

INTERCULTURAL WORK TEAMS, A CHALLENGE IN THE NEW CONTEXT OF ROMANIA'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Bibu Nicolae Aurelian

Has Daniela

West University Timișoara

In the context of globalization, organizations proceed to adapt to exploit new opportunities by creating intercultural work teams (IWT). Consequently, their management acquires new dimensions. To be successful, international companies should adapt to cultural norms of the host country, without neglecting their own organizational cultural values that have ensured their success. IWT are the main instrument used currently to achieve this fit. IWT are the basic unit for performance in any global organization. We analyze the situation of IWT in Siemens VDO Romania and Alcatel-Lucent Romania, as promoters of teamwork and intercultural knowledge transfer inside them.

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1. The Need and Opportunity of Work Teams

Globalization is a continuously growing phenomenon which requires organizations to consider more complex factors in an international framework, something that rarely occurs without teamwork.

A management approach in a country does not necessarily give the same results in another country. Performant managers must know how to overcome this cultural barrier, either be it national or organizational, which makes people react differently to the same challenges, transforming the opportunity offered by working in teams in a success. Performant management appears to be problematic in IWT, as individuals tend to bring widely different views on appropriate ways to reward, recognize, evaluate, train and develop the members of global teams.

Teamwork and, management of work teams have been the subject of numerous researchers in several fields, thus denoting the difficulty of exercising this in practice. The more difficult appears to be managing a work team whose members are from different national and/or organizational cultures or whose manager comes from a different national and/or organizational culture, a management that is to be oriented towards achieving performance. We refer especially to the management of IWT, a new challenge for managers in the context of European integration.

Forming teams is generated by the organizations' need to adapt to the external environment, ensuring their flexibility and competitiveness⁴⁶⁷ in the new context of globalization.

Changes in the structures of the company, enterprises, markets, transactions, call for a focus on teams, only them being able to assume continuity, flexibility, professionalism and long-lasting performance. Teams "with a variable geometry" and "distance" teams show this more than ever⁴⁶⁸.

Teams are the basic unit of performance in any organization. In any situation requiring a real-time combination of multiple knowledge, skills and judgment, teams inevitably get better results than some people with restrictive roles and responsibilities. Teams are more flexible than a larger group, being

⁴⁶⁷ Escriba-Moreno, M. Angels, Canet-Giner, M. Teresa, "The combined use of quality management programs and work teams. A comparative analysis of its impact in the organizational structure" www.emeraldinsight.com/1352-7592.htm *Team Performance Management* Vol. 12 No. 5/6, 2006. pp. 162-181.

⁴⁶⁸ Nifle, R., „Le management des équipes à distance, Une application du modèle de Management Communautaire Avancé”, <http://journal.coherences.com/article361.html> jeudi 10 août 2006.

more easily formed, developed, refocused and dismantled. Teams and performance are an unbeatable combination⁴⁶⁹.

If the work group means a sum of component parts, namely of individual work, by contrast, teamwork is more than that amount⁴⁷⁰, it is that “group of individuals with complementary skills which develop a distinctive identity, working together in a coordinated manner and being committed to achieving a common goal of whose achievement they are considered equally responsible.”⁴⁷¹

Many definitions approach the team as a group of two or more persons. Can a working group composed of two people be considered a work team? Is the dyad a work team? We say no, because it does not hold all the “ingredients” that give it this quality. Who coordinates, who exercises control, who oversees the work?

2. Work teams’ typology

In organizations specific to the new international configuration, teams are found in different forms.

According to the criteria of cultural diversity, we identify:

1. *Team culturally homogeneous.*
2. *Intercultural team* – characterized by diversity of the national, organizational, managerial, culture etc.
3. *International team* – people from at least two different national cultures working together in the same organization or the same project, who have at least one common objective, which is the project goal. So, they can work together, interrelate, cooperate under the same management⁴⁷².

All these types of work teams are themselves found in the following forms:

A second criteria is department number:

1. *Improve departmental team* – consist of employees working in the same department, led by the manager of the department concerned. Are established to identify and solve department problems, being authorized to implement solutions with a small number of approvals from outside⁴⁷³.
2. *Interdepartmental team* (problem-solving teams, special teams) – are made of people from at least two departments, for finding alternative solutions to complex problems, members being elected according to experience in the field. They are limited decision-making teams, being dismantled after solving the problem. Members of these teams engage only partially, being mainly engaged in tasks of the departments they work in.

