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Cosmopolitan Leadership, Teams, and the Global Workforce

Globalization has increased workforce diversity in almost every industry around the world. More than ever, companies compete on the basis of how effectively they can integrate and synthesize the knowledge of their individual members, raising essential questions about ways to coordinate people of different backgrounds to promote organizational goals.

This chapter explores the necessary competencies and myriad of challenges facing a cosmopolitan leader or team member in complex global organizations. We address leadership strategies and competencies for managing projects and people and emphasize the important skills and knowledge required for an international environment. We define the various structural configurations that are emerging for global teams and discuss how they affect communication issues in the global workforce. We also look at some of the challenges embedded in the multicultural communication processes needed for problem-solving and decision-making. Finally, we examine some of the technologies designed to help virtual groups work more effectively.

Cosmopolitan Leadership and Leadership Competencies

As organizations become increasingly complex, leaders need to continually develop their personal and professional competencies. An effective cosmopolitan leader is one who can access the strengths of his or her employees while minimizing the weaknesses. Although this is true of any leader, the

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cosmopolitan leader is often challenged with managing the complexities of a workforce rooted in various cultures. This is made even more difficult by the requirement of working through time, space, and technology.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Cosmopolitan leaders face challenges that are greater than those working with a homogeneous culture or those working locally. Most companies have found that the principal problems involve the failure to effectively manage their people issues (McDonough & Kahn, 1997). Challenges emerge from a variety of social contexts, such as the ambiguity that arises from differences manifested in stereotypes, the importance of face saving in various cultures, the use of nonverbal communication (including silence), and the disparate responses that result from the use of humor. These challenges must be addressed to thrive as a global leader.

One of the challenges is borne of the fact that managers develop their understanding of good leadership based on how it is defined in their native cultures. It is no surprise that they “often wield their power in conformity with the national set-up—for instance a confirmed democracy like Sweden produces low key democratic managers” (R. Lewis, 1999, p. 59). Still, problems often arise when the style of leadership encountered by subordinates does not match their expectations. Odenwald (1996) observes that “conflicting cultural values increase the risk of creating misunderstanding, lowering the morale of employees, and often alienating strategic global customers or business partners” (p. 65). Leaders and their employees are often puzzled by behaviors that are hard to interpret from their own paradigm (Brislin, 1993).

One’s perspective of employee participation can also affect the working relationship. In many cultures, leaders are expected to be decisive without needing to check in with the team first, and leaders who ask for consensus may be seen as incompetent or weak. In other cultures, consensus and collaboration are the norm, and workers would expect to participate in decision-making or to have input on issues that affect their work and would negatively view leaders or micromanagers who did not consult them. Consequently, subordinates have differing expectations of leaders depending upon their cultural orientation (Brislin, 1993).

Another cross-cultural challenge for cosmopolitan leaders occurs when employees attribute meaning to the leaders’ behavior or words based on their own perception of power distance. Responsibility taking and who initiates action are often impacted by one’s sense of hierarchy and authority. Some workers may wait to be given explicit directions when the manager is expecting more assertive behavior. For individuals whose cultural values are in opposition to

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those used in their workplace, it is often one of the most difficult adjustments to make.

Often ambiguity arises from the continually changing demographics with which one has to operate. As one manager stated, “given the tri-cultural makeup of the county—I realized anyone could be offending $\frac{1}{3}$ of the population at any given point, resulting in a significant impact on attitude, communication, and productivity” (Dooley, 2003, p. 57). Jane Bloodworth (2005), Manager of General Services Printing, Graphics and Map Design, would agree. She has 38 nationalities and 18 languages reporting to her at the World Bank in Washington, DC. The cultures that report to her are also widely diverse (Nigerian, Philippine, Swiss, English, Barbados, United States, Japanese), which requires a skillful approach to leadership. Bloodworth noted in an interview that individual sensitivities manifest differently or more strongly in various cultures, yet she found that preconceptions about gender and age issues are the hardest to overcome. She also reflected on how she was more cautious and had to construct her messages more carefully to avoid offending some workers. With others she was able to be more informal and talk to them directly without needing to be overly concerned about cultural sensitivities. She summarized her experience by saying that “people are people . . . no matter what their cultural or national origin, they all bring their ‘stuff’ with them [and] it is often the ‘stuff’ that matters and needs to be handled carefully.”

Cosmopolitan leadership or global management can often be more challenging for females, particularly if one is crossing traditional cultural barriers based on gender. One of the cultural differences defined by Hofstede (1980) is the degree of masculinity that is reinforced in a society. Those cultures with a high masculinity ranking typically experience a high degree of gender differentiation, such that males more frequently dominate positions of authority or power than females do. Therefore, female managers often find their authority and power tested by members of their workforce when the members are from a highly masculine orientation.

