

Optimizing Leadership Skills for Cross-Cultural Project Management: Strategies for Effective Leadership Across the Project Lifecycle

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ABSTRACT

In the following literature review, the critique of the implementing leadership skills for employees 'turnover within cross-cultural project leadership is disclosed. In detail, the study aims at identifying the extent to which cross cultural strategies can be applied in relation to the different phases in the project management cycle in order to bring about improved project results. In this context, the research focuses on the analysis of the topics that are communication, digital leadership, risk management, and emotional intelligence to learn how leadership is influencing cultural diversity in project teams. The review also outlines possible obstacles to the implementation of cross-cultural plans and some tactical footsteps to overcome the difficulties. Moreover, this study brings a critical concern to the future research on focusing on the lack of information pertaining to the effectiveness of cross-cultural leadership training in various contexts of the global environment. Thus, it is beneficial to find out how leadership competencies can enhance understanding of the need to manage cross-cultural teams for project success to occur.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Project Management; Leadership Skills; Communication; Digital Leadership; Risk Management

Introduction

Leadership skills are necessary to conduct and manage employees in project management activities. A lack of leadership skills or management skills endangers the project's successful outcome as employees may face issues and leaders may not be able to solve problems. Hence, firms need to focus on appropriate leadership skills and cross-cultural approaches to manage project members. Oh and Choi (2020) addressed, management skills have a direct connection with project success and it means a lack of appreciated skill may create a negative impact on project outcome. Originating from this concept, it is evident, managerial skills are necessary for project leaders and managerial skills allow project managers to gain success as end result.

Leadership plays a vital role in project management and leaders guide project employees in different project management tasks such as methods to overcome challenges, and provide guidance to new techniques. Ali *et al.* (2021) addressed, project leaders contribute to project success and often acknowledge employee's skill and allocate tasks. Project leaders ensure workers acquire different tasks based on skill sets. Figure 1 shows the UK's ad agency includes 23.6% non-white employees in 2019 and it has increased from prior years (Statista, 2020). It also means workplace leaders need to learn about cross cultural methods to manage diverse employees. This literature has been based on leadership skill's importance in project management tasks and in this context, key skills of project leaders have been discussed. A brief overview of the key findings has been provided and the core outcome has also been discussed in a different section.

This literature review showed high scope in leadership context and in other words, this study has focused on key leadership approaches in project management tasks. Project managers show high importance in the current era and project managers also handle stakeholder's requirements and align those with project goals. Srinivasan and Dhivya (2020) addressed, stakeholder management plays a vital role in project management and it allows project managers to identify stakeholder's needs. In this manner, project managers also fulfil project goals and provide satisfaction to stakeholders. This report has also highlighted cross cultural approaches in project management and it is useful for a modern diverse workplace. Moradi *et al.* (2020) addressed, leaders need to respect workers from different backgrounds and this will allow leaders to gain worker's utmost support and hence, the project will become successful. Hence, the report's outcome may be useful for future project managers and leaders to understand their duty and responsibilities in terms of stakeholder management and it is also the scope of this literature review.

Aim

This is to highlight cross-cultural approaches in project management leadership based on specific stages of the project management cycle. Based on this aim curtains objectives and questions have been formulated and these have been provided below.

Objectives

- To highlight significance of cross-cultural approaches for project management leadership
- To evaluate the role of leaders in managing cross cultural approaches for project management tasks

- To identify potential challenges to implement cross cultural approaches in project management
- To detect strategic measures to overcome potential challenges in cross cultural projects or organisational activities

Research question

- What is the significance of cross-cultural approaches for project management leadership?
- How do leaders manage cross-cultural approaches for project management tasks?
- What are the barriers of cross-cultural approach implementation in project management?
- What are the strategic measures to overcome potential barriers in cross cultural approach implementation?

Literature Review

The importance of cross cultural approaches when it comes to leadership in project management has been widely discussed in literature especially with the aim on improving the project performance through leadership and management. According to Zhang et al. (2019), sound communication is a critical area through which firms can effectively foster interaction with the different stakeholders and achieve organizational performance. This is supported by Almeida et al. (2021) that discussed various measures different communication approaches, and the approaches that have been adopted by organisations such as Samsung and Apple noted that the main approaches positively influence the management of stakeholder. These two studies points towards the need to have good interpersonal communication skills when dealing with people from

different cultural background if one has to deliver on the set projects.

