

LEADING CULTURALLY DIVERSE TEAMS

MAIN TAKE-AWAYS

Typically research and literature on international teams describe cultural differences as a source of conflict and inefficiency. But adopting this mindset will prevent you from realizing the innovative potential in diversity.

DIVERSITY BREEDS INNOVATION

Global companies like Alibaba and Google point to diversity as the source of their success and innovation. Nancy Lee is diversity manager at Google. She says: “To succeed in business today, you need ideas coming from every perspective and background. Period!”.

DANES WILL BE DANES AND CHINESE WILL BE CHINESE.... OR WILL THEY?

We can no longer look at culture as something that is predictable by nationality. Culture has become much more dynamic, so try not to buy into the stereotypes.

SIX TEAM CULTURE DIMENSIONS

Interviews with 41 international teams all point toward six crucial team culture dimensions. Cultural diversity is constituted by the differences team members have on these dimensions:

1. Relationship to power and authority
2. Communication (direct vs. indirect)
3. Ways of maintaining “face” (as in saving face)
4. Problem and conflict solving (detailed vs. efficient)
5. Humour and small talk
6. Relationships – trust is built in different ways

“Are cultural differences an obstacle or a key to success”

DO WE WORK AROUND OR UTILIZE DIVERSITY?

Much of existing research and literature on cross cultural teams suggests that the people should try and adapt to each other to even out the differences. But if you try to neutralize the cultural differences you may lose out on the diversity, that enables a team to make innovative solutions.

THE HEADQUARTER DYNAMIC

The global teams do not feel respected and included by headquarters. This comes out in meetings and in the decisions that the global teams receive from headquarters. These decisions are often times not adapted to the concrete reality of the global team.

FIVE TIPS THAT IMPROVE YOUR GLOBAL TEAMS

1. Have team talks about how to make use of cultural diversity
2. Acknowledge that cultural competence develops over time
3. Practice turning cultural conflicts into high performance
4. Strengthen headquarter support for global teams
5. Acknowledge the difficulties inherent in cultural diversity

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REFLECTION

When did your team make the most of its cultural diversity?

Which of the six cultural dimensions cause challenges in the team?

In what type of situation would it be interesting to practice turning cultural conflicts into high performance?

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RECOMMENDED READING

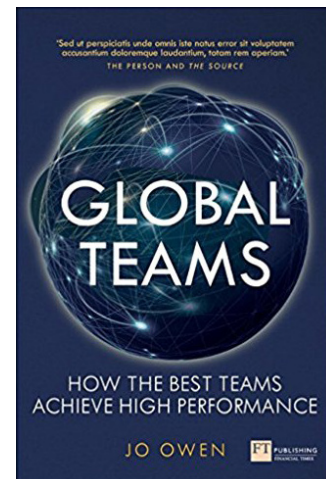
BOOK (English)

Global Teams: How the best teams achieve high performance (2016). By Jo Owen. Published by Financial Times Publishing.
Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Global-Teams-teams-achieve-performance/dp/129217191X>

ARTICLE (English)

How To Grow and Manage International Teams (2015). By John Rampton. Published by www.forbes.com. Link: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnrampton/2015/05/15/how-to-grow-and-manage-international-teams/#8cfb5cf2c604>

Unraveling the Effects of Cultural Diversity in Teams: A Metaanalysis of Research on Multicultural Work Groups (2010b). By Stahl, Günter K, Maznevski Martha L, Voigt Andreas, and Jonsen Karsten. Published in Journal of International Business Studies 41 (4): 690-709. Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/jibs.2009.85>



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