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Foreword by Fons Trompenaars,
author of *Riding the Waves of Culture*

VIRTUAL TEAMS ACROSS CULTURES

Create Successful Teams Around the World

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Contents

Foreword **xi**
Introduction **xiii**

PART ONE: Context and Cultural Diversity **1**

1 CALDO & Configuration **3**

CALDO Model 3
Team Configuration 7

2 Introduction to Cultural Diversity **17**

What Is Culture? 20
The Pleasure and Pain of Cultural Diversity 24

3 Three Ways Culture Impacts Global Virtual Teams **29**

I. Within the Team 30
How Often to Follow Up? 31
I'm Not Your Dear! 33
When Loud Is Too Loud, Quiet Too Quiet 35
What Do Words Mean? 37
Specific and Diffuse 41
Up and Down the Hierarchy 44
II. Between the Locations 46
III. Outside the Team 51
Developing Cultural Competence 59

PART TWO: Attitudes and Levers **71**

4 Attitudes and Beliefs 73

Trust 75
Psychological Safety 82
Shared Team Identity 87

Leadership Levers 94

5 Eliminating Uncertainty 97

Roles and Responsibilities 98
Team Collaboration: How the Team Works Together 98
Knowing Each Other 101

6 Create the Team 105

Types of Virtual Teams 107
Shared Purpose and Goals 111
Knowledge Sharing 115
Virtual Team Building Exercises 118

7 Bring in the Humanity 123

Personal Attention from a Distance 124
Intellectual Stimulation 130
Recovery 131
Giving Feedback 133
Fairness 135
Perceived Proximity 136
Inclusion 139
Perspective Taking 142

8 Complete the Work **147**

Structure to Leverage the Flexibility 147
Technology 149
Influencing Virtually 160
Conflict 164
Overlapping Time Zones 168

Conclusion **173**

Acknowledgements **175**
About the Author **177**
Notes **178**
Index **185**

Types of Virtual Teams

In my consulting practice, many clients want support to help teams in their organizations improve the collaboration across different locations. When we review the CALDO model together, they notice cultural diversity and immediately attribute cultural differences as the source of the problem. However, when I interview the team members and diagnose the situation, I discover that one of the Levers of the CALDO model has not been give enough attention. The team have not identified the correct team type and then under the Lever Create the Team, built the appropriate team.

They have misdiagnosed their team type because the geographic distance causes people to feel and think more separated than they actually need to be to achieve their goals. They tend to be more transactional with each other and much less supportive.

The following scenario is a version of situations I often encounter. Within the same company, a factory in Norway sends product to the distribution and sales office in the US, who deliver to the final customer. To begin, the functional differences give a sense of separation, and then the geographic distance and cultural diversity add to the feeling. The colleagues behave in the following ways:

- **Very transactional.** They expect orders and deliveries to be as per the service agreement documentation.
- **Viewing from their own perspective.** They interpret behaviors and assume business based on their own local conditions. They may often say, 'Why do they need that?' or 'That does not make sense' when they hear what the other location requests.
- **Blame the other location.** Neutral people assessing the tension see both sides of the story, but the people in each location do not.

If the customers' orders were standard and the factory produced commodities, then the transactional relationship would probably be adequate and a service agreement could be applied in most of the cases. However, the clients who contact me have customized products, demanding customers and quickly changing markets. A transactional collaboration is wholly inadequate and they need a productive, collaborative 'we are in this together' team mindset.

When teams identify their team type accurately, they realize the necessity of creating a team that matches the amount of necessary collaboration to achieve their goals.

Virtual Team Type

Virtual teams can be classified into four team types based on the level of task interdependence, meaning how much colleagues need to interact to complete the work. These classifications were defined by Professors Bell and Kozlowski, who at the time of the article were both at Michigan State University.[2] (Figure 6.1)

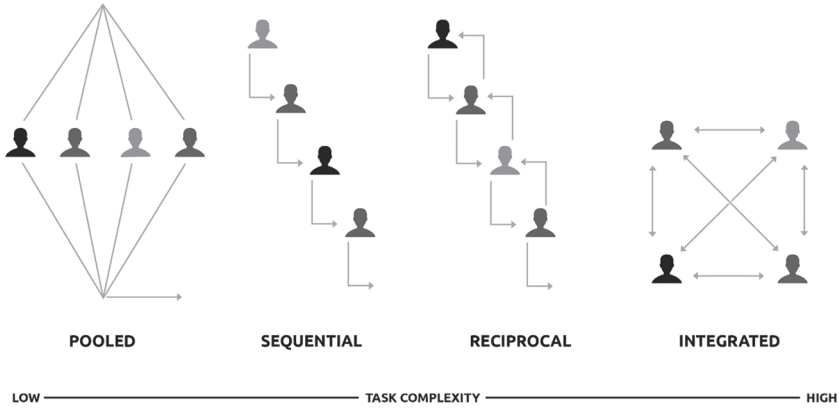

Figure 6.1 Type of Virtual Teams, Bell and Kozlowski. The lines indicate communication pathways between colleagues at different locations.

