INFLUENCE OF CULTURE IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ON VIRTUAL TEAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides with more insight into the influence of cross culture in the Knowledge Management from learning perspective. Successful knowledge transfer involves neither computers nor documents but rather interactions between people. Moreover, the gained knowledge should guide the audience to sustain the deliverables with distributed virtual teams that are appropriate for the increasingly multicultural nature of the global workforce. Managing multicultural team seems to a multifaceted across the world today. Cultural differences, Poor knowledge management, absence of vision and mission, poor Communication and absence of trust are the hurdles of the distributed Virtual teams. The greatest hurdle for distributed virtual team is tacit understanding of the team members’ knowledge and cognitive style and their difference. This paper highlights the strategies and best practices for Effective knowledge management in Virtual team.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual teams are receiving attention and globalization has made it increasingly important for all the business. All Multinational organizations are analyzing critically on cultural risk which would impact the quality of the project/product. It’s absolutely vital to have a firm understanding of the cultures that project team will be dealing.

In the current situation, all the software development organization has project executed across the globe and the managers find themselves leading project teams with members located literally around the world. Organization’s financial situation doesn't allow the team to meet on a regular basis. Many of the managers feel with these situations note that while demands are high, team performance often falls short of expectations and, at times, the team seems to be spinning apart. Whole Software Industry has numerous concerns from start-up issues to long-term performance.
Why People Don’t Share Knowledge in Virtual teams

- Poor Cross Cultural knowledge
- Added complexity of distant interaction
- Knowledge gain
- Tacit knowledge
- Top & mid management don’t believe in it
- No time
- “I may lose my job”
- People may steal my ideas
- This idea is not invented here (mostly in R&D organizations)

Reasons people don't tell what they know

Companies waste billions when employees and managers don't share their knowledge. But change means understanding why they don't share.

People believe that knowledge is power

"If I know something you don't know, I have something over you." (These quotes are from managers in my study.)

People are insecure about the value of their knowledge

"I feel that people tend to underestimate life experience, that intellect has been so over praised, and for some people without a formal education, that it is hard for them to believe that they can add value in a very different way."

People don't trust each other

I didn't know the other members of the team personally, so I didn't trust them."

Employees are afraid of negative consequences

"I was afraid that my idea would be ridiculed if it were slightly 'over the top,' rather than looked at as a useful brainstorming point."

People work for other people who don't tell what they know

"Personally, I have had more problems with managers and decision makers withholding information than I have had with colleagues or team members."
### CAUSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge hoarding considered</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of not getting credit &amp; suspicion</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of ownership of expertise</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of comprehension of value of K</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of K-sharing mechanisms</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of time to share</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwillingness to use existing</td>
<td>Y</td>
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Source: The Essential Guide to Knowledge Management (Amrit Tiwana)

### CULTURE

- An enabler – “the organization’s culture can either make or break the knowledge management system”
- Widely held to be the major barrier to successful KM implementation
- Ernst & Young Report “Executive Perspectives …”, biggest impediment to knowledge transfer:
  - 54%: culture
  - 32%: top management’s failure to signal importance
- Either: adapt to the culture OR reshape the culture
- Lack of unanimity about the underlying meaning and definition of the construct “culture”
- Culture is a “wooly concept”, cannot be measured and has therefore been “dimensionalised” (placed along “continuums”) by Hofstede, Trompenaars, …
- Wide-ranging and contradictory scholarly opinion about what constitutes “the set” or even “a reasonable set” of values, norms, and beliefs for “culture”
- Murdock (1965) listed universal cultural traits, or values, that existed in some form in all known cultures
- Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) distinguished 164 definitions of what anthropologists meant by culture

### Social Identity Theory

- Each individual is influenced by a plethora of cultures and sub-cultures – some ethnic, some national, and some organisational
- These cultures fuse together to create one’s overall culture
- The combination is unique to each individual

### Frameworks of Culture

- Dimensionalisation of national culture (the breaking down of culture into its constituent characteristics) facilitates comparisons across cultures
• One looks at the same trait and observes similarities or differences among the nations under investigation or even notes its absence from some cultures altogether
  • Hall; Hofstede; Trompenaars

**Dimensionalisation: Criticism**

• By putting culture into neat, sometimes unconnected boxes, we lose sight of the big picture (myopic!)
• National culture cannot really be simplified and reduced to a handful of boxes into which some nations are placed and from which others are excluded
• Minimalism – a more holistic picture needed
• Simplistic – less than ten variables

