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Leading Global Teams

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Table of Contents

This reading contains links to online interactive illustrations and video, denoted by the icons above. To access these exercises, you will need a broadband Internet connection. Verify that your browser meets the minimum technical requirements by visiting http://hbsp.harvard.edu/tech-specs.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Global teams—comprising people who work together across national boundaries to achieve a common goal—are ubiquitous in today's interconnected world. Modern communication technology and increasingly fast-paced, dynamic, and distributed work environments have accelerated their spread. Global teams can provide significant competitive advantages for companies. They enable them to achieve economies of scale by pooling resources and leveraging labor costs. They cover multiple time zones to respond to global customers, suppliers, and partners at any time of the day or night. They bring specific skills and expertise to organizations. The diversity of work backgrounds, knowledge sharing, and intellectual capital that are characteristic of global teams can be drivers for innovation and growth.

Despite global teams' considerable advantages and rich array of benefits, the scale and complexity of global collaboration can make their promise hard to realize. Building effective work groups is hard enough when everyone is local and people share the same physical space. But when team members come from different countries and cultures, do not always speak the same native language, and are working in far-flung locations, communication can rapidly deteriorate, misunderstanding can ensue, and cooperation can degenerate into distrust and conflict.

Enter ***social distance***, defined here as the lack of emotional or cognitive connection among team members. When social distance is high, the team has difficulty developing trust, empathy, and common understanding. When social distance is low, the team is productive and effective. Social distance is a pervasive issue for global teams, and learning to reduce it is key to the kind of productive, cross-cultural interaction that enables team members in a geographically dispersed workforce to collaborate. The Essential Reading focuses on how leaders of global teams can improve the workings of their groups by using the SPLIT framework to identify and address five common sources of social distance: **S**tructure, **P**rocess, **L**anguage, **I**dentity, and **T**echnology.

The two-part Supplemental Reading focuses on issues that are essential to working in global teams. The Role of Culture in Global Teams addresses the frequently used and often charged word culture by describing it as a static or dynamic concept. Global team leaders who grasp a nuanced view of culture can best guide their teams to overcome misunderstandings and conflicts that arise when people come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The Role of Trust in Global Teams describes different types of interpersonal trust integral to working in teams, outlines the challenges that conventional notions of trust pose for global teams, and discusses how global teams and their leaders can establish and cultivate trust.

2 ESSENTIAL READING

Geographically distributed global teams lose the benefits that come from face-to-face communication. Social bonding, whether through nonverbal communication, spontaneous communication in common spaces, or casual, non-work related conversation about topics such as the weather or national holidays is made easier with face-to-face interactions. Such interactions create a shared experience, represent commitment to the interaction through physical presence, and allow people to focus their attention on the interaction.[1] Social distance can develop in global teams when physical distance, temporal constraints, and structural considerations make it difficult to develop a shared context and easy to develop unproductive conflicts.[2] Socially bonded groups with low levels of social distance feel close and congenial, while groups with high levels of social distance face greater challenges in developing satisfying interactions. Technology such as email, although meant to streamline distant communications, can often contribute to a further sense of social distance between the people on either end of the exchange. Linguistic and cultural differences, as well as distinctive subgroup imbalances, also increase social distance between team members. This is further exacerbated by the need to work across time zones and rely primarily on electronic communication.[3]

This Core Reading presents a model called SPLIT—**S**tructure, **P**rocess, **L**anguage, **I**dentity, and **T**echnology—as a way to recognize and reduce social distance in global teams. The reading will discuss the five factors of the SPLIT model and help readers understand how each factor, individually and collectively, contributes to raising or lowering social distance. Each factor is discussed in a separate section that focuses on specific areas of teamwork in which social distance may develop, along with suggestions for how leaders can reduce it.

Section 2.2, on Structure—defined as strictly the physical configuration of people on a global team—discusses how effective global teams learn to emphasize group-level identity, bridge differences, and focus on the team's common purpose to ameliorate power imbalances.

Section 2.3, on Process—defined as behaviors and interactions over time—discusses how planning for unstructured time, encouraging disagreement, emphasizing helpful differences, and creating self-awareness can compensate for the challenges that arise when global teams must get things done. This section also describes the process of ***reflected knowledge***—the ability to see one's own behaviors and attitudes through the eyes of others—and its usefulness when global team members hold conflicting assumptions about making agreements, handling problems, and planning.

Section 2.4, on Language—which is necessary for communication—introduces the idea of English as the common language of business and highlights how social distance develops in global teams as a result of fluency disparities between native and non-native English speakers. This section details rules of engagement for team meetings, in which fluent speakers learn to lessen verbal dominance, less fluent speakers learn to increase verbal engagement, and team leaders learn to balance for inclusion.

Section 2.5, on Identity, defines identity as how we define ourselves in relation to others. Working on a global team whose members come from diverse backgrounds and locations can complicate identity in ways that increase social distance. This section explains the mutual adaptation model as a way for global team leaders to build common ground and develop the productive understandings that lead to lowering social distance.

Section 2.6, on Technology, defines technology as the media by which communication occurs. Technology is essential to geographically dispersed teams that rely on electronic communication. This section captures how leaders and team members use technology, and discusses how the communication means they choose—delayed or instant, rich or redundant—can affect social distance.

2.1 Why Social Distance Matters

Social scientists locate the origin or inspiration for social distance in the work of an early German sociologist, Georg Simmel.[4] Social distance, for Simmel, was contingent on his concept of "the stranger"—a person who shares enough similarities with a particular group to warrant inclusion but also enough dissimilarities not to fit in with the group entirely. By way of example, Simmel offers the trader who comes to town with goods for sale; the trader is included in the group of buyers, but is unfamiliar to the townspeople due to having originated from another place and culture. Social distance was construed as an integral determinant of relationships with strangers. Importantly, Simmel's idea of social distance included a stranger who was physically and/or psychologically distant.[5]

Following Simmel, sociologists elaborated on the social distance concept and used it to understand and measure individuals' openness regarding people from different demographic groups.[6] Social distance was also used to measure groups' attitudes toward one another, with the finding that greater social distance increased attitudes of us as good versus them as bad. The core conceit for sociologists has been to conceptualize social distance as stemming from individuals' affective or emotional closeness toward given groups. Alternative and more recent models of social distance

include dimensions such as differences in social attributes (wealth, power, or education) and cultural attributes such as meaning, values, or norms.[7] Construal-level theory, promulgated first by psychologists, considers social distance to be a facet of a broader psychological distance and posits a connection between psychological distance and our ability to think abstractly—to make cognitive constructs.[8]

Global teams are made up of people who are geographically distant and often culturally diverse, and have traces of Simmel's concept of the stranger. Often team members share enough similarities—organizational membership, expertise, education, previous work experience—to feel part of the group, but enough dissimilarities—language, culture, local market and practices, geographical location—to also feel outside the group. Global team members, it could be said, are all partial strangers to one another. Social distance, for the purposes of this reading, is connected to how team members feel emotionally about one another as well as the extent of their cognitive connections, such as the capacity to value the experiences, skills, and expertise of others.

A common by-product of social distance is errors in interpretation or inference, otherwise known as misattribution, which all humans do when they are trying to assimilate new data—in this case, interpreting what others say and do. One classic example of error in interpretation based on misattribution that plagues global teams is the ***fundamental attribution error***, which holds that individuals are most likely to attribute behaviors to personal traits rather than environmental influences or constraints.[9] This type of error is common in global environments, in which individuals are unfamiliar with the forces that influence their colleagues' behaviors and communications.

Consider the following example: A highly talented senior executive from Latin America with a proven performance track record gives a presentation to his global team in English. The presentation does not go well—he struggles to express himself in English and gives only the basic facts for a complex new project he is proposing. When questioned, he is hesitant to disagree with the other senior leaders and does not present persuasive arguments in support of his ideas. To make matters worse, the presentation is delivered via a screen-sharing application only, so the meeting participants are unable to gain cues from the presenter's facial expressions or body language. Based on assumptions that senior-level executives should be able to give convincing presentations to guide others toward their vision, the other executives may walk away from the call doubting the presenter's competency in his role—even though his track record demonstrates high levels of performance.

This executive was evaluated based on how others interpreted his language skills. Lack of English fluency was perceived to signify a lack of competence. In other words,

people inferred and inaccurately attributed incompetence to this executive without taking into account the difficulties inherent in communicating in a foreign language in addition to the challenges of remote communication that do not include visual cues. Nor did they recognize the speed at which they spoke and the number of idioms they used that would be difficult for a less fluent English speaker to understand. Social distance and misattribution are directly correlated. More social distance between people in a group leads to greater misattribution. In other words, less social bonding on a team is fertile ground for incorrectly attributing others' behaviors to personal characteristics rather than environmental conditions. Attributions problems can also occur when beliefs, assumptions, and values influence the way that data are interpreted.