Pooled: Pooled teams agree in the beginning on what each team member needs to deliver. Everyone works independently and delivers the agreed output with little interaction in between. They agree what needs to be done, but how each person works on their deliverable is independent and not of consequence to the rest of the team.

Example: A team of consultants each work at a different site of a client to implement a common solution. They only connect once a week to discuss the progress on each site. Each consultant works on his assignment and handles the client location on his own.

Sequential: Colleague A independently completes a task and passes the output to Colleague B, who independently completes a task and passes the output to Colleague C.

Example: A local shipping department sends monthly figures to their local finance department, who then create financial reports that are sent to the regional finance department, who in turn compile the results for the

countries in the region and send the results to headquarters. Everyone is dependent on someone else to provide data, but their calculation process, the contact with stakeholders and the approval process are independent of the colleagues from whom and to whom they send the information.

Reciprocal: Reciprocal teams are active with coordination and exchange of information. The exchange of information is ongoing, and Colleagues A and B have a back-and-forth exchange until Colleague B completes the work and sends it onto another colleague. These teams may produce non-standard work, which requires an iterative question-and-answer exchange.

Example: A team that consists of different functions assigned and completed in different locations. The team need to discuss and align on what they will do together and also how they will work together. They will agree on coordination, communication channels, stakeholder management and process integration. By understanding what their colleagues will do with the information or product they send, they can better prepare their work. For instance, if manufacturing, marketing and sales are in three different locations, they will coordinate with each other, align on deliverables and send information back and forth to support each other. However, they do not need to agree as to how each function will do the work.

Integrated: These are virtual teams in which the work between the team members is coordinated from different locations. They create, research, experiment, organize, decide, reject and undertake all other team processes within the team. These teams converge on what they will do and how they will work together.

Example: A 100% virtual software team who create new solutions together. They work intensely together and are continuously checking that everyone is aligned.

In the example I gave at the beginning of this section, the Norway-US

team thought of themselves as sequential, when they needed to act as reciprocal. They thought a service agreement would be enough, but they needed a relationship based on trust, shared objectives and culturally competent team members, willing to think beyond their own local markets.

Identify the Team Type to Create the Team

The team leader of a pooled team will need to spend less time and energy to create a team than to a team leader of an integrated team, who needs to ensure everyone knows each other, the purpose and objectives are clear and how the team will work together has been agreed upon and is regularly reviewed and updated.[3]

Returning to the Norway-US team, in spite of all the signals of separation, they need to strengthen their working relationships. Returning to the CALDO model, they need to recognize the impact of distance and cultural diversity on their collaboration, focus on the 4 Leadership Levers, monitor the attitudes such as trust and psychological safety and develop the competences of the team members. They had planned that a service-level agreement could replace the need to intentionally develop working relationships, but the resulting issues prove that more intense relationships are needed.

Although the example I referenced involved a manufacturing company, I often find this issue arising in IT companies where the software development is in one country and the client interface in another country or in shared service center constructions. The people involved feel separated when they need to think, feel and act connected.

2. Bell B. S. and Kozlowski S. W. J. (2002) "A Typology of Virtual Teams: Implications for Effective Leadership." *Group & Organization Manage- ment*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 14–49.

3. Maynard T. and Gilson L.L (2014) "The Role of Shared Mental Model Development in Understanding Virtual Team Effectiveness." *Group and Organizational Management*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 3-32.

"Theresa has examined cultural diversity where it currently happens, in the virtual team. A masterpiece of research, stories and practical advice "

-Fons Trompenaars

Virtual Teams Across Cultures examines what makes multicultural virtual teams tick - why they're different and how to unlock their true potential. Drawing on 25 years of professional experience, academic research and interviews with team leaders around world, Theresa Sigillito Hollema offers practical frameworks for understanding the dynamics of global teams. Full of real-life examples and actionable advice, this book provides a blueprint for ensuring that remote, multicultural teams can thrive in today's connected business world.

Virtual Teams Across Cultures helps leaders shift teams to the next level by:

- becoming more confident working across cultures and leading virtually
- creating a productive team environment where everyone is a valued contributor, regardless of where they are
- turning the team's cultural diversity into its greatest asset
- focusing on connecting people across enabling technology

This is an inspiring and comprehensive guide for reflective leaders who want to bring out the best in remote, culturally diverse teams.

Theresa Sigillito Hollema has worked in and with global teams for over 25 years. As a cultural consultant and team facilitator, she's helped hundreds of leaders around the world learn how to excel when working with virtual, culturally diverse teams. Previously a consultant for Trompenaars Hampden-Turner, a leading cultural consulting firm, she now leads the team at InterAct Global, a group helping organizations capitalize on cultural diversity and virtual connections. Theresa left the US for a three-month assignment 23 years ago and has lived in the Netherlands ever since.

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