the data gathered in the interview will be used to raise a conclusion about the communication dynamics happening in their respective workplace. Company 1 is located at Pulilan, Bulacan, Philippines. It is a company owned by civil engineers having 37 employees ranging from 30's to 50's, and most are in their 40's. The company is in its 13th year, and it is known for the establishments it has successfully built. Meanwhile, Company 2 is located in Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines. The institution is known for its civil and structural works and belongs to the architecture, engineering, design, and construction industries. The total number of workers in the company for non-managers is 25, while 14 are their top contract workers. The age range of this institution is mostly in their 20s to 30s, where most of the fresh graduates are employed.

The analytical objectives of this study are to compare and analyze the dynamics of communication between the two organizations, and how they vary depending on the ages of their workers. Specifically, it sheds light on the following concerns; (1) Understand communication preferences, (2) Examine intergenerational communication challenges, (3) Assess communication effectiveness, (4) Identify best practices and areas for improvement, and (5) Provide recommendations for enhancing communication.

The outcome of this study will help future researchers better understand the various cultures of communication in each organization, which will help them conduct more in-depth research about the same topic. Furthermore, this study will help the respondents comprehend their culture of communication. Through this comparison, the respondents can reflect on their communication and know the effectiveness of their organization's communication style. This study is beneficial for the respondents to create more suitable communication practices in their organization, leading to a more robust and balanced organization. This study will utilize a qualitative approach, as the researchers aim to understand the communication dynamics inside the two institutions. To achieve the main objective of this study, the researchers used a semi-structured interview as an instrument for the data gathering. The data gathered will then be analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Effective communication is crucial for organizational success in the modern workplace, impacting efficiency, employee satisfaction, and overall efficiency. Knowing and negotiating the complexities of communication relations becomes vital with a varied workforce that includes people of all ages. This study aims to identify the communication dynamics within the two institutions. Hence, this chapter contains the related literature. The information included in this chapter will help better understand the current study.

2.1 Generational Differences and Diversity in the Workplace

Communication varies by age group and is influenced by characteristics such as preferred communication methods, feedback patterns, and connection frequency. In an organization, communication exists between employees and employees; this is where organizational communication begins. Bovee, Thill, and Schatzman (2018) define it as exchanging ideas and information in an organization. Employees and employers interact with one another to have a harmonious relationship, which is one of the essential elements of a business's success. A company's environment is diverse, especially regarding the workers' age and personalities. According to Harris (2023), there are five (5) different generations that can be categorized as the

employees' age brackets – ***Baby Boomers,*** born between the 1940s and 1960s; ***Generation X,*** born between the 1960s and early 1980s; ***Millennials,*** born between the early 1980s to 1990s, ***Generation Z,*** people who are given birth on middle of 1990s up to 2010s, and the ***Alphas*** who are born later 2010. These are also known as ***"Generational Cohorts,"*** wherein people born with the same or relative years share similar experiences, beliefs, values, and practices (Lim & Parker, 2020).

Preferences of the generations above create diversity in the workforce. Baby boomers prefer to be direct to the point and usually communicate more verbally in person. They also stick with the written memos, phone calls, and in-person meetings. Generation X is the one who experienced the evolution of the digital world prior. They can adapt to changes in technology and value face-to-face communication. They mostly do their job independently and value personal space and time.

Moreover, Millennials work happily and joyously inside the company. They often communicate via email, messaging apps, and social media. They tend to seek activities where they can find the growth and development that they need. On the other hand, Generation Z is living in the digital world. They are tech-savvy, quick learners, and prefer digital communication. They often interact through video calls, virtual meetings, instant messaging, and other collaboration tools. Lastly, the Alphas still need to be in the working field. However, they possess the highest level of digital knowledge when they join the corporate world (Harris, 2023). On the negative side, with their communication style influenced by the generation where they were born, challenges developed inside a company or an institution might affect their performance and their relationship with their coworkers (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).