The results of misattribution are all too visible in meetings and afterward, when employees talk to one another. In the example of the Latin American executive described above, team members who were native English speakers criticized the project's merit and questioned the presenter's commitment to his ideas. The executive, who was frustrated by his ability to communicate in a language he did not speak well, left the meeting feeling discouraged. He also made inferences: in this case, he might have suspected that he appeared unprepared or incompetent, which made him unsure whether he could trust his colleagues. Misattribution leads to conflict, distrust, and discomfort when two or more members of a group feel misunderstood. It may also lead to favoritism among group members when some members prefer those whom they view to be more similar to them and disdain those they perceive as different. Equally important, the potential upside of collaboration disappears. A huge opportunity cost is incurred because the hoped-for benefits of drawing upon and integrating talent from around the world are lost.

2.2 Structure

In this reading, ***structure*** is defined as the physical configuration of a global team, that is, the number of distributed sites in which team members are located, the number of employees who work at each site, and the relative balance in numbers of employees at each site.[10] This narrow definition allows us to focus on the dispersion challenges that global teams face, although team structure and team design can also encompass size, specializations, roles, and other attributes.

Diversity is generally important when selecting members and structuring teams. Ideally, a team is strengthened by members who hold diverse experiences, personalities, and cultural backgrounds. Invisible divisions, or ***fault lines***, between subgroups that differ in, for example, expertise, age, or gender are organic and unavoidable. Groups

often thrive on fault lines, feeling energized by subgroups' divergent perspectives or expertise. Problems arise when these divisions become too distant or too strong.[11] Strong fault lines exist on a four-person team with two people who are young and male and two who are older and female—the age and gender subgroupings align perfectly, and there is only one way to subdivide the team on these attributes. If the age gap were especially wide, then the fault line distance would be considered large. Fault lines that cause problematic subgroups and imbalance within groups are especially relevant to dispersed global teams. When multiple members of a global team work in a given site, they often develop a strong sense of allegiance to each other. This allegiance can come at a cost, however. Such subgroups often consider themselves inferior and unconsciously resent the person designated to lead them, particularly if that person is located in another part of the world.

More generally, people tend to categorize along geographical lines. Without meaning to, they use the primal distinction between "us" (good) and "them" (bad) to orient themselves as they complete tasks with distant colleagues. The more similarity there is in a subgroup, the more likely the us versus them categorization will occur. These geographically created fault lines lead to greater social distance from, and conflict with, other subgroups.[12] This is even more evident when language, time zone, and cultural reference points differ. Left unchecked, problematic subgroups or imbalances between them can negatively affect members' level of team identification and knowledge sharing, and can lead to an increase in perceived power or status differentials and more conflict and coordination challenges.

There are four distinct team configurations: (1) teams that are entirely collocated, (2) teams that have equal numbers of employees in all locations, (3) teams with unequal numbers of employees in locations, and (4) teams that involve ***geographic isolates***, or members who are alone in locations away from their colleagues.[13] Note that teams with isolates are generally immune to us versus them categorization effects that tend to occur when multiple members are located at a particular location.[14] Isolates do, however, feel excluded more often than collocated subgroup members.

Perceived and actual imbalances of power can create strong fault lines if the number of people differs widely between subgroups. People in larger (majority) groups can develop resentment for the minority group based, for example, on their belief that this subgroup will try to get away with contributing less than its fair share. Meanwhile, those in the minority group can feel threatened, believing the majority is attempting to usurp what little power and voice it has.[15] To complicate matters, those fears may be well-founded. Members who sit near the headquarters, or with the team leader, tend to ignore the needs and contributions of other people in the team outside their location.[16] Leaders of global teams have a responsibility to be aware of the common tendency for

fault lines created by unequal number distribution among geographical groups and to help foster equity among subgroups in the team. In particular, it is important to consider who might be unintentionally left out. In short, perceived and actual power imbalances among subgroups in a team influence interactions between its members.

Perceived Power Imbalances in a Global Team

Consider these views from the marketing team of a multinational pharmaceutical company that had 17 members in different locations. Each group, depending on size and proximity to the leader, saw the structure differently.

Moscow (one person): "I am all on my own here and at the mercy of the Boston group. I need to make sure that the boss has my back."

Singapore/Tokyo (3 people): "Our opinions are often ignored. It's so difficult to find a good time to exchange ideas, and even if we do manage to connect, we can't get a word in edgewise."

London (5 people): "We represent the most challenging regions in terms of diversity and institutional hurdles. The Boston team really doesn't understand our markets."

Boston (8 people): "We do the important work and have easy access to the boss."

Source: Neeley, Tsedal, "Global Teams That Work," *Harvard Business Review* 93 no. 10 (October 2015): 75–81.

Another potential outcome of subgroup structure and imbalance is that perceptions of ***status***, defined here as the degree to which an individual or group is respected or admired by others,[17] varies within the team. These differential perceptions may lead to habits of thought that could be harmful to team functioning. A study of three international teams in the automotive industry, for example, showed that employee groups who perceived themselves as low status misrepresented their work practices to colleagues in groups they perceived as high status to align with their own (inaccurate) stereotypes of how the high-status group conducted its own work. This misrepresentation led to greater conflict and reduced collaboration between the groups. In the same study, when employee groups perceived themselves as high status compared to others, they were more likely to communicate openly, share knowledge, and foster cross-team learning.[18] Leaders can counter the harmful effect of perceptions of low status by taking ongoing steps to recognize individual strengths. They can also

deemphasize both perceived and real differences in status between members of the team.

Successful global teams learn to emphasize certain group aspects and downplay others. First, they build and play up group-level identity: the umbrella identity that binds the team together into one rather than a fragmented, entity.[19] Regardless of function—for example, marketing or design—each team member represents the team. Consider the marketing team member who blames the design person for irresponsible spending, and the design person who blames the marketing colleague for constraining creativity. A team leader who wants to build group-level identity can help the marketing team member appreciate the importance of innovation and help the design person acknowledge that some ideas are too costly to implement.

Second, individual team members may come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the team should not ignore or erase differences. Creating a sense of common identity means remaining sensitive to differences among team members so that leaders can actively look for ways to bridge them. For example, a manager in Dallas, Texas, inherited a large group in India as part of an acquisition. He made it a point to involve those geographically distant employees in important decisions, contact them frequently to discuss ongoing projects, and thank them for good work. He even called team members personally to give them their birthdays off. His team appreciated his attention and as a result became more cohesive.

Third, effective global teams emphasize superordinate goals: the common purpose that team members are trying to achieve for the firm. They understand that each person, no matter his or her background, will help the team reach that goal. In the multifunctional team example above, both the marketing and the design people will work toward the shared goal of a successful new product. When concerns do arise based on perceptions of skewed power, healthy global teams learn to redirect and focus on the bigger goal of increasing revenue or beating the competition.

Video 1 provides further insights about how to deal with structural challenges in global teams.

VIDEO 1 Inconvenience Everyone Equally

Scan this QR code, click the icon, or use this link to access the video: http://bit.ly/hbsp2yBadxs

2.3 Process

Process refers to behaviors and interactions over time. In addition to traditional team processes, such as decision making, task coordination, and building trust, global teams are consistently challenged by having to interact in meetings where not everyone is physically present.[20] The time differences that geographically distributed teams must handle can cause problems with even routine, action-based processes. Julie, a French chemical engineer, and her teammates in Marseille only checked and responded to emails first thing in the morning to ensure an uninterrupted workday. They had no idea that this practice, complicated by an eight-hour time difference between France and the United States, made them seem unreliable or uncaring to their team members in California. The Americans, who were unaware of their French colleagues' email behaviors, felt mistrustful because they could not rely on a prompt response to urgent or even mundane matters. It was not until Julie visited the team's offices in California and experienced the same issues with email from her own home site that she understood the challenges of timing.

Building trust is especially challenging for global teams because the conventional means for doing so—geographic proximity, face-to-face interactions, and repeated interactions over time—are often unavailable. In addition, differences in cultural backgrounds and language may create conflicts or misunderstandings that lead to distrust. Global teams must be especially attentive to establishing trust via direct and reflected knowledge, which leads to understanding and adapting to others' processes, as Julie did when she realized how time differences affected differences in email behaviors. Global teams can acknowledge and access less conventional forms of trust, such as swift trust and passable trust. The Role of Trust in Global Teams in the Supplemental Reading section discusses in more detail types of trust and mechanisms for building trust.

Scholars who study teamwork have classified traditional aspects of team processes as transition-based, action-based, and interpersonal.[21] Transition-based processes involve analyzing tasks, setting goals, and developing strategies.[22] Action-based processes involve decision making, monitoring, and coordination during task implementation.[23] Interpersonal processes involve managing team conflict, emotions, and engagement.[24] Because these traditional aspects of process are likely to be complicated by geographical distance and technology-mediated communication inherent to global teams, global team leaders must also make productive use of the following four types of recurring deliberate moments: (1) structuring unstructured time, (2) encouraging disagreement, (3) emphasizing (helpful) differences, and (4) creating self- and leader awareness among team members. Each of these four deliberate

moments, which can engender trust and communication to reduce social distance, is discussed below.

