Integral goal and cross-cultural team synergy as determinants of international business

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ABSTRACT

Most of the authors conduct empirical research in a large range of academic scientific fields. Due to the focus on empirical research, concentration on conceptual ideological research is rare in recent times. This study is conceptual research, addressing the key question of cross-cultural team synergy, the construct which has not yet got due attention in the literature. The paper responds the calls for pragmatic cross-cultural sustainability scholarship. The framework proposed in the paper demonstrates business/company sustainability emanating from team synergy particularly in cross-cultural environment. The research shows that Cross-Cultural Team Sustainability is achievable considering a range of factors, including cross-cultural competence of the team members, the integration role of a leader and integral goal, efficient team processes of discussion and decision making, using specific cross-cultural mind grouping instruments.

KEYWORDS: cross-cultural team sustainability, integral goal, international business sustainability, cross-cultural competence, social responsibility, international mind grouping

ABBREVIATIONS

CCTS – cross-cultural team sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Team composition in cross-cultural setting is one of the most influential factors as cross-cultural differences add ambiguities but at the same time give new opportunities for unique synergetic effect. Dealing with different cultural logics effectively requires cross-cultural competence...
(3C) otherwise conflicts will hinder the workflow. The concept of 3C involves psychological treats, knowledge, skills and abilities, fusing intercultural adaptation and adjustment. Environment and society are not the individual properties rather the collection of individual and group care; hence, research on sustainability is gaining attention. It has been researched from many social, business and cultural perspectives. The main focus is to understand what spreads and expands principles of sustainability in community, business, team and individual. In contemporary business multiculturalism has become a daily routine and our research is organized around theoretical analysis of cross-cultural team sustainability (CCTS). A range of scientific domains have paid particular attention to team resilience and sustainability, among them military [1], health [2], and management [3]. Main focus of their works is that team members are interconnected, not isolated. Their experiences are shared thus team level of research in sustainability and resilience should gain privilege over individual [4]. Teams have become the main organizational structure in companies and businesses [5]. Salas et al. define teams as composite complex systems, represented by two or more individuals, who socially interact, recursively, dynamically, adaptively, having common or shared goals, contribute meaningfully into task management, goal interdependencies and feedback, often characterized by hierarchical structure, with a limited life-span, the expertise and roles are distributed in between the members, within an environmental/organizational context, including and being influenced by processes and competencies, cognitive and affective states, results and outcomes, and team member judgments and perceptions of the team effectiveness [6]. They represent workflow of an organization, satisfy operational necessities, innovate, create, represent synergy, globally enfold market opportunities [7]. In this way we put CCTS as a determinant for business or company sustainability in international settings. The paper analyzes factors influencing CCTS, including leadership, team composition and team processes, highlighting an underestimated factor of integral goal. In this way our paper is supposed to be of appreciation for the corporate sustainability researchers and company leaders, who aim to practically implement the values and activities of sustainability.

DEFINITION AND CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

The United Nations Commission Report of 1987 names sustainability as: ‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ [8]. In other words its social responsibility on all levels: global, environmental and economic. It is supposed to initiate individuals, companies and communities to promote practices protecting natural and human resources to enjoy life for our and future generations. Sustainability got a vast interest in different areas of research and social agendas. United Nations has initiated a decade 2005-2014 to promote transformative Education for Sustainable Development around the world [9]. Catholic Church has proclaimed contribution to awakening the values and moral forces to support and create just structures and their effectiveness in the long run [10]. 12,000 corporations from 145 countries signed United Nations Global Compact, showing their will to follow principles of sustainability in the areas of Environment, Human Rights, Labor and Anti-Corruption [11]. In this direction the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) trend in science and corporate culture has started to gain significance, and cross-cultural interest in CSR is also on rise [12]. Advantages of CSR practice for the companies have several dimensions. According to Sweeney [13] it improves their social reputation, attracts good employees, increases stuff retention, attracts consumers and their loyalty. Driven by these social trends, companies have started changing their environments and business strategies, vision, culture and operations for corporate sustainability [14].

WHAT COULD BE TEAM SUSTAINABILITY?

