

Effects of Cross-Cultural Leadership on Employee Productivity

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### **Introduction**

Cross-cultural leadership involves the practice of leading and managing teams comprising of people from diverse cultural origins. Cross-cultural leadership in such context can be defined as the ability of a leader to intentionally engage, motivate, and direct a team of culturally diverse members towards the achievement of the desired results. As a concept in organizational practices, cross-cultural leadership defines the skill and knowledge combination that one requires to make sure that a culturally ununiformed team is sufficiently functional to achieve goals and objectives of the organization. In addition to realizing that cultural differences existing in a team, cross-cultural leaders are expected to know how to manage the cultures in a way that does not affect the performance of the individuals. Also, managers in the settings are required to learn how the differences existing among members can be converted into opportunities and tools of competitive advantage.

With the increasing cultural diversity of societies across the globe, the ability to successfully engage in cross-cultural leadership has become one of the most valued skills that a leader should possess (Aktas et al, 2016). Following rapid globalization across the world, the need for cross-cultural leadership is expected to increase since more organizations will involve employees from various cultural backgrounds. As a result, the negative and positive elements associated with cross-cultural leadership should be identified to facilitate successful management in related situations and maintain the desired employee productivity. For instance, cultural diversity can improve the productivity of a team or affect the ability of its members to cooperate with each other and reach their full potential (Aktas et al, 2016). Effective cross-cultural leadership should, therefore, be defined by successful management of the present cultures to facilitate the desired performance as well as personal development for all involved employees.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research will establish the relationship existing between cross-cultural leadership and employee production. There exists a unique as well as the complex relationship between how cross-cultural leadership is executed and its resulting impact on employee performance. Following the increasing diversity of present-day societies, both employee workforces and customer bases comprise of people from various cultural backgrounds (Aktas et al, 2016). As a result, they create the need for the adoption of cross-cultural leadership in organizations to manage the interaction among people from different cultures in a way that creates the best results for the organization. Cross-cultural leadership is a major challenge in most culturally diverse organizations especially when the practice does not involve the basic components to promote the productivity of employees.

### **Statement of the Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of cross-cultural leadership on the productivity of employees. In such context, the research will define cross-cultural leadership and the various elements that contribute to an efficient cross-cultural leadership. According to Aktas et al. (2016), transformational leadership, emotional, and cultural intelligence make a significant contribution towards constructing effective cross-cultural leadership. Similarly, the research will seek to define the individual characteristics that a cross-cultural leader should possess in order to achieve the desired performance if their leadership practice. Some of the characteristics as defined by Aktas et al. (2016) include conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, emotional stability, and extroversion. Further, the research will establish the effects of cross-cultural leadership on the productivity of employees across an organization. Also, it will focus on how

cross-cultural leadership should be structured to produce the best impacts on employee productivity in a multinational organization.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework for Cross-Cultural Leadership**

Various theoretical perceptions can be utilized in understanding the concept of cross-cultural leadership. A theoretical framework acts as a tool for explaining, predicting, and understanding phenomena. A theoretical framework tends to provide concepts related to phenomena to facilitate its understanding or to provide more insight (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016). Theories related to cross-cultural leadership help one understand the idea behind the practice as well as how it functions to create an impact in an organization. Various theories that can be used to understand cross-cultural leadership include implicit leadership theory, Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, and Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior (GLOBE).

##### **i. Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT)**

The ILT asserts that the underlying stereotypes, assumptions, schemas, and opinions that an individual holds have a major influence on their definition of a leader. As a result, it is possible for employees to judge one as a good or bad leader depending on whether or not they meet their culture-informed criteria for defining a leader (Brodbeck & Eisenbeiss, 2014). The ILT relates to cross-cultural leadership because it provides an understanding of the different perceptions of a good leader existing among employees. Being viewed as a good leader could enhance one's ability to influence employees towards improved productivity, which makes the ILT an essential framework for understanding the nature of cross-cultural leadership.

##### **ii. Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions**

In his theory, Hofstede argued that that the culture existing in a society has a significant impact on the values of its members (Flatten et al., 2015). As a result, people from different cultures tend to attach different levels of importance to diverse organizational behaviors. Hofstede, in the effort to explain the origin of value differences, provided six dimensions that define as well as differentiate organizational cultures across countries. The dimensions include masculinity versus femininity (MAS), individualism versus collectivism (IDV), power distance index (PDI), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), indulgence versus restraint (IVR), and long-term orientation (LTO) (Flatten et al., 2015). The score in each dimension determines a person's preferred organizational structure and can affect their ability to function in the certain work environment.

