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## **Understanding culture-specific leadership relationship in a multi-cultural virtual project team (MVPT): a case study**

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**Abstract:** In the 21st century business environment, successful international project management requires special attention to team leaders' leadership styles from different culture backgrounds. This case study explores an intergroup conflict that occurred during a global product development project within an international company which utilised a virtual team. The virtual team consisted of team members with different cross-functional roles, from teams and offices in the People's Republic of China, the USA, and the UK. The conflict was centred on the management of the project as well as leadership style differences in approaching resource allocation among headquarters, local offices, and external partners. This case study demonstrates that when conflict happens in a multi-cultural virtual project team (MVPT), a successful resolution is dependent on the leadership styles of team leaders. The study distinctly reveals the effect of leadership for reshaping the culture of virtual teams and how doing so will impact team performance for the duration of the project.

**Keywords:** leadership style; virtual team; conflict management; cultural intelligence.

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper, we discuss a case study of a multi-cultural virtual project team (MVPT) that experienced conflicts during its life. We start the work by providing contextual information about cultural dimensions and leadership. We will show that as an organisation becomes more global, MVPT becomes more popular, hence the need to understand its unique dynamics. We begin by reviewing the literature on culture and organisations, how culture influences leadership, and the peculiarities of virtual project teams. We then provide the case study of the MVPT where conflict was experienced, followed by our analysis of how it could be prevented in future situations. We conclude the paper by providing new insights for effectively managing a MVPT as well as theoretical implications.

To succeed in the rapidly changing and interlinked business environment, multinational companies often have to establish a MVPT across different geographical boundaries and cultures to increase the operational effectiveness of the company. A MVPT performs activities ranging from research and development (R&D), new product development (NPD), manufacturing, to customer service. Several studies have shown MVPT as a valuable medium to take advantage of expertise from different companies, office sites and cultures around the globe (Hinds and Bailey, 2003). However, it is also recognised that due to team members' physical and cultural differences, a less shared context, low familiarity and trust, misunderstanding, project delay, exhausting travel, and overall high managerial challenges exist (Hinds and Bailey, 2003; Nurick and Thamhain, 2006). The possibility of conflict occurrence and level of hostility are higher than traditional face-to-face teams (Armstrong and Cole, 2002; Hinds and Bailey, 2003). The conflict may concern a task, a process, and/or emotional mode among team members. Under conflict situations, virtual team members "often feel compelled to take sides and adopt extreme positions at the opposite poles of an argument, called polarisation" [Osland et al., (2007), p.342]. This polarisation separates team members in a MVPT from each other and significantly reduces their feeling of belonging to the MVPT. The MVPT conflict may subsequently develop into an intergroup conflict and may have increasing

and long lasting negative impact on individuals and between groups. Such outcomes may further affect the project performance of the MVPT and impact the working of other projects.

A virtual team conflict could be resolved through communications and negotiations (Osland et al., 2007). Leadership plays a role of managing the direction of such communications and interactions resulting in resolution. Besides diverse leaders' communication skills, different cultures result in different leadership styles, behaviours, and roles. It is important for global managers to know that leadership plays a central role in creating as well as changing culture of a group (Schein, 2004). In the long run, how leaders demonstrate their leadership styles within and beyond their cultures and stereotypes is an essential factor to the success of the MVPT in creating a positive atmosphere that can successfully shares in diverse culture and climate.

This case study has two goals. Firstly, it attempts to demonstrate that when conflict happens in a MVPT a successful resolution of it is dependent on team leaders' leadership styles. Secondly, it shows how leaders' behaviour interacts with their own and others' culture and situational properties in a MVPT, eventually shaping the team culture and climates for the duration of the project.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Cultural dimensions in the workplace*

Culture is considered as "an interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment" [Hofstede, (1980), p.25]. Individuals who grow up and get educated in different countries and societies form one kind of collective mental programme in the environment (Hunt, 1996). This collective mental programming "covers a wide range of values, beliefs, assumptions, behaviours, norms, and so on" (p.217), which construct a societal culture in which a person comes from. Although individually people have their unique background and personal history, this societal culture represents how a group of people act in the same way (He and Thatchenkery, 2010). We understand that in one societal culture, individuals have their own belief systems that constitute their personal preferences and behaviours unique from others. We hold our interest in this paper to the collective characteristics of different societal cultures on how they would impact the way a group of people act.