Unstructured time allows for spontaneous, collegial interactions to take place. While such interactions—comparing notes on the weather, children, or the new restaurant in town—often have little or nothing to do with the business goal at hand, they are essential to building strong relationships among team members. Within global teams, these informal interactions are often harder to achieve due to lack of physical collocation. Even relatively small physical distances between team members, such as desks located on different floors of the same building, can reduce informal contact, communication, and collaboration. Global teams must find ways to engage in some forms of spontaneous interaction that will both help build shared identity and engagement within the realities of people's respective work contexts and help to curb excessive, unproductive conflict among global team members.[25]

Unstructured time is a way for team members to bond and openly convey their thinking. Global teams can, for example, make a habit of using the unstructured time during the initial minutes of a meeting to initiate and join in the informal chat about nonwork matters. Teams make the best use of unstructured time by communicating openly and honestly about the invisible constraints that may exist within their firm. For example, an employee on a team may have concerns about upcoming legislation that may affect the way the bidding process works in her region. Such information may or may not apply directly to the team's project, but it may offer some valuable insights for the future. More important, the chance to talk about local challenges encourages team members to feel heard and cared about.

Besides budgeting for unstructured time, another way global teams can make a difference is by encouraging disagreement in both task and process. Encouraging intellectual disagreement is often a crucial element for the process of bringing forth new ideas. It does not mean inviting team members to vent grievances or focus on difficult interpersonal issues, such as mismatched personalities or irritating cultural differences. Instead, effective global teams understand encouraging disagreement as a way to provoke open discussion intentionally, which can spur innovation and new solutions. Team members, including those with least status or experience, may have valuable knowledge about the best methods with which to approach new problems. Without a climate that supports intellectual disagreement, those best methods may be lost. That's what happened when a software developer in Istanbul kept silent in a team meeting in order to avoid conflict, even though he questioned the other team members' design of a particular feature. He had good reason to oppose their decision, but his team leader did not brook disagreement, and the developer did not want to damage his

own position by speaking his mind. However, four weeks into the project, the team ran into the very problems that the developer had seen coming.

Getting Things Done: A Spectrum of Differences

In order to avoid confusion or misunderstandings, global team leaders can make explicit how a particular team is expected to operate in order to get things done. Below are three common processes—making agreements, handling problems, and planning—and the spectrum of views toward each area that leaders should take into account and address.

Agreements: Fixed or Fluid?

Some team members may prefer clear, detailed agreements about what is going to be done and when. Once a decision has been reached on a course of action, they assume it is fixed and will be carried out exactly as decided. Failure to follow through exactly as agreed is viewed as a sign that a person or team isn't trustworthy.

Other people may view agreements as fluid. They're expressions of intention that are open to revision, guidelines, and aspirational targets, rather than fixed commitments. This assumption is based on the ideas that one can't absolutely control circumstances and that things will come up to change the context of the agreement. Besides, new and better ideas may come up as the agreement is being implemented.

Problems: Heads Up or Heads Down?

Some team members may expect that any mistakes or potential problems will be promptly communicated, along with options for addressing them and moving on. This heads-up approach assumes that acknowledging mistakes and problems is acceptable, especially if doing so leads to better problem solving and results.

Others may prioritize the emotional considerations of saving face and are reluctant to disappoint the boss or client. Mistakes and potential problems are quietly resolved, without bringing attention to potentially bad news.

Planning: How Much or How Little?

One approach is to spend time up front carefully planning the work ahead. Clearly articulated goals, deliverables, deadlines, timelines, and processes are valued as a systematic approach that will create an efficient and reliable road map. Built-in review and opportunities for changes may exist at particular points along the way.

Another approach is to expect to begin a project with a general concept and then work out the details over time. A process does not have to be perfectly calibrated to bring about the desired results. Ingenious improvisation, an ability to adapt or compromise, and flexibility are seen as prized attributes.

Source: Adapted from Carol Kinsey Goman, interview with Karine Schomer, "Why Your Global Team Can't Collaborate," *Forbes* (October 2014). http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2014/10/13/why-your-global-team-cant-collaborate/2/#718ed31061ce.

Some global teams are tempted to prize organization and efficiency above all as they attempt to balance the many needs of different regions working on a given project. However, teams benefit most when viewpoints, ideas, and opinions are actively solicited on each topic discussed. Task-based conflict, for example, can improve team

performance when people "openly discuss differences of opinion, exchange information to solve problems together, and firmly pursue their own sides of disagreements."[26] In effective teams, members ask other team members directly about their thoughts, or ask if they would suggest a different approach. They say things such as, "What do you think about the new proposal?" or "Does anyone have any additional comments?" Leaders encourage such thinking, not just regarding specific tasks but also in considering the overarching process by which tasks get done. Being specific in calling out the different perspectives accessible on the team may also help the team embrace constructive disagreement. "I know Nadar drew up the original milestone dates, but Elena has brought up some new issues that will delay delivery. I'd like your opinions on what you think is the best way to proceed." Each agenda item, therefore, is up for evaluation, by the leader and team members, regarding how it can be better understood and executed. Encouraging open and productive disagreement allows team members to shape their own leadership skills more actively. See the sidebar "Getting Things Done: A Spectrum of Differences" for examples of some of the major areas where global team members may differ in their expectations and assumptions.

As mentioned earlier, it's easy for team members to avoid open disagreement with those they don't feel they know well enough or whom they perceive to be in more powerful roles. One nonthreatening way that leaders break such silences is to frame disagreements as encouraging difference rather than antagonism. In other words, team members need not view difference in a negative light. One might start a discussion positively: "I like that idea. Let's brainstorm more like it." If others disagree in antagonistic ways (e.g., "That's too risky"), force people to be specific (e.g., "In that scenario, I'm worried about . . . .") Instead of having to defend the plan itself, the original author gets to continue taking an active role in shaping it by addressing another's specific concerns.

The act of gently teasing out disagreements and treating them as opportunities to learn gets back to a point made earlier about celebrating individuality. Instead of focusing on what a particular group of people has in common—the most obvious and tempting example being their location—focus on the "good" differences between each person. A four-person cohort from Indonesia, for example, is not "the Indonesia people"; rather, they are four individuals with different levels of experience, expertise, and training.

Along with allowing for unstructured time, encouraging disagreement, and emphasizing (helpful) differences, team leaders create deliberate moments for self- and other awareness, in which they solicit suggestions and insights from their team members for team and company improvement. Global team leaders can foster trust among their group members by engaging in ***direct knowledge***, or learning about group

members' personal characteristics, relationships, and behavioral norms.[27] In addition, leaders can and must turn the tables by inviting team members to gather such information about the leaders themselves as well as about each other. Doing so invites team members to have a voice and to process observations they have made consciously or subconsciously.

Team members can also engage in reflected knowledge, defined as the ability to see the personal characteristics, relationships, and behavioral norms of their own sites (e.g., themselves) through the lens of their geographically distant collaborators. Such perspective often brings about a level of introspection that looks inward but also invites others in. In an earlier example, Julie, the French chemical engineer, engaged in reflected knowledge when she traveled to California and realized that her habit of checking emails only in the morning presented communication problems for her American counterparts. By using reflected knowledge, leaders and team members learn how others see them and also how others want to see them. Both direct and reflected knowledge (discussed in greater detail in The Role of Trust in Global Teams in the Supplemental Reading section) help to foster trust and social bonding between teams and their leaders, and reflected knowledge, in particular, promotes feelings in team members of being understood.[28]

2.4 Language

Communication is essential for successful team functioning. Communication enables information sharing among team members, which can enhance team performance through improved decision making and collaboration.[29] Communication empowers team members by allowing them to participate in team decision making, which not only benefits the company with their skills but also can make them feel more confident and capable in their role.[30] Communication can foster trust among team members by allowing them to establish group norms and to share common experiences.[31] Communication is a significant challenge for global teams, however. Not only do global leaders need to manage the barriers to communication related to physical distance and different time zones, they may also need to manage language diversity within their teams. In addition, the language that people use to understand and construe teams varies by national and organizational culture.[32] If not carefully managed, language diversity can become a "lightening rod" to the strong fault lines that create divisive subgroups within teams and increase social distance.[33]

Using a common language to communicate is one of the most fundamental aspects of a global team.[34] Most often, that common language is English. (See the sidebar

"English as the Language of Global Business.") However, a decided-upon, unifying language is just the first step in the process of organizing a team. Unless carefully managed, a common language can prove to be more divisive than unifying. Recall the example earlier in this reading when a talented executive's competency was inaccurately questioned due to a presentation in which he struggled to express himself in English. A policy that establishes a lingua franca, usually English, for an organization can influence pathways to power and control within an organization that differ for native and nonnative speakers.[35] In a classic misattribution error, leaders often unwittingly position fluent speakers of a ***lingua franca*** as winners, and less fluent speakers thus experience a substantial loss of power and status, no matter what their level of expertise or experience. As a countermeasure, it is helpful for fluent speakers of a lingua franca to reflect on the challenges and fears they might face if they were asked to communicate in a language in which their colleagues are fluent—for example, Mandarin or Portuguese. It is essential that team leaders make sure team members know that each one is responsible for contributing to the successful implementation of the business language—no matter their level of fluency.