### **iii. GLOBE Research**

The GLOBE research integrated both Hofstede's dimensions and ILT into a single study program (Henson, 2016). Also, the study stretched the ILT to incorporate a scene where people of the same culture maintained a stable uniform belief regarding leaders which was different across cultures and termed it as the Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership Theory (CLT). The GLOBE then developed nine dimensions to define the CLT; future orientation, uncertainty avoidance, performance orientation, power distance, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, institutional collectivism, humane orientation, and in-group collectivism. Some CLT dimensions correlated with those from Hofstede's theory but differed because the GLOBE sought to distinguish between cultural values and practices (Henson, 2016). The GLOBE, therefore, provides further insight into understanding the possible distinction that may exist between cultural practices and values of employees and how they may impact each individual's functionality in the organization.

### **Major Cross-Cultural Leadership Practices Utilized by Multinational Organizations**

In achieving an effective cross-cultural leadership, organizations are required to design suitable management styles to facilitate the incorporation of aspects that enhance the performance of the practice (Jiang et al., 2016). For instance, the leader-member exchange theory proposes the use of a distinct management plan for different employees. The theory argues that all employees are different and a single technique should not be used to manage them. In such cases, it provides for successful management of all juniors since a suitable technique is utilized on each employee. Transformational and transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on directing juniors towards a mutual objective by offering the required enthusiasm and support (Jiang et al., 2016). Transactional leadership involves the use of incentives that are preferred by each employee to encourage their contribution towards the organizational goal. Transformational leadership encourages the use of employee-centered techniques to manage an organization.

### **Effect of Cultural Diversity on Employee Productivity**

#### **Measures of Employee Productivity**

Employee productivity refers to the number of goods and services produced by a worker within a unit of time. In other situations, employee productivity can be defined by comparing the input provided and output produced (Jönsson et al., 2016). Employee productivity can be measured using various methods depending on the data availability and purpose of measurement. Employee productivity measures can be classified as a single factor when involving one input or multifactor when it incorporates measuring various inputs. The choice of productivity indicator should be comprehensible to all employees encompassed in the measurement.

#### **Cross-Cultural Workforce Diversity and Worker Productivity**

Cross-cultural diversity often has a significant impact on the productivity of employees. As argued by Miska & Öner (2015), the perceptions, values, and behaviors possessed by an

employee determine how they relate to other people in the workplace. Managing a multicultural workforce, therefore, requires one to understand the diversity existing across the organization and how it affects relational and communication structures. However, it essential to note that multicultural workforces can construct or destruct employee performance (Miska & Öner, 2015). Differences may not always develop hostility among employees as they can be transformed into tools of performance improvement across the organization.

### **Challenges of Cross-Cultural Leadership**

Cross-cultural leadership faces major challenges especially due to the complex organizational setting under which it operates. Cross-cultural leadership seeks to manage culturally diverse employees in ways that maximize their productivity (Stahl & Tung, 2015). However, successful cross-cultural leadership can be challenged by language barriers and cultural disparities regarding attitudes, work values, and perceptions. As a result, it becomes a major problem to manage and motivate multicultural teams, address identity-based conflicts, acclimatize leadership styles, and establish cross-cultural competencies. In other occasions, leaders themselves may face the challenge of being accepted by members of the multicultural organization.

### **The effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Leadership**

The effectiveness of cross-cultural leadership can be defined by the ability to lead in an ambiguous cultural setting. A study by Stahl & Tung (2015), showed that most multinational corporations fail because of the inability to manage the diverse cultures defining their organizations. Similarly, Stahl & Tung proposed that cross-cultural leaders should possess attributes such as cultural flexibility, reduced ethnocentrism, and tolerance to ambiguity. The KSAOs model can also be utilized in defining the effectiveness of cross-cultural leaders. The model states that cross-cultural leaders should possess knowledge, skills, abilities and other

personality characteristics related to multicultural organizational settings. Effective cross-cultural leadership is an essential aspect of multicultural organizations especially because it can impact employee productivity and overall organizational performance.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the research problem and literature review, the research questions that will guide this study include:

1. What are the cross-cultural leadership practices used by multinational organizations?
2. How does a cross-cultural workforce diversity benefit employee productivity?
3. What is the relationship between cross-cultural leadership and employee productivity?

### **Research Methods to be Employed**

#### **Methodology**

The study will utilize a qualitative research design. Since the study is aimed at collecting data to determine the impact of cross-cultural leadership on the productivity of employees, a research design that can quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables will be required (Timms et al., 2015). Also, qualitative research design can generalize findings from large sample sizes. Similarly, qualitative research design will provide for the vivid description of is various features of the research problem.