Another criteria is homogeneity of skills needed to perform of the team:

1. *Functional team*, or stand alone teams – operate with traditional organizational hierarchies, their members possessing similar skill sets and qualifications, with the same functional specialties.
2. *Interfunctional team* (of processes improving, policy-making organizational teams) – their members belong to several functional areas of the organization, who are focused on a specific objective. While other teams usually have a more focused mission to a particular task, multifunctional teams focus on a specific process. The multifunctional team or the process improvement team identifies process issues that will be

⁴⁶⁹ Katzenbach, J.R., Smith, D.K., *The Wisdom of teams-Creating High Performance Organization*, A Harperbussines Book, 1994, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Katzenbach, J.R., Smith, D.K., „Teams at the top”, https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Teams_at_the_top_42.

⁴⁷¹ Bibu, N.A., „Managementul organizațiilor într-o lume în schimbare. Cum să facem față globalizării și internetului?”, SIM 2002, Ed. Mirton, Timișoara, p.238.

⁴⁷² Bibu, N.A., Brancu, Laura, „Convergences of the Romanian societal culture with European culture clusters in the process of European integration. The role of intercultural teams management in increasing European cohesion”, 2008, <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/9476/>.

⁴⁷³ Harrington H. J., Harrington J. S., *Management total în firma secolului 21*, Ed. Teora, București, 2000, p. 213.

corrected by an operational team. While the process team works on, the operational team only meets until the reported process problem is solved⁴⁷⁴.

Fourth criteria is management:

1. *Managed team*.
2. *Semi-autonomous team* – are composed of interdependent members jointly responsible for achieving goals, being assisted by a coordinator who liaises with the organization.
3. *Self-managed team* (self-directed, self-determined, self-regulated, and autonomous) – are composed of individuals having an interfunctional training, which interact and have responsibility and authority to perform a series of specific activities. They operate in the context of minimum intervention from management. Self-managed teams are favored by today's business environment, being agreed by employees, who want a greater freedom of action at work. Self-managed teams require significant interaction and a greater cohesion among members. They are the proper environment in which its members conduct efficient work in reduced surveillance.
4. *Self-managed interfunctional team* – self-managed interfunctional teams⁴⁷⁵ have a specific role in achieving continuous improvement in all activities within an organization. Facilitating communication, innovation, and increasing autonomy of decision, in a self-managed interfunctional team everyone is aware it must take first responsibility for the results. Within self-managed interfunctional teams, members show a basic training, plus several additional trainings, they being experts in their own field and able to work with specialists in other departments of the organization.

Fifth criteria is objective:

1. *Creative team* – focusing on discovering the new.
2. *Tactical team* – formed to carry out well-defined plans.
3. *Project team* – a team formed for a limited time in which members cooperate to achieve the unique objective of the project.
4. *Quality circle team* – identify, analyze and solve problems at work, recommend solutions to management.

Sixth criteria is territorial division:

1. *Traditional team* – characterized by the face to face communication style, working in a given space.
2. *Virtual team* (geographically dispersed or not, the members are not in the same physical location) – These are teams whose members primarily interact electronically and who meet face-to-face only occasionally, usually temporary. Examples of such virtual teams include work teams whose members are located in different geographic areas, characterized by cultural diversity, or project teams. Their effective leadership and management can be very different from that applied to traditional teams.

Last criteria is level objectives' achievement

1. *Ordinary team* – fulfill the objectives at the proposed level.
2. *Performant team* – achieve their objectives at a level higher than proposed.
3. *High performant team* – very high effectiveness and efficiency, due to a tremendous effort and productivity.

3. Intercultural work teams

We bring into discussion an new approach to describe project teams: according to the “Hollywood model”⁴⁷⁶, they are groups of individuals from various corporations that come to work together to develop a project (a movie-metaphor of reality), then dissolve, coming perhaps back together at one point to accomplish another project. In our opinion it represents an intercultural project team in terms of organizational culture, and not necessarily in terms of the national one. Therefore, an international team

⁴⁷⁴ Harrington-Mackin, Deborah, Cum se formează o echipă de succes, Ed. Teora, București, 2002, p.15.