Bloodworth (2005) discussed her perception of those reporting to her from cultures with a highly masculine predominance. She noted that “the younger and more educated employees adjust most easily to adapting to having a woman leader, and perhaps this is based on their exposure to various others.” As an illustration, she reflected on situations where male employees from highly masculine cultures tended to avoid taking instructions and feedback directly from her and preferred to hear from their own male supervisors. Additionally, when asking for compliance with required changes in the work, she found younger workers more adaptable and less resistant to the requests than older ones. She continued, “the bigger challenge is when you are in their country” and one is challenged by the norms of the larger community. Interestingly,

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Baugh and Graen (1997) found that when gender and racial diversity in a team decreased, the team's perception of the team leader's competence decreased as well.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Companies are recognizing the need to define the competencies of cosmopolitan leadership for global managers in order to improve recruitment and identify training needs. These competencies include strong personal characteristics, leadership skills, and cross-cultural knowledge. Leadership dimensions for the global manager involves understanding both the business itself and the global political scenarios in which the business is located. Researchers have identified several characteristics that constitute cross-cultural competence: interpersonal skills, communication skills, and interaction skills (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). Affective and behavioral skills such as empathy, charisma, and the ability to tolerate ambiguity and anxiety (Gudykunst, 1998; Spitzberg, 1991) have also been studied as critical components of cultural competence.

Learning how to assimilate the skills essential to cross-cultural competence follows a cyclical process of moving from ignorance to suspending judgment to adopting new behaviors based on greater understanding. Jo Lamb (2005), former Executive Development Manager at a major entertainment company, notes the importance of being able to "suspend and shift," to suspend one's initial reaction and think about the situation from multiple perspectives, and then shift one's response if appropriate. She considers suspending judgment to be a great first predictor of effective communication. It is important to reflect on your own experiences and build a learning framework around them.

Odenwald (1996) further calls attention to the sequence that teams must experience to progress through the initial phases of working across diverse backgrounds. First, all team members acknowledge their own cultures and perspectives. Second, they begin to understand the cultures of other team members. Finally, trust building ensues and members shift their focus to accomplishing team goals. Odenwald (1996) continues to describe several qualities of an effective cosmopolitan or global team member: (1) flexibility and adaptability, (2) strong interpersonal skills, (3) ability to think both globally and locally, (4) ability to work multiculturally, (5) linguistic skills, (6) listening skills, (7) strong commitment to product and corporate values, (8) initiative and enthusiasm, (9) ability to promote and/or achieve consensus, and (10) self-confidence. These same traits are equally important for cosmopolitan or global leaders and multicultural managers.

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Rather than just learning to tolerate ambiguity, cosmopolitan leaders need to be able to manage it by being experts in learning through observation, reflection, and application. They also need skills to manage teams that work autonomously and communicate through technology (Barczak & McDonough, 2003; Maznevski & DiStefano, 2000; McDonough & Kahn, 1997). Moran and Riesenberger (1997) provide a comprehensive list of qualifications, stating that a cosmopolitan or global leader must (1) have a global mindset, (2) have a long-term orientation, (3) work as an equal with others from diverse backgrounds, (4) facilitate organizational change, (5) create internal learning systems, (6) negotiate and approach conflicts in a collaborative mode, (7) manage the foreign development cycle skillfully, (8) accurately profile the organizational culture and national culture of others, (9) lead and participate effectively in multicultural teams, and (10) behave in a manner that demonstrates knowledge and respect for other countries.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING COSMOPOLITAN LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Many organizations are beginning to focus on professional development and training for executives that specifically address these competencies. Allredge and Nilan (2000) describe 3M's executive leadership and competency model and show how they delineate the transition in skills needed to move into the future. They list these as transitioning aptitudes: (1) from having the skills of "innovation" to "nurturing innovation"; (2) from understanding "how to grow the business" to understanding "how to assess business health and results"; (3) from "managing" systematic change to "integrating" change; (4) from effectively "analyzing" complex situations to "handling" multiple, complex, and paradoxical situations; and (5) from "giving feedback and reinforcement" to employees to "giving and seeking" open and authentic feedback (p. 138).

Being able to speak essential words and phrases in the language of the local workforce is critical, but knowing the language is even better. This skill lends credibility to the leader and also increases the trust and respect received from their employees. Hilton's (1992) work confirmed this concern and reported that Americans are often critical of non-English-speaking participants in meetings and are impatient with mispronunciation and inadequate grammar, yet these same Americans are unwilling to learn the local language. Additionally, cosmopolitan or global leaders need to be sensitive to intercultural communication patterns and nonverbal cues for interaction.