There are different studies to categorise dimensions of societal culture. Hall (1976) illustrates high-context culture and low-context culture in different countries around the world. Context plays an emergent function that influences an individual's preprogramming of information between himself/herself and the outside world. According to Hall (1976), western countries are more low-context cultures, while Asian countries are high-context cultures. In low-context cultures, people deliver messages explicitly, organise time extremely well, and pursue tasks firstly. In high-context cultures, people are likely to communicate indirectly, discuss ideas patiently, and maintain social relationships firstly. Hofstede (1980) concludes that individualistic culture is popular in most western countries while most Asian nations tend to place high value on collectivism. Individualistic culture encourages personal accomplishment and more calculative participation in their organisation where global managers are more encouraged to take on leadership. Collectivistic culture drives Asian managers to take

cautious attention on when and how to involve their leadership roles and responsibilities in different context. Lewis (2000) summarises worldwide culture into three categories: linear-active, multi-active, and reactive. According to Lewis, people in these three categories of culture have different attitude to time, tasks, and leadership. People in linear-active culture are result-oriented achievers, time planners, and aggressive leaders; people in reactive culture demonstrate more on relationship building, patient listening skills, and silent leading; people in multi-active culture plan for grand outlines, work many hours, and are inquisitive.

There are two additional levels of culture in the workplace – the organisational culture and its sub-culture. Organisation as a total system maintains its integrity with many layers of elements and conceptions in culture. Hunt (1996) summarises the layers of organisational culture from previous typologies as a peeled onion. The core assumption drives an organisation on what it ought to be and their “behavioural patterns and visible or audible results of behaviours” (p.220). Organisational culture represents the collective mental programming of people in the organisation, which is unique with other organisations. The societal and organisational culture characterise the collective-individual group of people in the workplace and also make a MVPT more popular and valuable in effectively utilising the best people resources in the world. Conversely, the collective-individual characteristics cause international companies many challenges such as “maintain(ing) a sharp collective-individual separation ... between or among various individuals or organisational groups” [Hunt, (1996), p.217].

## *2.2 Leadership and culture*

The global leadership and organizational behaviour effectiveness (GLOBE) research reveals the traits of cultural fluency in leadership behaviours based on the need of global managers working in across-culture business environment (Javidan and House, 2001). “Being global is not just about where you do business. It is also about how you do it” (p.292). The reality of being global for an organisation is the cultural diversification of their employees, partners, customers, suppliers, and competitors. These diversifications bring many new challenges to global managers which affect their way of doing business, communicating and leading. Having competent global leaders become a multi-national company’s scarcest resource and key factors to determining its business success in international market according to a Fortune 500 survey (Javidan and House, 2001). Among the many skills and knowledge for a competent global leader, many chief executive officers (CEOs) are looking for those who have better cultural awareness and understanding. A global manager has the obligation to effectively communicate and bears the responsibility to create an environment for employees and team members that enables them to work together. Interviews among Chinese leaders and Western leaders by Paine (2010) confirms doing successful business in China requires leaders who understand the market, respond to rapid change, and have the crucial adaptability to meet contradictory cultures and deal with diverse circumstances. Thomas (1977) suggests that the single-valued approach produces dysfunctional consequences in managerial practices, as every value system generates its own variety of right and wrong. It is suggested that to adopt a multi-valued approach in cross-cultural communications and interactions is advantageous and allows the manager the ability of moving out of self or group’s norms to interpret and cope with unfamiliar and/or even opposite value systems and is

recognised as an important trait of cultural intelligence (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004; Earley and Peterson, 2004) for a global manager.

Network models that examines the leadership-culture relationship and its impact to followers reactions and behaviours (Hanges et al., 2000) show that psychological variables can be affected by culture and leaders' behaviours at a conscious and subconscious level. The model also suggests that "culture sets boundary conditions for effective leadership behaviours" (p.153). Some studies show that culture changes occur more frequently than people thought (Leung et al., 2005), this provides more opportunities for future research on how multi-valued approach would affect leadership style and effectiveness.

