

challenges of Intercultural Project managment

General, Virtual and Onsite



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# INTRODUCTION

During the past decade effective project management has become a desired skill that every organization is seeking in people. Projects are now more complex and dispersed among different countries and their successful operation is the key for the organizations and their businesses.

As this is the era of globalization and the market is very competitive, project managers need to be able to understand the sophistications in the problems and come up with ways of solving them within the scope and limitation of the projects. They are the people that need to be smart enough to devise problems into sub problems and use all the members in the project team according to their area of expertise and bring the best outcome from them.

Virtual project management is the system by which virtual teams collaborate for a finite period of time toward a specific goal. A virtual team is a small temporary group of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed knowledge workers who coordinate their work with communication technologies in order to accomplish one or more organization tasks. The virtual teams entail a large set of benefits, such as access to talent, focused virtual knowledge base, reduction of international investment and lower labor costs and on the other hand virtual teams also pose variant challenges like motivation, geographical and cultural differences.

High tech firms increasingly form projects composed of team members with different cultural backgrounds to respond to their customers’ needs. Prior studies have regarded multicultural projects as an important instrument for developing products, yet little effort has been investigated on the issue of onsite projects. This study aims to fulfill the gaps in onsite project management and multicultural teams. In particular, it examines the features of project management and challenges mediated by the teamwork processes and moderated by the different backgrounds of team members represented by their cultural values. Chapter 9 of this paper dedicated to features of onsite projects management with multicultural teams: the chapter commences with the concept of a project management and collocated team definition and proceeds to the major aspects of traditional teams on the basis of challenges.

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# INTERCULTURAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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## Chapter 1: Intercultural Project Management in General and in Bangladesh

### 1.1 Background:

As the usage of World Wide Web grew enormously in the past decade so did the number of global development teams. Especially in the IT field, teams having members, for example from Europe, US, Eastern European countries, Middle East, Philippines, South Asia is a common scenario. The more the teams have cultural diversity the more complexity is seen in managing projects. Although there are numbers of  methods have been developed in order to ensure the successful accomplishment of projects but the performance of projects are highly inﬂuenced by Intercultural factors like language, race, age, gender, religion, sexual preferences, beliefs, habits, etc. So, the analysis of these factors is an essential task to gain and guarantee fruitful output.

Bangladesh has also become a stakeholder in the IT boom by creating conducive environments, drawing attention of IT companies around the globe to invest in the country. The country, with its huge underutilized man power (cheaper than India, China and Malaysia) benefited from the growth of IT sector by providing a nationwide IT infrastructure and skilled labor force. (1)

Many companies have been managing projects from their Bangladesh offices and people from different nationalities working on those projects. Addition to this, people of Bangladesh has many cultural differences. They have different colloquial languages, culture, food habit etc. in different parts of the country. All these matters play important role in project management. This paper is to provide insights into cultural issues to keep in mind in order to manage teams and projects effectively in Bangladesh. This will also be useful for team leaders, managers, chief executive officers, chairmen, primarily the decision makers; those who would like to create offices or teams in the country in future.

### 1.2 Objective of the study:

The major objective of this study is to analyze the intercultural issues of Project Management in general as well as in the context of Bangladesh.

The specific objectives of this report are-

1. To provide insight about Project Management, its components and constraints
2. To find out the general and intercultural issues in Project Management.
3. To identify challenges and realities of intercultural Project Management in Bangladesh.

### 1.3 Methodology:

For data collection, a software consultancy firm in Bangladesh has been chosen. The company has been running for past 15 years and operating their Bangladesh office for last 10 years. Its main branch is in the United Kingdom and it also has an office in Germany. The company has over fifty employees in total and 30 of them are in Bangladesh. Its business type is Information Consulting Services and annual revenue is seven million dollars.

### 1.4 Data collection methodology:

Data collection have been done in the following two ways –

1. Survey
2. Interview

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### 1.5 Primary data:

All employees including the managing director, country managers and executive assistants have been provided with an online survey form to answer some carefully selected questions.

### 1.6 Secondary data:

Some persons of the same company have been selected in order to be interviewed. Questions were developed carefully and have been asked over internet through online conference software, Skype.

Interview was taken to gain insights into their experience and get to know as to what they think about issues regarding intercultural project management.

The following table lists the people who have been selected for the interview and the rationale behind choosing them –

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Person | Rationale |
| 1 | Managing director. | Main manager of the company works from the UK office. Have three distributed teams. Also a team of country managers, executive assistants, office assistants etc. Have the overall understanding and experience of project management, especially in intercultural context. |
| 2 | Country manager, Bangladesh | Manages a local team of lead and other developers, executive and office assistants. Recruits people in Bangladesh, determines salary, bonuses and yearly increments of local employees. Reports to the managing director on daily basis. Have first-hand experience of building team in Bangladesh. |
| 3 | Executive assistant, UK and Bangladesh. | Both the executive assistants in Bangladesh report to managing director and the country managers. Generates salary sheets and inform individuals of different office related information. Maintains organizational charts, documents. Sends and replies to office related emails to both the employees and sometimes to clients regarding invoicing. As they reply to employees’ email regarding office related queries sometimes they have to deal with angry employees regarding issue with salary statements, their amounts. Sometimes they also have to face angry clients for invoicing related issues. |
| 4 | Team lead, UK. Works with Bangladesh team over internet. Also works with the local team on day to day basis. | Manages project teams in UK. Responsible for selecting who would work on which project and ensuring the projects are done successfully. As he works collaboratively with the global teams, especially the Bangladesh team, he is much aware of the issues and challenges of projects also the intercultural issues, especially dealing with the Bangladesh team. |
| 5 | Team lead, Bangladesh. Works with the UK team over internet and the local Bangladesh team on daily basis. | Responsible for supervising and managing project teams in Bangladesh. Decides the project teams and members in Bangladesh office. So, he is aware of the cultural context in Bangladesh as well as the challenges faced while working with global teams. His experience would be valuable for the study. |
| 6 | A developer in Bangladesh, who works over internet with overseas teams and went to UK to work on-site with the UK team. | Works on local Bangladesh team and with the global teams on projects. While working on-site in the UK he observed, first-hand, the cultural differences in both the teams. He had to learn and adapt the working culture and ethics of UK and has valuable input for the study. |
| 7 | A developer in Germany, who works over internet with both the UK and Bangladesh team as well overseas teams from clients (depends on the projects). He also has been to Bangladesh to train Bangladesh team and work on-site. | Works on German team and with the other global teams. Has been to Bangladesh and experienced huge cultural differences between the first world and third world. He had to learn and adapt with the teams on-site and gained a good experience working with the people on-site of different cultures and completely different country. As mentioned before, even in Bangladesh, there are many cultural differences based on the different regions of the country, so this broadens his horizon and that experience would be useful for the study. |

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### 1.7 Limitation of the study:

There is always room for improvements and the study is no difference. It was not free from limitations. These limitations are discussed briefly below:

1. **Inadequacy of Data:** One company was chosen as a sample. That means the survey was done on only one company. It would have been good if it could be done in several companies. As the issues have dealt in the context of Bangladesh the only Bangladeshi company I am acquainted with was chosen for the survey.
2. **Limitation of Time:** The time available was not enough to conduct the survey on many companies. That hindered the quality of the survey.