2.2 Communication Gaps and Challenges

"At work, generational differences can affect everything, from recruiting, building teams, dealing with change, motivating, managing, and maintaining and increasing productivity" (Hammill, 2005, as cited in Hayes, 2013). Multigenerational workplaces experience communication gaps that potentially cause misunderstandings and trouble accepting and gaining employees' trust and loyalty (Hayes, 2013). From the five generations, the workplace might be chaotic due to some instances. Between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boomer era witnessed a generation characterized by their diligent work ethic and commitment to their professions. They perceive their work as an extension of their personal interests and financial stability, often preferring democratic and inclusive decision-making approaches. Despite their reputation for hard work, they may only sometimes match the productivity levels of other groups. This generation prioritizes dedication and consistency over adaptability and is sometimes perceived as resistant to change, favoring traditional workplace customs and structures. Generation X, born between 1965 and 1977, values achieving a harmonious balance between their personal and professional lives. They gravitate towards workplaces that prioritize skill enhancement, provide opportunities for advancement, and afford them more personal time. Despite being acknowledged for their diligent work ethic, Generation X also desires meaningful social interactions and a fulfilling home life. They may encounter challenges relating to colleagues from different age brackets, resulting in feelings of isolation and disengagement. Individuals born between 1977 and 2000, known as Millennials, are typically adept with technology and tend to engage less in face-to-face communication, preferring digital means. They prioritize working smarter over working harder by leveraging various technological tools. This generation has grown up alongside the internet and rapid technological progress. However, research suggests that Millennials are often criticized for

having weak work ethics and being labeled lazy due to their reliance on technology. They are perceived as impatient in their career advancement, seeking frequent feedback and valuing flexibility. Additionally, their perceived lack of experience is viewed as a drawback in the workplace.

In countries like the Philippines, with diverse cultures and languages, miscommunication may occur due to language barriers and cultural differences among project stakeholders (Newman, 2020). The construction industry traditionally relies on paper-based communication and manual processes in engineering-related institutions. Adapting digital tools and technologies for communication can be challenging for some stakeholders, leading to resistance or inefficiencies (Atkinson et al., 2021). Education plays a vital role in every individual's communication knowledge and background. As the English language is primarily taught and given emphasis in schools, it greatly influences how people build and gain their ability to communicate. It may be wrong to think that the educational systems of all nations are alike. For instance, the way universities and colleges function may differ in different countries. The curriculum, teaching methodology, evaluation systems, etc. differ. (Saulat, 2014). Following this, education became one of the gaps in an organization's communication. There will be instances where employees with poor educational backgrounds and employees who are not as good and as skilled in speech and knowledge as other employees are usually not given attention and recognition for their contributions to an organization just because of the university where they graduated or maybe because of the level they reached in school.

In the context of cultural diversity, language is a big factor in communicating, and language barriers are also one of the common problems when it comes to age differences among workers in an organization. Some of your employees may not speak English as a native language. Even with a high English fluency level, some phrases or words could still need clarification for a non-native speaker. Avoid using idioms like "the early bird catches the worm" or "do not let the cat out of the bag," and be mindful of words that sound similar but have different meanings (Haab, 2020). In line with this, age differences have a significant effect on understanding the language of each individual. In an organization, different workers are born into different generations, and concerning each generation, language tends to be different for each generation. There are instances where Generation X's English is different from that of the generation of millennials, which becomes a language barrier for the workers of an organization.

Nonverbal communication is another issue faced by employees and organizations concerning language barriers. There are several reasons why nonverbal communication in the workplace might need to be corrected, including cultural differences and misunderstanding indications. According to Chron (2021), while body language can indicate a colleague's feelings, a misinterpretation of the body language can lead to misunderstanding and friction. This may become more of an issue in a diverse workplace where cultural differences make body language more difficult to read. Accordingly, the way non-verbal cues like hand gestures and facial expressions are used in the workplace might impact how messages are understood and communicated due to generational differences. One instance is when two coworkers of the same generation use friendly body language, which a coworker of a different generation could misunderstand. This could result in better communication and difficulties at work.

2.3 Strategies for Improving Organizational Communication

Clear communication, mutual regard, and understanding depend on effective communication techniques. These techniques are crucial for fostering better interactions, settling conflicts, and raising general well-being and productivity in interpersonal relationships and professional and educational environments. Active listening, clear and concise messaging, feedback systems, using a variety of communication channels, cultural sensitivity, and inclusivity are essential tactics. Active listening, clear and concise messaging, feedback mechanisms, multiple communication channels, and cultural sensitivity are essential in the workplace. According to Khanna (2020), listening is not about agreeing or disagreeing, defending or arguing; it is about art that requires placing attention over talent and giving more importance to 'others' over self". So, the intention to listen to others should not only be aimed at formulating a reply to what you are listening to but also at understanding and respecting another's point of view. In line with this, every organization has numerous employees with different cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and even skills for accomplishing tasks. As active listening is an essential strategy in communication in the workplace, each individual should learn how to listen and be open to what others may suggest and execute to accomplish their organization's goals. Being able to express ideas and be heard freely is a big step toward achieving a smoother and better connection among the workers.