### *2.3 Conflict management in the MVPT*

Macduffie (2007) summarises four types of 'distance' that would construct a virtual team: cultural distance, administration/political distance, geographic distance, and economic status. A MVPT typically contains these four types of distance. Studies show that virtual teams experience high prevalence and severity of conflict and more challenges than traditional teams (Hinds and Bailey, 2003), due to the cultural differences on communications, logic, leadership, and values. The severe and long-lasting conflict in a MVPT disrupts the outcome of team performance (Hinds and Bailey, 2003; Thomas, 1990). Studies have showed that a virtual team with members from different locations and cultures could not create a shared context (Hinds and Bailey, 2003), which creates barriers for mutual understanding, trust, common goals, tasks, priority, and an effective working process.

People have different modes to respond and manage conflicts. According to the degree of assertiveness and cooperativeness, Thomas (1977, 1990) summarises five conflict handling modes that can be implemented in more than 20 conflict situations: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each conflict handling mode has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the collaboration-orientated person seeks a mutually beneficial outcome and a win-win solution, but doing so requires significant time and loss of some autonomy (Osland et al., 2007). Depending on the situation, an effective leader should have the ability to engage in appropriate modes with different level of assertiveness and cooperativeness.

### *2.4 Leadership style and conflict resolution*

A conflict resolution process involves voluntary leadership that manages authority, process flow, task outcomes, and the overall team performance. Culture impacts how leaders play their roles in a conflict situation. According to Lewis (2000), leadership in network mode and task-orientation mode concerns different things and perspectives to authority, process, and tasks. Network mode involves a leader's own and others' status, command chain, employee motivation, and language to be used according to specific context and situation; Task-orientation mode concerns perspectives of accomplishing tasks including forming a strategy, assigning tasks, playing roles, and using time (Lewis, 2000).

Research on conflict resolution (Sarin and O'Connor, 2009) suggests some mechanisms to resolve conflict in across functional teams:

- confronting: open discussion of the disagreement
- compromising: mutual bargaining amongst the disagreeing parties; smoothing, meaning building on the areas of agreement
- forcing: the coercive imposition of a solution by an individual or a group on others
- withdrawal: refusal to deal with the conflict (p.191).

According to the outcomes of the above conflict resolutions, these mechanisms are categorised as either functional or dysfunctional resolutions (Amason, 1996; Muczyk and Reimann, 1987; Thomas, 1977). Functional types of conflict resolution bring together ideas from all parties and members to reach an agreement in defining common objectives and shared tasks of a MVPT. Functional conflict resolutions include confronting, compromising, and smoothing. Dysfunctional conflict resolution is based on win-lose philosophy for a result that fulfils only one party's goals. It includes forcing and withdrawal (Sarin and O'Connor, 2009).

Thomas (1977, 1990) summarises five conflict-handling modes that are considered useful mechanisms in different managerial situations. He also discusses the possible connection between preferences of conflict mode and cultures. Ideally, a leader should utilise multi-valued approach to handle conflicts and cope with environmental circumstances, as each value system has its own definition of what is right and what is not acceptable. Once a value system denies the justice of others' behaviours, it causes others to hide their motives and needs. This act of hiding makes the job of a team leader more difficult when dealing with the conflict effectively (Thomas, 1977).

### **3 Case description**

A MVPT was set up with staff from Company A Limited, an American, multinational, Fortune 100 Telecommunication company (Company A) and Company B Limited, a UK-based innovative internet service and application provider in consumer technology industry (Company B). The project the MVPT worked on was called 'Project S'. The mission of Project S was to develop 'Software S' to preload into a series of music-propositioned mobile devices of Company A to be distributed to all the Asian Pacific countries' (AP) markets.

This MVPT consisted of employees from different offices of Company A and required them to work together on NPD for the AP markets. A global project manager from the global business development team of Company A was based in London. His responsibility was to manage key roadmaps, maintain relationships with Company B, and coordinate regional and global resources, and other business and legal correspondence. He had two technical support engineers working with him. One of these engineers was a Swedish male who was based in the California office. His main job was leading overall technical support for Project S. Company B assigned a female British vice president to be in charge of the overall business dealings and to manage the relationship with Company A. She was the key interface person with regional projects managers and the global project manager for Company A.