### 

### 1.8 Questionnaire:

The questions that have been asked by online survey are given below –

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Question | Question Type | Options |
| 1 | Your role in the company | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Manager 2. Supervisor 3. Project Manager 4. Programmer/Developer/Executive 5. Student/Working Student |
| 2 | Your role in the project you are currently involved in | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Project Manager 2. Lead Developer 3. Programmer/Developer/Executive 4. Tester 5. Advisor |
| 3 | How many people are in the team? | Short text | Blank text box |
| 4 | Are your teams multicultural? (i.e people from different cultural background are involved in the team) | Yes/No | 1. Yes 2. No |
| 5 | Do you prefer a culturally diverse team? | Yes/No | 1. Yes 2. No |
| 6 | Why so? (i.e if you prefer intercultural project team why / if you do not prefer, why) | Long text | Blank text box |
| 7 | What project environment are you currently involved in? | Multiple choice (One answer can be selected) | 1. Virtual 2. On site 3. Both |
| 8 | Which project environment do you prefer? | Multiple choice (One answer can be selected) | 1. Virtual 2. On site 3. Both |
| 9 | Are you involved in multiple projects at the same time? | Yes/No | 1. Yes 2. No |
| 10 | What you do think? What goes wrong in projects? Check 3 | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Lack of Planning 2. Poor User Input (& Mismatch of Expectations) 3. Lack of Senior Management/Executive Support 4. Poor Definition of Project Scope 5. Unrealistic Timescales 6. Lack of adequate Resources 7. Incomplete or Changing Requirements 8. Lack of Leadership and/or Communication Skills 9. Lack of Project Specific Skills/Competence |
| 11 | What are the major contributors to poor project performance? | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Management 2. Requirements 3. Systems Engineering 4. Reliability 5. Schedule 6. Test Planning 7. Software (Architecture, Design/development discipline, skill levels) 8. Maintainability |
| 12 | What are the top success factors? Check 3. | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Project Mission 2. Top Management Support 3. Project Schedule/Plan 4. Client Consultation 5. Personnel 6. Technical Tasks 7. Client Acceptance 8. Monitoring and Feedback 9. Communication |
| 13 | What are the top challenges of working on a culturally diverse team? Check 3. | Checkbox (Multiple answers can be selected) | 1. Communication 2. Integration 3. Team motivation 4. Difference in understanding of work etiquette 5. Resistance to change 6. Building trust |
| 14 | Would you like to see yourself as a project manager? | Yes/No |  |
| 15 | Why so? (i.e if you would like to be a project manager, why / if you do not want to be a project manager, why) | Long text |  |
| 16 | Which PM process do you prefer? | Multiple choice (One answer can be selected) | 1. Traditional Waterfall Process 2. Agile Project Management Process 3. Depends on the project |
| 17 | What do you think? Project management training pays off? | Yes/No |  |
| 18 | Comments (your overall experience in projects, your suggestions on how to improve project performance etc.) | Long text |  |

The questions that have been asked by interview are given below –

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. | Question |
| 1 | What is you role in the team/company? |
| 2 | How long have you been working here? |
| 3 | How your day to day works affect others in your team/company? |
| 4 | Is your team/company culturally diverse? |
| 5 | Are they from different nations or from different cultures within the same country? |
| 6 | Do you have issues working with your team? What types of issues? |
| 7 | Do you find yourselves always motivated working with your team? |
| 8 | Are you able to motivate your team? |
| 9 | Are you comfortable enough going to superior or subordinate with any sort of issues? |
| 10 | What challenges do you face while working with your diverse team? |
| 11 | What will you recommend the project managers to manage a culturally diverse team? |
| 12 | Tell about your overall experience working with people from other culture. |

## Chapter 2: Background Theory

### 2.1 What is a project?

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result. (2)

If one organizes a large party or event, this is called a project. Because it is a specific party, for a specific reason, it is held on a specific date and time. That means it is unique, temporary and has a defined beginning and end created a specific product or service.

At work, if an office is moved, it is most likely being handled as a project.

If one company decides to hire new virtual employees, the whole hiring process can be handled as a project.

Everyday operations, is not a project. Washing clothes is not a project.

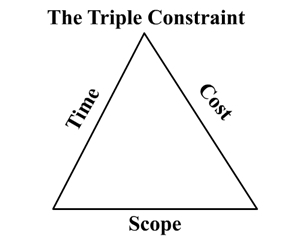
When a project is executed, certain constraints are faced by the project team.  A constraint is a factor that might imply some restrictions on a project and define its limitations. It defines the what, how and when of a project.

For example, if a party is to be arranged, and if it has to be occurred on a certain date, that is constraint.

If new software has to be developed for a company, it has to be developed within a certain date and it has a limited budget. These are constraints of the project. A project manager has to ensure the overall management of the project by overseeing and using their knowledge and skills along with right project management tools and techniques, bearing the constraints in mind.

The formal definition of “constraint” is: “The state, quality, or sense of being restricted to a given course of action or inaction. An applicable restriction or limitation, either internal or external to a project, which will affect the performance of the project or a process”. (3)

The three most significant project constraints - schedule, cost and scope are known as the project management triangle or the triple constraint.



When one is changed, it affects one or both of the others.

### 2.2 Who is a project manager?

Project managers are organized, passionate and goal-oriented who understand what projects have in common, and their strategic role in how organizations succeed, learn and change.

While managing the trade-offs, the project manager (PM) is expected to integrate all aspects of

The project, ensure that the proper knowledge and resources are available when and where needed, and above all, ensure that the expected results are produced in a timely, cost-effective manner. (4)

As a summary, a project manager is supposed to have the following skills -

1. Leadership skills - key element of a successful project, PMs have to be people person
2. Technical skills - ability to decompose complex problems into sub problems and solve them
3. PM process skills - the whole project management process, how to start and manage and control the project

And a project manager has the following roles –

1. Working with people in the project
2. Gather different technical expertise required for and integrate into the project
3. Looking at the overall picture of the project, and divide the whole problem in smaller components and assign people to appropriate tasks
4. Dealing with stakeholders in the project

### 2.3 What is project management?

One of the early attempts of defining project management says -

Project Management is the application of a collection of tools and techniques (such as the CPM and matrix organization) to direct the use of diverse resources toward the accomplishment of a unique, complex, one-time task within time, cost and quality constraints. Each task requires a particular mix of these tools and techniques structured to fit the task environment and life cycle (from conception to completion) of the task.

The project management institute (PMI) defines,

Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements. It is accomplished through the use of processes such as initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing. (5)

Project Management provides an organization with powerful tools that improves its ability to plan, control, implement and control its activities as well as the ways in which it utilizes its people and resources. (6)

The British Standard for project management BS6079, 1996 defined project management as:

The planning, monitoring and control of all aspects of a project and the motivation of all those involved in it to achieve the project objectives on time and to the specified cost, quality and performance.

### 2.4 Project life cycle:

A typical project goes through different processes. According to PMBOK, there are phases of a project. These are –

1. Initiation – in this phase the project need and objective is identified. Requirement from the client is analyzed and, a feasibility study is conducted, to develop a new product or modify an existing one.
2. Planning – planning for the project is made and the milestones are set in this phase. The risk assessment is done as well.
3. Execution – in this phase the project plan is put into motion. Project manager and project team spend most of the time in this phase.
4. Monitoring and controlling – The project is controlled and monitored in order to guarantee a successful delivery. Corrective actions are taken if necessary.
5. Closing – this is the final phase of a project and the final product is delivered for live operations. The documents are also delivered with the product.