The implementation of sustainability in a company should involve strategic, normative and operational levels [15]. It must become organizational culture of the whole organization, its leaders, teams and individuals [16]. In unison with the resource-based-view [17] we posit that teams, being the main internal resource and organizational pillar of most companies, stipulate its success and sustainability respectively. Based on the general sustainability definition and the team functions in a company we propose to define team sustainability as team development that meets necessities and designated results of the team without compromising the ability of the other company members, whole company and society in general to achieve their necessities in present and future generations.

The effect of culture is powerful in achievement of environmental sustainability [18], amendment of educational systems in the name of sustainability [19], global political sustainability [20], management [21,22], making tourism sustainable [23], etc. Nevertheless the area of cross-cultural team sustainability has not been mentioned and elaborated enough.

The core of any team involves their common interactions, processes, collaborations and conflicts within and outside the team, shared beliefs, norms
and models, group affect and cohesiveness [24]. In the image of team effectiveness by Cohen & Bailey [25], we put team sustainability as a function of four main factors, including team environment, design, processes and personal traits of team members.

ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING FOR TEAMS SUSTAINABILITY

Teams operate within a company environment, thus the company’s strive for corporate sustainability in economic development, social responsibility and environmental protection evinced in sustainable strategic and profit-driven company activities [26] would be an important environment for team sustainability. It also lead to the need of paying attention to unattended wants of community [27] At the same time organizational culture incorporating beliefs, values and experience of a company, its material system and structure together with behavioral patterns of its members [28] is like water, which the team and its members absorb in every day functioning. It influences subtly but strongly. If it is focused on sustainability, the team sustainability orientation will be subconscious. HR management of such company selects the employees, whose inner values correspond to sustainable approach. Simultaneously the attitude and perception of sustainable development on each layer of company leadership influences the whole process of corporate strategy design and activities towards sustainability [29] within the organization and the team. In our model the role of leadership correlates with the integral model of society [30], when the leader is an integrator, who stays in relationship with every team member as all the elements of nature, but at the same time respectable and responsible for the team processes. In image of integral education principles [31] such leaders nurture reflective thinking [32], when each team member directs his activity and own development himself. Effective leaders capable of providing support for sustainability are strongly oriented to achieve task- focused social climate [33] and puts meaningful integral goals. They give adequate time to do the quality work and an opportunity for self-reflection through additional information, choice of assignments (within the team work array), give a quality feedback without judging, but motivating for results and sustainability. Hence when company, its leadership and goals are conformable with sustainability focus, team sustainability would develop faster and easier.

TEAM COMPOSITION

Adaptation is transformation of one’s behavior according to circumstances; environment and social influence, when adjustment is subjective perceptions while adaptation [34]. Successful cross-cultural adaptation and adjustment is revealed in fruitful relations with foreigners, efficient cooperation and work environment, perceiving the communication comfortable and positive, being warm and respectful with representatives of other cultures [35]. And our hypothesis is that CCTS will increase if the team members will possess high level of 3C. There is a versatile literature on 3C measurement instruments, but cultural intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS), and Multicultural Personality Inventory (MPQ) are the most extensive for assessing 3C [36]. Ang et al. [37] defined CQ as a special kind of individual intelligence, enabling effective dealing within culturally diverse environment. It is measured on four levels: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral CQ. ICAPS assesses personal physiological skills of openness, critical thinking, emotion regulation, empathy, flexibility, interpersonal security, traditionality of thinking and tolerance for ambiguity [38]. MPQ was designed by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven [39] to measure multicultural effectiveness. It includes open-mindedness, adventurousness/curiosity, cultural empathy and emotional stability, orientation to action, flexibility and extraversion. Summarizing the main ingredients of the 3C as they have visible correspondences in comparison of all the measurement instruments: open-mindedness, social initiative, flexibility, cultural empathy, critical thinking and emotional stability are the main personal qualities, reinforcing 3C [40]. When HR management of a company recruits congruous personnel, while creating a cross-cultural team (CCT), sustainability of a multicultural team will increase, as discouraging confictions will be eliminated or decreased to minimum and the collaboration within the team will be synergetic.