The counterpart of the global project manager for Company A in the Asian Pacific market was an Asian project manager from the Asian business development team based

in Beijing. She was in charge of the Project S rollout in Greater China (China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), Southeast Asia, and Australia. The Asian project manager was a local Chinese woman and her supervisor was an American-born Chinese woman (Asian supervisor). The Asian Project Manager took her leadership in managing and coordinating the progress and critical tasks among teams in Asian offices of Company A. The MVPT for Asian Pacific markets was one piece of Company A's global strategy to embed Software S into as many mobile devices in many geographical markets around the world as possible in the following several years. This MVPT consisted of team leaders who came from Eastern and Western cultures, different office sites, and from different countries.

In November 2007, the Asian project manager found a mismatch of different schedules among team members of the MVPT, the Asian business development team, the global business development team, and the Asian product marketing team. The first mobile device designated to preload Software S in Asian markets was named 'GW'. It was on Asian product marketing team's schedule but did not appear in the global project manager's roadmap. Due to various reasons, this issue was not exposed until the time of the final launch of the GW phone. The result was that the team was left with about 45 days to correct the problem.

The Asian supervisor and the Asian project manager would take whatever actions they could to achieve the on time launch for the GW phone. The key tasks to solve the problem were for Company B to deliver the completed software packs as soon as possible and for a software test manager from Company A to test and qualify the two software packs as soon as possible. The Asian project manager and her supervisor notified the global project manager of the problem and also sent e-mails to the software test manager with the same message. The global project manager received the message but did not take immediate action; the software test manager did not respond to e-mails or telephone calls from the Asian project manager or the Asian supervisor. At that moment, the mismatch of the schedule put the Asian business development team in a problematic situation and caused friction between all the other Asian teams.

During December 2007, the Asian supervisor sent out an e-mail to the global project manager with a definite schedule with clear dates and responsibilities of Company B, the software manager, and all members of the Asian teams. This e-mail was copied to all higher level supervisors of the teams. The e-mail contained the message that

- 1 if Company B or the software test manager could not complete the tasks according to the required time, it would impact the on time launch of GW phone
- 2 the Asian business development team would be given the responsibility to check key time points and milestones of deliveries by all related teams.

This e-mail stirred negative emotions among the MVPT and their related teams. The relationship among these teams became very strained. The global project manager verbally told the Asian supervisor that such an e-mail should not have been copied to his supervisor and the administration. He then coordinated Company B and the software test manager to allocate urgent resources to rescue the completion schedule for GW phone. The Swedish engineers expressed in his e-mail that if there was any negative impact to other regions beyond Asia, the Asian supervisor should take the responsibility. The relationship among team members of the MVPT especially between the Asian business development team and the Global business development team was very competitive, and

the conflict among such team members “frequently leads to friction, interpersonal animosity, and hurt feelings that can make future interaction extremely difficult” [Osland et al., (2007), p.343].

#### **4 Discussion and interpretation**

Conflict management research suggests that in certain crisis situations, among the five conflict handling modes, the competing mode works best. We found that though the competing conflict handling mechanism solved the problem for the GW phone launch in the short-term, the long term impact on performance in the MVPT was clearly negative.

Figure 1 shows the MVPT performance changes along with time and the development of the conflict. When this conflict began, it was a task conflict, followed with process conflict of disagreement to accomplishing the task. Eventually, it changed to affective conflict among team leaders in this MVPT with hostile emotional conflict and disoperative relationships (Hinds and Bailey, 2003). Although any of these three types of conflicts would detract from the virtual team performance, the relationship conflict is the most dysfunctional one (Osland et al., 2007). Particularly, like many other international projects, the MVPT carried a goal to achieve a continuous and effective delivery of more and more new products with Software S, which required a productive intergroup and interpersonal working relationship for a stable project performance in a long run. As this case demonstrated, teamwork in the later product development process was met with less cooperation, mutual challenges, blaming and separations. Team leaders overlooked the low morale and low trust in this MVPT, which resulted in team polarisation (Osland et al., 2007) and separation. When the conflict episodes moved forward, the global business development team hired a local Chinese woman to replace part of the function of the Asian business development team to be an interface with all Asian teams for global project rolling out in Asian countries. Likewise, the Asian business development team rejected some projects from the global business development team in Asian markets. We observe team leaders and team members of one side avoided working with team members from the other side as the members could no longer get along. The solution for solving the GW phone conflict was unsuccessful from the perspective of integrating the MVPT together in later product development. Reviewing research on the relationship of conflict handling and team performance, we find that conflict handling mode is directly impacted by leaders’ leadership style. Between leadership style and team performance, there is another layer of managerial factors impacting team performance in a long run. We propose this layer as team culture and working climate. The key question we derive from this case study is, how can team leaders manage and create a culture and climate for a MVPT that works effectively?