Interestingly, some executives report that working overseas can create resentment and isolation upon their return (Lamb, 2005). Less than 2 percent of the U.S. managers surveyed rated the role of international experience as

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important for promotion or recruitment. Conversely, it was considered one of the top criteria by the European and Japanese managers in the same study (Tung & Miller, 1990). Tung and Miller (1990) assert “that if American corporations fail to integrate an international perspective into their human resources management policies and practices, their ability to compete successfully in the global marketplace will continue to be encumbered” (p. 13).

Cosmopolitan Leadership and Global Teams

Although cosmopolitan or global leaders are essential to the success of multinational organizations, teams do much of the decision-making in these companies. Therefore, one of the critical competencies of leadership is being able to lead a team. At the same time, it is estimated that over 30 million virtual teams are in existence (Scott, 2003), requiring new skills for leaders and team members. Today’s cosmopolitan leaders must negotiate the complexities of multicultural, multinational teams located around the world whose primary communication is mediated via technology. This challenge includes managing cultural diversity, differences, and conflicts; handling geographic distances; dealing with coordination and control issues; maintaining communication richness over distances; and developing and maintaining a team identity among members.

GLOBAL TEAMS

Currently it is reported that more than 60 percent of professional employees work in virtual teams (Kelley, 2001). Barczak and McDonough (2003) cite several reasons to form global teams: (1) to address global market issues by identifying common product platforms, (2) to identify unique needs of local markets and offer customized products, (3) to create knowledge experts whose skills can be accessed from any country, and (4) to bring together dispersed resources.

Indeed, virtual teams are ubiquitous, yet the speed at which they are initiated often makes it difficult to understand the dynamics that emerge. Therefore, it is useful to define the various types of teams emerging in today’s organizations. Lipnack and Stamps (1997) define a virtual team as “a group of people who work independently with shared purpose across space, time, and organizational boundaries using technology” (p. 18). Included in this definition are telecommuters who work from home offices and do most of their work via the computer, telephone, or fax. Others (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kristof et al., 1995) include cultural diversity and geographic dispersion in

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their definition of virtual teams, stating that virtual teams can be global, multicultural, local (across buildings), or any combination of these components. A global team specifically refers to groups of people who are working together across cultures and time zones for extended periods of time, and by nature of their geographic separation, they are also virtual teams (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). According to this definition, a global team is multicultural, multinational, and virtual.

Stohl (2001) provides a matrix that further shows the different organizational structures for various teams. She includes the structure and management models evidenced in the five predominant team orientations: *domestic*, *multicultural*, *multinational*, *international*, and *global*. A domestic organization is hierarchical, using bureaucratic and matrix structures typically located in a central headquarters. The management model is monocultural, and cultural differences tend to be ignored or not recognized. A multicultural organization uses teamwork and is less hierarchical but also tends to have one centrally located headquarters. The management model typically has one culture that predominates, and differences are expected to be accommodated through assimilation with that dominant culture. The multinational organization is usually managed from a central location in essentially a hierarchical manner; however, national subsidiaries create miniature replicas of the core where teamwork is employed. It is centralized and globally scaled, and overseas operations implement parent company strategies. The management model recognizes cultural differences, and they are somewhat accepted, but the dominant culture is typically enacted in the task domain. The international organization uses a joint hierarchy in which international divisions integrate global activities and joint ventures. There is extensive teamwork with subsidiaries and some decentralized decision-making. The management model embraces cultural synergy, and members work together to try to build a third culture. Finally, the global organization incorporates decentralization of decision-making and sharing of responsibilities. The headquarters and subsidiaries see themselves as part of an organic worldwide entity with a strong global strategy and dominant global alliances. The management model promotes cultural integration that recognizes diverse cultures and business conditions. Cultural adaptation is experienced in the task realm, and cultural integrity is seen in the expressive realm.

At the most fluid end of the structural continuum, Weick and Van Orden (1990) propose that the global organization will exist without a central or specific location. Decision-making will be the result of "fields of activity and systems rather than a static hierarchical entity that continually redefine the task using ad hoc centers of authority located at critical but evolving locations" (p. 56). Lipnack and Stamps (1997) agree, proposing that traditional structures such as hierarchies are not complex enough to manage the multifaceted issues

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that emerge in a global workforce. They believe that “neither a hierarchical organization nor a hierarchy of concepts can handle a network of environmental problems . . . without leaving many dangerous gaps through which unforeseen problems may emerge” (pp. 162–163). As information processing systems, organizations rely on the communication exchanges through formal and informal interactions. Over time these patterns often become rigidly institutionalized, thereby establishing and clarifying the team boundaries.

