

Why cultural intelligence matters on global project teams



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KEYWORDS

- Cultural intelligence
- Global project teams
- Communication norms
- Role clarity
- Inter-personal trust
- Individual performance and satisfaction

Article highlight:

Results of this study show that the level of global project team members' CQ-motivation significantly moderates how role clarity mediates the relationship between communication norms and individual job performance and satisfaction. The lack of significant findings for cultural intelligence (CQ)-knowledge and CQ-behaviour raises awareness regarding the contextual relevancy of the CQS (Cultural Intelligence Scale) for measuring global project team (GPT) members who work virtually across cultures. For example, as GPTs utilize more synchronous communication channels in lieu of email, behavioural items in the CQS – such as changing verbal behaviour, pauses and silences, rate of speaking, non-verbal behavior and facial expressions – will become more relevant.

What does the paper cover?

This paper examines a model of indirect effects on GPT members' performance and satisfaction. Two hypotheses were proposed:

1. GPT members' cultural intelligence (CQ) will moderate the positive relationship between their communication norm alignment and role clarity such that when CQ is higher the relationship between communication norm alignment and role clarity is stronger.

2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will moderate the positive relationship between communication norm alignment and interpersonal trust such that when CQ is higher the relationship between communication norm alignment and interpersonal trust is stronger.

Methodology:

The study focused on a Northern European engineering and manufacturing multi-national corporation (MNC) with operations in Europe, Asia, and North America, which had recently implemented a global change effort. The MNC was shifting its domestic product focus to grow revenues in the United States and in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) markets. To accomplish this, the MNC created project teams that operate 24 hours a day across multiple time zones with a primary focus on worldwide cross-culturally managed product development. With a consultancy group, a survey was developed to better understand the work and communication qualities and dynamics of 33 distinct project teams, and data was collected from 218 virtual GPT members.

Research findings:

The results of a moderated-mediation analysis reveal that CQ-motivation – one's attention and energy toward cross-cultural encounters – significantly moderates GPT members' alignment of their communication norms and role clarity, thus indirectly impacting their project satisfaction and performance.

Conclusions:

This study sets out to answer the research question: How does cultural intelligence moderate a model of indirect effects on global project team members' performance and satisfaction? The results of the analysis reveal the significance of GPT members' motivational CQ as it strengthens the interplay between clarifying roles and aligning communication norms. These indirect effects in turn positively impact GPT members' performance and satisfaction. Neither CQ-knowledge nor CQ-behaviour significantly moderated GPT members' communication norms and role clarity.

Significance of the research:

Research has established the relevance of cultural intelligence (CQ) for adapting to different cultural contexts and for directly affecting both performance and satisfaction. However, the boundary conditions of CQ have received less attention, in particular regarding global project teams (GPT).

The results of this study also contribute research findings to the growing literature on the cultural component of global project teams, and is timely and important given the prevalence of global and virtual project teams as a mechanism for carrying out the strategic goals of today's MNCs and organisations.

Comments from the authors:

The results of this study suggest the significant role that CQ-motivation plays in global project team processes and how CQ-behaviour may become increasingly salient as the communication technology for working virtually provides richer ways for team members to interact. The results also suggest the importance for future research to include CQ in studies of time zone disparity, cultural distance, psychological safety, sustainability of global projects, intercultural competence and leading GPTs.

Complete article

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Glossary:

Global Project Team:

A work team whose members are from different national or cultural backgrounds, are geographically dispersed, and rely on communication technologies for defining, planning and implementing their mutual project objectives.

Cultural Intelligence Scale:

A scale that seeks to measure an individual's ability to understand, act and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.

Cultural Intelligence Knowledge:

A person's knowledge about how cultures are similar and how cultures are different.

Cultural Intelligence Behaviour:

The capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures.

Cultural Intelligence Motivation

An individual's energy, drive and confidence toward interacting with others from and being immersed in other national cultures.



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