

Workshop Proposal for Track 1:

Power Relations in Cross-Cultural Interactions

Power and (mis-)communication:

Learning and Communicating about Collaboration in Dispersed Teams

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ABSTRACT.

This workshop offers two complementary methods for learning and communicating about power, communications, and cultural dilemmas or issues that affect co-ordination of activities and performance in geographically-dispersed, collaborative teams. The first piece, Reconciliation Method, locates and defines specific dilemmas that crop up in collaborative work among dispersed teams. The second piece, Collaborative Method, supplies tools for learning, recording, and teaching effective practices – practices for dealing with dilemmas in collaborative work among dispersed teams. Participants will benefit by the presentation of two complementary methodologies for improving dispersed, collaborative team efforts. Participants will take part in workshop exercises using the two methods.

PRACTICAL PROBLEM: TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS COMPETITIVE EDGE

Problem: commodification of engineering knowledge.

- Massive increase in production of engineers in Indian and in China
- Commodification of engineering knowledge
- Need for new competitive edge for engineers to work in geographically-dispersed teams.

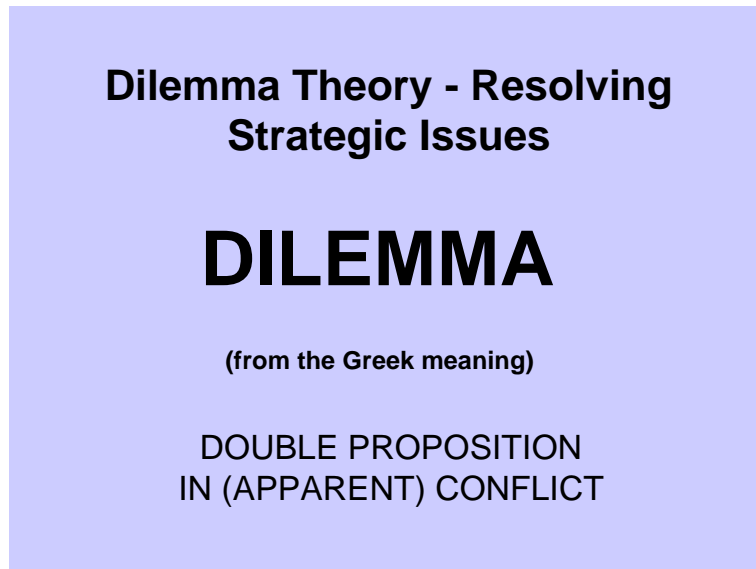
TWO DIRECTIONS OF SOLUTION:

- Reconciliation Method, locates and defines specific dilemmas that crop up in collaborative work among dispersed teams.

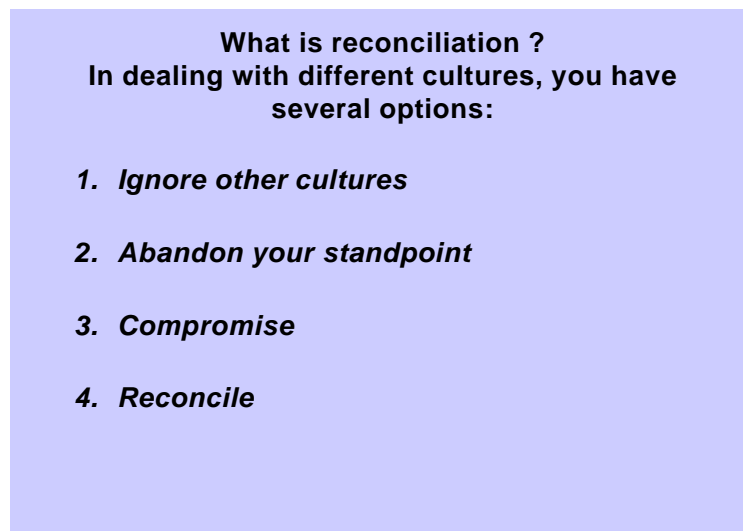
- Collaborative Method, supplies tools for learning, recording, and teaching effective practices – practices for dealing with dilemmas in collaborative work among dispersed teams.

