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What Does It Take? New Praxes of Cross-Cultural Competency for Global Virtual Teams as Innovative Work Structure

Norhayati Zakaria

Introduction

The digital era has led multinational corporations (MNCs) to experiment with varied forms of innovation, including new technology-based work structures. Information technology enables people to collaborate and communicate in virtual teams without the need to meet face-to-face. Yet, focusing only on technological changes as a competitive advantage is insufficient. Rather, a company must also prioritize its human capital as a primary value-added advantage. Despite the benefits of the "digital wave" that allows people to work anytime, anywhere and with

N. Zakaria (✉)
University of Wollongong in Dubai, UAE and Universiti Utara,
Kedah, Malaysia

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anyone—known as global virtual team (GVT), such novelty work structure has also heightened the need for employees who are culturally competent (Lockwood, 2015; Marcoccia, 2012). The radical changes that have taken place in the work landscape have compelled MNCs to rethink and re-strategize their approach to global human capital to better accommodate these technological changes; a significant part of this is through innovative forms and praxes of cross-cultural competency.

At a global workplace, innovation entails people to alter the way they usually operate. Renowned gurus of the innovation and strategic change in organization, O'Reilly and Tushman (2011), simply assert that *innovation* is about execution as well as about getting it done. As such, innovation can be viewed from two different perspectives, which is either from a result or outcome-orientation concept or from a process-orientation concept. In this chapter, my premise of argument on innovation will be based on the process-orientation concept. In specific, I conceptualize *innovation* in the form of "a new mindset and creativity" in approaching teamwork. It is crucial for MNCs to pay attention on ways to materialize their innovative structure because innovative structure needs new and creative ways of thinking, managing emotions, and molding behaviors that lead to high performing GVTs.

For example, both team members and team leaders must be able to handle culturally complex scenarios such as the following: working with team members who are separated by a 12-hour time difference (e.g., Thailand and the USA) resulting in meetings being conducted at odd hours, working with people with different attitudes toward deadlines (urgent vs. laid-back), accommodating those with different structural preferences (rigid vs. flexible rules and procedures) when engaging in assigned tasks, or bringing together people who deal with conflicts in a blunt and straightforward manner versus those who prefer a subtle and polite approach. These are some significant and multifaceted cultural challenges that can arise in the GVT novelty work structure.

In addition, the digital wave offers new platforms and opportunities for MNCs to operate in a sharing economy. The sharing economy is a new economic model that enables consumers to share, swap, trade, and rent products and services via a digital platform; it is also known as collaborative consumption. MNCs can use this same concept by sharing

their global human capital, allowing them to collaborate using digital platforms. This novel work structure such as GVTs leads to several key concerns: How do MNCs recognize and recruit global talent capable of working in GVTs? What creative forms of cultural competency are desirable when people work in a GVT environment? How can we ensure they are both culturally savvy and technologically savvy, in order to become high performing teams? What are the new praxes necessary for GVTs to thrive in terms of practices, procedures, and processes?

In this chapter, I will discuss how the digital wave requires organizations to rethink and re-strategize their human capital competency and cultural praxes. I will define several key concepts, such as global virtual teams, culture and intercultural communication; all of these are important elements that bind together GVTs and new praxes of cross-cultural competency. I will introduce a new framework called the C.A.B. cross-cultural competency, which is compatible with the GVT work structure, and propose some innovative practices and processes for collaborating effectively in the context of a GVT. For example, I will emphasize how GVT members and leaders need to be creative in coming up with ways to replicate face-to-face situations in a virtual team, or strategies to ensure that (e.g.) low context people understand about the value of relationship, instead of just focusing on task orientation. In the next section, I will present managerial guidelines for human resources and management, and offer some culturally attuned guidelines for building new forms of specialized GVT competencies that integrate culture and technology. Finally, I provide few concluding remarks and suggest fruitful directions for future research.

Global Virtual Teams as Innovative Work Structures

Most people today are competent in the use of numerous technological tools that enable them to work effectively, but they may have little or no experience working with culturally diverse team members at a distance. Imagine this: a team of engineers from India needs to collaborate with a team in Germany to develop a new transportation hub in Saudi Arabia.

These teams need to complete their work within six months in order to lay out the plans and begin implementation. They will need to work with and trust other members with whom they have no historical background, manage different technological systems, navigate cultural differences in work practices and communication styles, overcome geographical distance and time differences, and so on.

MNCs introduced virtual work platforms as a way of staying competitive and agile by cutting costs related to travel and the expatriation/repatriation process. To fully exploit this virtual workspace, MNCs need to seek out and recruit global talent, employees who are competent not only in working with people of different cultural backgrounds, but also in working together at a distance—that is, virtually (Chang, Hung, & Hsieh, 2014). This work structure, which is increasingly common in MNCs, is called a global virtual team or GVT. GVTs consist of team members from different cultures, who work together from different geographical locations, using computer-mediated technologies to collaborate and communicate across disparate time zones in a non-collocated workspace (Chang et al., 2014; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Zakaria, 2009). To excel in such an environment requires two kinds of competencies: cultural and technological. It is not easy for an organization to recruit people who have experience in working with a heterogeneous team in a virtual work setting.

