

# Chapter 21

## Developing Trust within International Teams: The Impacts of Culture on Team Formation and Process

**Kurt Kirstein**

*City University of Seattle, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*The widespread use of international teams has been driven by an unprecedented need to draw upon varied talents of employees from around the globe in a manner that is both organizationally and financially feasible. Despite the importance of technologies to enable such teams, their success depends largely on the levels of intra-team trust and collaboration they are able to establish throughout the life of their projects. Team members on international teams may differ substantially on a number of cultural dimensions including preferences for individualistic versus collective teamwork, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and contextual communication. This chapter will investigate how these four cultural dimensions are likely to impact trust within an international team. Suggestions that team leaders can utilize to address these cultural dimensions are also presented.*

### INTRODUCTION

Given the increasing globalization of business practices, and the difficulties associated with international and even domestic travel, organizations are seeking ways to realize the benefits of multinational collaboration without the undue inconvenience and expense that have typically been associated with globalization efforts. Improving information and communication technologies have provided the means by which multinational companies can move beyond the geographic constraints that were formerly associated with

traditional face-to-face business models. Such technologies enable companies to draw upon the contributions of employees or associates from around the world as they develop creative products for a global market. These advances have opened the door to new and evolving levels of collaboration through the use of international teams, which can be understood as a group of people who work together, via technology, toward a shared purpose despite space, time, and organization boundaries (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). International teams cross multiple domains to streamline a company's operations by maximizing personnel efficiency

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9970-0.ch021

and adding flexibility (Hanover Research Council, 2008). The complexity of international teams is increasing steadily as the structure of global organizations shift. What was formerly a dual or tri-nation organizational hierarchy has now evolved into truly globally networked organization. What was formerly an arrangement of organizations, each with its own national identity, has shifted into new entities that create and employ novel transnational strategies (Harvey, McIntyre, Moeller & Sloan III, 2012).

Certainly, international teams could not exist, or be effective, without the proper technology infrastructure to support them. Yet, as important as technology is to an international team, it is merely a tool to carry forward the team's purpose. What is more important is that the team is clearly organized, with a unified purpose, and that it is capable of drawing upon the strengths of all its members. Given the international variances of these teams, cultural considerations become a significant concern and may even be a more important factor in the team's success than its chosen technologies or working processes.

The ways in which team members communicate and contribute ideas will, to a large part, be driven by their cultural orientation toward interpersonal interactions (Sosik & Jung, 2002). The level of initiative demonstrated by team members may have much more to do with their attitudes toward authority and power than anything related to personal motivation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Even the content and completeness of communication are impacted by norms that vary widely from one culture to the next. Failure to understand culturally-based differences toward key activities that will be encountered in team formation and process can pose a serious threat to the generation and maintenance of intra-team trust which is critical to the success of international teams (Dubé & Paré, 2001; Gibson & Manuel, 2003).

This chapter will review key considerations of cultural relevance to intra-team trust on international teams. Specifically, this chapter will ad-

dress how a team's development and maintenance of intra-team trust is impacted by its members' views on individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and contextually based communication. Each of these cultural dimensions is presented in the sections that follow along with a list of suggestions that team leaders and members can utilize to minimize the adverse impacts that these dimensions can bring to a team.

## **BACKGROUND**

Team formation can be a challenging process and one that takes time. Often, the process of forming the team and bringing its members together to accomplish a difficult task can take longer than the actual task itself (Wallace, 2001). Peck (1987) used the term pseudocommunity to refer to the ways in which a team interacts when it is first formed. The team will attempt to become an instant community through cordial interactions and the denial of differences. Yet, Peck points out that such reticence toward the recognition of individual differences does not support the development of novel solutions to pressing problems. The team must progress beyond its pseudocommunity stage and this requires the acknowledgement of different traits, attitudes, experience, and cultural norms.

Increasingly, large numbers of employees serve on teams with members whose locations, work processes, and collaboration technologies differ from their own. Teams are assembled and most complete the bulk of their work using communication and information technologies such as email, audio and video conferencing, and other technologies that allow information exchange across distances and time zones. International teams differ in the range of communication technologies used and their purposes for using them. Some tools may be for cohesiveness, some are used to facilitate the building of trust through social interaction and development, some are used to demonstrate that team members are meeting goals, and others are

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/developing-trust-within-international-teams/146666](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/developing-trust-within-international-teams/146666)

## Related Content

---

### Peace Development: Resolving Intrastate Conflict Through Leadership

Andrew H. Campbell and Ambassador Felix Obirize Nwosu (2022). *Evolution of Peace Leadership and Practical Implications* (pp. 46-60).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/peace-development/303461](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/peace-development/303461)

### Principal Preparation: The Case of Novice Principals in Turkey

Kadir Beycioglu and Helen Wildy (2017). *Educational Leadership and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1152-1169).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/principal-preparation/169054](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/principal-preparation/169054)

### Prospects and Challenges of Teaching Religious Ethics in Nigerian Universities

Finomo Julia Awajiusuk (2016). *Leadership and Personnel Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1925-1937).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/prospects-and-challenges-of-teaching-religious-ethics-in-nigerian-universities/146472](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/prospects-and-challenges-of-teaching-religious-ethics-in-nigerian-universities/146472)

### Introducing Trait EI

(2015). *Promoting Trait Emotional Intelligence in Leadership and Education* (pp. 1-29).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/introducing-trait-ei/127220](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/introducing-trait-ei/127220)

### Teachers' Knowledge about Asthma and Asthma Management in Inclusive Classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago

Elna Carrington-Blaides and Myrna Ransome (2017). *Assessing the Current State of Education in the Caribbean* (pp. 174-193).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/teachers-knowledge-about-asthma-and-asthma-management-in-inclusive-classrooms-in-trinidad-and-tobago/168959](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/teachers-knowledge-about-asthma-and-asthma-management-in-inclusive-classrooms-in-trinidad-and-tobago/168959)