⁴⁷⁵ Petrișor I, Progresul organizațional, Schimbare, Transformare și Inovare organizațională, Ed. Mirton, Timișoara, 1999, pp. 169-173.

⁴⁷⁶ Bennis, W., Powell, Sarah, “Great groups and leaders”, <http://www.emerald-library.com>, *Team Performance Management: An International Journal* Volume 6. Number 1/2. 2000. pp. 34-36.

is always an IWT, reciprocity not being valid. We will further use the term of IWT referring to the diversity in terms of the national culture of its members.

Why is the use of an IWT so important?

The IWT is a more complex version of a national team. This is currently the best existing form of organization to make best use of new technologies and knowledge, expertise and creativity of people from different cultures. Teams are organized as support networks for the mission of the organization, its objectives and strategy by creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge. There are new types of forms of IWT, such as the intercultural project teams. Also, there is a shift from the traditional model of building IWT to the model of intercultural virtual teams, to improve the knowledge creation process. IWT are different and therefore their potential for creativity is greater than culturally homogeneous teams⁴⁷⁷.

Multinationals, in particular the network type, use IWT as:

- a mechanism for encouraging innovation, organizational learning and transfer of knowledge;
- a path of breaking national boundaries, encouraging development of information flows through horizontal communication;
- a means of encouraging the various inputs in decision making, problem solving and evaluation of strategies;
- a way to develop global perspective;
- a way of sharing values through social development, supported by an informal, normative control.

To a certain extent, for certain international tasks, teams are formed by sending employees in different locations of the organization. Expatriates develop relationships that persist even after the tasks are completed. These informal links can then be activated for work, providing the project team members. Not everyone wants to be an international operator. In order to have available potential operators, multinationals are aware that they must provide international experience at all managerial levels, regardless of nationality. The idea of having a team of employees able to work in different environments, having different duties and jobs is promoted⁴⁷⁸.

The individual will bring in the IWT besides thinking patterns, feelings and personal reactions also fundamental features of the original national culture, generating an additional source of conflict. The way this conflict will be resolved within the team will make it creative, or not, in achieving its objectives.

Some conditions for effective IWT, adapted by research⁴⁷⁹ which has found the factors contributing to the effectiveness of multifunctional teams, could be:

- composition – all relevant specialties are needed, the more the team is diverse, the greater its creative potential is;
- objectives have to be complex, their accomplishment can only be achieved through collaboration;
- physical closeness – it is preferable that team members are close each other to facilitate informal contacts; otherwise techniques to replace the spatial closeness have to be applied;
- autonomy – teams need a certain autonomy from the organization and functional specialists need a certain degree of authority in decision making;
- rules and procedures are necessary to prevent chaos;
- team leaders need technical expertise and skills to work with people.

At this point, the interpersonal relations between team members formed after meeting face to face still have a great importance. They are the basis for building trust. Teamwork largely depends on the ability

⁴⁷⁷Bibu, N.A., Brancu, Laura, „Convergences of the Romanian societal culture with European culture clusters in the process of European integration. The role of intercultural teams management in increasing European cohesion”, 2008, <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/9476/>.

⁴⁷⁸Dowling, P.J., Festing, M., Engle Sr, A.D., International human resource management-Managing people in a multinational context, South-Western Cengage Learning, USA, 2009, p. 151.

⁴⁷⁹ Johns G., Comportament organizațional, Ed. Economică, București, 1998, pp. 249-250.

of members to trust each other⁴⁸⁰. If we are to think about IWT dispersed geographically, this means that management methods must be applied to replace the lack of spatial closeness between team members, by using appropriate communication techniques by which members can communicate sensitive information. Also, an aspect that leaves room for discussion would be the system of motivating members of IWT. What would be best so it is also the most effective – the one of the national culture or the one of the organizational culture? Perhaps, that of the team culture. Thus, IWT management becomes more complex, including aspects of national culture of various members and the most effective ways to supplement its characteristics and bring those skills in line with the needs of the team.