2.4 Cross-Cultural Communication Considerations

While not directly related to age, the literature emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity in communication practices within organizations, which may have implications for managing communication across different age groups (Raithel et al., 2021). Misunderstanding is the most significant impediment to communication in a multicultural context. This is frequent among persons from diverse cultural origins whose values and beliefs differ. The differences between cultures cause high tension and confusion, leading to misunderstandings (Albert, 1994). Effective workplace communication is rooted in the engagement of workers and associates, which the leader or the organization's head spearheaded due to their daily interactions with employees. According to Sadik (2023), a consultant emphasized the importance of effective communication in the workplace. The article underscores the critical role of effective communication in building trust, encouraging collaboration, and cultivating a positive workplace culture. Furthermore, it outlines strategies for effective workplace communication, such as active listening, using clear and succinct language, and practicing empathy to foster understanding and trust among colleagues and stakeholders. In line with this, organizations' leaders play a vital role in promoting effective communication, especially in a case where the ages of the workers may vary. In contrast, the beliefs, values, and perspectives may differ from those of the other employees, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective communication.

2.5 Technological Adaptation

Technological advancements impact communication patterns, with younger generations often more adept at adopting and utilizing new technologies than older generations (Ng & Parry, 2016). This may influence the choice of communication tools within organizations. Technology plays a significant part in the lives of Millennials, giving them the moniker "Digital Natives" (Torrado, 2015). They live considerably differently than previously. The "mobile" generation expects a mobile job (Jackson, 2015).

As a result, using social media and having access to various gadgets in the office has been highlighted as one of the essential criteria one-third of Millennials consider when accepting a job offer (Gabriel et al., 2020). Technology has blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, yet Millennials like it, demonstrating a solid commitment to their employment (Kim & Chon, 2022). In the technology era, when speed is crucial, Millennials *"value speed, service, competencies, and are a competitive edge"* (Jackson, 2015). Technology has helped people to be lifelong learners and collaborators. They value feedback and open and direct communication (Hodges, 2016).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Moss (2016), Generational Cohort Theory suggests that people of the same age are most likely to share common attitudes and characteristics. These groups of people are influenced by the shared events and experiences that happened throughout their time. People who lived and were born simultaneously are called "generations." Baby Boomers born in 1946–1964 and Millennials (1981–1996) are some of the generations. This theory is used in research to examine behavior patterns and values within different generations. The theory used in the study aims to comprehend the attitudes and preferences of the organizations, one composed of Baby Boomers and the other of Millennials, in terms of their communication culture. The theory is applied to comprehend the characteristics of the culture of communication of the organizations, and the comprehension is used in the comparative study of the two organizations.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach to determine the lived experiences of the chosen participants in their respective institutions. The Phenomenological method is a qualitative research approach that explores the experiences of individuals and interprets, describes, and comprehends one's involvement in certain phenomena. It aims to understand a person's or people's situation in a particular event. Using the described experiences given by the participants, the researchers can assess the situation of the respondents towards the phenomenon (Green, 2022). With this method, the chosen participants' experiences will be the researcher's source for constructing the study results. The data collected from them will serve as a basis for the success of this research. The responses of the participants will be interpreted and analyzed using thematic analysis.

4.1 Data Gathering Procedure

Researchers started by selecting individuals from institutions chosen to conduct the study. The participants were chosen using the Convenience Sampling Technique, whereas the most available and nearest people from the researchers were chosen to be this study's participants. As stated by Simkus (2023), convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling method, and the participants were chosen due to its availability and convenience for the researchers. However, the participants were selected based on the study's criteria: ages 20 to 60 and currently employed in the two institutions. The researchers chose an employee aged between 20 at Company 2. Researchers selected the owner's mid-50s and 60s for Company 1. The researchers then produced consent forms and questionnaires to give to the interviewees. The consent form covers the study's purpose, interview processes, confidentiality measures, and participant rights. Researchers constructed a semi-structured interview method with ten open-ended questions about communication dynamics within and across age groups. The researchers then proceeded with data collection. They arranged

individual interviews with participants from both firms. However, the participants could not conduct it face-to-face due to a conflict with their schedule. Instead, the interview was conducted via a video call using a messenger platform. Researchers sought documentation and photo opportunities. Despite that, the respondents refused to be photographed for their privacy.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section displays the results and discusses the participants' responses in the interviews conducted by the researchers. The participants were coded respectively. For Company 1, Participant 1 answered the interview questions. Participant 2 participated as the representative of Company 2. Three parts in this section emphasize elements considered by the researchers in the communication dynamics of the two institutions: (A.) Communication Preferences, (B.) Communication Process and Other Considerations, and (C.) Conflicts and its Solution in Communication.

