

Looking beyond culture: Success factors for collaborative cross-border multiparty projects

Dr. James Hemsath DM, PE, PMP

There is a truism about working in Alaska published in 1895 in the Alaskan Mining Journal— “The road is long, supplies are costly, seasons are short, fortune is fickle.” This, in a nutshell, defines what is like to do business and perhaps, even more importantly, to construct infrastructures in the High North. The distance material and supplies travel is long, the location of these projects (especially natural resource projects) is far from population centers. The cost of these supplies is high both from a transportation perspective as well as a design perspective due to the harsh climate. The time to move products tends to be short (summer months only), and like any business the economics can change in a heartbeat, leaving the project heavily in debt. Climate change is opening up new shipping lanes while at the same time it has increased the severity of winter storms and generated erosion that threatens old communities (Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, n.d.). The Arctic, endowed with a quarter of the world’s oil and gas reserves (Bird et al., 2008) and the current ability to shorten the shipping distances by half (Greenert, 2014) from Europe to Asia and the United States, is poised to be the next significant global arena. To support this development, significant investments in infrastructure (Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty SE, 2014) are necessary at a level that exceeds any one locale’s or region’s investment ability.

How can this development be accomplished? Diversifying risks will require groups from different regions and different countries to invest and participate in projects in conjunction with the indigenous peoples of the North. The problems being tackled are complex and simple cooperation will not be sufficient— true collaboration, where individuals and organizations build on the strengths of *all* parties will be the only way forward in these situations. Such multiparty collaborations need to consider both the technical complexities of the projects as well as the complex social and cultural issues brought to bear by the public and private authorities, technical experts, and social interest groups involved in the projects.

This session will describe the results of a two year mixed methods research study which involved the use of qualitative data gathered through interviews with business professional’s experience on transnational multiparty projects and quantitative data gathered through surveys representing eleven national/cultural sectors. Core issues for collaboration in such settings include: 1) understanding the role that culture and identity play in creating a fused individual and organizational identity; 2) development of strong connectedness between parties; and 3) creation of shared vision.

Our findings show: 1) as differences in culture can be a show-stopper, energy must be expended for active management and awareness of cultural differences; 2) collaborative environment is created through empathy and trust that acknowledges Identity (role and individual) and 3) the significance of an inclusive process of creating a shared vision. A systems approach was used to understand the role of various components that interact in generating a collaborative space.

At the end of this session it is our hope that the participants will recognize the proper role culture plays in transnational projects and how to choose participants correctly; Discuss the role that trust, empathy and connectedness play in a collaborative environment and how to best utilize those traits.

The human soul has still greater need of the ideal than of the real. It is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live.
Victor Hugo

As projects become more global and more complex understanding and being able to lead and manage a cross cultural team is going to be an essential skill for a project manager

- ❖ Projects will require working with multiple parties not from any one area
- ❖ Dynamic nature of work will be best suited to a teaming approach
- ❖ Innovative approaches will be required to find new solutions to these problems

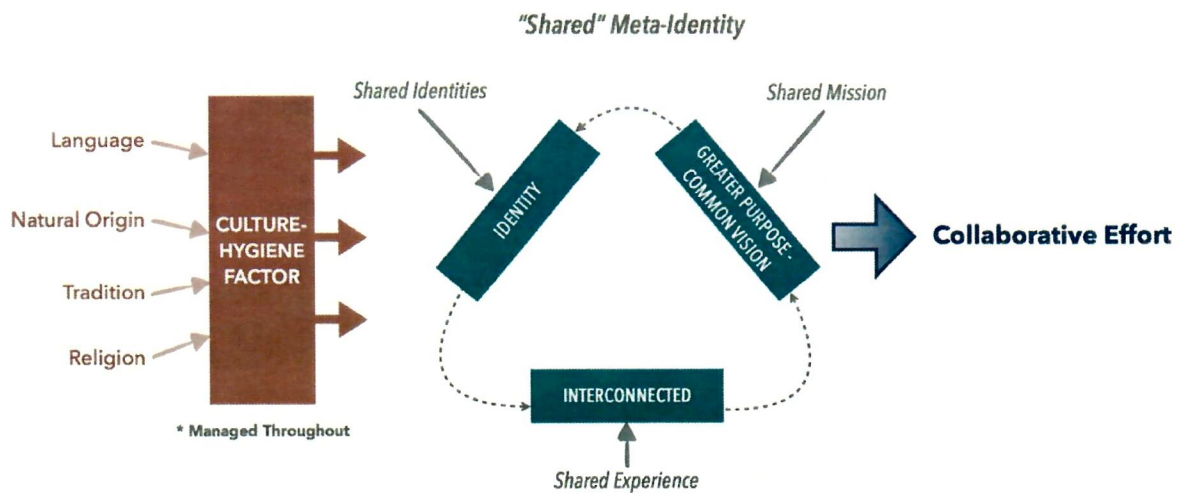
In this time of globalization and problems that cross borders, the use of multiparty teams that can bridge borders will continue to grow. In order to assure success of these activities it is important to understand how transnational-cross cultural multiparty collaborations function.

Takeaways Part 1

1. Cultural “factors” should be considered in a similar way to “hygiene” factors (Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory), where they can only be “**dis-satisfier**” if not addressed
2. There are at least 2 identities and most likely 3 to manage
3. Creating and building relationships allow individuals to understand each other, establish trust and empathy.
4. Look for shared values and shared humanity to find the "sameness" in order to create a common identity.
5. Emphasize shared vision/common

Takeaways Part 2

1. Active awareness or consciousness of cultural differences are key to success – utilize cultural intelligence checklist
2. Allocated time and opportunities to allow trust between individuals to develop.
3. Allocate time and opportunities to allow individuals to understand and empathize with each other's respective roles
4. Shared vision does not have a direct impact on creating a collaborative environment
5. Think team think vs. group think



WRAP IT UP

- ❖ Cultural differences, uniqueness's and identity should be actively managed, but it is not the driving force behind multiparty transnational collaboration. Culture will play a preventive role if not acknowledged.
- ❖ Identity both role and individual have a differential effect on the creation of shared vision and collaboration. Both must be consciously acknowledged, appreciated and balanced to have a successful collaborative project.
- ❖ Trust and empathy play a significant role in creating a collaborative environment. Time must be allotted as well as opportunities for individuals and roles to create the trusting bonds necessary for these factors to develop.
- ❖ In order to allow the opportunity for collaboration to take place, care must be taken not to place too much emphasis on creating a shared and *unified* vision.
- ❖ A systems approach focused on components that interact to generate a collaborative state is necessary for multi-party collaboration. Collaboration, overall, is an emergent process and requires a holistic and systemic way of approaching the task.

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE CHECKLIST

- I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.
- I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.
- I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.
- I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
- I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
- I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.
- I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

EMPATHY CHECKLIST

- I sympathize with others
- I set others at ease
- I enjoy other people's stories
- I pay attention to the emotions of others
- I am a good listener
- I enjoy getting to know others profoundly
- I sense when others get irritated

TRUST CHECKLIST

- [The Trustee] is very capable of performing their job.
- [The Trustee] is known to be successful at the thing they try to do.
- I feel very confident about [The Trustee] 's skills.
- My needs and desires are very important to [The Trustee].
- [The Trustee] would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.
- [The Trustee] really looks out for what is important to me.
- [I never have to wonder whether [The Trustee] will stick to their word.
- Sound principles seem to guide [The Trustee]'s behavior.