English as the Language of Global Business

Global organizations increasingly adopt English as the lingua franca to facilitate collaboration across boundaries.[36] The need to grow globally, as well as the mergers and acquisitions that often bring together employees from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, make it necessary to find a common language in which to communicate and collaborate.[37] The alternative—unrestricted multilingualism—has proven to be inefficient and unproductive. Relying on translators and interpreters for written documents or verbal interactions becomes overly challenging, unnecessarily lengthy, and imprecise.[38] In addition, global team members who do not share the same language struggle to convey valuable tacit knowledge.[39] Even if everyone on a global team shares a common language other than English, it is likely they will eventually have to interact with customers who rely on English. Subsidiaries and headquarters must be able to communicate in the same language if employees are to operate with the shared mission and values that ultimately advance the company's global vision.[40,41]

How did English become the lingua franca for global business? History has shown that a lingua franca becomes global because of the military, economic, and political dominance of its native speakers.[42] Just as Greek, Latin, and Arabic were once the lingua franca of international communication at the height of their respective empires, English as a lingua franca is due in large part to the long history of colonial Britain and the superpower position of the United States.[43] Linguists estimate that nearly two billion people worldwide speak English at a useful level.[44] This is not surprising given that the intrinsic properties of a

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language contribute to its spread as a lingua franca. English's flexible grammar makes it relatively easy to learn. Its centuries-long habit of borrowing vocabulary from other languages—*pajama* (Urdu), *menu* (French), and *plaza* (Spanish), to cite a few contributions—lends it a familiarity to learners.[45] Despite the fact that an organization's initial change from multilingualism to a single language is difficult and often met with employee resistance, many organizations find that English is necessary to fuel multinational growth.[46]

Meetings, whether virtual or face-to-face, can become particularly problematic for global teams when everyone is expected to speak the lingua franca. Varying levels of fluency and comfort with speaking English are inevitable. Below are summaries of the most productive language-related behaviors for global groups. The more team members embrace and model these roles when it comes to language, the greater the chance of success for their teams. These behaviors are referred to as dial-down dominance, dial-up engagement, and balance for inclusion (see also **Exhibit 1**).

2.4.1 Fluent Speakers: Dial-Down Dominance

Fluent English speakers need to work on helping others to join the front lines of discussion. They can do so by slowing down their speaking pace and using fewer idioms or unfamiliar slang terms when addressing the group. To refrain from dominating the conversation, fluent speakers can also limit the number of comments made within a specific time frame, depending on the meeting's pace and subject matter. In addition, fluent speakers can listen actively by rephrasing another's statement for clarification or emphasis rather than immediately adding his or her observations. Finally, these speakers can actively seek to be understood. After making a particularly difficult or lengthy point, they can verbally check in, perhaps by asking colleagues, "Is there a better way I can rephrase that and still get my meaning across?"

2.4.2 Less Fluent Speakers: Dial-Up Engagement

Less fluent speakers, on the other hand, share responsibility to participate verbally in the discussion, despite the discomfort they may feel in using a nonnative language. These speakers can monitor the frequency of their responses the way that fluent speakers do but with the goal to speak up *more*. Again, depending on the pace of the meeting, such team members might aim to make a specific number of verbal contributions within a specific time frame. As with fluent speakers, non-fluent speakers can pause to make sure they have been understood accurately. These team members should ask, "Do you understand what I'm saying?" and then push for an honest response. If they don't understand what more fluent team members are saying, they

should ask for repetition or additional explanation. Such clarification is difficult to seek, particularly for less-fluent individuals whose perceptions of their power may be weakened by how fluent in English they perceive themselves to be. However, this type of clarification is necessary.

In addition to resisting the tendency to be silent and withdraw in meetings, non-fluent members should resist other avoidance behaviors, such as not attending meetings at all. At the same time, they should resist the temptation to use their mother tongues in the presence of other team members who might share this language. Switching between two or more languages within one conversation is called ***code switching***. In this case, code switching between the lingua franca and one's native tongue, a language other team members may not understand and that isn't the group's official business language, can cause alienation in the group.[47]

2.4.3 Team Leaders: Balance for Inclusion

Team leaders must embrace the necessary role of maintaining balance within the conversation. In this case, *balance* means a good mix of speaking and listening on the part of each team member. Although team members should be expected to track their behaviors in order to influence this balance, team leaders can also observe who is doing more speaking than listening, and vice versa. They can verbally solicit participation from the less active speakers and make sure that everyone's opinions, proposals, and perspectives are heard by periodically checking in with verbal reminders. This not only takes care of the need for less fluent speakers to say more but also tactfully allows those who have been overly dominant to step aside temporarily and tactfully. Remember also to check in for mutual understanding. Ask whether non-fluent speakers understand what fluent speakers are saying. Similarly, make sure that fluent speakers grasp the meaning of non-fluent speakers' contributions. If necessary, rephrase what has been said to clarify meaning or restate a sentence to confirm that everyone is on the same page.

Leaders should also remind teams about the need for consistent contributions by explaining that the nature of global work mandates that each person participate. By continually emphasizing that true collaboration involves multiple points of view, leaders can make sure that the contributions of all team members remain ongoing and immediate while at the same time allowing these contributions to evolve into deeper levels of influence.[48] The leader of a global team based in Dubai went so far as to require that members post the three rules of engagement (see Exhibit 1) in their cubicles. Soon one heavily accented European team member began contributing to discussions for the first time since joining the team 17 months earlier. The rules had given this person the license, opportunity, and responsibility to speak up.

EXHIBIT 1 Rules of Engagement for Team Meetings

Fluent Speakers	Less Fluent Speaker	Team Leaders
Dial-down dominance • Slow down the pace and use familiar language (e.g., fewer idioms). • Refrain from dominating the conversation. • Ask, "Do you understand what I am saying?" • Listen actively.	**Dial-up engagement** • Resist withdrawal or other avoidance behaviors. • Refrain from reverting to your native language. Ask, "Do you understand what I am saying?" • If you don't understand others, ask them to repeat or explain.	**Balance for inclusion** • Monitor participants and strive to balance their speaking and listening. • Actively draw contributions from all team members. • Solicit participation from less fluent speakers in particular. • Be prepared to define and interpret content.

Source: Tsedal Neeley, "Global Teams That Work," *Harvard Business Review* 93 no. 10 (October 2015): 75–81.

However, language fluency does not equal cultural fluency. Understanding the cultural background of each team member is as essential as learning to conjugate new verbs in another language. Insensitivity to cultural differences around decision making, hierarchies, and work practices can hinder communication. For example, one team leader from the United States found it frustrating that he could never get a clear yes or no when talking by telephone to another team member in Indonesia. What he didn't know, or failed to take into account, was his Indonesian team member's cultural assumptions and expectations. For his colleague, it was crucial to build a trusting relationship before expressing a yes or no opinion.

Video 2 provides further guidance about managing language policies in global teams.

VIDEO 2 Language Policies

Scan this QR code, click the icon, or use this link to access the video: http://bit.ly/hbsp2IiOJ7X

2.5 Identity

For the purpose of this reading, ***identity*** means self-definition. We all have ways that we see and define ourselves, and much of our outlook is formed by our interactions with the environments in which we work and live. The interplay between how we see ourselves and how others see us is a dynamic process that influences our behaviors. Often, we try to behave in ways that match others' expectations of ourselves with our own. Clearly, this process is easier when others see us in the same way that we see

ourselves.[49] People often seek to align their self-perceptions and others' perceptions of themselves by surrounding themselves with those who seem to agree with their self-perceptions. They may also, through their interactions, give clues that demonstrate how they feel they should be perceived. An individual who expects to be perceived by her team members as a leader, for example, may elicit support from long-term colleagues, make frequent reference to her own skills and experience, and take informal control over team processes.