3.1. Interculturalism and work teams of Siemens AG

Siemens AG, the leader in manufacturing and services in the electronics and electrotechnics field, can be regarded as one of the pioneers in promoting diversity in Germany. In 2001, the company published “Principles for promoting and managing diversity”⁴⁸¹, showing that in countries with many nationalities, cultures, ethnic groups, religions and different conceptions Siemens wants to attract people from all these groups, motivating them to develop their abilities, giving them equal opportunities in professional and personal development. Within Siemens VDO Automotive in Timișoara most of the activity takes place in IWT. Our study made on one of the project teams (formed in the division called “Quality Team”) has shown that an important role is played by the degree of fusion or assimilation of the cultures involved. The team has eight members and each of them is responsible for completing a number of projects. Often they overlap, meaning that two or even more members have to handle the same projects, discuss with the same customers, thus working as a team. The German organizational culture has asserted itself, Romanians assimilating it quite easily, even if the number of German managers, initially the majority, dropped; on the other hand, however, one can observe that Romanian culture makes its presence felt. The specific German order and discipline, correlated with the Romanian creativity and diligence, make up an ongoing objective that the team manager does not overlook. In this case, we cannot talk about assimilation, but rather about a mutual complementation of cultures.

3.2. Interculturalism and work teams in Alcatel-Lucent

Another company that focuses on intercultural skills development of employees is **Alcatel-Lucent**, the largest manufacturer and supplier of equipment, technology and integrated telecommunications solutions, with a presence in over 130 countries on all continents, with a representation over 100 nationalities. Alcatel-Lucent Romania Timișoara operates in department teams, intercultural project teams. A feature offered by the company to its employees worldwide is the access to international learning and/or online documentation tools, which include the “Culture Wizard” solution⁴⁸², specific for intercultural training and information. When the financial-accounting department has introduced a new working model based on the concept of *shared service center*, and the team from Romania gradually took over projects from across Europe, both team leaders and employees have noticed that they started to encounter more difficulties in communicating with colleagues abroad. Moreover, working with 20 different countries on the European continent, employees began to be increasingly annoyed while for the same kind of demand they found that were receiving very different feedback and responses, without understanding why. It was actually a problem of intercultural misunderstanding. Thus arose the opportunity to merge traditional communication training with interculturality elements, having as support the tools Culture Wizard already existing in the organization.

⁴⁸⁰ Benson-Armer, Richard și Tsun-Yan Hsieh, 1997, „Teamwork across time and space”, https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/ghost.aspx?ID=/Teamwork_across_time_and_space_246.

⁴⁸¹ <http://www.siemens.com/responsibility/en/employees/diversity.htm>.

⁴⁸² <http://rw-3.com/>.

The first group participating in the training was the team that took over the project “Nordic countries” – Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The interculturality section of the training aimed to clarify the following issues: definition and content of cultural dimensions, comparative description of cultural profile of Scandinavian countries compared to Romania, focusing on major differences, the impact of intercultural differences on interpersonal relationships. One aspect that has surprised the participants referred to the communication style, Nordic countries being characterized by a more direct way of communication than we are used with in Romania. Once this issue was clarified, training participants agreed that direct style approach practiced by their foreign colleagues is not an insult, and in no case has it any connotation of impoliteness. Romanian employees understood that they need to structure their messages in a more clear and concise manner to capture the attention of their northern partners. Again by the analysis and discussion of this dimension, Romanian employees have found that Latin style to interrupt, to speak all at once, creates an impression of an extreme lack of professionalism in front of their Danish, Swedish and Norwegian colleagues. As advancing in accumulating intercultural knowledge, problems that the team had in the beginning within the joint project began to resolve. Such modules can be developed so that they can have direct applicability to specific problems encountered by different types of teams.

4. Conclusions

We talked about companies whose professionals are brought in and sent all over the world to form teams almost like a puzzle. Globalization and IT technological progress make possible to conduct activities and collaborations with anyone anywhere. These are challenges that professional managers must face, beyond overcoming the intercultural implications of a possible status of expatriate manager. The multinational companies that are present in Romania use ITW in order to develop their activity, to implement new technology, to realize research and innovation projects. These teams are enhanced due to diversity's potential. Our studies, performed on the two companies, show that Romanians are open and adaptable to work in intercultural teams; this has been proved by their team's performances. The Romanians know to adapt to defined rules, clear procedures, specific to another's cultural organizations, succeeding in transmitting their creative spirit to the team. The rules and procedures are German, Austrian, Swedish, Danish, the atmosphere and human relations have all the best out of Romanians spirit.

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