### 2.5 Project management activities:

Primarily, there are three key activities of a project, namely, Planning, Scheduling and Controlling.

1. Planning – Planning activities include defining project activities, planning resources etc.
2. Scheduling – Development of detailed planning, milestones etc. are included in scheduling activity.
3. Controlling – controlling and measuring the project progress, mitigate issues are controlling activities.

### 2.6 Project management methodologies:

There are many project management methodologies that have been developed in order to provide frameworks for planning, managing, controlling and delivery of projects successfully. Some of them are mentioned below -

1. Traditional waterfall method – In waterfall method, a project has to be completed once all of the requirements are developed and the project has come to an end completing all the phases. Once the requirements are fixed, there is no way to make any change that might appear needed over time. It is a rigid method.
2. Agile project management method – In agile method, a project can be delivered in iterations. The project starts from a firm foundation and delivers small chunks of it and takes feedback from the customer. As the whole project is delivered in iterations, it allows the facility to incorporate changes in requirements. It is a quite flexible method.
3. PRINCE2 – It is a process-driven project management method that focuses on high-level activities, such as management, organization and control — but not lower level activities, such as work breakdown or scheduling. It is based on seven principles, seven themes and seven processes. (7)
4. Rapid Application Method (RAD) – It is a method with rapid prototyping and iterative model with no specific planning involved. This methodology put more emphasis on process and less importance in planning. The main aim is to develop project at a faster pace. It follows iterative and incremental process.

## Chapter 3: Data Analysis

### 3.1 Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA):

The questions for the online survey were created via an online tool and an email was sent with the link of the survey to all the members who participated in it. Survey was available online for 15 days so that everyone can fill it in their spare time. The total time for filling the form was estimated 15 minutes.

During these 15 days, we were looking at the form and we went through the excel file that was recording all the responses from the survey tool. We were going through responses from each individual. While doing so, it has been realized that one question needed to be added in the survey form. Question number 13 was added and all the members were informed of the update on the survey form and people were asked kindly to fill up the form again and thanks to their courtesy they did so.

### 

### 3.2 Deriving the main findings:

After the deadline was passed, the excel file was downloaded and used to generate summary from the data. Excel graphical tool was used to create graphs and charts. In total, 45 persons (90 percent of the people) responded to the survey.

The summary of the findings are discussed below –

1. 50% of the people who responded are developers or executives, 17% of them are managers, project managers or supervisors, rest of them are working students
2. 83% of them are developers/executive in the project they are currently involved in and 17% of them are lead developers
3. Majority of them (67%) work in a team of 5 persons
4. And majority work in on-site projects (50%), whereas 33% are from virtual teams and rest (17%) work on both types of teams
5. 67% of the people like both types of working environment, on the contrary, 17% prefer virtual environment and 17% would prefer onsite environment.
6. 50% of them work on multiple projects (more than) at the same time and 50% of them work only on one project at a time.
7. Half of the people believe that the main thing that goes wrong in projects is lack of leadership and / or communication skills (50%). Then come the issue of incomplete or change in requirements (33%) and lack of project specific skills / competence.
8. Half the people (50%) also believe that proper test planning is the major contributor to poor project performance whereas 33% voted for lack of proper leadership and rest thinks it is the overall system engineering that is the main reason behind poor performance of projects.
9. Majority of the population (66%) believe communication is the top success factor while rest of them voted for project mission (33%) and top management support (17%).
10. Then we asked them whether they would like to see themselves as a project manager in future. Majority of them (83%) said yes they would like to be a project manager someday.
11. They also provided reason as to why they would like become so. Some said, they want to apply their experience with projects, lessons from past failures in order to succeed in project delivery. Some simply said they believe they can do it. Those who do not want to be a project manager in future, one of them said, lack of experience as a developer makes it unrealistic to become a project manager. That means, they want to gain a lot of experience as a developer first. In essence, they think experience bring success.
12. As we mentioned before that there many project management methodologies we also asked people which methodology they prefer. We only mentioned the traditional waterfall and agile project management. Majority people (66%) prefer agile project management over the traditional sequential method (20%) and the rest (14%) think that it depends of the project.
13. 83% of the people working have a culturally diverse team whereas 17% of them do not work in team with people from different culture.
14. And 83% of them said that they prefer a team that is diverse in culture and 17% of them do not prefer teams with cultural diversity.
15. Those who prefer diversity in team, they mentioned two reason for their preference –
    1. Relations in such teams build on professionalism and makes it easy to address issues
    2. Every culture has its own Strengths (S) and weaknesses (W). And they believe diversity helps teams to maximize S and minimize W.
16. On the other hand, people who do not prefer working in a diverse team mentioned the following issue –
    1. Different cultures bring problems
17. Majority of the people (66%) think that the top challenge of working on a culturally diverse team is the communication, whereas 20% believe team motivation is a major challenge. Some (10%) find it hard to build trust in the team and rest (10%) think integration is a key problem.
18. Then there was a question that asked what people think about project management training. Do the trainings pay off? All of them (100%) said yes, project management trainings pay off. That means even the top management think that arraigning trainings has advantages and help to have more productive team.
19. Finally, there was a blank text box that asked people to tell about their overall experience and suggestions on how to improve project performance. Only one person responded to the question. I think this is due to the fact that everyone had a lot of thing to share and they thought it will take them time to write in the online survey form. So, ignoring the question was convenient for them. I think this is one of the disadvantages of doing a survey. Some questions could be ignored by people. Face to face interview is helpful in this case. However, who responded to question believe –
    1. Project success is guaranteed by motivation and professionalism of team members. Everyone must be willing to communicate and contribute towards same goals despite their differences.

### 3.3 Findings from the interview:

As mentioned earlier, the interview was taken through internet by Skype. In total 7 persons were interviewed and each interview took 15 minutes or more in some cases. There were different dates for every individual and every session was recorded through a digital media recorder. After that, points were noted from the audios, collated and summarized.

The summary drawn from the interview are discussed below –

1. When establishing a company what comes first is the name of the company. By that people recognize a company and it is the brand. In Bangladesh, it has been noticed that people value and respect company which has English names. It could be a name of a river, city, a direction (east, west, north etc.) or any English name. People also tend to trust foreign companies instead of local companies. Local small organizations try to utilize this mindset of people in their advantage and use such names. In addition to this, as Bangladesh was once a colony of British Empire so the colonial mindset is everywhere. Government job has the highest esteem and respect because it has stability. After government job, foreign company offshoring from Bangladesh are regarded as stable.
2. After establishing comes hiring people. Managers, mainly the managing director and country managers said that it is a hard job to establish a team right for the job with the right attitude. For this, recruiting is a crucial part of brining right people with the right mindset. There are cultural differences, in countries, even as to how recruitment works. For example, British never send picture with their CVs whereas it is quite opposite in Germany. People do not mind sending picture with CV and same culture is seen in Bangladesh. So for recruitment it is important to adopt a strategy that is compatible with the local culture. They also said that as Bangladesh has many cultural differences in the different parts of the country they also want to hire people from cultures within the country. They see it one form of training and they believe it broadens individuals’ horizons.
3. In terms of wearing dresses in work environment, the more a work environment is polished, disciplined, people come to work wearing the formal dresses, the more respect that work environment has.
4. Religion play an important role in the daily lives of people in Bangladesh and it is crucial to realize and respect to understand the team. People like to get good bonuses during the holy festivals, which happen twice a year. It motivates them a lot and brings happiness and joy to the team. People do not mind getting no or little performance bonuses but during the holy festivals it is a must. Even non-Muslims also like to get bonus during that time.