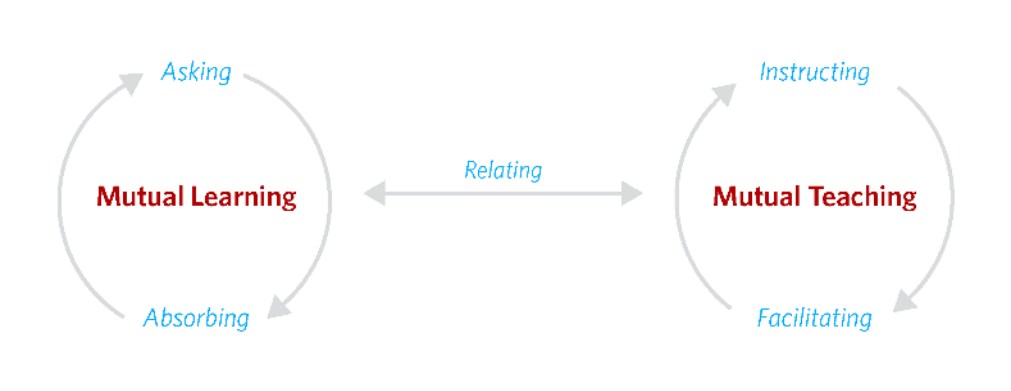
In a global environment that, by its very nature, includes cultural differences, finding a way to negotiate and balance our own and others' perceptions of who we are can be significantly challenging and contribute to social distance. In this context, how we affirm our own identity in the eyes of others is less clear. In North America, for example, a person who wants to project confidence might use the behavioral cue of looking others directly in the eye. Yet in meetings with people from other parts of the world, individuals find direct eye contact to be rude or threatening. In other words, when people from vastly different backgrounds come together in a group setting, they can't assume that their usual ways of reflecting their identities will be interpreted as they would in their home environments.

Balancing our own and other's perceptions of who we are is complicated by the fact that our identities are constantly reshaping as we absorb and relate to cultural, religious, political, ethnic, and other types of external stimuli. The North American who has learned from experience to avoid direct eye contact with people who originate from cultures that tend to find such behavior rude or threatening may well go on to interact with an individual from another part of the world who has spent enough time in North American environments to be comfortable with direct eye contact. In other words, identity and culture are in a dynamic relationship to one another. The Role of Culture in Global Teams in the Supplemental Reading section sheds additional light on this relationship by discussing in detail the ways in which culture can be conceptualized as static or dynamic, and the ensuing ramifications each conceptualization has on our experiences of cross-cultural interaction.

The mutual adaptation model (see **Exhibit 2**) allows leaders to successfully build common ground and negotiate mutual identities with their global counterparts for the purpose of reducing social distance. Central to this model is the act of developing an understanding of both how others see the world and how they perceive your own behaviors. The mutual adaptation model comprises two interactive cycles that help to shape identity and interactions in new contexts—the mutual learning cycle and the mutual teaching cycle. There is no sequence or hierarchy to these actions; global leaders and their team members engage in both teaching and learning activities during

different episodes. Repeated over time, the effects are cumulative rather than immediate.

EXHIBIT 2 Mutual Adaption Model



Mutual Learning

The first cycle in the mutual adaptation model involves mutual learning, which comprises two specific learning-related behaviors: absorbing and asking.

Absorbing. Global leaders and team members learn by actively observing and listening to the behaviors of others, similar to the way children develop cultural know-how in their native contexts.[50] While true for all groups, the wider cultural span makes these activities crucial for global teams. When global team members move out of their comfort zone and into a new context, they must actively watch, listen, and "take it all in." Essential to this process is the suspension of comparisons between themselves and others, and deferring judgment until they have gathered more relevant information about the situation. These actions allow leaders and members of global teams to develop productive and comparative understandings of different perspectives and alternate practices.

Asking. Global team members who come from diverse cultural backgrounds can also learn by asking questions. This allows individuals to gather information about a new context or to verify an understanding of why people behave as they do. The give-and-take of asking questions and providing answers establishes mutuality within a team. This information-based interaction pattern provides a sanctioned opportunity for individuals to make sense of their contexts and adapt to an evolving process of interacting.[51] Asking questions may not always provide a clear enough picture, however. An elemental part of a leader's ability to embrace difference is the ability to accept ambiguity and to develop attitudes in which diverse workgroups respect differences.[52]

Absorbing and asking are interconnected behaviors. Absorbing gives global leaders and team members more opportunities and experiences about which to ask questions; asking questions allows them to develop a better understanding of the observed behaviors. This mindful method of understanding valued parts of others' identities allows leaders to consider the ways their own identities are expressed and how their team members may perceive such identities. Such understanding often increases the likelihood of more effective collaboration.

Mutual Teaching

Mutual teaching marks the second cycle of the evolution of global identity within the mutual adaptation model. In this process, team members focus on instructing and facilitating. With the idea that everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn, mutual teaching requires leaders and team members to take on both the roles of tutor and tutee. Theories from educational psychology on social interdependence emphasize the central role of peers as coaches and informal teachers.[53] For leaders, the cycle of mutual teaching helps facilitate a culture of acceptance among team members and allows for development of dynamic, multidimensional views of oneself and others.[54] The collaborative process of teaching and being taught helps activate greater awareness. It enables all team members to better understand others' unique perspectives and differences. The shared experience of teaching and learning also allows leaders to develop common ground with their global colleagues, which in turn reduces the barriers caused by social distance.

Instructing. Instructing comprises coaching, teaching, mentoring, and other forms of guidance that help expand the knowledge and understanding of global teams. Instruction involves advice and assistance that peers share with one another in order to help each person understand new perspectives. Mentoring establishes a personal connection between two or more team members. It frequently occurs between one person who is native to and one who is new to a particular environment or language. Instructing and mentoring is an appropriate venue for helping to diagnose and resolve specific communication problems experienced in teams that contribute to social distance.

Facilitating. Facilitating is another type of teaching behavior within the mutual adaptation model. Those who facilitate can intermediate and translate among team members who may be challenged by misunderstanding or missed communication. Team members who are versed in multiple cultural repertoires and therefore have a wider set of cultural tools can serve as links between team members whose backgrounds are markedly different. As cultural brokers, these individuals are well equipped to

synthesize disparate behaviors and information.[55] For more about cultural tools, see The Role of Culture in Global Teams in the Supplemental Reading section.

Mutuality is the key element of all these teaching behaviors—team members from different backgrounds help one another learn and understand each other while also working to develop their own new global identities. Such a process is cyclical, reciprocal, and mutually adaptive. All members of a global team should be equipped to use instruction and facilitation regularly in order to build shared learning and understanding of varying perspectives. Doing so allows them to experience more substantive relationships with fellow team members than they previously had, which again can prevent social distance.

Cycles of mutual learning and teaching allow people to adapt to one another and in turn to relate better to fellow team members. As learning and teaching behaviors evolve, collaborators build interpersonal trust.[56] Mutual learning allows team members to identify and build upon shared interests; mutual teaching allows coworkers to increase expectations that their fellow team members will be reliable, deeply concerned with each other's inclusion and wellbeing, and able to make each other feel increasingly comfortable during group interactions.[57]

Note that sometimes engaging in information sharing, mutual learning, and mutual teaching with colleagues may result in conflict. When this occurs, leaders must carefully consider the nature of the conflict to ensure that they manage it properly. While task-based conflict may lead to greater flexibility and adaptation to change, process-based conflict may lead to decreased productivity and performance. Furthermore, interpersonal conflict may erode trust among team members.[58] There may be times when the teaching and learning is unrelated to identity and simply facilitates day-to-day business activities. It all depends on the context of the information being exchanged; some pieces of information may have a greater impact on the adaptation process than others.

The mutual adaptation model can help global team members move through the process of negotiating global identities. At times, the negotiation may result in self-verification, where people can find ways to make others see them as they see themselves.[59] At other times, the negotiation may result in affinity, such that people's own perception of their identity shifts to conform to that of their team. The dynamic interplay of these processes is not easy. Alongside this difficulty, however, comes learning that reduces social distance and therefore results in improved team collaboration and satisfaction from work.

2.6 Technology

Geographically dispersed global teams typically rely on mediated technology to communicate; indeed, technology has enabled global teams to flourish. Yet communication mediated by technology is associated with impaired performance, information lags, increased misunderstandings, and incoherent messages.[60] These drawbacks, which often accompany reduced mutual knowledge among remote team members, can lead to greater social distance and greater conflict.[61] However, research has shown that, although global technology-mediated teams take longer than collocated teams to develop trust, cohesion, effective communication, and conflict management, many of the differences between the two types of teams diminish over time.[62]

Global teams need to be flexible and diversified in their approaches to technology. They must consider the social cues, team dynamics, and what they want to communicate to whom. Media types are divided into synchronous and asynchronous technologies. ***Synchronous technology***, also called ***instant technology***, facilitates richer communication by offering a sense of emotion and presence in addition to information sharing. Instant messaging (IM) platforms, chat rooms, and conference calls are examples of synchronous technology; they allow spontaneity and real-time interactions that "create an awareness of presence, knowing that recipients are actually around and able to respond."[63] ***Asynchronous technology***, also called ***delayed technology***, reveals far less context and tends to supply information only.[64] Email and project management technologies that provide tools such as document storage or scheduling are all widely used forms of delayed communication.