GVTs have received a good deal of attention in the field of Information Systems (IS) in the past few decades, following the emergence of computer-mediated communication such as email, videoconferencing and instant messaging (Chen & Hung, 2010; David, Chand, Newell, & Resende-Santos, 2008; Sarker, Sarker, & Jana, 2010). Scholars in the fields of cross-cultural management and international management have extensively argued about the impact of culture on work practices, attitudes, and values (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Dekker, Rutte, & Van den Berg, 2008; Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012; Johnson, Lenartowitcz & Apud, 2006; Zakaria, 2006; Zhu, Bhat, & Nel, 2005), but all agree that cultural differences do exist between many Western and Eastern management practices and processes in face-to-face teams, including decision making, negotiation, leadership methods, and communication styles. However, cultural impacts in the context of GVTs are not fully understood, particularly in the area of management practices. Scholars further theorize that as glo-

balization continues, the use of GVTs in multinational corporations will become more prevalent. Global talent must be recruited more vigorously as the demand rises for human capital with specific competencies tailored for the global market. As such, innovative practices and processes need to be incorporated in MNCs to ensure global talent recruited for GVT is a sustainable and competitive source of human capital.

Leveraging Culture for Innovation

According to O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), to win through innovation, organizations need to introduce organizational cultures that thrive on the concept called "ambidextrous organization." Such organizations uphold that organizational culture is the main engine that can initiate revolutionary change and continuous and discontinuous innovation. Organizations need to participate in ongoing changes to help promote high level of alignment and fit among several factors like people, strategy, structure, individual competencies, culture, and processes. In essence, a crucial question like "How can MNCs leverage on culture to create innovation and obtain competitive advantage?" demands an understanding of both the organization as well as the national culture.

Not only organizational culture matters in organizations, people also need to have the appropriate cross-cultural competency as manifested in individuals' acts and values. The key to understanding cross-cultural competency lies in the concept of culture itself. Over the last few decades, more than 160 definitions of culture have been developed by scholars in fields such as anthropology, cross-cultural management, and international business and management. Significant aspects of culture are that it is dynamic rather than static, is transferable from one generation to the next, and is learned, rather than inherited, by a society or group of people over time (Browaeys & Price, 2014). Hofstede (1984) defines culture as the mental programming of human beings, in that it shapes the way people think, feel, and act. Hall (1976), on the other hand, defines culture in terms of communicative behavior, where communication is culture and culture is communication.

According to Rogers (1979), cultural changes are not automatically accepted or adopted. First, people need to screen and select cultural

changes. They evaluate cultural changes based on whether they are (1) better and more useful, (2) consistent with existing practices, (3) easily learned, (4) testable through trial and error, and (5) confer benefits recognized by all members of the society. Second, cultural borrowing is a reciprocal process. Those who receive the cultural change and those who instigate the change need to be equally accepting. It cannot be a one-way street. Third, the transference of culture may be incomplete, and the end result may differ from either of the original forms. People may eliminate some things and introduce new things. Leaders may model certain practices by making modifications as necessary to fit with their current context and culture, whether organizational or national. Fourth, cultural change is difficult because it is not easy to transfer patterns of behaviors, belief systems, and values. As Ferraro (2010) asserts, "some cultural practices are more easily diffused than others" (p. 33).

There is a strong interaction between organizational culture and national culture. In order to understand the effects of culture in an organization, both perspectives must be considered: the influence of national cultural values on development of individual and team behaviors, and the effects of organizational culture on the processes, practices, and values of those who inhabit the workplace.

Understanding Intercultural Communication

In intercultural communication, one has to manage their own communication styles with others and at the same time handle other people's communication styles (Hu & Fan, 2011). The way people communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, is highly influenced by their own cultural practice (Kealey, 2015, Lieberman & Gamst, 2015; Martin, 2015). A number of cultural dimensions have been developed to facilitate the understanding of cultural differences in communication, and one of the main dimensions is called "context" (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1984; Wang, & Kulich, 2015). In his renowned book *Beyond Culture*, the intercultural communication theorist Edward Hall (1976) affirms that context is a process, an important aspect of communication that has as yet received insufficient explanation. He further states that

"[t]his brings us to the point where it is possible to discuss context in relation to meaning, because what one pays attention to or does not attend to is largely a matter of context" (p. 90) (Hall, 1976). Context plays the role of a medium that carries the meaning of the message.

Although Hall defined—and I will discuss—context as having two extremes, high context and low context, it is useful to bear in mind that context is a continuum, and despite their cultural backgrounds people may fall anywhere along the continuum from high to low. As previously defined briefly, context can also explain why in some cultures messages are implied through non-verbal means while in others they are verbally written or spoken. In a "context culture" (high on the context spectrum) people depend largely on non-verbal cues conveyed by the other person's behavior or word choice to fully interpret messages. In a context culture, the words chosen are indirect, tactful, polite, and ambiguous. Conversely, in a "content culture" (low on the context spectrum), messages are interpreted directly from the exact words that are written or spoken. The words chosen are direct, succinct, and specific. Examples of high context cultures include Malaysia, India, China, Sweden, Thailand, and many more (the majority are Eastern countries), whereas low context cultures include the USA, the UK, Germany, Australia, and many Western European countries.