During the month of Ramadan, people fast from dawn to dusk. Fasting means no food, not even drinks. People tend to get angry easily during this time. It is important to understand these so team members speak softly and calmly with each other and even if someone gets angry they try not to react. Specially, managers, supervisors, team leads should be aware of this issue.

Many people pray five times a day. So, it may happen that there is an important meeting ongoing and someone might want everyone else to excuse them for five or ten minutes. It should not be considered as an insult or a bad manner because the person who is seeking for it does not want to miss the prayer. Meeting conductors, team members should understand and respect individuals’ inclination toward religion. It also makes them happy with their superiors and team members.

While in conferences or abroad for projects, Bangladeshi people might encounter culture shock for example, drinking of alcohol. It is better not to offer them any alcohol because it is not their culture as well as prohibited by their religion. They might take an offense.

1. There is respect for everyone, especially for the elders. People do not call their senior colleagues by their names. It is considered as an offence. People usually call their seniors as ‘brothers’ or ‘boss’ or ‘sir’.
2. People are generous and love to feed others. One person who came to train and work on-site with the Bangladesh team from Germany mentioned that this something he did not expect. He was invited by many in their houses for dinners and lunches. People also feed him in restaurants and became offended when he wanted to pay the bills.
3. The person who went to the UK from Bangladesh said that British people are extremely polite and if they ask someone nicely ‘could you please do that for me when you have time’ this simply means I want you to do it now. It is really important to understand these little things in order to understand our team members better.

He also mentioned ice breaking with the British people is easy. Anyone can start speaking to a British people simply talking about the weather. British love speaking about weather. British people have some different work ethics than the Bangladesh and it is necessary to understand these differences.

1. People in Bangladesh are not too much professional. They do not argue over salaries and tend not to switch companies rapidly. So, a lot less employee turnover rate is seen in companies. If they like the company and environments they do not want to switch if there are no overwhelming reasons. In some countries, for example in India, there is a lot of employee turnover rate, 50% which is alarming for global companies. Employees may switch companies for mere increase of 200 dollars in salary. It is not the case in Bangladesh.
2. There are differences in weekdays and weekends in Bangladesh than many other countries. Friday is weekend in Bangladesh as well as weekly prayer day. So, asking people for working on Friday shall be considered as an offense. Project manages or team leads that rely on people from Bangladesh team should plan and divide work according to weekdays and weekends so that no emergency arises and they do not need to call someone in Bangladesh to work on Friday. At the same time, Sunday is weekday in Bangladesh whereas in most countries it is the weekend and weekly prayer day. So, the managers and leads in Bangladesh working with global teams should plan accordingly.
3. As there are differences in culture and languages within Bangladeshi people, it is sometimes hard to mitigate risk of stereotyping, prejudices and racism. Not everyone would be same and they might not communicate what issues they are facing within the team. This will lead to distrust and disintegration within the team. Supervisors to sit with their subordinates on regular basis to find out where their issues are, what they are working on, where they are in terms of career and where they want to see themselves. Based on those, supervisors to resolve individual issues and set goals and objectives and arrange relevant trainings for them.
4. Companies are now adopting agile project management methodology than the traditional waterfall method because this has been proven as useful. It ensures delivery of products early, with increments and gets the early ROI (Return On Investment). It is also beneficial for a culturally diverse team. An agile framework called DSDM (Dynamic System Development Method) deals with the overall management of projects and it provides a lot of guidance to strengthen communication. DSDM’s emphasis on human interaction (e.g. through the use of workshops), visualization (e.g. through the use of modeling, prototyping and iterative development) and clearly defined roles is at the heart of excellent project communication. These activities have been proven effective for a culturally diverse team.

## Chapter 4: Reflection

### 4.1 Summary:

The whole project helped me get to know many aspects of project management. It also showed the cultural issues seen in general also in teams working from Bangladesh. It was an eye opening project and people shared their experiences, opinion and also thanked for conducting such a research. I really enjoyed working on this project, learned by doing and it generated a lot of enthusiasm in my mindset.

### 4.2 Next steps:

In future, I would also like to conduct the same research collecting data from some other companies. My aim would be to collect as many data as possible and use other statistical tools to summarize and make sense from the data.

# INTERCULTURAL VIRTUAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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## Chapter 5: Virtual Project Management

### 5.1 Background Area - Going Virtual

The phenomenal growth of mobile technologies, as well as the global adoption of the Internet, have altered the way people access and share information. The division of technical knowledge, brought about by cultural differences and inequalities that fragment societies and the capacities of individuals, has been quickly overcome by a faster and cheaper exchange of knowledge. This provides technological know-how to a wider range of cultures and communities around the world, opening up the possibility of incorporating international workforce with minimal expansion needs. Global markets exceed nationalities and seek key advantages in terms of cost, quality and flexibility.

The virtual teams entail a large set of inherent benefits, such as increased pool capacity, access to talent, long active shifts with dispersed teams, focused virtual knowledge base, smaller sites, reduction of international investment and lower labor costs. Coming to lower wage markets. From the perspective of team members involved in distance work, there are a substantial number of recognized benefits and on the other hand virtual teams also poses wide variety of challenges like geographical difference, motivation and cultural differences.

A survey of more than 1,000 respondents created by Wrike, Inc. shows that the three main benefits identified are time savings (41%), productivity increase (29%) and opportunity to focus on work, instead of office politics (10%). On the other hand, the main challenges identified by the respondents are lack of direct communication (38%), difficulty accessing data (21%) and poor visibility of peer actions (19%). (Filev, 2013).

Project managers, regardless of the typology of the project, are not able to carry out their work without the help of a project team and the proper evaluation of the stakeholders. Therefore, an effective project manager must be able to calculate a balance between technical, personal and conceptual skills, in order to help the manager to analyze and interact properly.

### 5.2 Virtual Project Management

One of the most prevalent project management document is the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) edited by the Project Management Institute (PMI) defines Project Management as *“the application of knowledge, skills tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements.”* (Project Management Institute (PMI), 2008)

Virtual project management is the system by which virtual teams collaborate for a finite period of time toward a specific goal. There is a multiplicity of factors that may explain the increasing adoption of virtual project management in the current international workplace. The current increase in virtual projects and their economic importance within the project management industry make it a convincing case to investigate the factors that affect the success of the virtual team. This “Virtual Project Management” paper aims to explore the characteristics of progress, motivation and challenges in intercultural virtual environments.

### 5.3 Virtual Teams

Across literature there are multiple definitions of virtual teams. In the literature section there is a wider definition. An introductory definition is the one that Ebraim (2009) summarize from their own literary review:

*“A virtual team is a small temporary groups of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed knowledge workers who coordinate their work predominantly with electronic information and communication technologies in order to accomplish on e or more organization tasks.”*

### 5.4 Intercultural Virtual Projects

Culture is a differentiating aspect that has usually been used to describe Diversity. In each culture there is a specific capital of beliefs, ideas, values, myths and, above all, those that unite a community. An individual from that community, when involved in the working group of individuals from other communities to achieve the goal, forms the Intercultural Project environment. If all individuals are not correlated and work at a distance, they form the virtual intercultural project environment.