McCullom (1990) notes the clear lack of group boundaries for virtual teams as compared to those that characterize traditional teams (e.g., office location or reporting structures). These porous boundaries are often defined on the basis of the project status and organizational requirements. As a case in point, The Fusion Team at GE started with eight members chosen from research and development, computer design, and finance who were asked to develop a new software product in response to a unique market niche. Initially, several members were responsible for market analysis, but as a concrete product began to emerge, they dropped off the team and were replaced with a few software and hardware engineers. As the project approached beta testing, test engineers and customer service representatives joined the team, and those whose expertise was no longer needed dropped off the team. This continual reshaping of the team’s membership illustrates how teams are essentially composed of patterns of relationships within a network.

Miles and Snow (1992) conclude that global networks are the ideal organizational form of the future and others propose that network structures offer better explanations of organizational behavior than formal organizational structures (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993). Across cultures, global organizations are expected to move from “centrally coordinated, multi-level hierarchies toward a variety of more flexible structures that loosely resemble networks rather than traditional pyramids” (Weick & Van Orden, 1990, p. 53). Networks are more flexible, allowing emergent communication structures and linkages easily supported by technology that many believe are needed in the complex and fluid organizations emerging today.

Still, hierarchies serve an important function in today’s organizations. However, they often emerge in a unique fashion that combines the features of a matrix organization and those of adhocracy (Applegate, 1995). These hierarchical structures emerge naturally in organizations based on the need for order as organizations grow in size and complexity. Ahuja and Carley (1998) also studied the role of hierarchy in virtual teams and found that “virtual organizations may well be non-hierarchical and decentralized from an authority standpoint, however, from a communication standpoint they may still be hierarchical and somewhat centralized” (p. 20). They propose that managers should monitor and manage the communication structures just as carefully

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as they manage the formal reporting structures. They caution that “managers responsible for virtual project teams should not assume that non-hierarchical communication structures are necessarily more effective than hierarchical structures” (p. 23).

Thus, there are many strong business reasons for the emergence of global teams. Defining the variety of structures helps to identify critical aspects that describe the management models observed in each orientation. The team structure itself is often seen as a fluid composite of network links continually being shaped and defined by the formal and informal communication patterns established through the interaction of team members. Although hierarchies are somewhat diminished from an authoritarian perspective, they remain vigorous in that they define the communication network and influencing patterns. Managers need to monitor these communication patterns that characterize the team and affect productivity.

GLOBAL TEAM CHALLENGES

Eisenberg and Riley (2001) observe that “globalization is one of the drivers of growing workforce diversity in almost every industry, raising critical questions about ways to coordinate people of markedly different backgrounds to promote organizational and personal goals” (p. 315). All groups have some element of diversity, yet from a team perspective it becomes significant when it affects a group’s performance. Maznevski (1994) identifies two different types of diversity: role-related and inherent (e.g., gender, nationality, cultural, personality). It is often these differences that allow a group to make decisions from a wider perspective. For example, if a company is marketing a product to women in France, having women and team members from France can assist the group in its advertising approach. Similarly, having team members from training, sales, and finance can help the group look holistically at various facets of the project and develop a comprehensive timeline for product release.

Although diversity in a team is valuable, the benefits of multiculturalism are not automatically positive or easily accomplished. In fact, more effort is usually required to establish the team’s communication strategy and working relationships so that productivity is achieved. Parker (2003) perceptively observes that “the communication modes that make virtual group status possible are the same modes that make group interaction difficult” (p. 19).

Although several studies have shown that multicultural groups develop more and better alternatives to problems and offer more creativity than homogeneous groups (Ling, 1990; McLeod & Lobel, 1992), others report that the actual performance outcome of the groups was decreased (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992; Kumar, Subramanian, & Nonis, 1991). Even the sense of

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permanence affects the working relationship of team members. Walther (1994) found that communicating virtually as a team was perceived as more positive when team members believe the interaction would be extended over time. Maznevski (1994) concludes that the differentiating factor is the degree of integration of diversity itself. She states that “diversity led to higher performing groups only when members were able to understand each other, combine and build on each other’s ideas” (p. 533).