RECONCILIATION METHOD.

The first part applies dilemma-reconciliation theory as presented by C. Hampden-Turner and F. Trompenaars in *Building Cross-Cultural Competence* (see also www.thtconsulting.com). It is about reconciliation of cultural differences, of extremes, of dilemmas managers are facing in their work and not imitation of the host's cultural norms, values and attitudes.

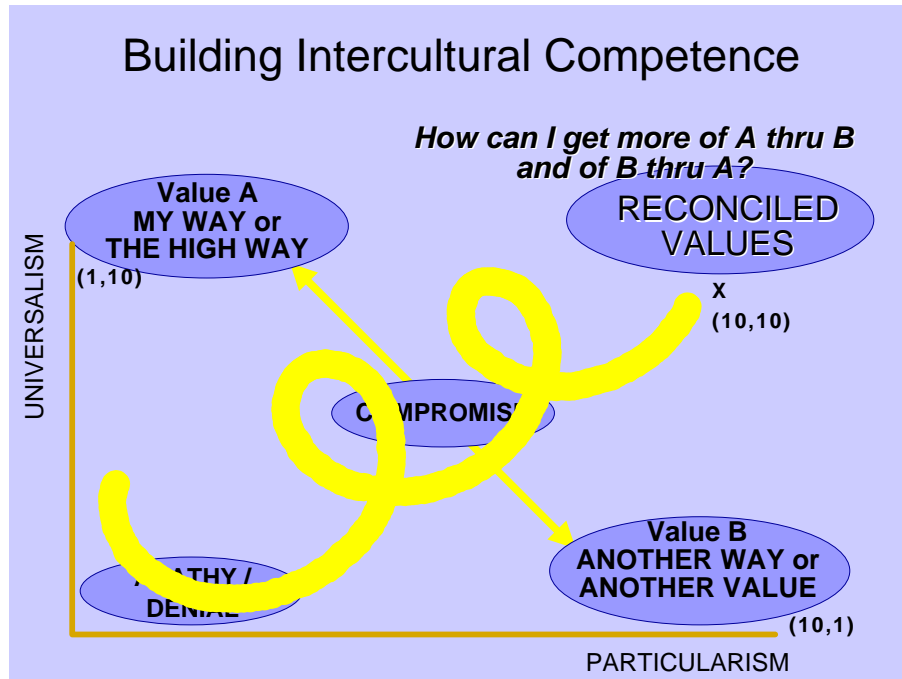


Picture 1 – Definition of a dilemma



Picture 2 – Definition of reconciliation

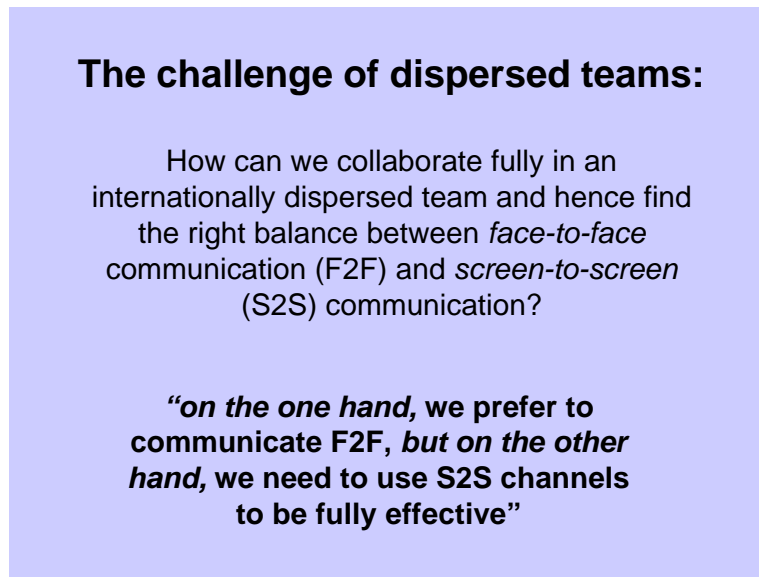
This interactive learning process will ultimately make it possible to find and apply best communication practices among dispersed teams. The final goal is to find a new win-win situation, in opposition to a compromise that means losing some of one's identity or values.