5.1 Communication Preferences

Purpose of Communication. People always have a purpose when conversing with others. Individuals from the organizations have their preferences in how they deliver their messages to their coworkers. As emphasized by Participant 1, "*We communicate casually with our coworkers."* Furthermore, Participant 1 added, *"For them to feel at ease around us, we want them to feel confident."* According to Iosim et al. (2010), informal or casual communication is an efficient and fast way of delivering substantial information to others. This does not follow strict guidelines and enables the workers to discuss their interests. This is beneficial because it alleviates stress and tension among the workers and enables them to communicate freely. This type of communication creates a connection or relationship between those at the top of the hierarchy and the employees.

Nevertheless, Participant 2 stated, "*Often, we communicate adequately; we also often conduct meetings in a conference room wherein the topics and agendas are recorded called 'minutes of the meeting.'"* In their organization, formal communication was being practiced. Unlike informal communication, formal communication sticks to a particular pattern or a norm and is restricted in using words and phrases, goal-oriented, function-related, and rational. It strengthens an organization's reliability, and discipline is also being attained by practicing formality. (Dailey & Gomez, 2017).

Utilization of Face-to-Face or Online Discussion. Participant 1 claimed*, "We do not do any online activities within the firm. We only do face-to-face interactions as we find this reliable and efficient."* Employees and organizations favor face-to-face communication, enabling them to build interpersonal relationships with other members (Ean, 2010). It efficiently provides immediate feedback between the receiver and sender of the information; it bridges managerial-employee gaps. Furthermore, face-to-face communication proves efficient in resolving a misunderstanding, and there are more evident gestures or non-verbal cues in face-to-face communication. This type of communication enables the organization to have a good relationship within the organization.

However, as the world drives along with technological advancement, video conferencing, virtual meetings, and other platforms for conversing online are in demand, especially for the younger generations. Fenich et al. (2012) concluded that Millennials prefer using technology in attending events and collaborating with others, such as team building and communication. Technology provides 'edutainment' and convenience to those available in WI-FI. This claim was supported by the statement of Participant 2, who noted that they usually use apps on computers

that allow interaction with other people; he noted, *"We find online meetings hassle-free as we do not need to plan where to meet and what to have in the meeting. In online meetings, everything is spontaneous and can be easily executed whenever and whatever. We use Microsoft Teams, a meeting room for group meetings or even for one-on-one interaction. We also use Microsoft Outlook".* Additionally, Gibson & Cohen (2003) said that virtual teaming plays a significant role in today's organizational landscape, especially in the form of virtual teams (VTs), where team members are geographically dispersed across different locations, culturally diverse, and working together utilizing a range of technologies to communicate and share information.

Use of Printed or Written and Online Materials. Written and printed materials are necessary for communication in many different contexts. Their significance is demonstrated by several factors, including the fact that written materials guarantee proper communication and serve as a permanent and transparent record of conversations, making them easily accessible to future generations. Additionally, it is visible in professional contexts where written documents such as contracts, business communication, proposals, reports, and official letters have legal weight, serve as a tangible record of agreements and transactions, and project a formal, professional image. As Participant 1 mentioned, *"My wife and my daughters do the paperwork, and the rest of our staff purely do construction work."* Fathom and Fathom (2019) state that a well-drafted written contract is a reasonable risk management technique to help avoid misunderstandings and disputes that can lead to professional liability claims and other legal disputes. In line with this, what makes print materials stand out can be traced from the fact that these are time-effective and cost-effective. (Loyola, 2013). Participant 1 stated that his wife and daughters handle the paperwork, which could include project contracts, floor plans, or blueprints. The paperwork can be written or printed for clarity, to provide a tangible message, or as legal documents that are required in businesses and organizations.

On the other hand, Participant 2 revealed that their institution only sends emails to disseminate tasks and information; he said, *"The administration group email and send us the agenda of monthly meeting enclose its date and venue."* He added, *"We use emails when the clients are from other countries."* If Participant 1 chose paperwork, Participant 2, together with the institution where he belongs, preferred using online generated materials or emails to provide the tasks and information throughout the whole team. Email is beneficial to the workplace since it provides detailed and concise information to the employees. It also disregards the position in a company, avoiding hierarchical issues. Furthermore, it lessens the administration inside a company, which signifies that time can be allotted to other workers' responsibilities (Mano & Mesch, 2012).

