

The study of influence of cultural traits on team disruption management

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Abstract

Keywords

Research paper,
team disruption,
behavioral traits,
cultural dimensions.

Purpose—Past studies has shown the influence of the Hofstede's cultural dimensions on turn over intentions of employees. This study is conducted to understand the relation between the Hofstede's cultural dimensions and their influence on the disruption management on teams.

Design/Method—A qualitative research was done in which depth interviews were conducted among the Team Leads and the Project managers in several companies. The average team size was 8 members including the leader. Their interviews were conducted through zoom and they were recorded. The disruption was given in terms of technology changes and they were interviewed how they managed the disruption in terms of the cultural traits.

Findings – All the chosen variables from Hofstede's cultural dimensions play a prominent role among the teams in managing the disruption among them.

Implications – This research provides the clear proof how the cultural traits are important for a manager and gives an insight to the educational institutions to reframe their curriculum according to the dynamic environment to manage disruptions.

Introduction

To minimize the damage caused by the disruption among the teams in the dynamic IT sector, firms should always invest in active identification, evaluation and eliminating the sources of disruption among the teams. Many of the impacts of this disruption could be minimized if identified and acted upon the earliest by the Project managers and team leaders. Studies provides the proof on the correlation between the behavioral traits and the turn-over intention of the employees.

In this study, the correlation between the cultural traits proposed in Hofstede's study and their impact in disruption management in the teams is studied. For this study, four traits proposed in the Hofstede's study were used. They are

-) Resistance to change
-) Power distance
-) Masculinity vs Femininity
-) Uncertainty avoidance

Hofstede (1980a) defined culture as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another'. In the first chapter of his (2001) book 'Value and Culture,' Hofstede states that the key construct capturing such mental programming is values, which are both held individually and shared collectively among cultural groups.

The primary focus of this study is to establish the strong influence of the cultural traits on the disruption in teams and what are their impact on the teams. Moreover, this study focuses on the extent to which these cultural traits influence in managing the disruption caused among the teams.

As a part of the study, four different team leaders and project managers were chosen from different organizations and depth interviews were conducted among them which was recorded and documented. The names of the respondents, their organizations and the nature of the project which

they are currently associated with were collected during the interviews but were not disclosed in the paper considering the confidentiality.

Literature Review:

Within today's dynamic work environment, uncertainty in the work is unavoidable and the way in which the employees within an organization respond to those situations are highly influenced by the cultural value orientations (*Sarafan et al.2020*). So, it becomes unavoidable for any research to understand the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (*Hofstede, G., 2009*) which lay a foundation for the studies which chooses the cultural traits in the work place as dependent variables and document the results of the studies in terms of the cultural dimensions.

With growing internationalization and a shift of businesses to new markets, cultural diversity in multinational organizations is an issue of growing relevance to research and practice. Because work is increasingly organized in team-based ways this growing internationalization invites a focus on the influence of team cultural diversity on team performance. Team leadership particularly plays a very important role in managing these teams and the team leader should act with a complete knowledge of the cultural traits among the teammates (*Raithel, K., et al.2021*).

Recent behavioral research has shown a range of behavioral factors that explain variations in managerial responses to supply-side disruptions (*Ellis et al., 2010, 2011; Miret al., 2017; Polyviou et al., 2018*).

The cultural traits also play a prominent role in the employee turnover intention and it became inevitable for a team leader to understand that in order to manage the teams effectively when the members in the teams are disrupted by any external force (*Wong, K.F.E. et al.2020*).

Correlations between Hofstede's dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance among the global work force should be understood by any team leader for effectively managing the teams (*Matusitz, J. and Musambira, G., 2013*).

In this globalization era and dynamic work environment, it is clear that the cultural dimensions play a prominent role among the teams in any organization. Hence it becomes eminent for any manager or a team lead to understand the cultural dimensions described by Hofstede, understand how they influence the team members when they are exposed to any kind of disruption. This study focuses on understanding the influence of cultural dimensions on team disruption and the importance of any manager to overcome the disruption with respect to the cultural dimensions.

Theoretical Choice of Cultural Dimensions:

In this section, the different cultural values that were chosen for the study are listed and the nature of those are discussed. The reasons to choose them for the study are discussed and how the hypothesis is built upon them are clearly stated.

1. Resistance to change

Resistance to change is the reluctance of adapting to change when it is presented. Employee's willingness to adapt to organizational changes, whether in technology or organizational culture, can be overt or covert, which is why resistance to change can be a factor in an employee retention study (*Oreg, S., 2003*).