High context people value building a relationship before collaborating or working with another person. They feel that knowing others on a personal level will enhance their understanding and improve their interpretation of the messages they receive (Gudykunst et al., 1997). Non-verbal cues such as body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures are important elements for effective intercultural communication with high context people. The information cues used by low context individuals, on the other hand, are very different. They do not place much importance on relationship-building; rather, they prefer to conduct business or engage in collaboration through formal agreements such as a written contract between two parties. During collaboration, they are strongly focused on the task to be achieved, and much less focused on relationships. In essence, the understanding of high vs low context for GVT can be explored in studies of between-the-team communications (Xiao & Huang, 2015).

Developing New Praxes for GVTs Using the C.A.B. Cross-Cultural Competency Framework

Cultural competencies are crucial for success in today's rapidly globalizing workplace, in which no dominant monoculture drives work values and business practices. In such an environment, teams and managers must be culturally competent to make the most of their human capital in order to maintain a competitive advantage. Yet oftentimes employees are hired without the necessary competencies to meet the demands of a complex culturally attuned work environment. The challenges of intercultural communication are often intensified in a GVT situation, since virtual collaboration requires the use of technology and not all people are comfortable using a communication medium with limited non-verbal cues, such as email. But computer-mediated technology—both synchronous tools like Skype, Instant Messaging, or Twitter, and asynchronous tools like email—are vital for companies operating in a global environment. Indeed, with the rise of the global market and the global information society, it is likely that GVT members will encounter more different cultures than ever before, now that there is no boundary to collaboration. How do MNCs move forward with GVTs in terms of human capital? What new kinds of processes or procedures need to be developed and deployed to take advantage of or add value to the current practices of virtual teamwork?

According to Chen and Starosta (1996), there are three aspects to the development of cultural competencies: cognitive, affective, and behavioral, which are abbreviated as C.A.B. in this paper. According to Zakaria (2013), these three areas can be used as a basis for developing a set of cross-cultural competencies:

1. *Cognitive Skills*—leaders need to educate and disseminate knowledge to their members regarding the cultural frames and values that may impede their effectiveness. Team members thus become more knowledgeable and informed about cultural conflicts and differences.
2. *Affective Skills*—leaders need to show compassion and be sensitive to the errors and misunderstandings that may arise based on cultural dif-

ferences among the team members. Tolerance, appreciation, and sensitivity among team members will enable everyone to operate more effectively across distance and cultural differences.

3. *Behavioral Skills*—leaders need to understand and model relevant congruent behaviors that complement their team members and are appropriate responses to cultural differences; this behavior can then be observed and replicated by team members.

Based on these three aspects, I introduce new praxes of cross-cultural competencies in the context of GVTs, built on a new framework: the C.A.B. cross-cultural competency for GVTs (Fig. 6.1). In the C.A.B. framework, cultural competency formation begins with information and knowledge about a culture at the cognitive level, which shapes one's mindset with the right amount of knowledge (quantity) as well as knowledge that is relevant and accurate (quality). Without both quantity and quality of cultural knowledge, GVT members will be at a loss, confused or frustrated by the behaviors of their colleagues. The key question at this level is to ensure that team members can answer the following: *What* is culture? *Who* is impacted by it and *how* in this new environment which limits face-to-face interactions? The goal at this first level is to achieve cultural awareness.

Once adequate cross-cultural training has been provided and appropriate cultural knowledge acquired, the next step is to create an emotional state in which members are appreciative of and empathize with the cultural complexities they encounter. Given information about a culture, a person will have a heightened sensitivity to and tolerance for differences in cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs. The key question is *why* do we need to understand culture? The goal is to inculcate cultural sensitivity. Once a person is sensitive to and appreciative of differences, they begin to demonstrate appropriate behaviors and take appropriate action to avoid any cultural misunderstandings or blunders.

The last phase is to identify and practice appropriate and effective culturally oriented behaviors. Blunders and miscommunication are costly when a team is engaged in an ad-hoc project that lasts only a few weeks or months. The key questions are: *How* can we better understand what needs to be done, *what* actions to take that are appropriate and relevant to the

Stages of Cross-Cultural Competencies
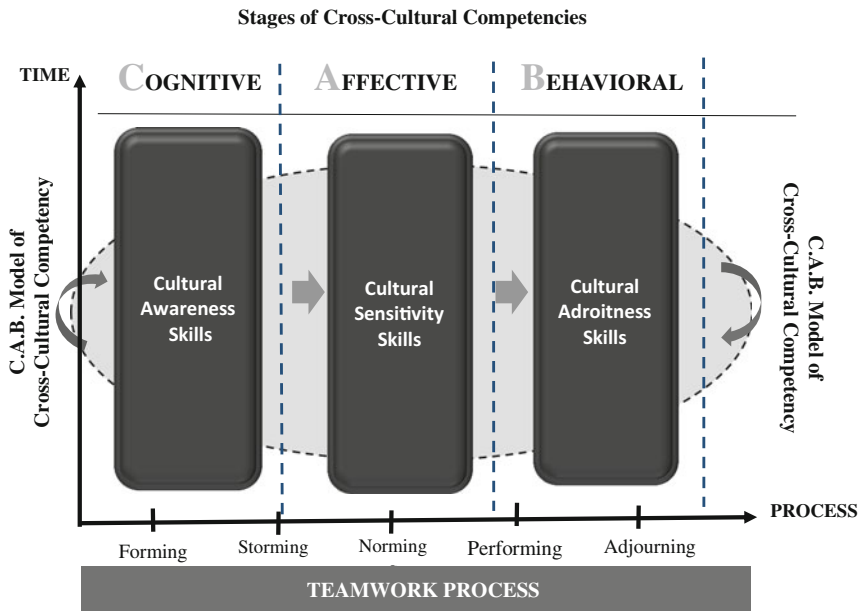
Fig. 6.1   C.A.B. framework of cross-cultural competency for GVT

people we are leading and managing, and *when* to behave in accordance with the cultural condition/situation? The goal of this stage is to develop cultural adroitness, where the appropriate behavior comes naturally and easily. As a result, by modeling appropriate behaviors, other people can learn. In turn, these individuals can model behaviors, educating others, thus new knowledge is created and awareness is increased.