Additionally, the research will incorporate both primary and secondary approaches to research. Primary research will involve the issuing questionnaires to 20 managers of US-based multicultural health institutions. Permission to conduct research in each institution will be obtained from the human resource office (Timms et al., 2015). On obtaining permission, I will visit each of the selected respondents and issue the questionnaires. Questions will be open-ended to make sure that respondents can provide information on their background information, cultural

practices they apply to their multicultural teams, the result of multiculturalism on team productivity, and the impact of their cross-cultural leadership on employee productivity.

Secondary research, on the other hand, will be used to collect information on existing cross-cultural leadership practices utilized by multicultural teams, the effect of diversity on employee productivity, and the effect of cross-cultural leadership practices on employee productivity (Timms et al., 2015). Secondary research will be incorporated to facilitate easy access to wide range of data from sources such as books, the internet, and scholarly articles. However, it may be difficult to determine the validity and timeliness of secondary data, hence the need to combine it with primary research. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, will be used to analyze the collected data.

#### **Study Population and Sampling Procedure**

The study population will consist of 20 managers of multicultural teams from US-based multinational health organizations. A simple random sampling technique will be used to select respondents. In this procedure, every member of the sample will be selected from the subset of the population in a way that the probability of being chosen for all members in the sample subset of the population will be the same (Timms et al., 2015). The procedure was chosen because it requires basic knowledge of the population (i.e. being a multicultural team leader), is representative of the population, and is easy to utilize.

#### **Results and Findings**

Data from the research was collected through questionnaires and review of existing literature. The research questions guiding the study include:

1. What are the cross-cultural leadership practices used by multinational organizations?
2. How does a cross-cultural workforce diversity benefit employee productivity?

3. What is the relationship between cross-cultural leadership and employee productivity?

### **Study and Demographics**

The questionnaires were issued to 20 managers of US-based from three multinational health organizations; Genesis Health System, Holy Redeemer Hospital, and Abington hospital. Selection of the companies was done based on the cultural diversity of their workforce. The selected respondents from the companies were randomly sampled from a population of managers of multicultural teams. There were no other criteria that were applied during the selection of the 20 respondents. Each participant was given a questionnaire that they were required to fill and submit within two days. On receiving the questionnaires, the data was recorded for analysis. For confidentiality purposes, the questionnaires were only labeled using numerical numbers; 1-20.

The first category of questions in the questionnaire was aimed at collecting each respondent's background information. However, they were not required to provide any information related to what organization they were sampled from. Although the absence of company information made it impossible to compare the performance across organizations, it enhanced the confidentiality maintained during the research (Henson, 2016). Questions included in the background information were aimed at portraying the diversity that existed in the organizations. Also, a person's experience guided the research towards determining the difference in the knowledge that was created by the variation in the time one held a position. Also, the years one has worked in a senior position made it possible to predict the expected competency and compare it with the actual results (Henson, 2016). Therefore, the background information was aimed at acquiring an overview of the cultural diversity existing in the sampled institutions. Background questions provided the following data:

- What is your nationality? Feedback showed the 20 respondents were from 8 different nationalities.
- How many years have you worked in the company? 2 participants lied under 1-3 years, 7 lied under 3-7 years, 9 lied under 8-10, and 2 lied above 10 years.
- How many years have you worked in a superior position? 2 lied under more than 10 years, 10 under 5-10 years, and 8 under less than 5 years.
- What is your title? All respondents held manager titles in different departments of the organization.

### **Results for Research Question 1**

The following are the research questions that were included in the questionnaire to facilitate the collection of data in the first research question:

- What kind of cross-cultural practices do you think are necessary for a leader of a multicultural team? Responses provided by the participants pointed towards practices such as focusing on similarities, communication, addressing any differences that may be portrayed by members, equal treatment, breaking down cultural barriers through a unified organizational culture, closely relating with members, accepting and recognizing the existence of diverse cultures, portraying emotional intelligence, being observant, a good listener, and a compassionate speaker.
- What would you describe yourself as a leader? Answers simply pointed at good, effective, or compassionate leaders. Further, two respondents provided a brief description of themselves claiming that they were “employee-centered by focusing more on their needs than organizational goals” and “focused on giving my juniors the

best working experience to make sure that their productivity meets organizational expectations”.

- What is your experience of working with a multicultural team? Answers included adventurous, difficult, challenging, informative, and empowering as a leader.
- What are the problems you have encountered working in a multicultural setting? Language problems, rejection by some team members, dealing with culturally rigid individuals, making teams work despite differences, constant conflicts from clashing cultures, and inability to satisfy people’s perceptions of “a good leader.”
- What is the most important thing to consider when leading and managing multicultural teams? Your own difference with the team, the extent of inter-member differences, the differences themselves, how they affect organizational behaviors such as attitudes, values, and perceptions, and how they affect member interrelationships.