Picture 3 – The reconciliation process

We first supplied a general example of the dilemma reconciliation methodology by reviewing the Samsung Case (also known as the Korean Case) as described in Hampden-Turner, C. & Trompenaars, F. This means defining the dilemma Trompenaars was facing and proposing solutions to reconcile it in a win-win situation for all parties (for a full description of this case and the process carried out towards reconciliation, see in Hampden-Turner, C. & Trompenaars, F. 2000, p 46-48).

Secondly, participants practiced the six-step reconciliation methodology using an example pertinent to dispersed teams: **the dilemma of face-to-face versus screen-to-screen communications.**



Picture 4 – One of the dilemmas dispersed teams are facing

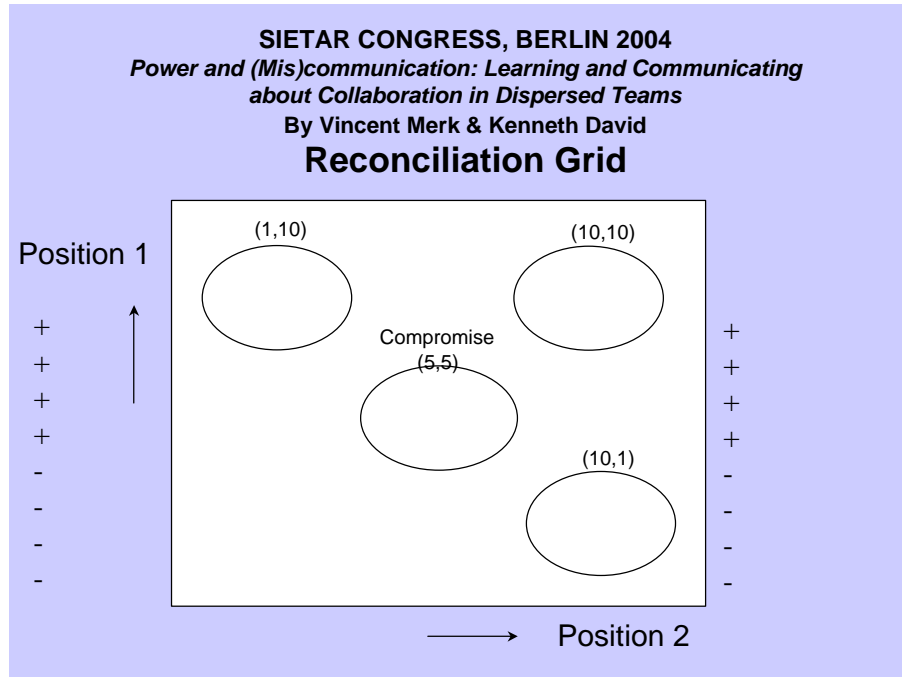
Step 1: Eliciting the dilemma, i.e. proposing a situation typical for dispersed teams and identifying the dilemma holder. Further, choosing which of the 7 cultural dimensions described in Trompenaars’ *“Riding the waves of Culture”* fit(s) this dilemma best?

Step 2: Charting the dilemma, i.e. labeling both axis with Position 1 and Position 2 of the dilemma and adding the relevant dimension(s).

Step 3: Stretching the dilemma, i.e. illustrate it by listing positive and negative characteristics for each position on the axis.

Step 4: Finding epithets, i.e. being creative in finding bumper stickers types of slogan illustrating each position: Face to face, Screen to Screen and Compromise. This can be done by using the positives and negatives defined during the previous step.