Pothukuchi, Damanpour, Choi, Chen, and Park (2002) studied joint ventures and found that the outcome of cultural differences had both negative and positive results depending on whether the organizational members viewed national cultural differences as barriers or as opportunities. Keyton (2005) also observed that “if national cultural differences are perceived to be part of an international or multinational organizational culture and embraced positively, they can in turn create a challenging and stimulating work environment with organizational members developing an organizational culture to accommodate and bridge national cultural differences” (p. 117). In a similar study, Hobman, Bordia, and Gallois (2004) reported that “there was a negative relationship between dissimilarity and work group involvement when individuals perceived low group openness to diversity, whereas there was no relationship when individuals perceived high group openness to diversity” (p. 560). In their study of managers with an average of eight years of international experience, Hurn and Jenkins (2000) indicated that the managers’ primary frustrations were (1) approaches to time which related to punctuality and keeping appointments and schedules, (2) decision-making—specifically knowing when a decision had been reached by the team, (3) managing the tension between the need to build personal relationships and the need for immediate action, (4) problems created by nonverbal communication (i.e., posture, gestures, and eye contact), (5) idiomatic phrases (i.e., “let’s hook up so you can teach me because I’m new and pretty green”), (6) business practices for conducting meetings (e.g., unstructured versus structured or open versus closed), and (7) challenges with giving and receiving feedback. They also identified the following items as a “cultural minefield” for team members working across cultures: (1) greetings, (2) degree of politeness, (3) showing agreement or disagreement, (4) use of “small talk,” (5) use of interpreters, (6) punctuality, (7) leave-taking, (8) gift giving, (9) status of women, and (10) body language.

Even the use of humor or teasing can be difficult to interpret when one is a member of a cross-cultural team. Dr. Jamie Murphy (2005), Business Professor at the University of Perth, Australia, recalled during an interview the challenges of understanding the role of teasing among coworkers that he encountered as an American working in an Australian culture. After several months of teasing, he asked a teammate to explain why people were frequently

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making sarcastic comments or continually using put-downs with colleagues. He was told that “we tease you to show you we accept you and like you, mate.” However, without the cultural understanding, others might easily take offense or withdraw from communicating when the repartee is interpreted as negative or disrespectful.

Time issues often create challenges for global teams, including perceptions about past, present, and future scheduling of work projects and crossing time zones. For example, in the United States we try to do jobs faster, whereas the Japanese and Germans are more concerned with the overall synchronization of separate tasks. We analyze before we integrate, whereas Germans tend to integrate before they analyze and generally consider that part of the whole context. Even silence may cause misunderstandings. In one study conducted in Finland, Americans were offended at the gaps in conversation and the long periods of silence and mistook these as negative negotiation strategies. The Finns, however, have a high tolerance for silence and they were comfortable and considered this normal behavior (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2002).

Team coordination, specifically for synchronous meetings, can become a critical point of tension. For many global teams, the time that is scheduled for the meeting may privilege some members and disadvantage others. Carol Ellis (2005), a senior advisor for ExxonMobil, reflected during an interview that “for us in the United States it was 7:00 a.m. and in Singapore it was 7:00 p.m. It seemed that it was easier for Europeans . . . because they always got to work a ‘normal’ day.” Time differences can not only disrupt family life but also often mean having less access to office resources needed to contribute to the dialogue or decisions being made.

Language skills also tend to favor some team members over others. Although teams may agree on a certain working language, those who are not as fluent in that language are disadvantaged (Bantz, 1993). Stohl (2001) pointedly states that “language not only directs what we say, but influences how we shape and frame experience, mediates the meanings we assign to action, helps define members of in- and out-groups, and confers status distinctions” (p. 354). It appears that the more linguistically skillful and articulate one is, “the greater the opportunity for the acquisition of resources, capital, information, and expertise” (p. 325).

Another issue that may create an advantage for some members and may potentially cause conflict is the choice of technology or software used for working together. Keyton (2005) has observed that “technology structures the work of organizations and, as a result, influences organizational culture, work activities, organizational members’ work roles, and their work relationships” (p. 121). Consider the consequences when the leader wants every project to be monitored through a specific project management tool, yet some team

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members may not own or know how to use the program. Or, when individual members of the team have software skills to create more professional looking presentations—even if the content is the same—it may give an advantage in the decision-making process.

For most teams, e-mail is the primary communication medium, and members exchange messages asynchronously. When working asynchronously, interaction patterns change as one is not required to take turns and ideas are often shared without interruption. Ideas can be documented for retrieval, and the text is constructed with opportunities for revision and reflection. On the negative side, conversations may be discontinuous or disjointed, and it takes extra effort to reconstruct the threads of various comments to make them cohesive. Although time, language, and technology can make it challenging for global teams, many organizations are using strategies to offset these issues.

GLOBAL TEAM STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS

Learning to work together as a global team requires significant effort and should be included as part of the organizational strategy. While learning how to coordinate their interdependency to produce a product or service, team members also need to create a common level of understanding the cultural perspectives of other members of the team. Global communication “requires the ability to translate the cultural meaning behind the words and to anticipate the impact of spoken or written words” (Odenwald, 1996, p. 55) such that the collective outcomes are realized. Matveev and Nelson (2004) maintain that cross-cultural communication competence improves team performance by 20 percent.