TEAM PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

The main objective of a team is to produce results. It is involved in a number of intra and inter team connections to increase effectiveness. Team processes include four main perspectives: normative, cognitive, psychological perspectives and problem-solving [41]. Diversity of tasks and speed of change is increasingly pressurizing environment involves decision making into every stage of team processes. The two main stages of decision making are generating ideas/possible solutions and choosing the most relevant one after evaluation of options [42]. In cross-cultural environment they are encumbered by cultural differences, perceptions and logics. Therefore decision making instruments should be different. We propose to aggregate a new mind
sourcing technique “international mind grouping” especially pertinent for cross-cultural teams, a feature-rich generic method, combining synergetic capacities of cross-cultural cooperation and ruling out its inhibiting factors. This method would be based on research of the available mind sourcing techniques, the analysis of their inducing and counterproductive elements and would embody the most relevant findings of the main theories, dealing with cross-cultural differences, like institutional logic, cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competence.

TEAMWORK DESIGN

Efficient teams comprise individuals, who realize what is best for the team and behave in the same manner willingly to supports the team [43]. According to Shaffer and Anundsen [44], team design is productive when the members experience a sense of community, which grows over time. It starts from common practice, dependency on each other, making common decisions, identifying their group as a part of something bigger and commitment to the group well-being in a long run. For the best team functioning in cross-cultural settings they should follow the universal communication guidelines and life skills, which are consistent in all communities and cultures, being core human values. Trust, truth, integrity, responsibility, common sense, active listening with eyes, ears, heart and undivided attention, perseverance, patience, flexibility, resourcefulness, effort to solve problems, with the attitude to each other and the world on principles of impartiality, no judgments, belief in yourself and capacities of others, and goal orientation [45]. Such teams will incorporate sustainability automatically as based on same values. Contradictions evolve because of our mind limitations, as in the nature nothing is contradictory; everything integrally coexists and complements each other. In quality team design all members should strive for such pattern, putting firstly a sublime goal to form a common field of love, participation, care, warmth, priority to achieve association in-between, and then the best specific results/decisions will come [46].

Another aspect of sustainability oriented team design is substantial early planning for sustainability and support [47]. For successful sustainability of a team needs to plan and develop shared vision and communication patterns, common objectives, improvement orientation of the collaboration, systematic self-governance and self-management, proactive problem solving [48], approaches to integration and full engagement of the team [49]. In strive to achieve wisdom and sustainability teams should also be focused on constant development, which is implemented through facilitation techniques, training, coaching and exposure to new experiences [50].

INTEGRAL GOALS

Important role for any team activity plays a goal. Numerous cognitive, social and behavioral theories highlight goal setting as an effective method to increase performance [51]. Goal level [52] and goal specificity [53] affect performance. High specific goals endeavor increased performance [54]. If the desired outcome is sustainability of a team, we suppose, that high specific integral goals will be the prime stimuli. The goal must be higher than of each team member, but at the same time non contradictory to their personal goals, comprising them.

CCTS MODEL AND CONCLUSION

In condition of globalized business accordingly the cross-cultural team sustainability gains prevalent scientific interest and is the center of corporate sustainability success. Literature review shows that many different cross-cultural backgrounds are connected with sustainability as a global social thrive. We have observed the components of CCTS from the dimensions of team composition, team environment, the generic effect of the integral goal, effective team processes acceleration and its cross-cultural technique requirement. The combination of all these interconnected elements constitutes the model of CCTS achievement as a way to reach cross-cultural company or project sustainability, proposed in our research (Figure 1).

The research outcomes suggest that CCTS is achievable with the combination of specific factors, influencing its facets. CCTS is firstly affected by the composition of a team, therefore cultural competence of the team members plays important role for the team integration and effectiveness. Company sustainability vision and integration oriented leadership is supposed to integrate, teach and lead the team to a high specific integral goal pertinent to sustainability. The integral goal affects and includes the goal of the leader himself, motivates the team, improves the team processes of efficient discussion and decision making thus productivity of the team.
At the same time cross-cultural setting implicates specific efficient decision making instruments and we suppose that such instrument "international mind grouping" can be created on the next stage of the research. Cross-cultural company/project from one side is an environment in which a team operates and influences its culture and focus, from the other side teams are composite elements of companies and thus condition and determine company sustainability.

The main limitation of the research is its being entirely speculative until verified, or not, by empirical studies. We invite cross cultural-management researchers to move from whether companies need to integrate or not sustainability but how to achieve it in practice, especially on the level of teams. This paper can help identifying the key arguments to drive the integration of sustainability practices within the organization, outlining the tools and processes involved.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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