Leadership regarding the implementation of cross cultural strategies is also important, particularly in the field of digital leadership. In another study, Soon and Salamzadeh (2021) investigated the mediating role of communication quality in enhancing virtual teams' outcomes regarding digital leadership competencies in MNCs. According to their research and analysis, they posit that digital leadership has a positive impact on team performance concluding that today's leaders need to have good working relations when it comes to virtual cross cultural teams. In addition, Sharmaa et al. (2019) make a contribution to the current literature on how an understanding of digital literacy can assist the leaders in the retail sector including Tesco as they point to the fact that risk management arising from digital disruption of the markets is a critical factor arising from the analysis of jobs for today's leaders.

The cross cultural approaches to project management also has its challenges as follows. Jaiswal et al. (2019) address that effective decision making is vital for the competitive advantage and upskilling of the employees for artificial intelligence in multinational companies. Roy and Roy (2021) also stress on management decisions in cost control and how the firms can sustain and operate in the market. In both the studies, the authors reveal the significance of integrative decision-making in overcoming the impediments to utilizing cross cultural intervention in project management. Finally, concerning the process of leadership, it is important to note that emotional intelligence plays a significant part in counteracting the difficulties in

project management. Tiftik, (2020) and Alzoubi & Aziz, (2021) paint the picture of why and how emotional intelligence leads to positive workplace outcomes and better strategic decision-making. Drawing from these studies, it can be deduced that leaders who have Emotional Intelligence, can tackle most of the cross-cultural issues that come with project management and lead to the improvement of project results.

Methodology

Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the set of assumptions that are used to develop knowledge about the research phenomenon. Research philosophy is of five types that include the following: “positivism philosophy, interpretivism, critical realism, pragmatism and postmodernism”. In this research, “interpretivism research philosophy” was used for interpreting the research phenomenon based on the cross-cultural approaches used in project management leadership. Interpreting the methodologies used in the stages of the project management cycle and the cross-cultural initiatives taken into consideration by project leaders help gaining a broader and detailed perspective on the topic. Positivism focuses on deriving statistical data whereas realism focuses on retrieving perceived experiences of the individuals, and pragmatism depends on the operational functions (Kironko, and Odoyo, 2020). These are not suitable for deriving information related to scrutinising the use of cross-cultural initiatives in the project management leadership.

Research approach

Research approach refers to the procedures and activities followed by the researcher in order to obtain information on a research topic. The research approach is categorised into two different types that include “inductive method and deductive method” (Proudfoot, 2020). In this research, the “inductive research approach” is used for illustrating and defining the research phenomenon in a detailed manner. The research due to the inductive method starts with observation on project management leadership, then theories are developed based on project lifecycle stages. The deductive research approach requires developing hypotheses that are tested throughout the research process. The intention of this research is to generate new theories on research phenomena and thus, there is nothing that can be tested through this research. For this reason, the inductive research method was chosen in this current research over deductive method.

Research design

Research design helps provide a planning on which research is carried out to generate an authentic outcome that can resolve the research problem in a significant way. The research design has four major categories that include “descriptive, explanatory, exploratory and correlational” (Ansari *et al.* 2019). In this research, the descriptive design was used which helped describe the research phenomenon in a detailed manner and obtain accurate information on the research topic (Ansari *et al.* 2019). Descriptive design is effective to use in this research because it helps describe the cross-cultural approaches used by project leaders in detail, especially highlighting all the stages of the project management cycle. Other methods such as “explanatory, exploratory and correlational” are

beneficial for retrieving primary data that is not the intention of this research for which descriptive design is suitable.

Data collection

Data collection is the method that enables researchers to gather authentic and reliable information on the research phenomenon. The two categories of data collection methods are “primary and secondary” data collection methods (Mazhar *et al.* 2021). Among these two methods, the “secondary” was used in this research for obtaining the cross-cultural approaches considered by project leaders in project lifecycle stages. The secondary data was collected from different journals, articles, newspapers and websites. Eight journals were used in this research for obtaining information and industry specific or case studies from different companies are used for better understanding of the research topic.