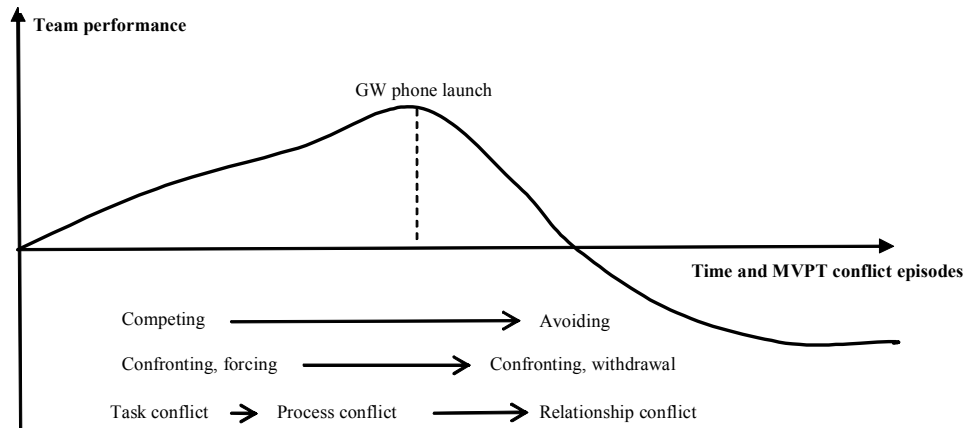
We think a MVPT performance is a dynamic process that changes with leadership behaviour, team culture and working climate. Team culture and work climate play a mediated function for conflict and performance. In Figure 2, we present our findings of team performance dynamic that relates to leadership style and culture in MVPT.

The first box describes a leader’s cultural background that constructs his value system. The second box is the leadership style preference based on a leader’s culture. The third box describes leaders’ preferences for conflict resolutions based on their cultural background. We think conflict resolutions have a temporary function for short term team performance. Team leaders should avoid using dysfunctional conflict resolutions for

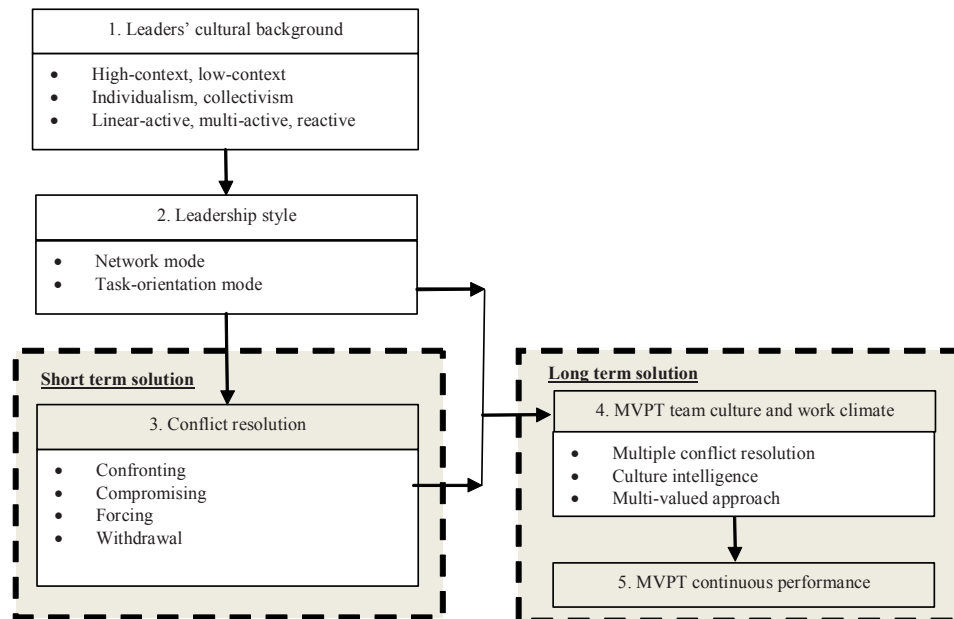


short-term goal delivery as they might impact long-term team performance. The fourth box is team culture and working climate that would impact MVPT performance at all times. The fifth box is the MVPT performance.