5.2 Communication Process and Other Considerations

People's Diversity. Multiculturalism in the workplace is vital for organizational success as it fosters creativity, innovation, and problem solving among individuals from many origins and cultures. In today's global and connected world, embracing diversity is a moral imperative and a forward-thinking business decision that adds to an organization's overall success and competitiveness. As Participant 2 mentioned, "*We openly accept and respect each other's cultural diversity.*" Participant 1 also said, "*We make an effort to fit in with their culture. Despite our differences, we manage to get along and make an effort to comprehend one another"*. A study carried out by Cox and Blake (1991) argued that diverse teams outperform homogeneous teams in problem-solving and creativity. This emphasizes the necessity of valuing diversity in the workplace to develop an innovative culture. Moreover, Ely and Thomas (2001) emphasized the

necessity of building an inclusive work atmosphere in which all employees, regardless of background, feel appreciated and respected.

Daily Routine Activities. A centralized workplace provides less employee liberty, culminating in a strict, organized setting. On the other hand, a decentralized workplace provides freedom, decision-making, and open communication, all promoting innovation and adaptation. Based on the statements of the respondents of this study, Participant 1 said, "*Every 6:30 am, we check the attendance, and all of our workers gather in front of our house to disseminate all the information for them to do. We do site visits at 3 pm*." This was followed by Participant 2, who claimed, "*The Team Leader in a group is the way to pass the message from the higher seniors. Clients from other countries have PIC (Person in Charge) from our organization.*". As noted by Smith and Jones (2019), centralized workplaces had higher levels of control and efficiency, whereas decentralized workplaces promoted innovation and flexibility. This emphasizes the necessity of knowing how organizational structure affects daily regular operations in the workplace.

5.3 Conflicts and their Solutions in Communication

Open Group Discussion. Open communication among team members yields many benefits in the workplace. They can express their ideas, plans, and feelings, which helps the organization come up with better, more engaging, creative, and innovative ideas. Participant 1 stated, *"We talk and solve it right away. We also ask for their opinions regarding any matter"* so that they can resolve the arising problems and take quick action on them. Participant 2 also highlighted, "*We are using meeting rooms to solve conflicts and exchange ideas and suggestions."* A Tripathy (2018) study mentioned that communication abilities significantly impact a person's personality and career, increasing their chances of fulfilling careers. Because every step of the hiring process depends heavily on communication, it is necessary to communicate thoroughly during the interview process. The organization as a whole may need better communication. Effective communication in various work environments requires both critical thinking and well-reasoned analysis.

Strategic Practices. Every organization has its specialties and strategies for planning, innovating, and working. It makes the workers work in harmony and implement clear and practical ideas with the help of their strategies to fulfill the work. They can also implement the resources as they work according to their vision to finish everything. By accomplishing goals with strategy, there are positive benefits to look forward to and productive efficiency within the organization. As Participant 2 said, *"We use a pink Stabilo to address the wrong ones in the drawing,"* this indicates their strategy for knowing what to fix and change through their plans. According to a study by Ahmad (2019), human resource planning (HRP) is essential to the efficacy and efficiency of the workplace. Human resource planning's overarching idea is to determine the development effort, along with forward-looking strategies and decision-making regarding what must be done to accomplish the mission. Additionally, some words or terms that a company uses during working hours help to understand each other more. Jargon is used in a specific company, and those working are the only ones who use those words. For instance, Participant 2 said, *"In our company, we use what we call kaizen. It is a Japanese word meaning 'change for a better' or 'continuous improvement; we use it to motivate our coworkers that he/she can do better next time".* Additionally, Participant 1 also revealed that they are also using jargon in their institution. Jargon

creates a strong bond and connection within the company, sharing a common language, identity, and shared culture (Egnal, 2015).

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to identify the communication dynamics between the two chosen institutions, with employees aged between 20-60. The first institution has employees belonging to the Baby Boomers, while the second institution consists of Millennial employees. Age differences between workers affect the communication between the employees. The way the two institutions communicate differs from that of the other; generational cohorts happen. To conclude, the environments of the two institutions, with employees coming from different generations, are different from each other. Baby Boomers and Millennials have different practices and preferences when communicating and interacting in the workplace. Based on the findings of this study, the institution should accept a more comprehensive age range for their respective company so that the diversity will become more prosperous and all generations will understand the similarities and differences between them. Knowing the difference between one generation and another helps everyone gain knowledge. It might solve the problems and the gaps that hold each generation back from exploring each generation.

7. LIMITATIONS

The study's primary limitation is the organizational communication of each institution. Organizational communication dynamics can shift over time for various reasons, including leadership changes, market trends, and external pressures. The study may need to capture these changes prospectively. However, as time goes by, this research may have to change. Second, the format of the study.

Since this is an IMRAD study, the research format is limited and restricted to adding more parts; the traditional formatting might help to focus more on the topic. Lastly, studying more than one institution is confusing. The need to study and analyze the two organizations might need to be clarified for the researchers and the readers to comprehend and digest the information in the paper.

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