Multicultural Team Building and Filling : Multicultural Gap within Thai Context

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Organization : A Differentiated Culture

Just like Japanese industrial success in the 1980s has made the emphasis of individuals into teams working, globalization has made transformation of homogenous teams onto multicultural ones. A team with different cultures lever more complexity and diversity in exchange of potentiality for greater creativity. This article shades light a multicultural gaps found within Thai context, In addition to conceptualize the driving forces required in the multicultural team in a condition where the team is already accepted the cultural differences. Teams can make better decisions; develop better products and services, as well as formulate a more energized workforce than people who work within their cultural paradigm. On the other hand, culturally diverse teams often perform either more or less effectively than their single culture counterparts. Nevertheless, the multicultural team with multicultural understanding will go thorough the same process as a homogeneous team has, just like a society did.

Through socialization process, people are normally educated to follow a norm, folkway and most people won't oppose it. In homogeneous or multicultural teams, norming is reaching a "cultural" convention on how the members should conduct themselves, approach things, as well as roles and requirements. In other words, it is the process of reaching a balance. Even though, multicultural teams use more time and effort on creating cohesion than homogeneous ones, they do offer potentials for creativity and synergetic solutions that are in desperate needs of the ever-converging globalization world.

Basically, to see the possible difficulties and performance of a multicultural team, it is essential to understand these general cultural factors

Hofstede proposed that cultural factors have two aspects: practices and values. In contrast, convergence is the process of choosing the best alternatives perhaps after refining them. In order to select from the divergent possibilities that is not only creative but also practical, the union has to take place to reach and intelligent decision. The convergence factors, in another words, have to motivate individual team members to reach the group goal. And the intrinsic motivations that come from within are what really energizes and motivates individuals (Hofstede, G, 1991)

Thus, the convergence factors call attention to individual determinations. These determined motivations, like energy sources, seem to be the link among the divergence, convergence and attribution factors. Attribution factors, on the other hand, are complementing aspects that bring about team efforts. The encourage team commitment. Perspective taking, team player inventory as well as team roles can be good indications of these efforts. Therefore, attribution factors are forces the "manage" the divergence and convergence forces: Only with the attribution factors to manage diversity and motivations, a highly productive team is possible.

What is culture?

According to American Heritage Dictionary, the definition of culture is:
1. a. The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs. institutions, and all other products of human work and thought
   b. These patterns, traits, and products considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population: Edwardian culture; Japanese culture; the culture of poverty.
   c. These patterns, traits, and products considered with respects to a particular category, such as a field, subject, or mode of expression: religious culture in the Middle Ages; musical culture; oral culture.
   d. The predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.
2. Intellectual and artistic activity and the works produced by it

3. a.   Development of the intellect through training or education.
    b.   Enlightenment resulting from such training or education.
4. A high degree of taste and refinement formed by aesthetic and intellectual training.
5. Special training and development: voice culture for singers and actors.

Culture is very hard to define since it covers a whole range of scopes. It is obvious but also hidden in people's subconscious. People from their own cultures sometimes can't get the full perceptive and don't know why their behaviors follow these "granted" patterns. Indeed, cultures influences individuals' life from how they think to how they behave and their values.

Nevertheless, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner classified specific and diffused oriented cultures. He thinks people in specific cultures tend to have a larger public area and small private area and more guarded. (Trompenaars. F.& Hampden-Turner, C., 1998) They are more direct and prefer to keep private life separate. On the contrary, in diffused cultures, the private space is usually larger while the public space is smaller and more guarded. They are more indirect and introvert, and also view private and work as linked. And the flexibility is very important to them.

The ultimate act of a multicultural team is to create cultural synergy, where in conception, the sum is greater than its parts combined. With every culture's perspectives in mind, ti is possible to create a cultural synergetic solution beyond the best existing alternatives. Multicultural team members learn from one another to enhance the overall team productivity and effectiveness. This is a process of combining and leveraging various cultures. With "cultural awareness" the idea won't seem strange. As a result, **Synergy is more likely to occur in a team**. In order for the multicultural team to perform, members have to converge into a norm to from a new convention. And to perform, the multicultural team has to diverge again to find the possible alternatives. On the path of diverging and converging, a multicultural team will have a wider range to look for that unexpected discovery.

Why multicultural Understanding?

McShane and Von Glinow define teams are groups of two or more people who interact and influence each other, are mutually accountable for achieving common goals associated with organizational objectives, and perceive themselves as a social entity with an organization. There are some characteristics of a team. It is formed by a small number of people. Individuals with complementary skills are usually needed to form the team. Often, they hold each other accountable in a "common approach" toward "a common purpose and performance goals." (McShane, S., and Von Glinow, M., 2005)

However, according to Scoltes et al., there are ten common teaming problems such as floundering, over bearing participants, dominating participants, reluctant participants, unquestioned acceptance of opinions as facts, rush to accomplishment, attribution, discounts and "plops." wanderlust: digression and tangents, and feuding members. (Scholtes J., et al., 1998.) Then, with these many possible drawbacks, why team? Why multicultural team?