Step 5: Reconciling the dilemma, i.e. applying a series of different stages. Combining the strengths of Position 1 Face to Face with those of Position 2 Screen to Screen and vice versa; Processing and Sequencing (like for ex. in verbal communication using the “Yes, but” strategy); Contextualising, by drawing pictures and frames to illustrate the dilemma at stake. Cartoons featuring the positives and negatives of each position often prove clearer to the dilemma holder and others than any long verbal description. Finally, Synergising, by implementing Position 1 through Position 2 and vice-versa. This will lead to the final Reconciliation Position on the grid.



Picture 5 – The reconciliation grid

Step 6: Implementing the new design (Action Plan), i.e. what actions should be undertaken to realize this reconciliation.

The efficacy of communication technology	Email	voice mail	telephone conf.	video conf.	Face-to-face meeting
◆ Words	Intrinsically most suited for: - Sharing factual info - Exchanging of data - Clarifying or summarising meeting results		Intrinsically most suited for: - Participating in discussion and debate - Reaching agreement and understanding - Discussing sensitive issues		
◆ control over format					
◆ voice tone					
◆ immediate feedback					
◆ Non-verbal clues				✓	✓
◆ environment				✓	✓
◆ physical exchange					✓
◆ informal exchange	Low context ↔ High context Low level of rapport ↔ High level of rapport				

Picture 6 – An example of reconciliation

COLLABORATION METHODS.

The next part of the workshop builds from the emphasis on cultural dimensions of work-related values and media practices (face-to-face and screen-to-screen communication) dealt with in the first part.

The second part augments the first with collaboration methodology for dispersed teams.