### 5.5 Challenges in Intercultural Virtual Projects

In the new virtual project environment, team members seldom share a common workplace, rarely seen, perhaps never worked together before, and may never work together again once the project is complete. In other words, when on-site project management has to manage virtual teams, it becomes virtual project management.

Intercultural virtual projects face tougher challenges than onsite projects. It is harder to manage the virtual teams to be successful than onsite teams. One of the reasons is the difficulty to create the common environment for the people from the different culture background and to foster motivation for the team as a whole, directly affected by the lack of face-to-face interaction. The consequences of low motivation can be directly connected to increased difficulty in monitoring the team performance, misunderstandings and perceptions of isolation within projects.

The platform of virtual projects allows organizations to surpass the boundaries of geographical distance, time zones, and cultural differences, however they are not deprived of specific challenges. The four major areas in which the management of global virtual teams face significant challenges: communication, culture, technology, and project management.

With the rise of virtual projects, it is particularly important to adapt management and leadership strategies to the new paradigm. Project management knowledge and techniques need to be applied on virtual projects, however, reduced direct human interaction, technical complexities and other characteristics require that project leaders of virtual teams address various issues of enhanced difficulty when approaching intercultural virtual environments.

## Chapter 6: Theory and Literature Review

### 6.1 Virtual Projects and Teams

The virtual project is one in which the participants are geographically distributed to an extent that they may seldom, meet face-to-face as a team.

A virtual team is a set of individuals who work independently working together to provide business solutions. A virtual team will typically include members who work primarily from home and may have a small, centralized meeting office and group projects can be planned and executed.

Virtual teams reside within the interaction of three larger systems: people, processes and technology. These are the components of virtual teams, and as such, need to be addressed in order to have a successfully collaborating team.

As it has been shown, virtual teams main characteristic derives from the lack of physical existence. The tasks, goals, or missions that they intend to accomplish do not introduce necessary differential aspects, however, it is the way these tasks are accomplished, and the unique constraints they face, that differentiate virtual teams from onsite ones.

### 6.2 Challenges in Virtual Projects

In a way, the most challenges identified relate to some of the special characteristics of virtual teams. As it has been pointed out, space and time are some of main characteristics, however, these factors have four main causes for concern: geography, culture, organization, and social issues.

Geography, culture, organization and social issues offer serious challenges in all types of projects, or even, any type of enterprise that has a wide-territory and that involves a multiplicity of individuals. It is true, that virtual environments are affected more severely from these challenges. Thus, the only truly challenge that is only present in virtual teams that has not relation in on-side ones resides in the lack of face-to-face interaction. However, trust, innovation, and leadership are challenges that exist in collocated teams, as well. With this in mind and as a fitting broad summary of virtual team challenges. The first challenge is precisely building trust within the team, which in virtual environment stems on performance consistency, rather than social bonds. The second challenge is maximizing process gains and minimizing process losses. The third challenge deals with overcoming feelings of isolation and detachment associated with virtual teamwork. The fourth challenge is balancing technical and interpersonal skill among virtual team members, which links back to selecting the right individuals for specific virtual environments, due to their technical skills rather than interpersonal skills.

### 6.3 Motivation in Virtual Projects

The fact that motivation is discussed separately because it is challenge and a solution at the same time. Motivation is positively related to productivity, makes it an area worth to be invested in. The two types of work factors influence motivation: hygiene factors and motivation factors. Hygiene factors refer to the contextual features of the working environment, such as salary, working conditions, interpersonal relations, etc. Motivation factors refer to the characteristics of the work itself, such as sense of achievement, responsibility, advancement and growth; in other words, progress.

## Chapter 7: Methodology and Analysis

### 7.1 Data Collection with Google Forms

The google form interviews are the main data sources for this paper. The interviews consist of a series of multiple choice, mandatory, optional questions followed by some description questions that aim for an extended reply or clarification. The questions are divided in different categories which at the same time can be focused into three main blocks: background and experience of the respondent, virtual projects, motivation and culture.

### 7.2 Data and Analysis

#### 7.2.1 Virtual Environments

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **ADVANTAGES** | **DISADVANTAGES** | **TIME ZONES** | **FACE TO FACE** |
| Respondent 1 | The challenge of meeting new cultures and establishing new relationships. Travel. | Language barriers. Making everybody understand what needs to be done. | It's not a problem. It's a challenge that can easily be bridged. | Depends on projects. |
| Respondent 2 | Flexibility in working schedule. | Not being able to physically interact with people. | Not a problem. | Normally there's no face to face interaction nor meetings. |
| Respondent 3 | Access to talent, flexibility of working hours, higher productivity. | Scheduling everybody is difficult. | It's not a problem. | Depends on the project. |
| Respondent 4 | More flexibility. Higher productivity as you can work with the best talent in continuous shifts. | It's hard to keep up with the progress of team members. | It's not a problem. | It's important to do it as much as you can. |

Table 1 Virtual Environments

The category identified is the one regarding virtual environments and how the respondent experiences their particular characteristics. This category shows interesting points that all respondents seem to have experienced. Challenges, cultures, talent, focus are some of the words that are mostly used. The time variable is a particularly interesting one, as several respondents show the advantage of higher productivity due to the possibility of having continuous shifts across the world in different time-zones.

#### 7.2.2 Virtual Teams (Bruce Tuckman’s Model)

It is important to look into the key activities in the lifecycle of virtual team management. While tradition team dynamics lifecycle stages are defined by Tuckman (1965) as Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and later on Adjourning.

The first phase is Phase A: Preparations, where the mission of the project is developed, team members are assigned, tasks are designed, rewards systems are defined, technology is selected, and an organizational integration is planned.

Phase B: Launch starts with a Kick-off event, on which team members get acquainted, the goals are explained and clarified, and a set of rules are set.

The third phase, Phase C: Performance Management revolves around leadership regulation of communication, assessment of motivation and emotions, and knowledge management.

Phase D: Team development is the fourth phase, and holds the assessment of needs and deficits of the team. Individual and/or team training is conducted, as well as the evaluation of the effects of the training.

Finally, Phase E: Re-integration of team members into the organization or other projects.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **FORMING** | **STORMING** | **NORMING** | **PERFORMING** |
| Respondent 1 | Project team members vary from project to project. | Team harmony and positive peer pressure are infectious. | 90% of communication happens via phone and conference calls. Teams are encouraged to communicate. | Knocking down barriers. |
| Respondent 2 | Teams are mixed with client and team members. | Teams are approached on one- by-one basis. | Communication is done with email, IM, phone. | Aim for a very open environment so that everyone can communicate any direction they want. |
| Respondent 3 | Project team members vary from project to project. | Team dynamics are difficult to get going. | Daily Skype meetings with tasks assigned in meetings and followed by emails. | Using the pyramid of communication. Between face-to-face and email. |
| Respondent 4 | Members are dispersed. | The stress lays in the planning phase, instead of brainstorming. Task oriented approach. | Communication is constant with email, instant messaging and Skype. | Use a team site where people can share things or show their profiles. |

Table 2 Virtual Teams (Tuckman’s Stages)

The categories chosen for this theme are taken directly from Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development model (Tuckman, 1965). The patterns that emerge from the first category are the way the teams are created. The teams are assembled normally by a multi-organization approach with different (and sometimes conflicting) roles and goals, and normally are delivered to the project managers already assembled.