Meeting in person is helpful to establish ground rules and begin to build relationships between team members. These sessions provide members with a personal connection to other team members and often serve as the reference point when potential conflict arises. Patterns that are established early in a group’s life are often those that last throughout the team’s lifecycle (Gersick, 1988; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). Once members have spent time together they are more likely to engage in dual perspective and ask for clarification instead of making assumptions. Some basic items should be addressed in the initial meetings, such as the team’s goal(s) and agreement on team protocols. It is also essential for virtual teams to agree on the frequency of their meetings and expectations for each member’s participation.

To address the issues with time, Oldenwald (1996) suggests developing a “team time culture” (p. 84). Montoya-Weiss, Massey, and Song (2001) state that having a pre-established communication plan can also help “address the

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communication challenges facing virtual teams as it introduces temporal coordination mechanisms” (p. 1259). They also discovered that a rhythm of coordination mechanisms, such as a regularly scheduled team meeting, created a structure that “mitigated the negative effects of avoidance and compromise” (p. 1259).

Hurn and Jenkins (2000) cited one successful training program in which the members of multicultural teams assembled and attended training classes together to address issues and develop action plans for working together more effectively. The group established concrete guidelines and had clear agreed-on agendas going forward. They established a policy to use a skillful chairperson to facilitate future meetings, frequently provide summaries of key points, and use questions more effectively to elicit feedback from each other during the meetings.

Working in a global team requires even more clarity about team protocols for communicating. For groups to work together successfully, they must negotiate their roles, norms, and behavior, as well as convey their various approaches to information processing. To illustrate, one virtual team defined what it meant to them when other members of the team did not respond to their questions posted by e-mail. They agreed if a team member sent a question and did not receive a response within 24 hours, one should assume the message was never received and the sender should re-send or use the telephone depending on the urgency of the question. Another protocol they created was to establish a priority code for their e-mail subject headings and voice mail messages. They agreed that a “code 1” meant “this is a ‘showstopper’ . . . I can’t move forward until you respond”; “code 2” meant “this is the action I will take unless I hear from you within 24 hours”; “code 3” indicated “this information is For Your Information (FYI) only and does not require a response.” In this way, they were able to help each other organize their communication exchanges and work more efficiently.

Maznevski and DiStefano (2000) describe three group processes for working with multiple cultures on a team: *mapping*, *bridging*, and *integrating*. They define *mapping* as having an understanding of the team’s “compositional differences and the corresponding implications for bringing to the team different knowledge perspectives and approaches to relationship management” (p. 197). Mapping requires suspending the assumption of similarity—believing that “others think like I do.” Useful maps create cognitive frameworks for understanding the preferences of others by providing a way to look at patterns (e.g., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or Hofstede’s dimensions). However, caution must be taken to avoid the tendency of using quick labels and thereby bypassing the need for deeper understanding. *Bridging* is the process of communicating across those differences to ensure that each member understands

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the others. Bridging involves recentering, where team members find common perspectives and explore them to identify important definitions and goals. In this way, teams manage their norms so that everyone is involved and has an equal opportunity to be heard. *Integrating* is bringing the different perspectives and preferences together, resolving any differences among them, and building on these differences to generate innovation and quality in the team's work. The skills include managing participation, resolving disagreements, and constructively building new processes for the future.

Although the challenges are ever present, team members need to find a unifying goal that they have in common, focus on the issues rather than the personalities, and find ways to include everyone's perspective. Surfacing disagreements and articulating protocols builds the team so they can solve problems more effectively. Ultimately, work group performance and the individual members' attachment to the group itself are related (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992). The success of a global team depends on the ability to create a shared team identity, to develop mutual respect and trust among team members, and to build supportive and collaborative personal relationships between team members. Goto's (1997) work reinforces this, affirming that "knowledge of the other culture [alone] is not effective. Rather [the] focus [should] be on encouraging perceptions of similarity, and opportunity for positive interactions" (p. 109). This foundation creates the culture of the team that emerges from the interaction of the individual members at work and communication exchanges between individuals themselves, not just between their respective cultures.

Decision-Making, Problem-Solving, and Global Teams

Effective decision-making often gives companies the competitive edge, especially when the playing field requires innovation and rapid solutions. Yet, working in a global environment creates new and complex challenges as members reach across cultures to solve problems through mediated technology. The research on the effectiveness of global teams is inconclusive and leads one to speculate about the best course of action.

DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Researchers have reported mixed and often conflicting results regarding the effects of working virtually on the quality of a team's decision-making. For instance, several scholars report that there is no difference in decision quality between teams who work virtually and those who work in person (Cappel & Windsor, 2000; Hiltz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986; Straus & McGrath, 1994).