**Figure 1** The MVPT team performance changes with time and conflict episodes



**Figure 2** The culture-leadership and MVPT performance dynamic (see online version for colours)



*4.1 Leadership style preferences in different cultures impact effectiveness of conflict resolution*

Culture plays an invisible and automatic role during the conflict episodes on how we act and expect what others shall do. We take for granted that our own culture is normal and

the other as abnormal (Lewis, 2000). “Yet things we take for granted can cause negotiations to fail” [Martin and Chapel, (1999), p.121]. Culture influences how people perceive others and whether their approach and reaction are normal and sympathetic. In this case, the Asian supervisor was showing a very aggressive leadership style to push forward a resolution to the problem and to accomplish the task at hand. She was of the opinion that the problem arose because the global project manager and the global business development team interfered with her team’s goals (Thomas, 1990) when they did not commit to the proposed schedule. Her creation of a fact-oriented, definite and abstract schedule with responsibilities of the MVPT team members was seen as a threatening signal to the global project manager, the Swedish engineer, and the British vice president from Company B. This threat was perceived because of the different value and perspectives to approaching tasks and social relations that occur between cultures in the USA and Great Britain.

American culture demonstrates a strong task mode that we can see in the Asian supervisor’s leadership style. To a typical American team leader, effective leadership means direct and explicit assertiveness and deliverable results (Javidan and House, 2001). Lewis (2000) suggests that British managers are diplomatic, laid back, and willing to compromise, their leadership style is more casual and situational. They maintain a combination of both network mode and task-orientation mode in leadership. Although deliverable result is important, they prefer to use more indirect and diplomatic language when communicating.

Sweden is reported to have the ‘*primus inter pares*’ [Lewis, (2000), p.69] leadership style. They are among the highest ranked countries on “uncertainty avoidance and institutional collectivism” [Javidan and House, (2001), p.302] according to the GLOBE research. The Swedish engineer pointed out to the Asian supervisor that her actions might impact other regions schedules and resource allocation negatively. He expressed his discontent in a way of less assertiveness with a concern of a collective delivery across all regions in this global project.

The Asian project manager had a strong sense of hierarchy of authority and low sense of independent decision making, which is a popular cultural and leadership style in Chinese society and business (He and Thatchenkery, 2010). Her leadership style was to look for consensus among stakeholders especially her direct supervisor and to make decisions based on consensus. Chinese culture has a high degree of network mode in leadership. This leadership style leads to a slow delivery, but focuses on long term benefits. In the Chinese culture confrontation is normally avoided. Seeking holism, inclusion, a self-other integration (Chen and Miller, 2010), using compromising and smoothing are common conflict resolution mechanisms in Eastern countries.

“Culture sets boundary conditions for effective leadership behaviours” [Hanges et al., (2000), p.153] at conscious and subconscious level. We observed that the team leaders in this case study acted out their cultural traits, normally at subconscious levels. We believe that with appropriate double-loop learning, one can go beyond single culture context to work effectively with multiple cultures. We will discuss this further in the conclusion section.

#### *4.2 Leadership plays a role in shaping a MVPT’s culture and climate*

Effective team leaders shall play a role of social architect to facilitate the understanding and positive interactions with team leaders and team members in an attempt to decrease

dysfunctional conflict and to nurture a climate of positive and active participation (Nurick and Thamhain, 2006). From a long term aspect, the two teams in this MVPT experienced conflicted roles and expectations from the MVPT and their own local teams. This case resulted in an unsuccessful resolution and demonstrated the lack of a continuous improvement process in dealing with the conflict.