Although the C.A.B. framework provides three aspects to consider and each aspect can be thought of as a phase to pass through, the phases are not simply a linear process with a starting point and an end point. The process does not always follow the sequential stages of cognitive, affective, and then behavioral, nor does it stop at the behavior stage. The process is iterative, and continues to feed each stage back until the culturally attuned behavior is habitual and natural, and true cross-cultural competence is reached. This is a time-consuming process, and a complex one to manage (Kim, 2015).

The order of the stages can also change—for example, one might begin with a behavior, then move to affective acknowledgement, and finally to cognitive knowledge. That is, a person could initially begin by mimicking the behavior of others without thinking much about it. For example, taking off one's shoes is a customary practice when entering an Asian home and thus a person may naturally take off his or her shoes as they step in the door. A person may be ignorant of the cultural nature of this practice and not formally educated in such procedures, yet follow this action simply out of respect. Afterward, he or she might ask, "Why do you take off your shoes?" The answer will educate them and provide them with cognitive information about how to behave appropriately next time they encounter a similar situation. Consequently, a person will learn to appreciate such behavior and be tolerant of the cultural custom of removing one's shoes, even though that practice is not a habit for Western cultures. At the end, with an open heart, this induces an affective reasoning process which will further shape and reinforce the person's logical thoughts at the cognitive level. Such is the cyclical nature of the cultural competence process as it moves from one stage to another, though it may begin at a different stage for a different person, contingent upon their existing level of cultural competency.

Given the abovementioned fundamentals of C.A.B framework, new procedures, practices, and processes (praxes) need to be developed in the context of GVTs. Taking off one's shoes is not relevant in the virtual work space, of course, but there are praxes inherent in a face-to-face work setting which are equally important in the virtual context. The challenge of developing cultural competency is intensified in the context of a virtual work setting because team members don't just need to get to know each other; they also need to engage in decision making, communication, negotiation, trust formation, teamwork, and so on effectively and efficiently. GVT members have fewer opportunities to observe behaviors than if they were face-to-face. The following section details the process of developing cross-cultural competency in its cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects.

Creating Cultural Awareness and Innovative Thinking Skills

Based on the theory of mind (Hughes & Devine, 2015), the ability of a person to interpret another's actions is dependent on the person's mental state of a person and how they make sense of their own and others' behavior, filtered through the articulation of their beliefs and desires. Davidson (1984) further points out that cognitive ability also depends on linguistic ability, because language is the main medium by which humans express thoughts, desires, and intentions. These can be directly expressed in words like "I would like to have coffee in the café this evening with you." On the other hand, a person can also use language in an indirect manner to suggest or imply their intentions. For example: "How are you? So, what are you doing this evening? Do you think you might have time to go out? If so, maybe you'd like to have coffee?"

The first step in building cross-cultural competency is developing cultural awareness. This means acquiring knowledge about, or providing information to others about, the new culture. Organizations can provide different kinds of cross-cultural training, both general and culture-specific (e.g., a list of "do's and don'ts"), to educate GVT members on what to expect from their colleagues and how to avoid blunders, misinterpretations, and miscommunication. If organizations provide the relevant culturally related knowledge to GVT participants, members will have the right mindset and will be prepared at the cognitive level.

Prepared with the right intellectual information, people will begin to attune their cognitive thinking and to develop the right attitude and mind set. For teams to work together effectively, members need to be cognitively prepared at an early stage. Normally, in a face-to-face setting, members engage in a "forming" stage, during which they meet and get to know each other; this "warm-up" session helps build initial trust. Team members learn about each other through activities that bind them together such as orientations, introductory meetings, welcome parties, and/or briefings about the new project. However, for GVTs, the "forming" stage is different since team members don't have the opportunity

to meet each other face-to-face. The "getting to know you" stage has to take place virtually and lacks any of the usual activities that are possible face-to-face. So, how do organizations create an environment conducive to people in a GVT getting to know each other? How can members be made to feel the presence and the excitement of others?' How do members develop initial trust when they are working with strangers?

To create awareness of the other cultures represented in the GVT and to enable members to get to know each other, GVT members need to undergo the same process during the "forming" stage as they would if they were physically collocated. At this stage, it is crucial for team members to understand what cultural backgrounds are present, who will be impacted by such diversity, and how. The forming stage normally begins with members introducing themselves, exchanging names, organization, position, experience, and so on. This is crucial in providing first impressions among the members and affects the extent to which a feeling of trust is generated, enabling people to continue to the next stage.