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Others maintain that face-to-face teams outperform virtual ones (Andres, 2002; McDonough, Kahn, & Barczak, 2001), and some assert that virtual teams make better decisions than those working face-to-face (Hollingshead, 1996; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Schmidt, Montoya-Weiss, & Massey, 2001). Some hypothesize that increased time and repeated exposure to team members enhances decision-making such that a virtual team may improve its ability to make decisions over time.

The same inconclusiveness is found in the literature about the performance outcomes of multicultural groups. Although previous research has shown that increased diversity on teams increases the innovation (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Cady & Valentine, 1999; W. Watson, Kuman, & Michaelson, 1993), Kirkman, Tesluk, and Rosen (2004) found that “team race heterogeneity was negatively related to team empowerment and to multiple indicators of team effectiveness” (p. 357). Further, they noted that “team members on more racially diverse teams reported experiencing less team empowerment than did team members on more racially homogeneous teams” (p. 358). At the same time, researchers found that empowerment was of greater importance for process improvement in teams that worked virtually (Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, & Gibson, 2004). Results like these are confusing for leaders and global teams, yet it is clear that there is a strong connection between message flow, participation, and quality of decision-making.

There is one point that most scholars and practitioners do agree on—communication, integration, and clarification are the keys to ensuring group performance. For groups to work together to make good decisions and solve problems, certain conditions must exist at both the individual and group level. It is critical that each member has (1) a clear understanding of his or her contribution to the task, (2) an ability to take the other’s perspective long enough to consider input, (3) motivation to communicate and work together rather than independently, and (4) the ability to establish and maintain a sense of trust.

Crookes and Thomas (1998) compared Chinese managers and contrasted local managers with expatriates (who were more typically Western) to study how culture might correspond with approaches to problem-solving. Using adaptation-innovation theory (Kirton, 1987), they discovered a correlation between cultural stereotypes and preferences for either an adaptation style or innovation style. Adaptors tended to develop their ideas on the basis of preexisting definitions of the problem and tended to work within established guidelines and rules. They approached decision-making by “refining existing solutions to problems” (Crookes & Thomas, 1998, p. 587). Innovators tended to “reconstruct the problem separating it from the accepted definitions and frameworks, generated many ideas, and developed unusual solutions” (p. 587). They approached decision-making from the perspective of working outside

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traditional rules and constraints. Each approach carries its own level of risk. For the adaptor, however, risk is initially much lower because ideas are based on previously established precepts. Conversely, the “ideas of the innovator can be more strongly resisted and their originator treated with caution” (Crookes & Thomas, 1998, p. 588). It appears that both cultural value orientation and organizational culture influence one’s predisposition to problem-solving. Large bureaucratic organizations may discourage risk-taking and encourage the adaptor style similar to those countries that value high power distance. This can affect how members themselves approach decision-making.

The effectiveness of decision-making in global teams is a factor of the decision process selected, the media used, and the complexity of the problem itself (E. Kelley, 2001). In effective teams, as task interdependence increased, so did interaction frequency; and as task complexity increased, so did message complexity, as the most effective teams selected richer media to match. For example, as the number of borders (cultural, professional, company, country) spanned within the group increased, they often used audio conference calls instead of e-mail and the “successful [team] focused specifically on building relationships to increase trust and develop shared views across these borders, while the ineffective team did not” (p. 132). The “effective teams exhibited a strong, repeating temporal pattern to their interaction incidents” that Kelley (2001) referred to as “a heartbeat rhythmically pumping new life into the team’s processes” (p. 135) providing stability to the team.

Establishing a communication pattern in the early phase of a team’s development is important for helping groups make decisions and solve problems. Social cognition theory (Bandura, 1986) reinforces the importance of strong communication patterns and suggests that empowerment is a socially constructed phenomenon requiring extensive communication, trust, and confidence in the skills of other team members. Roberto (2004) found that “groups attained greater efficiency and consensus if they made a series of small but critical choices during the process, rather than focusing entirely on the final selection of a course of action” (p. 639). He used the metaphor of “pruning a tree” in that successful groups systematically “pruned” member ideas, thoughts, and views, whereas the less effective teams tried to simultaneously analyze all views, which often proved to be cognitively overwhelming. “Pruning” makes the task more manageable and makes the evaluation process more transparent, enhancing members’ perception of fairness in the process while gradually building momentum that is more sustainable.