### **Results for Research question 2**

- How does the multicultural nature of the team affect the productivity of employees? Effects vary from positive to negative, positively, negatively.
- Do employees in the team perform well as a result of their cross-cultural diversity? All respondents had a similar response that the ability to perform well in a culturally diverse workplace setting varied across team members.
- Has the cross-cultural diversity of your team brought any advantages to your firm? The general response was positive following answers like yes, it is very likely, and I think so.
- If your answer is yes to the above question, what are the advantages? Advantages of cross-cultural diversity to an organization were listed as including; increases the

number of skills collection in a team, different levels of knowledge in different fields, enhances the ability to deal with patients from diverse cultures, creates a non-discriminating reputation for the organization, and provides a chance to learn from each other's expertise.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

- Are employees of your multicultural team performing well? Yes, not yet.
- Has your leadership practice improved the productivity of your team? All responses were positive.
- If your answer is yes to the previous question, how has your leadership practice improved the productivity of employees? enabled them to focus on building each other, employees have taken the chance to shine in their high-skill areas, employees seek to get awards for employee of the year, I have developed a uniform organizational culture that every employee must adapt, I discourage discriminatory behavior based on cultural lines, and I have constantly encouraged members to accept each other's differences.
- Would you say that cross-cultural leadership is effective in improving the productivity of multicultural teams than normal leadership? Yes

### **Implications of Results and Findings**

A qualitative method of research was utilized to collect data for the research. The research involved the acquisition of information by administering questionnaires to 20 multicultural team managers across three US-based health organizations. There were no other criteria for selecting participants to diversify their years of experience and for how long they had been in the organizations. One theme that was consistent throughout the questionnaires included the fact that a manager's ability to handle multicultural teams was the key to achieving the

desired organizational goals. Some of the key practices that were advocated by all participants included a good communicator, being keen and observant to identify any issues in the teams, unbiased by treating all team members the same way regardless of your own differences with them, and showing appreciation of members' differences (Jiang et al., 2016). It is also important to note that participants insisted on the ability to observe, listen, and communicate as forming the backbone of cross-cultural leadership. They claimed that the three aspects facilitate identification of differences, understanding of perceptions, and provide for the effective addressing of issues.

Another theme that emerged from the data is that multi-cultural teams were performance improvement tools when used correctly. As all participants noted, multicultural teams harbored diverse skill and competencies that could lead the organization towards the achievement of goals and objectives. (Stahl & Tung, 2015) Also, the managers noted that multicultural teams are essential when serving a culturally diverse community. As one participant quoted, "patients may require the confidence provided by a person they share beliefs and practices". Therefore, managers agreed that it only takes the right kind of leadership to reap the most benefits from a culturally diverse team.

Further, the theme of challenging multicultural teams was evident from the data. In some situations, the managers noted that the challenges posed by multicultural teams can adversely affect their leadership experience. For instance, not being accepted by the people you are leading, having individual differences with the team, and culturally rigid team members can pose the greatest leadership challenge for a cross-cultural leader (Stahl & Tung, 2015). As a result, cross-cultural leaders were portrayed as required to have personal characteristics such as trustworthiness and patience to make form a basis for dealing with such challenges. Addressing challenges associated with multicultural teams was also portrayed as requiring member-focused

strategies. Another theme that emerged from the research was the need for cross-cultural leadership to deal with multicultural teams (Stahl & Tung, 2015). All participants agreed that cross-cultural leadership was more effective than normal leadership when it came to dealing with multicultural teams. Therefore, it was evident that the structure of cross-cultural leadership was well designed to address the challenges of multicultural teams.

There existed a parallel connection between the participants' responses and managerial experiences and the literature. The literature provided an overview of the practices, challenges, and advantages associated with cross-cultural leadership. However, the study provided an in-depth overview of the aspects. As revealed by the research findings, cross-cultural leadership is more effective than normal leadership in situations involving multi-cultural teams. The literature had provided a speculation that cross-cultural leadership could possess a higher level of effectiveness in dealing with culturally diverse teams (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016). Similarly, data revealed that there are key practices that enable a cross-cultural leader to succeed in leading multicultural teams. Supporting those provided by the literature, the research revealed that they include communication, addressing differences portrayed by members, equal treatment, breaking down cultural barriers through a unified organizational culture, closely relating with members, accepting and recognizing the existence of diverse cultures, portraying emotional intelligence, being observant, a good listener, and a compassionate speaker.