2. Power distance

The power distance is the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally (high) and equally / democratically (low) (*Hofstede, 1980b, p. 45*). For example, during the 1990's a higher number of plane crashes were recorded from South Korea and researches proved that it was because of the high-power distance in the

country because of which the co-pilots were unable to report important (opposite) decisions to their pilots (*Gladwell 2008*). Thus, higher power distance will not allow the superiors to address their subordinates; dissatisfaction in work which will result in disruption in teams.

3. Masculinity vs Femininity

Cultures that emphasize masculinity (e.g., Hungary, Japan) are more oriented toward task performance, achievement, materialistic rewards, and quantity of life, whereas those that emphasize femininity (e.g., Thailand, Sweden) are more oriented toward interpersonal relationships, cooperation and quality of life. A scenario in which employees did not intend to quit initially but are now considering actual turnover behavior at another point of time (*Mitchell et al., 2001*).

When such a scenario occurs in a country high in masculinity, the primary focus on performance, achievement, and materialistic rewards will likely motivate employees to seek better job conditions (e.g., a higher salary, more fringe benefits) after the first time. Hence, if another firm offers them more attractive rewards and compensation at the later time, the employees are more likely to quit to maximize personal gain than their counterparts in countries with a lower level of masculinity. When the same scenario occurs in a country high in femininity. In contrast, the primary focus on interpersonal relations will render employees less likely to perform a job search after Time 1 because of their desire to maintain the good relations they enjoy with their current colleagues and supervisors. Furthermore, the influence of job embeddedness is also likely to lead these employees to maintain their initial stay intention despite being suddenly tempted by other external factors. In other words, intended stayers from more (vs. less) masculine countries are more likely to quit their jobs later.

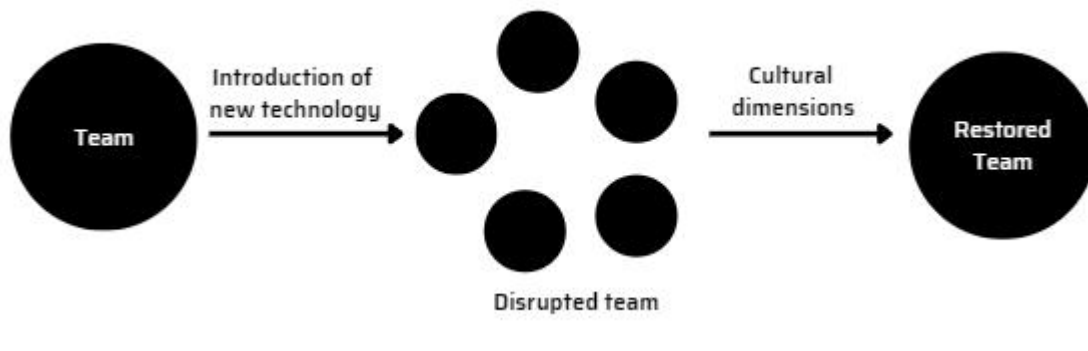
4. Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as 'the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these

situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise (Hofstede, 1980b, p. 45). Uncertainty avoidance is posited to be inversely associated with disruption behavior, because this cultural dimension may imply risk aversion. Employees in countries higher (vs. lower) in uncertainty avoidance are more likely to consider leaving their current jobs to be a risky option that involves meeting new colleagues and performing largely unpredictable tasks. Thus, uncertainty avoidance appears to indicate risk aversion (Allen et al., 2005; Vardaman et al., 2008).

Disruption Framework:

It has been predicted by the industrial experts that we have been in the edge of industrial revolution and this industrial revolution will be powered by evolution in the technology. Clearly, industries have appetite for this type of revolution which makes the introduction of new technologies within the industries as well as the existing projects (Brougham, D. and Haar, J., 2020).



The companies are implementing the new technologies at a faster rate than predicted owing to the cost reduction, better competitive advantages and other added advantages. It is easy to think about technology in a negative way with Autor (2015) stating that “journalists and even expert commentators tend to overstate the extent of machine substitution for human labor and ignore the strong complementarities between automation and labor that increase productivity, raise earnings, and augment demand for labor”.

Though the introduction of new technologies benefits the organizations, they have a negative effect on the employees. The technological disruption causes disruption among the teams. A more recent meta-analysis (Cheng and Chan., 2008) reported an estimated true correlation of

0.32 towards turnover intentions, based on 25,000 employees.

This study focuses on the disruption management done on the basis of cultural dimensions.

Methodology:

The Team leaders or Project managers were chosen in such a way that they have been a part of the project for more than two years and they have been leading the current team for a time period of minimum one year. The details of name of the organizations they work and the nature of the project they are currently a part were collected but were not disclosed owing to confidentiality. The average size of their teams was found to be 8 members including the team leaders.

A qualitative research was conducted with the selected respondents through depth interview. The researchers connected with the respondents through zoom meet (virtual mode) and the interviews were recorded. The interviews were later transcribed and documented by the researchers. Each interview lasted for an average of 50 minutes.