The importance of successful teams has been ascribed in winning organizations. Partly due to Japanese economic miracle of the 1970s, there have been more and more teams replacing individuals as the basic working units. Meanwhile, it is widely believed that teams can make better decisions, develop better products and services as well as a more energized workforce than people who work alone. However, these effects can only be achieved, if the goals are common and team members have complementing skills. In general, working teams are better at identifying problems, developing and choosing alternatives than individuals can.

Because a good team share information and responds to the external environment, team is also good for knowledge management. For example, with team, superior customer service can be achieved because of more breadth of knowledge and expertise to customers than an individual can have, By enriched "job" contents, teams also have potential to energize and engage people, because team members are "motivated" to bond as a group working towards a common goal. When people feel they are part of the group, the basic social needs are not only satisfied, but also motivate people to fulfill the common goals of the group. In a sense, a team setting with broader job scopes will let team members perform tasks that are too complex for an individual to deal with alone.

Culturally diverse teams often perform either more or less effectively than their single-culture counterparts. With individuals from different cultures, if the cultural differences are communicated and understood, it is believed that multicultural team will be more "creative" to achieve the objectives. How much are the influence of the cultures on the teams and how much values had they added? If a team can generate more alternatives than and individual, a multicultural team will have more creative prospects than a homogeneous team can, even though the potential conflicts are great, If individuals can be converged (normed) into a performing team, cultural divergent individuals may well as converged to outperform a homogeneous team. Multicultural team has the same kind of elements like team with more embedded cultural differences. From this point of view, cultures in essence are collective values that converged to a norm at a moment.

Divergence Factors: What the team can learn in the workplace.

The divergence factors are not only factors that diversify a team, but it also refers to a conceptual step when team is performing. Namely, a team looks for ways to stimulate thinking by diversifying and exploring the alternatives. It is suggested that divergence tools have five basic inherent action principles, **SWAMI:**

1. **Suppose:** Imaging a situation that will shift to new way of thinking.
2. **Wander:** Wandering through new territory for connections and linkages.
3. **Associate:** Deliberately link between ideas, events, people, objects, or processes that are not normally connected. By doing so, it might give a new direction on seeing things and new possibilities from new relationships.
4. **Morph:** Change various aspects of the situations, making the unfamiliar things acquainted, and making the strange things familiar**.**
5. **Inquire:** When questions are asked, the new "openings" are marked. It is often said that a great question can unravel a mystery.

The divergent factors emphasize from cultural differences on multicultural teams. "Cultural differences have been found to be responsible for over 70% of the differences in leadership behavior. Thus, a focus on these differences seems legitimate."

Convergence Factors: What the team has to understand.

Convergence factors are mainly from individuals of the team. Convergence is the process of choosing the best alternatives, perhaps after refining them. In order to select from the divergent possibilities that is not only creative but also practical, the convergence has to take place to reach and intelligent decision. Basically, all convergence tools have five basic inherent action principles, **SOARS:**

1. **Sort:** Possibilities need to be group into meaningful categories. Categories might be related to time, feasibility, market demand, availability of resources, type of possibility, or any other category that would bring order out of the chaos.
2. **Order:** The preference and pre-established criteria arrange the rank and order of these possibilities.
3. **Adapt:** After possibilities have been identified, they can be further expanded and adapted to create even better ideas.
4. **Refine:** These possibilities will be purified from the weak points**.**
5. **Select:** Ideas are only ideas until they are being implemented. Therefore, it is critical to have the right people implement the ideas.

Furthermore, individuals have motives for achievement, power and affiliation. Meanwhile, the team motivations are affected by these factors such as purpose, challenge, camaraderie, responsibility, growth and leadership. The two-factor motivation theory depicts extrinsic motivation that are environmental is a force that will de-motivate. On the other side, the intrinsic energize and motivate individuals. Tangible drives and surroundings characters can be from individuals. Characters can be shown someone's locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-leadership. Elaborations of locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-leadership can be enjoyed with the other in the workplace.

We are All in It Together

It may be wrong to "stereotype" a culture, but it is a starting point before one can full embrace the extents of it. So Schein and others once said, Culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and belief that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. (Schein, T.; Goldston, J.; and Benjamin. L., 1958) While others like Hofstede views "Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another." Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values. Then, similar to cultures, teams will develop collectively held values. In a sense, team will develop a "culture" like organizations have organizational cultures and this is a collective representation of individuals combined.

People are happy to work together with mind being full of multicultural understanding

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