Sampling Criteria

Sampling is the method of selecting participants for retrieving information and conducting research. The sampling is of two types that include “probability sampling and non-probability sampling” technique (Mweshi, and Sakyi, 2020). The sampling technique that is considered in this research is a “random sampling technique” that is actually a part of “probability sampling technique”. It helps collect information randomly from industries, and case studies for analysing cross-cultural approaches used by project leaders. In context to sample size, 4 themes were generated and eight articles were collected by considering the objectives for conducting this research process.

Data analysis

Data analysis is the process through which collected information related to the research can be analysed for interpreting the research phenomenon. Four themes were identified in this research based on the four research objectives that helped answer the research problem effectively. These themes helped analyse the patterns of cross-cultural approaches in project leadership and helped explain the methodologies used by the project leaders in project management lifecycle.

Ethical considerations

Ethical report construction is also helpful to avoid legal issues such as copyright issues, data protection issues and achieve successful rest at the end. In a similar manner, “Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988” helped in this report as guide and proper instructions for copyright works and data protection have been followed (Legislation, 2021). Apart from this, “Data Protection Act 2018” also helped to protect individual data and maintain privacy of the report (Legislation, 2021). In this particular situation, proper citations have been used to provide credit to original authors. Apart from this, all information has been presented in authentic form and no alteration has been made in the data for enhancing the authenticity of the results.

Findings

Theme 1: Analysis on the significance of cross-cultural approach for enhancing the outcome of project through effective leadership and management

Cross cultural approaches are necessary for project managers as cross-cultural

approaches allow project managers to ensure employee satisfaction in diverse backgrounds. In other words, cross cultural approaches are useful to manage employees from different ethnic backgrounds and ensure organisational success at the end. Zhang *et al.* (2019) addressed robust communication as a useful approach and communication process also allows leaders to understand stakeholder's intention. In this manner, workplace leaders may understand stakeholder's needs and integrate those needs in project goals. Zhang *et al.* (2019) also addressed Huawei's sustainable development approaches and are also useful to highlight CSR approaches. Firms also tend to understand different cultural values with proper communication and integrate those values in the sustainable practices. In a similar manner, Huawei also promotes a culture of integrity in the workplace and links it to sustainable approaches.

Communication strategies also act as cross-cultural approaches in the workplace and in this manner, administrative teams convey instructions to employees with different cultural backgrounds. Figure 2 also suggests, Apple and Samsung use social media platforms to communicate with stakeholders in cross-cultural markets (Almeida *et al.* 2021). Apart from this, Apple's word-of-mouth communication technique in the workplace and in this situation, Apple leaders provide verbal instruction to team members and allow team members to become part of business operations and it helps to gain employee attention in tasks. In other words, Apple uses different languages to communicate with employees and in this manner or with verbal communication's help, Apple workplace leaders tend to understand

employee's issues and guide employees. Apple also conducts employee conferences or meetings to communicate with diverse workforce and Apple distributes organisational goals and knowledge to the workers. Hence, the communication process is essential to manage a cross-cultural workplace.

Theme 2: Evaluating the role of leaders in managing cross cultural approaches

Leadership style and leadership skills allows firms to guide employees to achieve goals. In other words, a lack of appropriate leadership skill or managerial ability may reduce organisational scope to achieve success as without proper leadership firms cannot overcome issues and may face failure. Modern workplace leaders often possess specific skills sets such as communication, technological skill to address workplace issues and use technology such as AI to solve those effectively. Soon and Salamzadeh (2021) addressed, MNCs such as AMD, Intel often use digital leadership skills to collaborate with employees from different regions and it also helps MNCs to control foreign establishments from their home country. Figure 3 also suggests, digital leaders use technical knowledge and ensure virtual team effectiveness (Soon and Salamzadeh, 2021). In other words, digital knowledge is a mandatory aspect in modern leadership skills as this is the digital era and modern business leaders solve employee management issues with this particular skill set or knowledge. In other words, digital leaders often use virtual communication tools and robust technical knowledge to collaborate with cross-cultural employees and guide them in problematic situations.