**Power Distance**

• The extent that large differentials of power, and therefore inequality, are accepted in a given culture (stress: not existence but acceptance)
• The extent to which less powerful members of government and work organisations, and of institutions like families, accept and expect that power is distributed unequally
• The degree to which hierarchical power places individuals at a psychological distance from one another

**Lower Power Distance**

• Subordinates expect to be consulted
• Boss should be resourceful democrat
• Privileges and status symbols frowned upon
• Teachers expect initiatives from students in class
• Hierarchy in organizations seen as exploitive
• Inequalities between people should be minimized
• Parents and children treat one another as equals (Locke: exercise authority at early stages, but move towards an “older but wiser friend”)

**HIGH POWER Distance**

• Subordinates expect to be told what to do
• Boss should be the benevolent autocrat
• Privileges, status symbols, honorifics expected for the higher status
• Teachers are expected to take all initiatives in class (students remain reticent)
• Hierarchy in organizations reflects natural differences (inequality expected and desired)
• Children respect parents and parents expect obedience (discipline: break the will of the child)
Definition of TRUST

• Khoo (2006) describes trust as “Presence of predictability, absence of surprise.”
• Hultman (2001) provides another definition: “believing others have your best interests at heart”. He goes on to say that “lack of trust is the single biggest barrier to interpersonal, team, and organizational effectiveness … Unless trust issues are brought to the surface and dealt with, they remain deeply ingrained, negative aspects of culture.”

TRUST AND KNOWLEDGE Sharing

• 91% of the 474 government supervisors surveyed by the Lausanne Institute in 1998 opined that lack of trust negatively impacts productivity. “When trust is low, people focus on protecting themselves from each other instead of focusing on accomplishing organizational goals.” The leaders in the company play a key role in promoting trust – according to Welch and Welch (2005), “leaders establish trust with candor, transparency, and credit.”

TYPES of TRUST

• **Competence Trust.** Trusting a coworker's competence is critical. We need to believe the coworker has the skills needed to complete the job. Unfortunately, many leaders confuse competence with comfort. Sometimes employees are judged more harshly simply because their boss or coworkers are uncomfortable about one or more characteristics the employee represents.

• **Character Trust.** Trust in a co-worker's character is also important. Have you ever worked with someone who made promises they didn't keep? After that employee missed several deadlines or failed to come through with a key contact you stopped depending on them. Trust was broken and perhaps you felt betrayed.

Knowledge Friendly Culture

• A knowledge-friendly culture, one of the most important factors for a project’s success, is one of the most difficult to create if it does not already exist. Organizational culture should have several components with regard to knowledge:
  
  – People have a positive orientation to knowledge – employees are bright, intellectually curious, willing and free to explore, and executives encourage their knowledge creation and use.
  – People are not inhibited in sharing knowledge – they are not alienated or resentful of the company and don’t fear that sharing knowledge will cost them their jobs.
  – The KM project fits with the existing culture.
Trust Generating Behaviors

- Demonstrate what you know (and what you don’t)
- Deliver information clearly and consistently
- Display consistency between actions and words
- Respect others’ vulnerability and confidential information

Broaden the conversation beyond work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Awareness</th>
<th>Knowledge Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What We Know We Know</td>
<td>Emphasis: knowledge sharing, access and inventory. Tools: e.g. benchmarking, communities of practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What We Know We Don’t Know</td>
<td>Emphasis: knowledge seeking and creation. Tools: e.g. R&amp;D, market research, competitive intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What We Don’t Know We Know</td>
<td>Emphasis: uncovering hidden or tacit knowledge. Tools: e.g. knowledge maps, audits, training, networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What We Don’t Know We Don’t Know</td>
<td>Emphasis: discovering key risks, exposures and opportunities. Tools: e.g. creative tension, audits, dilemmas, complexity science.</td>
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</table>

Figure 1. A knowledge portfolio.

Cultural Variables at Communication are mainly based on Direct/Indirect

Direct communication can be defined as speech that specifically states and directs an action. Most of us grew up hearing direct speech from our parents or teachers: "Get that homework done before you go out to play," or, from our boss today we might hear: "I need this on my desk by Friday."