The second category, since is symbolically linked to the storming stage deals with the dynamics that teams follow when interpersonal challenges arise. The narratives of the respondents are surprising when they try to think about this process. All respondents mentioned that either they did not experience problems, or that the problems between team members are negligible due to the limited interactions and the higher task oriented nature of Virtual Project Management environment.

The third category, the norming stage defined by Tuchman, responds to the dynamics on which virtual teams communicate or how tasks are assigned and delivered to the teams.

The fourth category of this theme, Performing, which relates more to the way the team performs as a team, instead of the actual tasks and process produced and delivered by the team.

#### 7.2.3 Motivation in Intercultural Virtual Projects

The importance of motivation in Inter-cultural virtual projects is provided in two ways. The first one in a scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (critically important). The second one in relation to virtual projects. The responses show a very definite pattern. The value of importance averages 7.75, which signifies a high importance of motivation in virtual teams. However, almost all respondents clarified that the importance of motivation is equal in any type of project, virtual or not. They all agree that fostering motivation in virtual projects is particularly more challenging and difficult than in onsite projects and specially motivation becomes quite challenging in intercultural environment.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **IMPORTANCE** | **INTER CULUTRAL ASPECTS** | **MOTIVATORS** | **DEMOTIVATORS** |
| Respondent 1 | 9 out of 10 | With similar cultures it's easy to see if they're motivated. Overseas is more difficult. | Important to set goals together and build relationships in the beginning. | It's difficult to maintain high motivation if people fear for their jobs. |
| Respondent 2 | 7 out of 10 | Being virtual is a challenge. Having experience in the field is a big leverage point. | Knocking down Cultural barriers for the team. Focus on communication and the good things. | Big changes in the direction of projects. |
| Respondent 3 | 7 out of 10 | The best way to see if they're motivated is by looking at the completion of objectives. | Meaningful work. Listening to the team and the individuals. | Bossing people around. |
| Respondent 4 | 8 out of 10 | It shows because people don't do what they have to. | Choosing the right personality for virtual projects. Task driven people will be motivated. | Can't think of anything. |

Table 3 Motivation in Inter-Cultural Virtual Projects

If motivation is important, how do managers see if the team is motivated or not. If the individuals are doing their work, on time, and as requested, that is a sign of a motivated individual. If the project continues its course and moves forward, if it progresses, motivation should be high. In this case, it is not because of progress that team members are motivated, it is because managers see progress that they assume the team members are motivated. It is a little but important difference.

The last 2 categories try to capture the respondent’s experiences in regards of motivators and demotivators within an inter-cultural virtual project. It is worth pointing out that these factors are not necessarily different from those of onsite projects, as, for example, the cultural difference is a well-known demotivators in any kind of working environment. This category below is probably the most important of all, as provides a self-reflection quality that puts in perspective the other answers.

#### 7.2.4 Self-Motivation in Inter-Cultural Virtual Projects

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN INTERCULTURAL VIRTUAL PROJECT?** |
| Respondent 1 | Diversity of projects and dealing with different people of different cultures around the globe. |
| Respondent 2 | New challenges. See the group complete a project successfully motivates me. |
| Respondent 3 | Learning new technology. Pushing myself to more difficult levels. |
| Respondent 4 | I'm motivated by the fine salary I get at the end of the month. |

Table 4 Self-Motivation in Inter-Cultural Virtual Projects

This category is probably the most important of all, as provides a self-reflection quality. It is particularly interesting that all but one responses refer to purely intrinsic motivators. Diversity of projects, new challenges, learning, pushing oneself, attaining the goal, the sense of responsibility, pride in accomplishing something bigger, becoming better, self-accomplishment and a fine salary at the end of the month. All these factors are related to the internal gears that drive each individual and have little or no connection to external factors.

Obviously, this does not mean that without motivators, like a salary, or recognition, these individuals would continue working with the same motivation levels. What it means is that when given the opportunity of reflecting on what drives them, they think of factors that come from within. Even more interesting is that, the only person that acknowledges a motivator as the primary source of motivation is Respondent 4.

## Chapter 8: Observation and Conclusion

### 8.1 Observation on the Analysis

The observation about the first category, Virtual environments, is the fact that advantages noted by the respondents have a background of own personal enrichment. However, the disadvantages are linked directly to the social aspect of virtual projects. Team building, communication, misunderstanding, language barriers, enthusiasm, all seem to fit in a pattern of social interaction and intercultural environment.

The second category, Virtual teams, presents one of the main challenges of virtual teams and some of the problems that may derive from it. The lack of physical meetings and face-to-face interactions introduce a difficult situation.

Motivation in Intercultural virtual projects is the third and fourth theme emerging from the responses and are probably the most revealing of all. The main personal motivators of each respondent are so strong and genuine that everyone can feel as own motivators.

### 8.2 Conclusion

This study has been a personal journey that offered both expected and unexpected results. The expected results came in the shape of a lack of motivational features in intercultural project environment.

However, a complete set of unexpected results came with the notion of motivators and the way that translates into actual working settings.

challenges in virtual settings. The progress and the notion of improvement is an extremely powerful motivator that drives us and the salary as motivator is negligible whereas recognition, appreciation and learning curves with different people having different cultural background seem as good motivators.

# INTERCULTURAL ONSITE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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## Chapter 9: Challenges of Intercultural Onsite Projects

### 9.1 Background

National project management has an extended scope with different challenges like multi- cultural and cross-cultural conditions which is cause mainly by individuals including team members and stakeholders from diverse cultures with different ways of thinking and working procedures. It is the project manager’s responsibility to eliminate obstacles and to execute the project plan successfully within a limited timeframe. Because of constant pressure and the fast moving environment, project managers are expected to work very efficiently. They are prepared to set up a project plan and to adjust its structure to the local conditions as best as possible.

According to PMBOK Guide (A Guide to the Project Management Body) *a* ***project*** *is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. The temporary nature of projects indicates that a project has a definite beginning and end.* The project is managed by a **project manager** (The PMBOK Guide - 2015) is the person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the projects objectives. Beside team, stockholders are required to be managed by project manager. **Stockholders** groupincludes all members of the project as well as all interested entities that are internal or external to the organization. Some examples of stockholders: Sponsors, Customer and users, sellers, Business parties, organizational groups (internal stockholders), Functional managers, etc.

Projects are inherently collaborative efforts. The very nature of projects is such that project teams are usually comprised of multiple team members. Team members can not only be employees, but also clients, vendors, sub-contractors, and other third parties.

**Onsite or collocated teams** are those which can work side-by-side with one another. They normally share a working environment and benefiting from joining efforts and creating synergy. Halverson & Tirmizi (2008) defined: The **multicultural team** is a collection of individuals with different cultural backgrounds, who are independent in their task, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social system, and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries and beyond.

### 9.2 Objectives

This study aims to fulfill some specific objectives as follows:

* To examine the effects of work environment on team members from different cultural backgrounds
* To determine limitations of multicultural onsite projects
* To determine main positive and negative factors of onsite teams

The content of this paper is based on a research following by a survey to find out most prominent challenges of onsite projects. In addition, drawbacks and benefits of this type of project which have been pinpointed by participants is declared. Result of this survey is based of participants’ responses from different cultures including Indonesians, Nigerians, Lebanese/Syrians, Belgians/Germans, Indians, and Pakistanis.