Risk management is another crucial aspect and it has a direct connection with corporate success rate. In other words, a high-risk rate reduces a firm's chance to achieve success and low risk rates enhances a firm's chance to acquire success in the modern market. Sharmaa *et al.* (2019) addressed, Tesco's workplace leaders often conduct risk assessment and brain-storming sessions to identify issues in the workplace for risk detection and provide solutions for risk mitigation and allow leaders to continue work on projects. In this manner, Tesco's workplace leaders investigate potential risk factors with Delphi techniques in different departments such as production, packing, distribution and detect risks and potential solutions from the cross-cultural workers and it allows Tesco to avoid operational delays.

Theme 3: Discussion on cross cultural approach implementation barriers in project management

Project managers often face barriers in cross-cultural workplace situations and project managers or workplace leaders need to take effective approaches to overcome problematic situations. A lack of effective approaches may reduce a project's scope of organisational goals to become incomplete and it may damage the firm's reputation. Cross-cultural workplace also shows certain issues such as skill development and, in this situation, employees show inability to adopt new techniques due to the skill gap. Jaiswal *et al.* (2019) also addressed, giant companies such as Walmart, IBM often uses modern technologies such as AI for service improvement and also invests in employee's soft skill development. Hence, from the above analysis it can be addressed, skill gap is a barrier for multinational

companies and it forbids MNCs to integrate modern technologies such as AI in production service. Hence, it is necessary for modern workplace leaders to focus on skill development tasks and allow firms to adopt necessary tools to achieve market success.

Firms often need to create robust business decisions in order to achieve market success and complete organisational goals. Figure 4 also suggests, decision-making skill is important in future (Jaiswal *et al.* 2019). In this particular situation, firms often face issues to make proper business decisions as leaders often face confusion and choose a particular path from multiple options. Roy and Roy (2021) addressed, Walmart often focuses on cost-leadership strategy to achieve business growth and in this manner, Aldi offers products at low cost to the customers. Aldi often face issues to make cost decisions as low cost may reduce profit scope and for this reason Aldi's profit margin often fluctuates.

Theme 4: Illustration of strategic measurements to overcome potential challenges in project management tasks or organisational activities

Firm leaders often take strategic measurements to overcome potential barriers such as decision-making, employee's skill gap and in this manner, workplace or cross-cultural project leaders create a robust workforce to complete organisational goals. Tiftik (2020) addressed emotional intelligence skill's presence as a positive aspect as it allows leaders to understand employee demands and this skill is often observed among Walmart leaders. In other words, giant companies such as Walmart often use

emotional intelligence to identify employee's needs and, in this manner, fulfil employee needs and ensure long-term success. Leaders with emotional intelligence skills are able to identify an employee's needs and, in this manner, workplace leaders use this knowledge to inspire employees and achieve high performance. Walmart leaders uses emotional intelligence to highlight employee's issues and areas for improvement and in this process, Walmart leaders take innovative measurements such as recognition, wages to motivate employees.

Innovation plays a vital role in organisational growth and innovative measurement allows firms to overcome production barriers and achieve business goals. Alzoubi and Aziz (2021) addressed emotional intelligence skill's high importance in United Arab Emirates Bank (UAE) as it allows bankers to make strategic decisions and increase productivity. Figure 5 shows, emotional intelligence has a direct connection with strategic decisions (Alzoubi and Aziz, 2021). Emotional intelligence allows workplace leaders to make objective oriented business strategies and, in this manner, a firm may achieve market success. Leaders with emotional intelligence skills are aware of circumstantial situations, market conditions and this further allows an emotionally intelligent leader to make useful decisions and avoid financial losses or project delays.

Discussion

It is important for project managers to take appropriate measurements as it allows project managers to achieve project goals

and avoid any financial loss. It has been analysed, project managers often face issues collaborating with cross-cultural workers and this type of situation may increase project delay and expenses. Hence, project managers need to use appropriate skills to overcome employee management issues such as collaboration gaps and ensure project success with proper skills. In this partial scenario, Zhang *et al.* (2019) addressed communication skills as useful to collaborate with stakeholders and also highlighted "sustainable development goal" integration as a useful approach for cross cultural satisfaction as it allows firms to focus on cross cultural suitability needs. For example, Huawei integrated SDG goals in the company approaches and highlights environment protection as core business idea. In this manner, Huawei showed high interest in environment protection and it also allowed the company to show CSR duties.