What is challenging for GVTs is that the team members are strangers and the only way for them to get to know each other is via email or some other form of computer-mediated communication. GVT members will need to exchange emails frequently to get the ball rolling. In addition, in the virtual environment, people cannot see one another's faces, so it is difficult or impossible to recognize non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, body movements and so on, which are necessary elements of communication in certain cultures (Marcoccia, 2012). To overcome this problem, organizations can encourage GVTs to conduct meetings online using Skype or videoconferencing; this will enable high context members to feel more comfortable since it is similar to a face-to-face setting. Organizations using GVTs need to provide the option of an environment that closely replicates face-to-face so that members have a strong foundation for building effective and cohesive teamwork.

Proposition 1 GVT members that are educated about culture and provided with training about culture become more aware, knowledgeable, and informed about cultural differences and potential conflicts.

Managerial Guidelines

- GVT members need to cultivate an open mindset and be receptive to and accepting of cultural differences.
- GVT members must also develop innovative and creative thinking skills with the given information, knowledge, and training in order to appreciate changes.
- GVT members must be open to trusting others on short acquaintance, so that all members of the group can reach a common ground and find an acceptable balance between task achievement and relationship-building.
- GVT members must educate one another regarding any cultural attitudes, viewpoints, and values that may impede the team's effectiveness.

Culturally Attuned Guidelines for Creating Innovative Strategies

- *Low context* GVT members need to take time during the early "getting to know each other" stage to create a sense of warmth toward high context members. They also need to engage in building relationships before jumping straight to the task, in order to build rapport with high context members who value relationships. They need to demonstrate that they care by creating a strong sense of belonging within the team.
- *High context* GVT members need to demonstrate that they have a strong knowledge of the task to be accomplished (i.e., "know your stuff!") They also need to establish strong credentials regarding what they can do and how they can perform at their best, as this is important for working effectively with low context members. Strive to prioritize task orientation over relationship-building, and stay focused on the job at hand.

Instilling Intercultural Sensitivity and Appreciation for Innovation and Changes

What is the effect of emotional state in building cross-cultural competencies in GVTs? The theory of mind as abovementioned also states that a

person's mental state covers a range of elements, one of which is the person's emotional state that results in actions. In this section, we will explore the role of emotions in GVT behaviors. For example, at the intellectual cognitive level, a person can attempt to guess or interpret what is in the mind of another, that is, mind-reading. What about the use of intuition or "gut feelings" at the affective level? Intercultural sensitivity was defined as "an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 5). With the same kind of logic, intuition allows a person to use their affective judgment to feel or understand the feelings of others and to assess others' intentions and desires. To what extent is this type of emotion valuable in producing high performing GVTs? And what is the role of emotion in enhancing GVT performance?

According to Murphy, Hine, and Kiffin-Petersen (2014), there is a significant relationship between motivational systems and emotion in virtual work, just as there is in face-to-face work. They found that managers of virtual teams need to recognize the differences in motivational level that result from different emotional states, which consequently affect virtual performance. Some of the key emotions they identified are anger, anxiety, annoyance, nervousness, and distress. Cultural differences that create challenges in working with GVT members of diverse backgrounds can create these kinds of negative emotions. On the other hand, positive emotions such as joy, excitement, gratitude, hope, pride, inspiration, and love can create team cohesion, leading to better team performance.

At the affective level, a person needs to cultivate a high level of sensitivity when confronted with cultural frustrations. They must be considerate and appreciative of cultural differences; this will enable them to be composed, patient, and flexible when faced with cultural complexities. A culturally sensitive person will try to adjust to differences in others, and take measures to ensure that differences do not lead to conflict. At this level, a person will use his or her own intuition, wisdom, and values to identify the cultural synergies that are possible by working with others. Ultimately, they will develop the emotional intelligence that is necessary for understanding another culture.

When we think of emotion, we should also consider the concept of empathy. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feeling of others. Consider these two common maxims: *Do unto others as you would have others do unto you*, and *put yourself in the other person's shoes*. For example, suppose that a deadline is approaching and a team member will be unable to meet it because he is sick, and that this news was not communicated to you thousands of miles away? How do you put yourself in his shoes when you know that this missed deadline will result in delays in fulfilling a contract, and consequently will incur costly penalty fees? GVT members cannot empathize with one another if they don't have enough information, or if they are unaware of the situation that the other member is experiencing. How do you learn to be sensitive to others when others fail to communicate their intentions to you or to reach out at an affective level?

Many scholars in the cross-cultural management field argue that there is a greater need for emotional intelligence when people work in a multicultural workforce (Crowne, 2013). The development of emotional intelligence requires addressing two basic questions: What is the ability of a person to precisely evaluate the emotional state of himself and others? How do people use feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve their goals? Wong (2016) explored the role and significance of emotions when communicating intentions face-to-face in the context of international diplomatic negotiations and found that when people collaborate, they reveal their preferences, and when they compete, they misrepresent their intentions. In other words, collaboration results in greater honesty than competition. He further found that words and verbal expressions are not the only messages that diplomats pay attention to when negotiating; they also pay attention to emotional cues. For instance, the way people choose their words, the intonation used when speaking, the emotive gestures observed in hand and body movements—all of these cues can be vital in correctly evaluating a situation.