A standard question guide was prepared by the researchers and the interviews were conducted on the basis of the prepared question guide. The respondents were instructed to describe about the size of the disruption (Implementation of new technology in this study) which will be helpful to derive a correlation between the disruption management and the cultural traits. Later they were interviewed about the influence of different cultural traits in their teams and how they were used by them to manage the disruption in their teams. The findings were tabulated and documented which helped the researchers to arrive at a conclusion.

Question Guide:

Resistance to change

-) How frequently do you believe employees struggle to adjust to new technology or a change in culture?
-) Do you believe employees have difficulty adapting to new technologies, which is why they are switching to another firm?
-) Have you experienced any kind of resistance from your team members when a change is implemented?
-) How often do you find your employees leaving your team or complaining about the changes made within the team?

Masculinity vs Femininity

-) When your team was formed in your existing project, did your team focus more on task- oriented or relationship-oriented?
-) How do you think it affects the team?
-) If your team is masculine/feminine in nature, does it affect the team performance because other members of the team prefer to work the other way?

Power distance

-) Was power allocated across the team in key decision-making areas equally or in accordance with the abilities of each member?
-) Was it the growth in power variation in the organization that caused the employee to go to another firm?

Uncertainty avoidance

-) It is important to have job requirements and instructions spelled out in detail so that employees always know what they are expected to do?
-) As a manager, do you expect employees to closely follow instructions?
-) Rules and regulations are important because they inform employees what the organization expects of them?
-) Are standard operating procedures helpful to employees on the job?
-) How important are the instructions for operations to the employees in your team?
-) Are your team members ready to work outside the boundaries and rules of the company when it lies in the best interest of the company?

Analysis of the teams:

Company – A

The disruption in the team from company A is quite minimal, approximately 2/10 when assessed, since the team believes in standard progress towards technology, which will benefit both the individual and the organization.

Variables	Outcome	Reason	Disruption Management
Resistance to change	Low (2/10)	Employees feel that they need to adapt to technology or a different culture to have good career growth.	Since resistance to change was quite low and the teams were ready to handle such disruption but still increase the success rate frequent training was given to the employees.
Masculinity vs Femininity	Masculinity- low (2) Femineity- high (8)	Yes, femineity builds a team and this team is towards supporting each other.	Since femineity was high among teams more cross-functionality among teams was entertained.
Power distance	Low (2/10)	The team has given equal importance and the task has been given similarly.	Since power distance is low interactive systems through networks of cross-functional teams were developed to drive high levels of collaboration.
Uncertainty avoidance	Low (3/10)	The team is equipped to balance such situations, from the lessons learned and from their past experiences.	Adequate training was given to the employees so that the team could perform better in such uncertain situations.

Company – B

The disruption in the team from company B is quite moderate, approximately 6/10 when assessed, the reason behind this is though the company is prominent towards adapting to new technologies the team still has a backlog towards the power equally distributed among the team and also because of the uncertainty avoidance.

Variables	Outcome	Reason	Disruption Management
Resistance to change	Very Low (1/10)	It's like the environment as a human being, we have the nature of adaptability, it doesn't matter what where we have been thrown into, even if not automatically, get adapted to that environment.	Although employee resistance to change was low and teams were prepared to handle such disruption, periodic training were provided to staff in order to boost success rates.
Masculinity vs Femininity	Masculinity- Low (3) Femineity- High (7)	Normally we call it a family as it gives a perfect work-life balance to the team.	Because femineity was strong across teams, more cross-functionality was encouraged.
Power distance	High (9)	I personally feel that we personally feel that the power distance should be high in order for a team to be effective.	More team-building activities were conducted to build team bonding and reduce power distance.
Uncertainty avoidance	Medium (5)	The team is equipped to be flexible in such situations, but certain instructions and norms are to be followed.	Adequate training was given to the employees so that the team could perform better in such uncertain situations.

Company – C

The disruption in the team from company C is quite moderate, approximately 5/10 when assessed, the reason behind this is though the

company is prominent towards adapting to new technologies the team still has a backlog towards the power equally distributed among the team and also because of the uncertainty avoidance.

