Managing Cross-Cultural and Virtual Teams

Alex Swarbrick
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Objectives this evening

- Why this? Why now?
- Issues and challenges
- Culture and virtual teams
- What we know helps – from our research and clients
- Your own experience and insights
- Practical tips for effective communication
- Discussion
Roffey Park...

Educational charity, established in 1946:

‘To enable individuals to achieve their best both at work and in their wider lives’
Roffey Park today...

65 years at the forefront of Leadership and Management Development
Organisational Development  Human Resources
Personal Effectiveness
Why this? Why now?

2012 – Roffey Park *The Management Agenda*

- 58% of respondents reported their organisations operating internationally

2010 – Grant Thornton survey

- a trend towards greater internationalisation of business for UK mid-market firms over the short to medium term.
- 19% of respondents said their firms expected to grow through international trade or overseas expansion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing individual behaviour</td>
<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural differences</strong></td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business practice differences</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headquarters too remote</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor law differences</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting and tax differences</td>
<td>36%</td>
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*Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers*
Business issues and challenges

- Bureaucracy: 72%
- Legal requirements: 71%
- Political environment: 65%
- Cultural differences: 63%
- Logistics: 55%
- IT: 51%
- Time differences: 34%

Source: Roffey Park  Management Agenda 2012
“Multicultural teams have greater potential for misunderstandings and conflict, which are exacerbated if team members are dispersed geographically and across time zones.”


“Take a typical team, make it virtual and expect trouble”

What do you see?
What do you see?
What do you see?
Culture – the stories we find ourselves in.

- **Basic beliefs and assumptions** - what’s the world like?
- **Values** - what makes something “good” or “bad”.
- **Norms** - “right” or “wrong” thing to do
- **“Fixtures and fittings”**

**Actions and behaviour**

**Implicit culture**

**Explicit culture**

Alex Swarbrick
Developed from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner *Riding the Waves of culture; Understanding cultural diversity in business.* (2002)
What’s the story?

- One in which we control our environment or are controlled by it?
- One in which rules or relationships are more important?
- One in which I expect, and am expected to function as an individual or within a group?
- One in which I show my emotions or hide them?
- One in which I have to prove myself to receive status or expect it to be given to me?

(Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner)
When stories differ (The Ladder of Inference)

Steps

- Observe and select data
- Interpretation
- Evaluate and causally explain
- Decide whether and how to respond

Internal Questions

- The action I’ll take?
- What intention am I attributing to the person? Positive or negative?
- What meaning am I making of what the person says or does?
- What data am I paying attention to? What data am I excluding?
- What data are available to me? What did I actually see / hear?
What is different about virtual management?

Distance isn’t about miles; it’s about relationships

- Less time to build relationships
- Less information for making judgements
- More time travelling
- Increased need to trust staff
- Harder to monitor performance

- It works best in a flat, autonomous and empowered organisation
- Induction and performance management key
- Communication and trust critical
- Psychological dimension cannot be ignored

Source: Centre for Distance Management

Source: Roffey Park Institute
What we know helps.

Nine competencies

◆ Personal
  1. Passion for working internationally
  2. Energy and resilience

◆ Interpersonal
  3. Flexibility and balance
  4. Communication
  5. Influencing
  6. Involving and valuing individuals

◆ Management
  7. Results focus
  8. Planning and organising
  9. Interface management
Personal Competencies

1. Passion for working internationally
   - Dig deeper to understand the others’ less obvious expectations
   - Relish the challenge of international working

2. Energy and resilience
   - High energy; go the extra mile

“Need the right personality; be open, credible, sincere, lead by example”
3. Flexibility and balance

- “Give and take when you’re working across time zones. Sometimes I have to get up at 3a.m. for a call and that’s ok because I know sometimes they’re working at 9p.m.”

- “We’re all humans. No matter how good the technology, you’ve got to have a ‘face to face’ once in a while – at least at the onset. The team needs to get to know you. You have to establish trust pretty quick”

- “Leaders need to have tolerance. (For example) not everything will be written how you like it – need a high tolerance for misspelling, mispronouncing things..”
4. Communication - Levels of Directness

- Rude
- Blunt
- Direct
- Indirect
- Evasive

e.g. Communication in the NL / Norway

- Rude
- Blunt
- Direct
- Indirect
- Evasive

e.g. Communication in India / Nepal / Japan

- Rude
- Blunt
- Direct
- Indirect
- Evasive
Emotional Expression in Communication

- Emotionally Restrained
  - State only the facts
  - Be concise and focussed

- Emotionally Expressive
  - Always share your feelings
  - Give the full story
Intercultural Communication Styles

- **Direct**
  - Discussion Style: USA, Sweden, Finland, UK
  - Engagement Style: Russia, Italy, Brazil

- **Indirect**
  - Accommodation Style: Mexico, India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Iran, Egypt
  - Dynamic Style: USA, Russia, Italy, Brazil

Source: Mitch Hammer, Intercultural Communication Styles Inventory
Ten tips

1. Use range of media
2. Make it interactive
3. Be precise
4. Be clear
5. Check out understanding
6. Be personal
7. Banter and emotions is OK
8. Track the conversation
9. Find a time when all can talk
10. Don’t forget the people at base
Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

◆ Language

- Harder when not your first language
  
  “people who don’t speak good English can be more comfortable writing – because they can write it out, change it, take their time”

- Listen carefully and check understanding and assumptions.

- Non-verbal e.g. eye contact

- More detail. Short sentences. Use common words and avoid colloquialisms.

◆ Vary the methods, and go one up.
Groups

- People uneasy in English may say less
  - Message boards, post-its, pictures.

Email

- Use email before meeting / video conference
- Uncomplicated language
- Greetings
6. Involving and valuing individuals

- Recognition
  - In video conferences for instance “I make sure people get a pat on the back who’ve accomplished a difficult task”
  - “I make sure my team is motivated and developed”
  - The trick of being present while absent
7. Results focus
   - Ensures that the strategic purpose of the team is well understood.
   - “Need to make sure people feel connected – from what they’re doing to the whole”

8. Planning and organising
   - “Got to have good project management skills – what’s on track, what’s slipping and needs your involvement. Need a 6th sense of what’s going on and to prioritise”
   - Picking up what you’re not being told

◆ And manage your own boss in the same way
## In critical incidents, great virtual managers..

- Respond quickly
- Take time to get facts
- Listen to all parties
- Act on hunches
- Act as mediator

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<td>Balance task and relationship</td>
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<td>Inspire confidence</td>
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<td>Influence stakeholders</td>
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<td>Communicate clearly</td>
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Our conclusions

◆ Everything isn’t down to culture
◆ Get even more skilful at communication.
  – Suspend your assumptions
  – Take time to listen
  – Understand and be understood
  – Use wide range of media, and often
◆ ‘Distance’ isn’t about miles; it’s about relationships
  – Be present while absent
◆ Virtual management takes hard work, tenacity, tolerance, relentless results focus, humility and…
Developing empathy

...being aware that my view of the world is not yours

Putting my beliefs and values aside
Taking time to understand yours
We can achieve outstanding results
And in conclusion....

THANK YOU!

Merci

Danke schön

Muchas gracias

ありがとうございます

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