In the context of GVTs, organizations need to recognize that team members working in a non-collocated environment are less able, or have less opportunity, to assess non-verbal cues, which can pose a cultural challenge. For instance, in a high context culture people do not

readily demonstrate their feelings unless they have a strong bond with the other person, and when they do express emotions, they may do so indirectly. On the other hand, people from a low context culture are willing to express their emotions directly and make clear how those feelings affect their actions. In a virtual environment, low context team members may experience difficulty interpreting the actions of a team member from a high context culture, while a high context team member might perceive the straightforward or blunt verbal statements made by a low context team member as hurtful or hostile. Hence, GVT members need to be equipped with the emotional intelligence to be able to accurately assess the intentions and desires of others within the limitations of whatever technological platform(s) the team is using to communicate. Members need to be sensitive to and observant of the situation at hand. This heightened awareness can come from several sources: concrete knowledge, past experiences, wisdom, values, beliefs.

Proposition 2 When cultural blunders occur, GVT members need to look carefully for non-verbal cues or behaviors in order to respond with the correct level of empathy, kindness, and compassion. Tolerance, appreciation, and sensitivity among team members will enable everyone to operate more effectively despite distance and cultural differences.

Managerial Guidelines

- GVT members need to cultivate a warm-hearted attitude, with a high tolerance for and appreciation of cultural diversity.
- GVT members need to nurture the many characteristics that enhance emotional honesty, such as empathy, consideration, kindness, warmth, affection, and sincerity; all of these aid in recognizing the true feelings of others.
- GVT members need to learn to accurately read the feelings of others by developing good intuition and gut feelings based on reflections of past experiences that have resulted in strong and lasting relationships.

Culturally Attuned Guidelines for Creating Innovative Strategies

During the "Forming" Stage

- *Low context* GVT members need to be sensitive to the way communication takes place in the early stages. *High context* members value relationships; their need for an emotional connection needs to be considered in terms of word choice and the manner in which verbal communications are delivered and presented. For example, team members could be encouraged to ask each other questions about their hometowns, or to share pictures of their families; such actions create a friendly environment conducive to emotional connection.
- GVT leaders should, if possible, employ technological platforms that allow *high context* members to observe the non-verbal cues necessary for them to interpret and understand the content of a communication (e.g., videoconferencing rather than text-based chat). Team members can use emoticons in their text communications to create a heightened awareness of their emotional state at the time of writing.

During the "Storming" or Crisis Stage

- If a crisis or conflict arises, *high context* GVT members need to clearly communicate their feelings. Messages, whether or verbal or written, need to be clearly delivered, explained, and justified to avoid any confusion. *Low context* people prefer to deal with problems in an open and transparent manner, thus in a GVT setting, the level of transparency needs to be high to reduce the chance of miscommunication. *High context* members should ask questions as needed for clarification to reduce misinterpretations among them. If there is a conflict, *high context* members appreciate it when the confrontation takes place in a private setting, one-on-one, or through intermediaries, rather than in the open via public criticism.
- *High context* members need to avoid using the "silence" strategy in a GVT environment, because it is likely to complicate the issue and cre-

ate unnecessary delays in solving a problem. In a face-to-face setting, silence can convey a message through the use of non-verbal cues, such as smiling, frowning, looking bored, or nodding in agreement. However, in a virtual setting, silence conveys no message at all; this leads to a "clueless" work environment for both parties and is not effective for solving problems.

- Both *low context and high context* GVT members need to be creative in their communication styles so as not to offend or irritate one another, and develop a cohesive collaboration. Creativity in virtual communication might include using an informal yet fun social media platform such as online chat to create a sense of relaxation, harmony, and belonging by replicating a face-to-face office gathering.

Modeling Culturally Appropriate Behaviors and Innovative Actions

When you first encounter a new culture in one of your team members, how do you act appropriately? How do you practice the old saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do?" At the affective level, a culturally sensitive person will naturally adopt and mimic the behavior of others, thereby acquiring culturally appropriate behaviors. What they see, they will try to emulate, repeating an action, process, or activity. A person who is culturally sensitive may also innovate by performing an action based not on copying others but on his or her own understanding and knowledge of the culture. Once an innovation is accepted by others in the culture, that new knowledge becomes part of the cognitive intellectual process for those who are at the first step of acquiring cultural awareness.

In the third phase, one's actions are culturally appropriate in response to a situation. In the context of GVTs, all participants need to acknowledge the cultural diversity that exists among the team members. According to Earley, Ang, and Tan (2006), cultural intelligence is a requirement for global teams: it provides a competitive advantage and strategic benefits for individuals and organizations. How do you define cultural intelligence (CQ)? Earley et al. define CQ as "a person's capability for success-

ful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context" (p. 5), and propose three elements: cultural strategic thinking, motivations, and behavior. These three elements are associated with three questions:

- How and why do people do what they do here?
- Am I motivated to do something here?
- Am I doing the right thing?