This paper will be useful for top level of management and project managers to have a better understanding of onsite projects aspects (drawbacks, benefits, challenges) once working with a multicultural team. The outcome can shed some light for project managers to lead team members effectively and efficiently. I hope that this paper will help them with the management of diverse staff in organizations and inspire them to analyze and rethink your current situation.

### 9.3 Survey Method

To collect the data across cultures, the original questionnaire was developed in English

and distributed to willing participants (project managers and team members). The online questionnaire was implemented by [www.smartsurvey.co.uk](http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk) sent through emails and social networking to colleagues and co-workers from different culture-geographically distributed in the south Asia and Europe. Project managers and team members were requested to participate in this study through direct messages or indirect messages (forwarding my message to other people by receivers). Ultimately, 117 completed questionnaires were received.

### 9.4 Analysis and Results

The factors mentioned in this paper are the most influential ones chosen by participants of survey supported by some information and example of other resources. It is worth to mention that some of benefits may have negative effects, while some of the drawbacks may have some positive effects. For example, working in the same office might increase networking feasibility, however, it may probably bring less flexibility in work schedules.

### 9.4.1 Workplace

A controlled working environments where project manager can have “**better supervision**” (78% of project managers) on internal and external parameters of interruptions and conflicts can increases productivity. Apart from control, what does drive team members to work in an office?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Working environment | 63% |
| Meeting people from other cultures | 65% |
| Discussion and problem solving | 88% |
| Brain storming | 53% |
| Work-life balance | 41% |

Table 9-1: Benefits of multicultural work place

The most enjoyable task in onsite projects is “**discussions and solving problems**” (88%) following by “**meeting people from other cultures**” (65%). It was clearly determined by participants that cultural diversity plays a great role in solving problems. Their cultural backgrounds broaden team’s perspective to the issue. As a result, tackling problems are much easier: various outlooks leads to different interpreting process, solving problems and predicting future possibilities work together to produce a distinctive mental tool set. Groups with this sort of variety consistently outperform groups working with a single problem-solving perspective. **Brain storming** identified by almost half of people as an advantage (53%) which is fairly difficult in virtual teams.

Nearly tree quarters believe that working in the same place is pleasant and motivating. “***Sense of family***” was mentioned by more that 60% of people. They basically, appreciate the chance to empathize and assist other colleagues to improve. It is one of aspects which is less likely to exist in virtual teams. Generally, flexibility in work schedule is less than distributed teams. Since, under some policies, employees must work a prescribed number of hours a pay period and be present during a daily “*core time*”. Although, traditional 9 to 5, 40 hours work per week dose not allow employees to vary their arrival and departure times, and they prefer more flexibility at work. Office work schedule is yet another benefit of going to office. For example: One of participants remarked that “*leaving office in the afternoon means time to work is over, so it helps me to invest my time on other dimensions of life.”*. In other words, **work-life balance** (42% approximately) is considered as a benefit of going to workplace.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks of working in an office with with multicultural colleagues. **Understanding office rules and regulation** is the most challenging issue for foreigners – mentioned by one quarter. It takes a while till they adherent rules independently without receiving hints and reminders from human resource staff or project managers. Moreover, they found some of office rules irritating: For example, requirements for attendance, leave and time off, having limited personal items and dress codes. When companies create ridiculous and demoralizing rules to halt the outlandish behavior of a few individuals, it’s a management problem. There’s no sense in alienating your entire workforce because you don’t know how to manage performance. It makes a bad situation that much worse.

The other negative point might be “**discriminations**”: as employees have closer contact with each other in workplace, they know more details about one another, any type of discrimination can be easily tangible and visible by the entire team (this is pinpointed by about 30% of participants). Needless to say, negative discriminations have destructive impact on the team specially when they get offended by cultural discrimination.

The third drawback of working in the same workplace identified by 25% of participants is being **minority in office**. Due to less cultural diversity in onsite projects, majority of team members are from the same culture and expats automatically considered as minorities. Therefore, cultural influence of minorities is less and foreigners basically need to follow the dominated culture (local culture).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Following office rules | 34% |
| Being a minority and having less power | 25% |
| Cultural discrimination | 29% |
| Understanding regulations | 42% |

Table 9-2: Drawbacks of multicultural work place

### 9.4.2 Multicultural as a key parameter

Whether the cultural differences of a workforce lead to positive or negative impacts depends on various variables. The implementation of particular measures can offer assistance to diminish or indeed avoid issues such as team conflicts based on cultural differences. Furthermore, managing cultural diversity may offer assistance an organization to advantage as much as possible from positive angles like expanded productivity, improved problem solving, improved innovation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 0%-30% | 19% |
| 31%-50% | 45% |
| 51%-70% | 25% |
| 71%-90% | 11% |
| 91%-100% | 0% |

Table 9-3: Impact of culture on work interaction

Responses to this optional question reveals that people who had more intercultural experience determined less impact of culture on their interactions (about 19%). Even some of them added some sentences in comment part like “*These questions are racist. We all learn from each other.*” or “*Personality plays more important role*”. This group of response was related to those with a significant work experience (more than 13 years). However, the vast majority believe it as very important parameter (between 31-90%) and subsequently can not be ignored. The impact may have negative result like misunderstanding our positive outcome like more innovation. It is crucial for project managers to provide an encouraging ambiance in office where every once is interested to know about other cultures.

**What are disadvantages of mono-cultural teams?**

These need not all be negative points. Studies of intercultural teams show that their variety and different approaches can actually give a better result than mono-cultural groups, provided appropriate expertise in dealing with different cultures is developed and available. According to the survey result, monoculture teams for some cultures have some negative sides. Here are some instances:

Participants from **Iran** elaborated that the major drawback of working with the same culture can be “*underestimated training*”. There are few guide lines and instructions written and available for everyone. As a result, newly joined team members have to learn by “try-error” mechanism which is time-consuming and not efficient.

Among **Syrians and Lebanese, “***making all team members following office rules*” is troublesome. As they described, people from different cultures in their countries are more willing to have their own rules to obey. For a project manger it takes time to coordinate them.

In **German and Belgium** cultures, a team member is expected to inform project managers in case of facing problems. If that person for any reasons dose not speak out the problem stays hidden and will cause unexpected outcome later.

In **Indian** teams, probably “*competition to prove your skills*” adds more work pressure and exhausts members after a while. They explained that “finding a job is not easy in India, if you do not show that you are noteworthy, there are plenty of candidates that can be replaced by you”.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mono-cultural | 27% |
| Multicultural | 73% |

Table 9-4: Multicultural popularity

Cultural diversity at work placed was likable for majority of participants. Only 27 percentage prefer mono-cultural work office because of some reasons like: language, less misunderstanding and less conflicts. Multicultural aspect attracts employees because of some reasons. For example: communicating and learning cultural perceptions or benefiting from different cultural values.