Similarly, the research provides data to support the information provided by the literature regarding the challenge of cross-cultural leadership. As stated in the literature, achieving effective cross-cultural leadership requires the leader's commitment to eradicating the differences caused by cultural lines (Miska & Öner, 2015). The research in support of the statement revealed that cross-cultural leaders faced challenges such as language problems,

rejection by some team members, dealing with culturally rigid individuals, making teams work despite differences, constant conflicts from clashing cultures, and inability to satisfy people's perceptions of "a good leader." In such cases, participants revealed that it is difficult to achieve the desired effectiveness in the teams. Also, the research supported the literature's proposal that multicultural teams can have a negative or positive impact on a team's performance (Miska & Öner, 2015). The research provided ways in which multicultural teams created an organizational advantage such as increases the number of skills collection in a team, creates different levels of knowledge in different fields, enhances ability to deal with patients from diverse cultures, creates a non-discriminating reputation for the organization, and provides a chance to learn from each other's expertise. Negative impacts were portrayed in the challenges that the teams posed to successful management.

#### **Plan for Future Application**

The research can be applied widely in strategizing cross-cultural leadership not only in multinational organizations but also other organizations serving culturally diverse clients. Following the rapid rate of globalization, it is possible that most organizations will be faced with the challenge of cultural diversity among its employees or clients (Flatten et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential for firms to adopt effective cross-cultural leadership to enhance their ability to compete in their industries. Also, data acquired from the research can be used to guide managers of multicultural teams on the best practices they should develop to enhance their ability to handle culturally diverse employee teams. Further, the research can be used to prepare firms on the challenges they should expect on adopting multicultural workforces (Flatten et al., 2015). In so doing, the research can be utilized by firms to enhance their cross-cultural leadership experience, which will have a positive impact on both individual employee performance and the overall firm productivity.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite being very informative for firms that have or looking to incorporate multicultural teams, the study has various limitations. First of all, the study directed its focus on leadership and management personnel. However, multicultural teams are mainly affected by employees since they are the ones who determine the cohesiveness or conflict existing in a team (Timms et al., 2015). In such cases, the research would have been more effective if it incorporated the views of employees on cross-cultural leadership. Also, the research would have incorporated a larger study sample over a wide range of multinational organizations. In so doing, it would have been easier to collect a lot of data to make sure that the data collected is valid. Despite collecting crucial data on the experience of participants, the research did not obtain information related to their organizations (Timms et al., 2015). It would have been more effective if the study compared the information provided by participants with the resulting performance in the organization. In such situations, it would have been possible to determine how their experiences relate to the overall organizational performance.

### **Conclusion**

Cross-cultural leadership is commonly applied in managing multicultural teams. Cross-cultural leadership is often claimed to improve the functionality of multicultural teams, which in turn increased employee productivity. The study incorporated a qualitative research method to collect data aimed at establishing the effects of cross-cultural leadership on employee productivity. From the findings, cross-cultural leadership was found to possess higher effectiveness in managing multicultural teams than normal leadership. However, as shown by the collected data, cross-cultural leadership skills were required for one to manage multicultural teams successfully. Also, managers are required to understand the nature of their teams to lead them towards increased productivity. Cross-cultural leaders should also possess a clear

understanding of the challenges associated with multicultural teams. Knowledge of challenges would make it possible to develop suitable skills and measures for overcoming the challenges and leading team members towards increased productivity.

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**Appendix 1: QUESTIONNAIRE****1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. What is your nationality?
2. How many years have you worked in the Company?
3. How many years have you worked in a superior position?
4. What is your title?

**2. CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES**

5. What kind of characteristics do you think are necessary for a leader of a multicultural team?
6. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
7. What is your experience of working with a multicultural team?
8. What are the problems you have encountered working in a multicultural setting?
9. What is the most important thing to consider when leading and managing a multicultural team?

**3. EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL WORKFORCE DIVERSITY ON PRODUCTIVITY**

10. How does the multicultural nature of the team affect the productivity of employees?
11. Do employees in the team perform well as a result of their cross-cultural diversity?
12. Has the cross-cultural diversity of your team brought any advantages to your firm?
13. If your answer is yes to the previous question, what are the advantages?

**4. EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY**

14. Are employees of your multicultural teams performing well?
15. Has your leadership practices improved the productivity of your team?

1. If your answer is yes to the previous question, how has your leadership practices improved the productivity of employees?
2. Would you say that cross-cultural leadership is effective in improving the productivity of multicultural teams than normal leadership?

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