Communication skill or measurements also allows companies to handle cross-cultural project outcomes as it allows leaders to communicate with workplace leaders and provide instruction to complete work. Almeida *et al.* (2021) discussed Apple's work-of-mouth communication technique as useful in this situation and this technique allows Apple to communicate with employees. It can be discussed that leadership roles are also important as workplace leaders communicate with subordinates and provide instruction for project activities. For example, workplace leaders guide employees in project initiation, and also support during the monitoring process. In a similar manner, giant company leaders from Intel, AMD often use virtual methods and digital skills to provide guidance to leaders (Soon and

Salamzadeh, 2021). In this manner, workplace leaders communicate with employees from different regions and guide employees to complete organisational goals.

Workplace leaders also need to focus on risk management activities and it further increases the leader's importance in a firm. It can be described, workplace leaders in renowned companies such as Tesco, use effective techniques such as Delphi to gather employee's opinion and detect potential risk areas (Sharma *et al.* 2019). Workplace leaders tend to detect risk factors and provide solutions to the employees and this type of behaviour further allows employees to overcome risk factors and focus on workplace goals and business objectives. Delphi technique also allows cross-cultural employees to feel welcomed in the workplace as workplace leaders ask for employee's opinion to create risk management strategies. The overall analysis also suggests, skill gap is an important factor and it acts as a barrier for employee commitment and inputs.

Renowned companies often use modern technology to improve service quality and employee skill gap may act as a barrier in this type of situation. It can be discussed, renowned companies such as Walmart, IBM use AI technology to improve business operations and also focus on employee skill development processes (Jaiswal *et al.* 2019). Hence, it can be discussed, employee skill development is necessary in the current era and lack of skilled labour may cause firms to face failure and integrate modern technologies such as AI in business operations. Business decisions or strategies are problematic situations as its overall impact may

influence a firm's financial performance and reduce investment scope in training program, machinery purchasing. Aldi often uses low-cost strategies for the customer satisfaction but it often reduces Aldi's profit margin (Roy and Roy, 2021). Hence, it further shows firms need to make proper business decisions and wrong decisions can lead to financial failure.

Leaders need to possess specific skills such as emotional intelligence and understand appropriate measures to overcome business or project challenges in a cross-cultural workplace. Workplace leaders at Walmart often use emotional intelligence to identify employee's needs and provide support to ensure high engagement rate (Tiftik, 2020). Emotional intelligence also allows leaders to understand the overall market situation and make judgments for stable growth. Bankers from UAE banks often use emotional intelligence to uncertain circumstances of the market and make appropriate financial decisions to avoid loss (Alzoubi and Aziz, 2021). Hence, it can be analysed that business leaders may focus on emotional intelligence skills to overcome cross-cultural project management issues and achieve project goals without any issues such as delays, cost overrun.

Suggestions for future research

The overall discussion highlighted crucial factors such as important leadership skills, approaches to handling a cross-cultural workplace. It is common for researchers to have certain limitations and these limitations require proper attention to enhance knowledge base and fulfil literature gaps (Zhang *et al.* 2019). The overall discussion highlighted core factors and approaches for cross cultural leadership

style and it is helpful to manage cross cultural projects and achieve project success. Majority of findings showed appropriate measurements in specific regions and hence, future research needs to be done on international market context and also highlight international leadership practices. In this manner, firms may apply similar approaches for different regions and achieve positive results in each market.

Conclusion

Cross cultural projects or the workplace is a common aspect in the current era and in this type of workplace business leaders often need to work with employees from different regions. A workplace leader needs to possess specific skills to deal with cross-cultural workers such as robust communication methods, emotional intelligence, risk management skills, decision-making ability, digital or technical knowledge. These skill sets allow a business or project leader to handle different stages or situations in business or projects and also allow to make proper decisions with knowledge and skill base. Hence, from the above analysis it can be concluded, project management leaders need to possess multiple skills to overcome project barriers and fulfil project goals.

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