Managers who are trying to persuade their team members to take a particular course of action are likely to find greater success if they use instant technologies, such as phone, videoconferencing or instant messaging, at the outset. Because instant technologies require each person to acknowledge the other, they tend to create greater personal buy-in, or agreement. Managers who want to follow up on an earlier interaction or simply transmit information can effectively communicate their ideas via email or other methods of delayed communication.[65]

Although time zones may limit the possibility of instant engagement among team members, it is important, where possible, for global leaders to account for the impact of instant versus delayed technologies in their communications strategy. Bear in mind that delayed communication tools such as email are also affected by time zone differences; for example, team members in Seoul may be out of sync with team members in New York City when it comes to processing and responding. Both delayed and instant communications are susceptible to unproductive conflict if individual team

members are excluded from group communications.[66] Most global companies rely too much on delayed communication. Because global team members often emulate the technology choices made by their leaders,[67] managers who want a group to develop stronger ties must set the example by communicating with instant technology: phone calls, instant messaging, or scheduling meetings by video or audio call.

Choosing the Right Communication Media

Because global teams rely heavily on technology to communicate and get work done, you need to be deliberate and thoughtful when you choose specific software; you must invest in appropriate IT training for team members and set, enforce, and refresh norms for IT use. Privacy, security, and transparency must be addressed. In some cases, the particular technology platform your team relies upon may not be your choice. Compatibility issues may arise, and you can't assume that adequate technical support exists for every location. Governments may differ in their usage allowances. Human factors can be particularly important for global teams. For example, if a conference call is scheduled among team members who work in different time zones, those team members who do not have the technology at home must stay late (or even overnight) at the office. Below are examples to consider, categorized as instant and delayed technologies.

Instant

- **Instant messaging tools** allow teams to chat in real-time.
- **Videoconferencing tools** allow team members to conference and collaborate, sometimes through super-high-definition or real-time videoconferencing.
- **Chat applications** give team members a common platform on which to send short messages to individuals or informal groups.
- **Mobile phones** enable team members to speak to one another from almost any location.
- **Landlines** enable team members to speak in an office.

(continued)

(continued)

Delayed

- **Project management tools** help team members manage and plan projects with fellow team members through task assignments.
- **Document tools** allow team members to co-create and co-edit documents.
- **Document storage/file sharing** helps store and file documents securely among team members.
- **Scheduling tools** help team members to schedule common meeting times with one another.
- **Social networking tools** allow team members to collaborate and interact with one another through a social network.

A paradox exists in the use of technology among global organizations: The technologies that enable the work across physical boundaries also limit the amount of context provided, which is context often needed for strong global communication. Email, for example, is one of the most efficient ways to communicate, but it doesn't include the same elements of human communication (such as body language) as other technologies that convey information on a smaller scale. Yet according to a recent study of approximately 10,000 workers worldwide, the most widely used technology is email, with 94 percent of respondents engaging in it on a regular basis.[44] At the bottom end of the scale was enterprise social networking platforms, at 25 percent. As social networking sites multiply, however, they are evolving to better suit the needs of businesses in addition to functioning in the purely social realm. A study of workers in a global technology consultancy concluded that using knowledge management systems, such as an intranet for storing "lessons learned" or "accessing expertise" facilitated the trust and shared understandings central to social closeness.[68]

Media choices will likely change over time. What may not change is the trend of relying on a greater use of technology versus less. Nor will instant and delayed communications change.

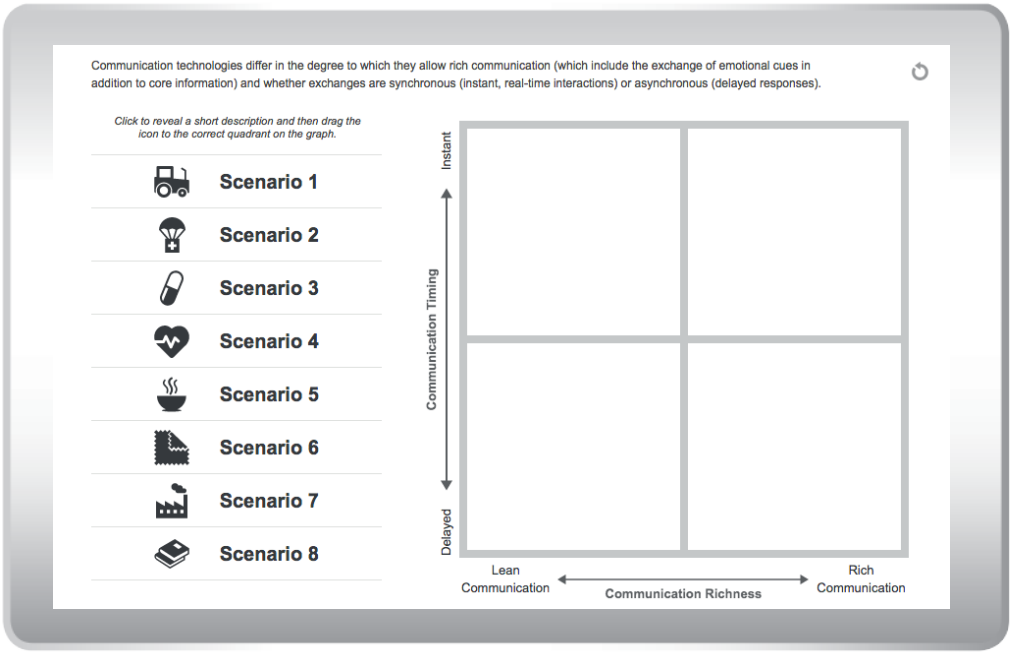
People are pairing technologies more and more often to communicate globally. ***Redundant communication*** uses a combination of instant and delayed communication technologies, depending on who initiates the communication and its purpose. For example, a communication may begin with instant messaging and follow-up with an email or vice versa. A field study that shadowed managers in six companies across three

industries and that observed how employees used redundant communication found that managers without formal power achieved results by first using an instant form of communication, often to remind team members of an upcoming project deadline, and then right away followed up with a delayed communication of that same message. They often moved a project forward faster than managers with formal power, who assumed (incorrectly) that a single email would ensure compliance with a request. Managers without power tended to follow up their initial delayed communication with an instant communication to make sure they had been heard. What's at stake here is how much of a presence a manager makes with a chosen technology. Two redundant communications sent more or less simultaneously proved to establish a greater presence for the receiver.[69]

Interactive Illustration 1 allows you to reflect on the use of different communication technologies in global teams.

INTERACTIVE ILLUSTRATION 1 Choosing the Right Communication Strategy

Scan this QR code, click the image, or use this link to access the interactive: http://bit.ly/hbsp2DX04bO



Context-rich communication can help teams move forward. However, richer communication is not always the best answer. Based on a team's existing dynamic and degree of social distance or closeness, enhanced communication methods can have a differential impact on team outcomes for negotiations and group decision making.[70] Teams who may have friendships that extend beyond the office do not achieve any better outcomes with the introduction of more context-rich technology. Global teams,

which contend with geographic distance and few to no face-to-face interactions, do achieve better outcomes when enhanced media types are introduced. However, this is not true if the team has high social distance due to a long-standing policy disagreement—in such cases, teams actually fare worse in terms of negotiation and decision making when rich technologies are used. An important takeaway for global leaders is to consider the dynamics and history of teams before making decisions about which technologies are best to employ. Often, technology use is guided by very specific circumstances. For example, if a decision needs to be made immediately, instant messaging is the likely choice even though that may provoke dissatisfaction from team members who are in distant time zones and thus asleep when the decision was made. Choosing the appropriate communication technology for a specific situation is a subjective skill rather than an exact science.