Variables	Outcome	Reason	Disruption Management
Resistance to change	Very Low (1/10)	So currently new technologies have been added so employers are finding it good because it's a very well renowned Technologies in the market so they are happy to learn it because it would benefit them in future.	Although employee resistance to change was low and teams were prepared to handle such disruption, periodic training was provided to staff in order to boost success rates.
Masculinity vs Femininity	Masculinity- High (7) Femineity- Low (3)	We have this appraisal process that is happening, which determines the growth of an employee in the organization. So that is I would say like 70% towards masculinity and 30% towards femineity	Since masculinity is high, additional team-building activities were carried out in order to boost femineity and prevent team disruption.
Power distance	High (9)	In my company, there is a high-power distance as it helps the entire organization to be more effective	More team-building activities were conducted to build team bonding and reduce power distance.
Uncertainty avoidance	Low (2)	So, it's a very laid-back culture and as a team leader, I won't expect any rules to be followed.	Adequate training was given to the employees so that the team could perform better in such uncertain situations.

Company – D

The disruption in the team from company D is low, approximately 4/10 when assessed, the reason behind this is the team's high uncertainty avoidance but still towards the technological adaptation the team believes in adapting to new technologies for the betterment of the organization as well as the individual.

Variables	Outcome	Reason	Disruption Management
Resistance to change	Low (3)	Employees feel that they need to adapt and change accordingly for their career growth.	Since resistance to change was quite low and the teams were ready to handle such disruption but still to increase the success rate frequent training was given to the employees.
Masculinity vs Femininity	Masculinity- Low (2) Femineity- High (8)	The team is more toward femineity because the team is more focused on teamwork i.e., completing the given task as a team.	Because femineity was strong across teams, more cross-functionality was encouraged.
Power distance	Low (3)	Everyone on the team has equal importance and each decision is made after the suggestion from the team.	Since power distance is low open forums with equal participation for project feedback were initiated to reduce the disruptions.
Uncertainty avoidance	High (8)	There must be a proper structure in an organization with proper rules and regulations, this provides ordnance among the employees.	Adequate training and team-building activities were given to the employees so that the team could perform better in such uncertain situations.

Combined Analysis of four interviewed companies

Parameters	COMPANY-A	COMPANY-B	COMPANY-C	COMPANY-D
Resistance to change	Low (2/10)	Very Low (1/10)	Very Low (1/10)	Low (3)
Masculinity vs Femininity	Masculinity-low (2) Femineity-high (8)	Masculinity- Low (3) Femineity- High (7)	Masculinity- High (7) Femineity- Low (3)	Masculinity- Low (2) Femineity- High
Power distance	Low (2/10)	High (9)	High (9)	Low (3)
Uncertainty avoidance	Low (3/10)	Medium (5)	Low (2)	High (8)

Implications:

From the interview and the analysis, it is clear that though the masculine teams are superior in terms of team performance and task completion within the time limits, it is evident that femineity embraces the teams to form a consensus among them and collectively overcome the disruption when they are exposed to one. The Managers and team lead in various organizations are expected to encourage both masculinity and femineity among their teams but they should have situational awareness (i.e.,) at what time what trait should be given importance and stressed to be followed by the team members. During normal conditions, masculinity can be followed and when the team experience any change in terms of team performance or any disagreement between the team members or any external disruption, the femineity should be given importance over masculinity. In order to overcome the challenges using femineity, it has to be followed among the team and they should develop the characteristics among other team members. So, it is the responsibility of the team lead to regulate the practice of both masculinity and femineity among the teammates.

The teams are aware about the uncertain situations they will be facing in the dynamic corporate environment which helped them in overcoming the disruption. The teams can be often given training to respond and adopt to

frequent changes which will further decrease the uncertainty avoidance among the team members.

Though high-power distance enables the team lead to effectively manage the project, the low power distance is the factor that helped the team members to overcome the disruption. Hence the team lead and the managers should be given adequate training to follow the right power distance during the right time.

Conclusion

From the analysis it is evident that the constraint resistance to change plays the least role in disruption management whereas other constraints namely Masculinity vs Femininity, Power distance and uncertainty avoidance play important roles in disruption management among the teams.

It is observed that Femininity is the cultural dimension which plays a dominant role over the other chosen cultural traits among the team in managing the disruption. This leads to the assumption that the employees are more skewed towards the interpersonal relationship among the teams they are part of and this attribute can be used by the organizations to bring change within the teams as well as manage the disruption within the teams.

It is also observed that the disruption taken in this study is the implementation of new technology in the organization and considering the dynamic environment in the IT sector in the world, the teams in the organizations are more adaptable to the changes in terms of technology. For the future studies to be conducted, the disruption can be chosen in such a way that the teams are not ready to adapt which in turn will cause disruption among them on a greater scale.

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	Website: www.ijarm.com
	Subject: Management
Quick Response Code	
DOI: 10.22192/ijarmr.2023.10.01.010	

How to cite this article:

Nagendra Pandian K, S. Stanly Winston, Dr. M.V. Mahesh. (2023). The study of influence of cultural traits on team disruption management Int. J. Adv. Multidiscip. Res. 10(1): 100-110.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22192/ijarmr.2023.10.01.010>