All three of these questions are important for MNCs to answer as they create new processes, practices, and procedures for their GVTs. Since the work structure and space change the landscape of work itself, thus the praxes also need to be changed to accord with new behavioral dimensions. CQ suggests that certain aspects of culture need to be consciously considered to build a high performing GVT (Shirish, Boughzala, & Srivastave, 2015). Each team member needs to identify and recognize his or her own identity and individual culture in terms of self-image (personal identity) and role identity.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) in their work on cultural variations in self-concept highlight an interesting cultural distinction between East and West, based on the contradictory maxims of "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" and "The nail that sticks up will be hammered down." These two proverbs illustrate a cultural distinction in how the individual sees himself with respect to others: the first suggests that calling attention to oneself has positive results, while the second suggests that it has negative consequences. Hofstede (1984) described this as a cultural dimension in which individualistic acts are balanced against the collectivistic goals of a society. Several points are involved in discovering one's self-image from a cultural standpoint. One must first recognize what one is capable of doing, why one acts in certain ways and manners, why certain actions lead to others, how one's actions reflect the cultural values one subscribes to, and when is the right time to behave in a certain way. Self-image and self-identity are rooted in cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values. If I am unable to understand the cultural roots that influence my behavior, I am unlikely to be able to appreciate the cultural values of my GVT colleagues. Self-concept is comprised of experiences, traits, goals, and ideas;

in the context of the workplace, these inform us how work is to be conducted and managed. According to Earley et al. (2006):

> [S]elf concept is regulated by culture as well as features of one's work. For example, people living in a high power-differentiated culture such as Thailand have a self-image that endorses respect for authority, deference to seniors, and so on. A Thai manager satisfies his self-motives by culturally acceptable methods, so he maintains high self-enhancement by being shown proper respect by people who are subordinates to him—that is, he will seek out situations that provide opportunities for recognition. (p. 153)

Turning from self-identity to role identity, GVT members need to understand how different roles give rise to different attitudes, values, and beliefs in different cultures and societies. A person's cultural values result in different interpretations of role identity. As suggested by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) in their cultural dimension of achievement versus ascription, in an achievement-oriented culture people are valued or respected in the workplace based on their credentials, achievements, and qualifications. For instance, in a French company my PhD might be valued because French culture places a high value on expertise and formal education. An ascription-oriented culture, on the other hand, prioritizes a person's role identity—for example, I am the Marketing Manager and that role identity is respected because it equates to authority and power in the work place; it gives me a specific role identity that identifies and acknowledges my level of importance.

In a study by Groves, Feyerherm, and Gu (2014), they describe cases in which international negotiation failed due to a lack of cultural intelligence, resulting in a failure to communicate with people of diverse cultures, a lack of understanding of other cultures, and an inability to adapt and tolerate situations of cultural unfamiliarity. In a similar vein, a study by Shirish et al. (2015) found that culturally bound discontinuities in GVTs such as geography, organizational outlook, work practices, and attitudes toward technology could only be bridged by developing high CQ. In short, CQ is vital for GVTs since culture forms the core of team members' actions and strategic capabilities. GVTs need to be alert to any

processes, procedures and practices that impede team cohesiveness and team effectiveness, and take steps to modify them as needed.

Proposition 3 GVT members need observe their own and others' behaviors, acquire knowledge about the cultural roots of that behavior, and cultivate open-mindedness toward cultural diversity. Team members need to accumulate solid cultural knowledge, emotional readiness, and appreciation in order to develop a high level of cultural intelligence (CQ).

Managerial Guidelines

- GVT members need to be receptive to cultural differences by responding to actions immediately and sincerely; do not delay responses or feedback because it may result in miscommunication.
- GVT members must be willing to adjust their responses and demonstrate culturally fit behaviors that are congruent with their thoughts and feelings when faced with a difficult situation. Team members should exercise restraint and not over-react in a conflict.
- GVT members need to acquire a cultural knowledge that is all-inclusive or holistic, rather than just a random set of isolated facts. Inaccurate information and shallow knowledge can distort one's behavioral choices and consequently produce cultural blunders. Effective cross-cultural training can provide this comprehensive foundation.

Culturally Attuned Guidelines for Creating Innovative Strategies

- *Low context* GVT members need to ensure that team charters and goals are defined through productive discussions in the early stages that involve all members of the team. Such inclusive measures taken at the "forming" stage will encourage the formation of trust among members, since teams that practice engagement and participation create an environment of collaboration. Low context GVT members should not treat the team's goals as purely individual responsibilities;

rather, they need to act as team players. For example, if they have completed their own assigned tasks, they can assist others, acting in a collectivistic manner.

- *Low context* GVT leaders need to ensure clear communication with high context team members. For example, use several different technological platforms including both synchronous and asynchronous. High context members usually appreciate being offered a variety of communication platforms because this demonstrates sensitivity to their communication preferences.
- *High context* members need to learn to actively engage during team discussions and brainstorming sessions and to risk offering creative and innovative ideas, either verbally or in writing. They need to get comfortable taking ownership of their ideas and expressing their thoughts and feelings openly. They cannot expect people to continuously provide guidelines and instructions, or read between the lines and correctly infer what they intended to propose. In a virtual environment, everything needs to be explicitly spelled out. Non-verbal cues are of limited use and relying on them can cause miscommunication. There should be no guessing games; teams should be built upon clear communication.
- *High context* members need to acknowledge that in a GVT environment, establishing rapport may have to take second place due to time constraints. It takes longer to develop relationships with strangers in virtual setting, and GVTs must often complete their work in a limited time frame. Instead of their usual relationship-orientation, they need to focus on task-oriented behaviors to earn the trust and acknowledgement from low context members. The ascription orientation that values "who I know or affiliated with" is less practical in GVTs than "what I can contribute"—the achievement orientation.