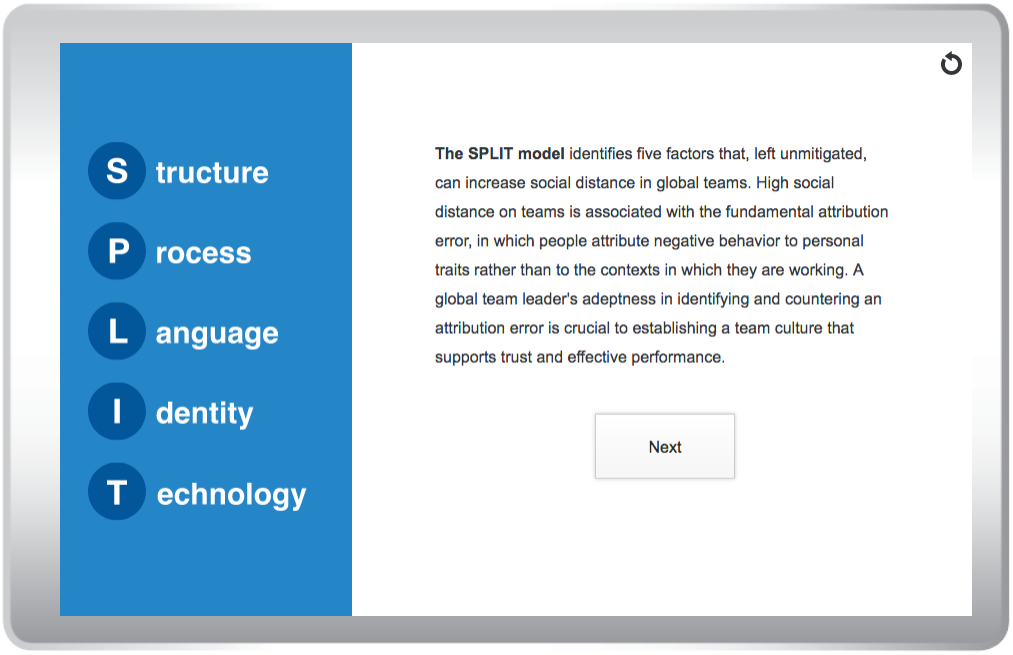
2.7 Conclusion

In understanding how to manage each element for the good of the team, global teams must constantly return to two important principles. First, social distance will likely be pervasive in global teams. However, with a clear understanding of each SPLIT factor, along with much practice, leaders and their teams can meet this challenge. Second, the nature of teams is cyclical, not linear. Problems and patterns may repeat themselves as teams shift, disband, and regroup; there is no such thing as the end. Like people, no two teams are ever exactly the same. In managing all parts of SPLIT, global teams will engage in their own process of rediscovering the most effective ways to lead their groups to achieve more.

Interactive Illustration 2 presents the five elements of the SPLIT model, allowing you to click on each element to see an example of how the element can contribute to increased social distance and misattribution errors.

INTERACTIVE ILLUSTRATION 2 SPLIT Model: Social Distance and Attribution Error

Scan this QR code, click the image, or use this link to access the interactive: http://bit.ly/hbsp2ITFkFy



3 SUPPLEMENTAL READING

3.1 The Role of Culture in Global Teams

"They're lazy," complained the Indian engineers about their team members in Germany. "They take too long to respond to our emails."

"They're always taking tea breaks," complained the German engineers about their team members in India. "They're lazy."

Indeed, the German engineers were accustomed to working sequentially on tasks and assumed the same of their Indian counterparts. Indian engineers did go often to the tearoom, frequently in pairs—to mentor, share knowledge, and problem-solve. Had the two groups understood the cultural background and processes of how their colleagues got things done, they would have been less likely to complain and more likely to decrease rather than increase the social distance.

The misunderstanding between the Indian and German engineers is just one example of how working in a global team invariably requires navigating differences between a native culture, which team members find natural, and a culture that is unknown, which they may find unnatural and difficult to understand. Before we discuss how global teams can effectively manage the challenges of what scholars call intercultural contact,[71] or what transpires when people from different cultural backgrounds meet, it is instructive to understand how culture has been conceptualized. Scholars tend to adopt one of two constructs of culture: static or dynamic.

3.1.1 Culture as a Static Construct

This first view assumes stasis in values, norms, and attitudes in any given national culture. Cultures are viewed as integrated systems, with underlying principles guiding similar behaviors and mind-sets among the majority of group members. *Everyone* from a German cultural background will value efficiency; *everyone* from an Asian cultural background will prioritize respect for authority in the workplace. Consequently, those who view culture as a fixed and tightly knit network of values, symbols, and practices advise global team members to manage cultural differences by deciphering each other's relevant cultural codes and particular rituals.

In the 1960s, anthropologist Perti Pelto studied 29 societies and differentiated between those with tight versus loose cultures.[72] Tight cultures are formal and disciplined, have clearly stated behavioral norms, and have consequences for straying from the norm. Loose cultures, on the other hand, are informal, have weak or ambiguous behavioral norms, and tolerate deviant behavior. Pelto's distinctions are relevant for global teams regarding how they correspond to leadership styles. An effective leader from a tight culture is likely to be authoritative and rule-bound, whereas a leader from a loose culture is likely to be charismatic and want to empower employees. Challenges arise when there is a mismatch; for example, a leader from a loose culture expects team members to collaborate and make independent decisions when team members from a tight culture expect to follow a leader who exhibits strength, stability, and authority.

Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede formulated an influential example of this perspective in 1980. He classified national culture according to four dimensions: power distance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, and uncertainty–avoidance.[73] Since then, this within-nation homogeneity perspective was supported by studies that suggest, for example, that East Asians use *holistic* forms of cognition; like botanists who identify plants by their leaf formation, holistic thinkers understand by finding patterns and relationships between different components. Westerners, this view asserts, are more *analytic*.[74] Like a mechanic who takes apart an automobile engine to figure out

how it runs, analytic thinkers understand a system by thinking about its parts and how they work together. Other studies underscore a homogenous view of culture by contending that emotional experiences are governed by culture and in turn shape divergent ways of constructing the self.[75] Americans, for example, associate "good feelings" with independence while the Japanese associate the same emotion with interdependence.[76]

Despite its enduring influence, the static and homogenous view of national culture has received considerable criticism. Scholars decry Hofstede's model for its limited explanatory power and inattentiveness to within-country heterogeneity.[77] Other critics have pointed out that a homogenous conceptualization of culture does not reflect the reality of cultural diversity, suggesting that there may be as much variation within as across any particular national or ethno-cultural groups. Heterogeneous cultures also change over time and in response to contextual influences.[78]

3.1.2 Culture as a Dynamic Construct

Scholars have called for cross-cultural research to move beyond a simple values-based notion of culture and to instead develop theories that reflect the complexity and dynamism of culture as people actually experience it, including the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions.[79] Taking up this call, scholars have developed a view that uses the metaphor of a mosaic to explain how culture is made up of interchangeable tiles that correspond to demographics, geography, and associations.[80] An individual may carry a range of thoughts and feelings that derive from various cultures and subcultures. In this view, a culture can be characterized, for example, as both Indonesian and executive.

Another dynamic conceptualization of culture is multilevel. Based on norms and values as well as behaviors, this framework posits nested levels of culture. Each level incorporates elements ranging from the most external and visible (behaviors and language) to the most internal and invisible (basic assumptions); values lie somewhere in between. According to this perspective, individuals can and do possess identities at multiple levels simultaneously.[81] For example, a senior manager who is a Japanese native may behave in accordance with the competitive and individualistic culture of her urban American global firm (including speaking English), yet when she goes to her home in a rural village, she speaks Japanese and conforms to native cultural expectations. Both the mosaic and the multilevel, dynamic views of culture still rely on relatively static notions of values associated with specific countries or groups, for example, millennial culture, American culture, traditional rural culture.

Scholars in cultural sociology offer still more perspectives about culture. According to these scholars, an individual derives sets of cultural tools from experience as well as

from surrounding cultural and social environments. Cultural tools include a repertoire of symbols, rituals, myths, scripts, ways of seeing the world, and stories. Members of any given nationality, ethnicity, profession, or organization can access certain tools more easily than members of other cultural groups because of their prevalence within that cultural context.[82] For example, because of training and skill sets, a software engineer may access and understand the latest technology development more easily than would a human capital manager whose professional background focuses on employees. In the same way, some individuals, through experience and exposure, can acquire larger toolkits than others.[83] That is, an employee in human capital management who had also attended engineering school is likely to have a larger cultural toolkit than someone with training in only human development or engineering.

The process that groups and individuals from two or more different cultural backgrounds undergo as they meet and interact is called *acculturation*. Ideally, both cultures are transformed by acculturation. In the tearoom example mentioned earlier, acculturation requires that the two cultural groups learn about behaviors and values other than their own. The German group needs to learn that work happens during Indian team members' conversational breaks. The Indian engineers need to learn the Germans' sequential work patterns. *Cultural code switching* is a term that characterizes the capacity to modify one's behavior in specific situations to accommodate varying cultural norms.[84] The asking and instructing that inform the mutual adaptation model, described in Section 2.5, is vital to this process of mutual understanding between global team members from different cultural backgrounds. Further mutual transformation via cultural code switching might mean that two European team members adopt the habit of taking coffee breaks to brainstorm problem solving together and that an Indian team member schedules a call at a set time once a week. Similarly, in the example regarding the inherent challenges of a leader accustomed to a loose leadership style working with team members accustomed to a tight leadership style, mutual adaptation might require that the leader set stricter rules and consequences to promote accountability. And the team members might need to realize their capacity to assume responsibility and, in so doing, gain confidence by making at least some decisions on their own.