Unlike direct communication, an indirect style of speech is not typically authoritative; rather it encourages input from the listener. By using this method, you give the other person the opportunity to speak up. An indirect style makes them feel as if their ideas are important. This style of communication places the listener in the "one-up" position.
Explicit/Implicit
Explicit communication refers to the things we say or write, often messages intended to influence the behavior of others. "Do this" and "Don't do that" count as examples of explicit communication. They leave as little room as possible for interpretation or ambiguity.

Implicit communication, on the other hand, refers to the things we do, individually or collectively, usually without regard to the messages others receive. It could be corporate culture or perhaps body language. It might even be a decision not to communicate at all.

Informal/Formal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Used in a Professional Setting</td>
<td>- Usually used with friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No Slang</td>
<td>- Contains shortened version of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pronounce words correctly</td>
<td>- Contains slang words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Cultural Variables
Cultural variables at work are mainly based on

Individualism /Collectivism
Individualism is "the opposite of collectivism; together they form one of the dimensions of national cultures. Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only."

Collectivism "stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty."

Relationship– oriented or Task oriented
A common stylistic difference involves the degree to which a person is communicating in a task oriented way, or a relationship oriented way. Both are valid and equally useful ways of interacting, but serve different purposes. Someone using a task oriented style focuses on "getting things done" efficiently, and is less focused on developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with the other person. The relationship oriented person is less concerned with getting things done, but more interested in building and maintaining good relationships with people and ensuring others are comfortable with the interactions.

Culture Comparison at US and INDIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocols</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>INDIA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The standard greeting is a smile. In business situations, a handshake is used</td>
<td>- The traditional Indian greeting is the namaste (press the palms of your hands together below the chin, near the heart)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Usually men and very westernized Indian women will offer to shake hands. It's a recommendation not to touch (except in handshaking), hug, or kiss in greeting.
- Do not thank your hosts at the end of a meal. Saying “Thank you” for a meal is insulting because the thanks are considered a form of payment.
- Returning the meal by inviting your hosts to dinner shows you value the relationship.
- Gifts are not opened in the presence of the giver.

**Business Practices**
- Punctuality is highly emphasized.
- If you are invited for a meal, you should arrive promptly.
- Prior appointments are necessary.
- People in the United States write the month first, then the day, then the year (e.g. 12-31-07).

**Business Entertaining**
- Dinner is the main meal; it starts between 5:30 pm and 8 pm.
- Meals at work are usually considered job-related occasions.

**Gestures**
- The standard space between you and your conversation partner should be at least two feet.
- A backslap is a sign of friendship.

### Cultural Orientation at USA and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Styles</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>INDIA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Americans are very analytical. Facts are important. The universal rule is preferred, and</td>
<td>- In India information is accepted openly as long as it does not challenge religious and social structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>- Points are made by the accumulation of objectives facts</td>
<td>- The use of objective facts is less persuasive than a combination of feelings and faith. - Indians have a less hurried attitude toward time than North Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Systems</td>
<td>- People from U.S. do not find it difficult to say “no”</td>
<td>- India is a moderately collectivistic culture in which an individual’s decisions must be in harmony with the family, group, and social structure. - Behaviors contrary to religious traditions are not easily tolerated - There is a very rigid structure of inequality, traditional male chauvinism is strong, and women do not have equal privileges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- USA is a task-oriented society
- India is task-and-people oriented society.
  - Americans need to learn how relationships could affect productivity
  - Indians need to understand cultural differences to have more productivity.

The above information is very critical success factor for attaining the world class quality.
CONCLUSIONS
Paper focused primarily on the organizational knowledge-creating process that takes place within a Global Team and the influence of the culture in Knowledge management. Papers have described the knowledge-creating process as the dynamic interaction between organisational members, and between organisational members and the environment. However, the knowledge-creating process is not revolving within the boundaries of a single company. The market, where the knowledge held by companies interacts with that held by customers, is also a place for knowledge creation. It is also possible for groups of companies to create knowledge. If we further raise the level of analysis, we arrive at a discussion of how so-called national systems of innovation can be built. For the immediate future, it will be important to examine how companies, governments and universities can work together to make knowledge creation possible.

REFERENCES
1. Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands book (USA)
11. Managing Cultural Risks on International Projects, Mona Sennara, M.Sc student, University of Calgary and Francis Hartman, PhD, PEng, FEIC, PMP, University if Calgary