Effective leadership shall mediate the effectiveness of team performance. The actions and reactions of team leaders in the MVPT ignored the team goal and performance as a whole. Their leadership behaviours separated the virtual team making the later teamwork even harder and somewhat impossible. It is important for global managers to know that leadership plays central roles in creating, embedding, transmitting, and changing cultures of a group (Schein, 2004). The core role of leadership is to build a meaningful team culture (Hunt, 1996) in an organisation and/or in a group. We are sure that there are some other approaches for team leaders in this case to improve relationships and create a shared context and trust.

We observe team leaders in this case study utilised a single-culture and single-valued approach to solve the conflict, but as stated earlier, this approach worked for only a very short time. From the long term perspective, the temporary solution might influence the integration of the MVPT in a negative and low productive way. The key barriers to team effectiveness include utilising of self single-valued approach to act the conflict and resolution. A task conflict is easily converted to relationship conflict unconsciously, which is very normal in the conflict resolving process. Leaders have responsibilities to manage the emotions and communication flows of self and others to avoid disaster of affective conflict. In this case, team leaders neglected their roles in creating positive team working environment. They took extreme polarisation actions that damaged the integration of the MVPT. We propose that a team leader's role in a MVPT is to create and maintain a healthy, meaningful and cooperative culture and work climate in an attempt to achieve continuous improvement in performance. We discuss the two aspects of culture-leadership and leadership-culture relationship next.

## **5 Conclusions and directions for future research**

One of the lessons we learned from this case study is in the team leaders' role in managing the direction of a conflict. Conflict dynamics can go very fast from functional to dysfunctional, from task and/or process disagreement to emotional and relational polarisation. The taking-for-granted and automatic strategy using self culture perspectives are risky in a multi-cultural team. Leaders in multi-cultural teams shall learn and play with the holism to balance and integrate self with others (Chen and Miller, 2010) to achieve the totality of tasks, relationships, and beyond for a sustainable team performance. It is important for leaders to understand that although short term deliverable results are important, a leader's job is to create and change team culture and climate to be a place where people desire and enjoy working together as Schein (2004) has pointed out.

To do so, we integrate our findings with some previous research to give some practical suggestions to global managers. Each conflict handling mode and conflict resolution has its own advantages and disadvantages. Team leaders particularly in a MVPT type team shall develop their ability to employ more than one mechanism to cope with changing conflict situations. Although some research suggests that certain conflict

resolutions are functional (Amason, 1996; Muczyk and Reimann, 1987; Thomas, 1977), we conclude that leaders should make efforts to avoid conflicts. Team leaders and global managers should develop conflict handling skills and communication skills with people in different cultures and distant office sites. We hope that leaders will have the opportunity to practice a multi-valued approach to develop behavioural flexibility to handle with situational contingencies and circumstances (Thomas, 1977).

Cultural background brings individuals' preference of either network mode or task-orientation mode in leadership. As globalisation is rapidly changing the culture of those individuals who are exposed to different cultures faster than we once thought, when West meets East, even West meets West and/or East meets East, team leaders in a MVPT type situation with a combination of both network mode and task-orientation mode have more chances to be successful. This is a world with mixture of culture, values, and norms. It creates new challenges to individuals, managers, and organisations. Research shows the importance of a leader's emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness. Cultural intelligence is related to emotional intelligence but ends with an ability to understand and react to unfamiliar or opposite value system through five senses of human body (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). Cultural intelligence is a new but trainable skill for both team leaders and team members working in a MVPT (Earley and Peterson, 2004). We also suggest creative team building activities could help a MVPT to create and build a mutual understanding culture. These team building activities will not happen in the face-to-face mode due to the nature of virtual teams, but shall facilitate familiarity of team members, create meaning and shared context, and motivate positive relationship. It should be possible to reframe and see what is positive in the virtual team environment and act in a way to bring future possibilities to the present, all of which are components of Appreciative Intelligence (Thatchenkery and Metzker, 2006). Such new and innovative team building activities for the cross-cultural virtual team will be an interesting and useful research topic in the future.

There are several topics that this case study has not touched upon, but should be worthwhile for future research when studying a multi-cultural virtual team. Along with the development of new communication technology and social media, it is interesting to know how a MVPT would leverage these new technologies to increase communication effectiveness. Another interesting topic would be to study the power and influence differences among team members from headquarter and local offices, and whether the heterogeneous group would underperform or outperform the homogeneous group in the long run.

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