Even when team members understand cultural differences, it is not always easy to code switch to the behavior called for by the new situations in global work, especially when the new behavior conflicts with deeply ingrained beliefs from the native culture. A Nigerian graduate student in the United States, whose native culture emphasized modesty, described feeling inauthentic when she attempted to promote herself in a confident manner in professional networking situations.[85] It took time for her to pass through several psychological stages—identifying what specifically about the new

behavior felt uncomfortable, understanding that the new behavior was appropriate to Western culture, and finally finding ways to make the new behavior feel authentic. This process is called cultural retooling.[86]

It's important to understand that in a dynamic system, cultural behaviors and attitudes that manifest in global teams are embedded in cultural systems,[87] defined as the behaviors and mindsets that global workers encounter outside the workplace. This can include, for example, the habits and norms of family and friends, the local systems of transportation and education, and the local job market. Because these dynamic cultural systems are so deeply embedded, it is often not enough for individual team members to learn about and adapt to differences in work processes or behavior. Global team leaders must address culturally systemic differences in, for example, attitudes toward authority and problem solving.[88]

Understanding the role of culture in global teams is a complex and evolving topic. Frustrations and misunderstandings will inevitably arise among teams when people hold competing ideas and behaviors. Although changes may feel slow and the process takes time, global team members who engage in the asking and instructing that make up the mutual adaptation process will understand how to reach common ground and achieve their work goals effectively.

3.2 The Role of Trust in Global Teams

Trust is the glue that binds a team together and drives performance. In global teams, interpersonal trust not only enables collaboration and coordination, but is also necessary to accomplish tasks across multiple countries, cultures, and languages. Team members in San Francisco, for example, must be confident in decisions that colleagues in Beijing will make while they are asleep. Trust cannot be compelled; people have to make a judgment about the trustworthiness of others on their own.

Yet conventional notions of trust that rely on credible, repeated interactions over time and shared contexts make trust especially difficult to establish in global teams. This is largely due to global teams' inherent conditions: geographic distance, social distance, reliance on electronic communication, cultural and linguistic diversity, differences in work practices, and team members who may not have previously worked together. What's more, even when trust is established, it can easily shatter.

3.2.1 What Is Trust?

Interpersonal trust in the workplace is defined as "the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on, the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of another."[89] There is an expectation that people will act for the good of the team.[90] In global teams, coworkers who seldom meet face-to-face, if at all, and work across geographic, cultural, and linguistic divides must nevertheless perceive their colleagues to be reliable, feel concern for their coworkers' welfare, and feel reasonably comfortable interacting with one another.[91] This Supplemental Reading will discuss four distinct types of trust that form the basis for relationships in global teams: ***cognitive-based trust***, ***affect-based trust***, ***swift trust***, and ***passable trust***, as well as two mechanisms to develop trust: direct knowledge and reflected knowledge.

Cognitive-based trust is grounded in the belief that coworkers are reliable and dependable. Teams motivated by cognitive-based trust consider their colleagues' qualification to do the task at hand; trust is usually formed over time and confirmed (or disproven) over numerous experiences and interactions. In comparison, affect-based trust is grounded in coworkers' care and concern for one another.[92] Relationships built on affect-based trust rely on positive feeling and emotional bonds, and they crop up most easily when team members share common values and mindsets. However, the diversity of values and mindsets in a global team, combined with social and geographical distance, make affect-based trust relationships, which are akin to friendships, more difficult to achieve. Although cognitive-based trust and affective-based trust are often combined in collaborative work done by global teams, affect-based trust is the more difficult of the two to establish in global teams, especially if social distance is high.[93]

In contrast to conventional definitions of trust, scholars have construed swift trust and passable trust, neither of which relies on the slow buildup of repeated actions that develop relationships over time. Swift trust, first identified in flight teams and law enforcement teams who were brought together in crisis situations, characterizes the high-level of trust that must be established swiftly in a team formed for a specific project or assignment whose members expect to be working together for a limited period of time. When swift trust is the norm, members decide to trust one another until proven otherwise.[94] Swift trust, crucial for global teams who must immediately begin collaborating and coordinating, is considered most challenging for people whose cultural backgrounds or experiences value relationship building over time and easier for people who prioritize individualism and are task-oriented.[95]

Passable trust refers to a level of interpersonal trust that is incomplete or imperfect but yet sufficient for people to share knowledge confidently and effectively within global organizations.[96] In contrast to swift trust, which occurs in specific and temporary

global teams where members are connected through functional ties,[97] passable trust can exist as a permanent state, without the expectation that it must deepen into complete or affect-based trust. Individuals develop passable trust by observing coworkers' public behaviors in the group, particularly on social media. The personal information shared in organizational chat groups or listservs, time spent chatting online with coworkers on non-work-related topics, and the transparency of interactions on social media all contribute to form passable trust relationships. For global teams, who communicate largely via electronic technology, passable trust is especially useful.

3.2.2 How to Build Trust in Global Teams

Developing trust in geographically distributed teams follows many of the same conditions as in collocated teams. Leaders must set clear, superordinate goals and purposes, which team members need to understand and follow. Transparency, or sharing information freely, is important, as is effective communication, clearly identified tasks, reliability, and standardized internal processes.[98] In global teams, all of these conventional conditions must also include an awareness of how geographic, cultural, and linguistic divides complicate trust. For example, the beginning of a global team's formation, when team members know the least about one another and the sense of belonging to a group is least secure, is when individuals are most likely to adopt cultural stereotypes that can lead to divisive subgroups.[99] To counter these tendencies, two additional means for building trust—direct knowledge and reflected knowledge—are especially relevant for global teams.

Direct knowledge, described in the Essential Reading section as learning about the personal characteristics and behavioral norms of distant colleagues, is crucial for fostering trust in global collaboration. Unstructured time scheduled at the beginning or end of conference calls is one opportunity to gain direct knowledge, as is travel to a distant collaborator's site for a period of time to learn about, for example, how one team member works under pressure and which individuals are likely to meet for working lunches. Less obvious, but equally important for building trust among global teams, is reflected knowledge, which is achieved by seeing the norms and behaviors of one's own site through the lens of distant collaborators. Recall the examples listed at the beginning of this Supplemental Reading, when a team of Indian and German engineers each accused the other of laziness due to misunderstandings about their differing work behaviors. Had German engineers visited the Indian site, they would have gained direct knowledge of the essential role that visits to the tearoom played in their Indian colleagues' collaboration and mentoring. Reflected knowledge would enable the German engineers to better understand and adjust their perceptions about their own site. The ability to see the German home site through the lens of their Indian

colleagues might make them reflect on the relative isolation in which their highly scheduled German colleagues worked. Understanding the cultural norms of their own site better would enhance the closeness and trust they felt for colleagues with differing cultural norms.[100]

Trust is necessary for the team to develop ***psychological safety***, defined as a context in which team members feel comfortable freely expressing their thoughts and questions. Psychological safety enables colleagues to take risks or admit mistakes and problems without fearing they will be blamed, which then enables team discussion and strategizing to reduce future errors. Research has shown that psychological safety fosters team learning, performance, and innovation.[101] Global leaders of dispersed teams who establish an environment where mistakes are understood as part of the learning process foster innovation by bolstering team members' willingness to communicate honestly and productively while working across multiple boundaries.[102]

Global teams must learn to accommodate cultural differences in behaviors, values, language, and communication patterns. Most if not all of the SPLIT framework for managing social distance in global teams, which is discussed in the Essential Reading section, includes ways to establish, develop, and maintain trust. In fact, the feeling of closeness and congeniality engendered by teams who have achieved low social distance is, by definition, intrinsic to trust. Low social distance and trust reinforce one another. In the end, trust is the important glue that helps global teams cohere and deliver results for their organizations.

4 KEY TERMS

affect-based trust Feelings of mutual care and concern between coworkers that is based on positive emotional bonds.

asynchronous technology See delayed technology.

code switching Going back and forth between two or more languages within one conversation.

cognitive-based trust The belief that coworkers are reliable and dependable.

delayed technology Asynchronous, distant communication via technology.

direct knowledge Learning about group members' personal characteristics, relationships, and behavioral norms.

fault lines Invisible divisions between subgroups.

fundamental attribution error Behaviors attributed to personal traits rather than environmental influences or constraints.

geographic isolates Team members working alone in a separate location from other team members.

identity How we define ourselves in relation to others.

instant technology Synchronous, real-time communication via technology.

lingua franca Common language.

passable trust An incomplete or imperfect trust that is sufficient within a specific domain for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and teamwork.

process Team behaviors and interactions over time.

psychological safety A context in which team members feel comfortable freely expressing their thoughts and questions and do not fear blame for admitting mistakes.

redundant communication Purposely using a combination of delayed and instant communication technologies.

reflected knowledge Personal characteristics, relationships, and behavioral norms seen through the lens of others who are often distant collaborators.

social distance The degree of emotional or cognitive connection that people have with others.

status The extent to which an individual or group is respected or admired by others.

structure The physical configuration of people on a team.

swift trust Quickly established trust between coworkers for a limited amount of time.

synchronous technology See instant technology.

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7 INDEX