The preceding three sections discussed the three components of the C.A.B. cultural model—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—in order to explore the new praxes that need to be developed for GVTs. We also discussed the three kinds of intelligences required to build on innovative praxes: cognitive intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and cultural intelligence (CQ). Each of these components and intelligences must

be considered at each of the classic teamwork stages of forming, norming, storming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), but tailored to a GVT context. The most critical stage is the first, forming, since it sets the tone and direction for the GVT's work. A second critical stage is storming, which is when teams are likely to encounter conflicts and crises. Cultural challenges will arise in all the stages, but mastering the different forms of intelligence is sure to enhance GVT performance.

Theoretical Implications for MNCs in Training and Educating GVTs

Traditionally, teams have been a group of people that meet regularly face-to-face to work on a common project or toward a common goal. But the past two decades have witnessed a dramatic shift in our understanding of the working of teams, with conventional team structures increasingly giving way to virtual teams. With the constant stream of technological innovations in communication, GVTs have become even more convenient, which has led to their becoming more common. In our increasingly global world, GVTs have also become popular not only for their ease of use, but also as an excellent tool to foster diversity, flexibility, and strong task-oriented focus, all of which are vital in meeting the demands of today's changing business world. GVTs are no longer simply an option; for many multinational corporations who employ GVTs as their innovative work structure, they are a necessity.

Employees are more valuable if they have obtained as much experience as possible; this makes them more competitive and, as a consequence, they are also more flexible when it comes to working in a new organizational structure such as a GVT. Multinational companies want new recruits who are equipped with the right levels of competencies, the right mindset, and experience with the right technologies. People who are potentially to be recruited need to have flexibility in their behaviors in order to acculturate to the new cultures when engaging in GVT (Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martinez, 2015). Given this demand in the

Table 6.1 Five key considerations for training and educating GVT members

1. Ensure teams fully understand the teamwork cycle of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning, and that this cycle can be iterative rather than linear
2. Encourage team members to develop relationships and friendship so that those whose cultural backgrounds base their performance on trust will be able to quickly develop it
3. Practice leadership without a formal appointment—leadership attributes should not be practiced by only one person; every member needs to play a leadership role
4. Experiment with new and different management skills—use the team as a training ground to establish the arts of planning, coordinating, leading, controlling, and organizing while working at a distance
5. Use more than one type of CMC (Skype, Facebook, Instant messaging)—keep updated with new developments, especially Web 2.0 options such as Whatsapp or Twitter, to ensure members can be reached easily and cheaply

industry, the responsibility lies with both educational institutions and organizations to put in place the appropriate training and grooming for the talents of the future. Table 6.1 suggests several points to be considered when training and educating people to be effective GVT members.

In addition, Earley et al. (2006) suggest few directions for training and educating individuals, which could be applied in the context of GVTs to obtain efficiency and effectiveness in teamwork (see below in Table 6.2):

Table 6.2 Characteristics of cultural strategic thinking for GVT innovativeness

1. Open, alert, and sensitive to new cultures between members that exist within the teamwork
2. Able to draw distinction and to identify similarities between different cultures because GVTs need to work within a short period of time
3. Able to develop different strategies for acquiring knowledge relevant to adapting to different cultures and achieve high level of cognitive intelligence for developing cultural awareness skills as well as emotional intelligence for creating cultural sensitivity skills.
4. Able to engage in active and dynamic thinking in interacting with people from different cultures, able to plan, check, and learn from each encounter, and able to resolve cultural dilemmas or problem in the encounter—all useful to achieve GVT cohesiveness.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions

The continuing globalization of the workforce creates new challenges which require innovative cultural competencies capable of addressing the complexity present in multicultural situations such as GVTs. In this chapter, I have addressed the following questions: How do team members successfully work with people who are totally different in terms of work practices, values, and attitudes? What does it take to be an effective team in the digital era and in a global work context? These questions are highly relevant given today's borderless world, where GVTs are becoming the work structure of choice for corporations with global ambitions or commitments. The challenges are multiplied by culture, which can result in confrontations and complicated dynamics between team leaders and team members as well as within the team itself. The cultural challenges that may arise are exacerbated by differences in time and space as well as in working attitudes and styles.

MNCs need to assess the compatibility between the practices and patterns of collaborating using technology, and their employees' cultural values (Borges, Brezilon, Pino & Pomerol, 2007; Lin, Standing & Liu, 2008). The wisest strategy for MNCs is to educate at the individual, team, and organizational level to develop both technological and cultural competencies, and build a workforce that understands the unique needs of a team comprised of people from different cultural backgrounds working together at a distance.

Since the work environment is ever more complex in this digital age, MNCs need to reorganize and re-strategize at every level, from vision and mission, to organizational culture and values, to specific practices and procedures, so as to successfully deploy and manage GVTs. Cultural differences should not be a barrier to developing competent teams and global leaders because all individuals have the same aspiration, need, and talents to become innovative and competitive. To be successful and effective, GVTs need the guidance of leaders with a global outlook, who fully understand that different cultures have different ways of working in terms of cognition, emotion, and behaviors.

In terms of future research, several questions remain to be asked and answered: (1) How do organizations develop culturally competent global leaders capable of successfully dealing with virtual multicultural teams? (2) How do organizations encourage leaders to be open to the many idiosyncrasies of behavior, the turmoil of emotions, and the unpredictable patterns of thought that may arise from divergent culturally rooted behaviors? (3) Can team members learn to trust members of diverse cultural backgrounds in a virtual workspace on short acquaintance? (4) Can team members develop the ability to alter their behavior to accommodate to the variation of communicative behaviors that exist among the diverse cultural backgrounds?

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