Teams often experience the tension of finding the balance between efficiency in decision-making and the need to build consensus for smooth implementation. Previous research suggests that attempts to enhance efficiency inhibit the development of understanding and commitment (Roberto, 2004),

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so leaders must find ways to seek the balance between these seemingly opposite polarities. The process of working globally is still in its infancy, and research conducted only a few years ago may need to be confirmed or updated to include recent technologies and team members who have greater exposure to technology and working globally with multiple cultures.

TRUST AND TEAM PROBLEM-SOLVING

Trust has been identified as an essential ingredient by several scholars studying virtual teams (Grabowski & Roberts, 1998; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). For many, trust implies an expectation that someone will do what they say they will do and that they are capable of doing it; however, trust is often undermined by a lack of clarity about purpose and goals or by a lack of understanding of individual roles and responsibilities. Social categorizing theory (Moreland, 1985) posits that people tend to sort one another into categories based on demographics and may attribute greater trust and confidence in other team members who are perceived to be more similar. Kirkman et al. (2004) state that “those who are recognizably different in terms of demographics may be more affected by in-group and out-group biases than those who are more similar” (p. 359). There are, however, certain communication behaviors that either encourage or discourage the building of trust.

Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) organized over 350 graduate students from different countries into virtual teams to study how trust was developed and maintained. They found that although all groups revealed sources of vulnerability, uncertainty, and expectations, how they responded to these challenges had a significant relationship to their final outcome. Specifically, they found that certain communication behaviors facilitated trust early in the team’s lifecycle and other behaviors facilitated trust after the initial start-up phase. Communication behaviors that facilitated trust in the early stages of the team included the following:

- Developing a system for coping with technical and task uncertainty
- Individuals taking the initiative to make suggestions and respond
- Predictable and timely communication with a regular pattern for exchanges

Communication behaviors that facilitated trust after the initial start-up included the following:

- Leadership based on proven expertise and revealing a positive tone.
- Successful transitions from social to task focus with consistent expectations.

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- Team members genuinely solicited input from others and did not judge responses.

Although trust is important to group cohesion and effective problem-solving, an individual's cultural values and cognitions affect their interactions. Trust, decision-making, and problem-solving occur "within intricately interwoven cultural tapestries that transcend individuals" (Stohl, 2001, p. 344). All studies concur that trust is essential to making good decisions and solving problems.

The Global Workforce and Technology

Since the use of the personal computer has become commonplace, there has been an increase in the use of mediated decision support software, and many teams are exploring the use of group decision support systems (GDSSs) and groupware. Groupware is defined by Bidgoli (1996) as "software systems that support a group of decision makers engaged in a common decision-making task by providing access to the same shared environment and information" (p. 59). He describes several levels of support—from software that automates file sharing allowing anonymous input for brainstorming, automatic summaries, and agenda, to advanced systems that structure input into PERT and Gantt charts or automatically suggests appropriate tools such as Delphi techniques or critical path analysis. Some groupware also includes electronic meeting systems that may use real-time computer conferencing, video conferencing, and/or desktop conferencing.

It's important to stress that teams with access to technology do not automatically become better groups. Technology does not guarantee team success. As wonderful as GDSSs might appear, it is obvious that their effective implementation is dependent on the training, protocols, and personal preferences of the members of the work group. As with any software tool, they have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages may include (1) greater satisfaction with meeting outcomes thereby improving morale, (2) documentation in both electronic and hard copy format to serve as a team archives, and (3) enhanced collaboration. Disadvantages would include (1) it may be difficult to reward individuals for outstanding input, (2) those who traditionally have power may lose some influence as input is more democratic and difficult to dominate, and (3) it is harder to implement in an organization because of costs and potential training required. Ultimately, any system is only as useful as the members themselves determine it to be. It is easy to see how GDSSs have the potential to

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advantage those who are more technically competent and those whose cultural values are reinforced by working in an environment that reduces the need for the social and/or relationship aspects of collaboration.

The global workforce is constantly redefining itself, and there is an ongoing need to discover ways to maximize the performance of all employees. Previous research has shown that increased diversity on teams increases creativity and innovation (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Cady & Valentine, 1999; W. Watson et al., 1993), and today's global competition often rests on ingenuity and inventiveness.

Summary

This chapter has examined the competencies, challenges, and strategies for the cosmopolitan leader. The job of managing a global workforce has become more complex and difficult, as leaders must address a myriad of cross-cultural and technological issues. Teams are increasingly working autonomously, requiring more integration and clarification of their communication strategies. Although new technology holds promise for supporting their work, it may also disadvantage members of the workgroup and thereby offset some of the gains of the global team. Proactively anticipating the challenges of multicultural work teams and thoughtfully addressing the technological challenges are vitally important. Cosmopolitan leaders who do this effectively will be those who have positioned their global teams for great achievement.