### 9.4.3 Communication

Even for onsite projects where coworkers benefit from the most effective way of communication (so called face-to-face) , yet the main challenge is **understanding different cultural perceptions**. (It was mentioned by 3 out of 4 participants). **Language** is another barrier (28%) in multicultural projects. Although all team members can communicate not only via the same language but also their body language and facial expressions. Effective communication is among the most essential parameters in team operating. Intercultural aspect deteriorates the situation and makes communication more challenging. It might be the reason why face-to-face communication is more suitable even for multinational work groups. It was preferred by a significant majority (77%). Furthermore, about 78 percentage of participants pointed out it vital for networking and building trust.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Face-to-face | 77% |
| Virtually | 28% |

Table 9-5: Preference for communication

There are plenty of reasons for face-to-face communication achievements. Here are some of them:

1. Body Language: Facial expression and body posture can communicate along with words. Specifically, in high-context cultures, it plays an important role to reduce misunderstanding.
2. Ensures Engagement: Contrary to virtual communication, it is easy to realize when people involve the conversations. Imagine people at a conference call in front of their computers while they have access to plenty of applications and can keep themselves busy with other activities rather than real contribution in the meeting.
3. Drives contribution: As attendees sitting in meeting rooms, the atmosphere encourages them to participate in discussions.

Despite the power this type of communication, there are some **downside** determined by participants:

1. Cost of communication and meetings in onsite teams is by far higher than virtual communication. In virtual team that members work in different locations and take advantages of virtual communication tools which are in general cheaper than traveling for a face-to-face meeting. (above 70% found it costly)
2. Business meetings can be a serious drain on company productivity. When staff has to spend time in meetings, then that's action that is not being taken to meet company goals and objectives. And the more staff involved in meetings, the more this lack of productivity can affect the company's output on any given day. For this reason, companies try to limit the amount of time that employees spend in meetings. Although, this issue can be handled intelligently in companies, about 1 out of 5 project managers and team members consider it as a downside (21%).

### 9.4.4 Recruitment

On one hand, collocated projects are older than other types like outsourcing and virtual teams. Consequently, workforce is more familiar with this traditional style. Onsite is the most traditional type of project management which is well known for the majority of team members, stockholders and project managers. Majority of Managers feel onsite project are easier to manage (78%) not only because of personal interactions but also because of **not psychologically fitting** of individuals for virtual teams (a quarter of project manger and team member). In other words, some aspects of virtual teams are not acceptable for them. Here are some random issues the participants mentioned in comment part of questions: “**working in untrusted work environment**”, and “**lack of virtual skills**”. Therefore, it seems easier to find employees who are are able to work in onsite projects.

On the other hand, finding the necessary talented team members in **one place** is challenging. In any given locality, there appears to be a talent shortage.  And the natural and random movement of people makes it hard to keep them together. Geography makes it hard to get these teams together. Human resource managers normally look for local people to hire but what if there is a shortage of skilled and qualified workforce? They need to utilize expats who on average have higher salaries.

Furthermore, generally, cultural diversity in onsite teams are lower than other sorts of project teams on the grounds that recruitmentpool is limited to the location of project. Availability of a pool of employees regardless of location, and possibility of easily expanding the workforce require developing skills of employees on special virtual teaming supporting applications.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cost of hiring expats | 65% |
| Limited recruitment pool | 53% |

Table 9-6: Difficulties of onsite recruitment

Responses to the question of challenges of onsite recruitment revels that “**cost of hiring expatriates**” is a major drawback (65%) and the second important one is “**limitation in recruitment pool**” identified by almost half of participants. It is noteworthy that beside from above elements there is another implicit effect which is “less cultural diversity”.

### 9.4.5 Autonomy

Autonomy refers to level of freedom, independence, and flexibility in scheduling granted to team members in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Some scholarly person have referred to liberty using different terms such as “decentralization” of anatomical structure (Brock, 2003), “authorization” (Elmore John Leonard -Barton, 1992) or “freedom”. In other words, self-sufficiency can be described as the empowerment of somebody to contribute meaningfully to the tasks (Gerwin and Moffat, 1997a; Leonard-Barton, 1992). Similarly, Sethi (2000) states that self-reliance in New Product Development refers to the extent to which somebody in a team have the exemption to make own project-related decisions and conduct employment without interference from senior managers.

Previous studies have shown that autonomy is an important predecessor of a work group’s performance, and team members creativity. For example, Cotgrove and Boxwood (1970) and Pelz and Andrews (1966) bill that autonomy and decision freedom are essential to innovative demeanor (as cited in Scott and Bruce, 1994). Amabile and Gryskiewicz (1987) found that a lack of operational autonomy or a lack of freedom over one's work or idea inhibited creativity and innovation. In a similar mineral vein, studies of projects show a strong family relationship between autonomy and innovation. For example, McDonough and Barczak (1991) found that the speed of new merchandise development is significantly related to the amount of freedom and responsibility given to team members. Another study by Barczak and Wilemon (1992) noted that technical professionals desire a high degree of autonomy to ascendance their activities and to make their own decisions about their roles and how to solve specific trouble.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Virtual teams | Onsite teams |
| Freedom in decision making | 3.4 | 2.3 |
| Level of responsibility and input | 3.8 | 3.3 |
| Independence in tasks | 4.1 | 2.4 |

Table 9-7- Autonomy

\* Scoring question result from 1 to 5

Above table shows **less autonomy in co-located projects**. Providing more autonomy is virtual teams may stem from the fact that some methods like micromanagement is technically impossible. Also, virtual conversation in different time zones reduce the chance of controlling every single steps in tasks. Therefore, project managers prefer to give team members more freedom.

### 9.5 Conclusion and recommendations

### 9.5.1 Conclusion

As discussed in previous sections, there are some features of multicultural onsite projects which play an important role in project management. Although, each parameter might consider negative or positive depends on many factors like the context of project and priorities chosen by top level of management.

For majority of project managers, it is easier to control the environment in onsite project but team members will probably encounter less autonomy in their tasks. One major motivator for onsite team members is interacting with people with different cultural background. Socializing, learning from each other culture, having wider outlook, discussions and brain storming are pleasant and stimulating. Generally, flexibility in work schedule is less than distributed teams but it may bring more work-life balance for employees. Cultural differences and language are still barriers. However, having more intercultural experience, creating a positive attitudes toward cultural differences can improve the situation. Creating multicultural teams seems to be inevitable because of global market and financial factors as well as workforce willingness to upgrade. The attitude of mono-cultural teams can be improved if they mix with other cultures. Beside the cost of face-to-face communication, it is preferred by the majority of people because of its effectiveness to reduce misunderstanding and conflicts. Limited recruitment pool and consequently expenses of hiring expats are the main difficulties to create an onsite team.

### 9.5.2 Action point for future

There are some limitations associated with this study and it is noteworthy to address

these limitations for future study. First, this study was conducted utilizing individual team

members mainly working on software projects across countries; therefore, product type role “software” for this case was ignored. There are some elements like country of workplace and dominated culture could not be measured, due to necessity of having question according to projects. Not surprisingly, some responses were ignored because of it’s insufficient numbers: For example, there were only one participants from Russia.

In addition, for this study only national cultures were taken into account and cultural dimensions (e.g.: specific vs diffuse) were omitted.

Regarding above research limitations, it may be interesting to examine the function of type of products in multicultural teams. For instance, architectural products are impacted significantly by cultures; how location and culture diversity influence the final product. Additional research may elaborate culture to cultural dimensions or cultural groups in every nation, in order to cater more concise and measurable information. It may also worth knowing that how effective the location of company is.

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