Benefit of Collaborative Method

Improving performance of

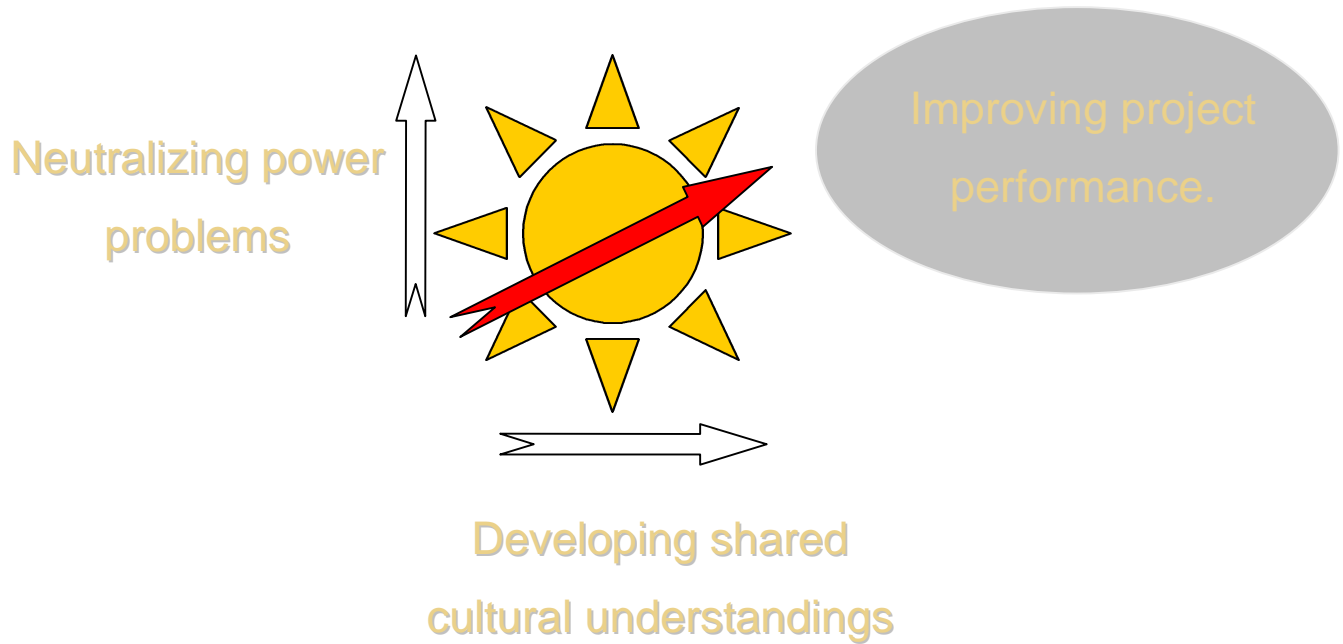
Geographically – dispersed

Culturally- disparate

Project Teams

Collaboration methodology focuses on effective practices -- boundary-spanning project management practices -- for dispersed teaming.

Effectively managing cultural and power issues



Collaborative Method includes

Assessment of readiness for dispersed teaming

Individual readiness for Dispersed Teaming

Assessment Tool: Individual Readiness for Dispersed Teaming.
[IRDT]

- ✿ IRDT assesses behaviors of individuals who are being considered for dispersed teams.
- ✿ IRDT identifies behaviors that need to shift in order for the team to be successful.

Collaborative Method includes

Boundary-spanning skills

Transcultural communication skills

Responding to power and cultural issues and developing practices for working together.

Multimedia communication skills

Developing conventions for the variety of media: face to face, phone, email, whiteboard, videoconference used by dispersed teams.

Collaborative Method includes

Defining specific problems involving power issues

- power relationships and choice of communications media,
- power and decision method,
- power and relations among client, the team geographically closer to the client, and the team geographically more distant from the client.

This presentation focuses on the interplay of power and cultural issues; power issues are often wrongly underplayed and labeled as “cultural risk”.

Collaborative Method includes

Combining power and cultural issues.

It is necessary to focus on teaching as well as learning about power and cultural issues.

In many transcultural situations, people can create greater cultural distance than previously existed when there is a power asymmetry and people feel exploited. On the other hand, people can move to bridge cultural distance when there is power symmetry (neutralization of power imbalance, not perfect equality).

Collaborative Method includes

Teaching as well as Learning

The management literature made acquaintance with the notion of *learning organization* over ten years ago (Senge 1991). Learning from project experience is already a recognized task. Experience, particularly non-technical knowledge about effective work practices, is not retained very long by project team members unless they record it and communicate it. This work thus stresses the complementary notion of *teaching organization*.

Collaborative Method includes Learning and Teaching effective practices.

The core idea is that team based organizations – especially when the organization engages in cross-border teaming — become more effective in collaborating when they become proficient at 1) Learning about effective project work practices, 2) Putting what they have learned in a form that others can understand, and 3) Communicating what they have learned to others so that it can be organizationally useful.

These collaboration capabilities are achieved via five tools for learning and then communicating knowledge about effective work practices:

- Field Notes.
- Transcultural incident reports.
- Project Case Studies.
- Cultural, Power, and Activity framework for charting work team effectiveness during a project.
- Contrasting Case Studies.

These tools are a nesting structure: the first tool is a building block for the next tool, the second for the third, etc. Taken together, they are a tool kit that spans the gap between learning and teaching processes within the organization.

We supply Tools for Organizational Learning and Organizational Teaching as presented by K. David and J. Lloyd (2003) in *Fieldbook in Collaborative Work Systems*. Based on continuing research effort (NSF 1997; Lloyd and David 2001; Steinfield, David, and Huysman 2003), the work presents tools for building collaborative capabilities across time, distance, linguistic, and organizational boundaries.

These tools for learning and communicating are illustrated with cases involving power issues and (mis-) communication issues researched in the course of a wider research project. The authors are part of multi-country, multi-discipline research study (1997-date) involving engineering, anthropology, and telecommunications researchers (Steinfield, David, Huysman 2003) and who are investigating how global engineering design teams function effectively. The results can be used by dispersed project teams to enhance the effectiveness of their collaborative work.

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