(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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Building trust and fostering collaboration: a guide for leaders and researchers managing multicultural teams

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Abstract

This paper aspires to study available research materials to identify and explore ways of building trust and fostering collaboration in managing a multicultural team. By analyzing the techniques described in different studies, the paper highlights the practical strategies to build trust and foster collaboration separately, along with their impacts at the workplace on individuals from diverse cultures, as well as on acquiring satisfactory efforts while working collectively to achieve shared or individual directives. Before stating the concluding statements on the answer to the research query, this study intends to provide a subjective reflection on the area of interest.

Keywords: Multicultural Team; Building Trust; Fostering Collaboration; Team Management

1. Introduction

Globalization has given rise to a grouping of people beyond geographical distance and barriers through virtual means or immigration processes [1]. This phenomenon has influenced organizations to recruit people from diverse cultures, leading to multicultural teams at workplaces around the world [2]. To provide more comprehension of a multicultural team, also known as a cross-cultural team, Baptista [2] defined the team as a group of persons with at least one member geographically and culturally different from the rest of the members cooperating to reach a common goal. Nowadays, such teams can be found in abundance because they come with many benefits, which include acquiring a wide range of perspectives, generating better ideas, practicing diverse meanings, communicating with debates, visualizing the higher quality definitions of the problems, and more alternatives of solutions [1]. Despite the advantages, as Karna & Knap-Stefaniuk, [1] and Baptista [2] enlisted, multicultural team comes with several challenges including feelings of isolation, insecurity, misunderstanding, mistrust, miscommunication, stress, absence, conflicts, inability to evaluate ideas from culturally diverse people with different perspectives and so on. Usually, those challenges lead teams to less efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and performance. To deal with these challenges, the idea of management of a multicultural team was developed.

One solution to manage a multicultural team facing challenges is to establish trust, which requires time, for instance, three to six months, to develop a certain level of trust with new members [3]. According to a report by CIPD [4], as soon as trust is established, members will feel comfortable in reporting to the leader before any clash emerges from dissimilarities in personality styles, beliefs, or methods of working, official, which may lead to disciplinary actions or settlement agreements. For such consequences, research suggests removing team members who can cause clashes in a workplace if they ignore acknowledging cultural differences openly or do not adapt intentionally [2].

Another practice that can help manage a multicultural team is fostering collaboration, which, if encouraged effectively, can resolve disputes arising due to different reactions to events at work by members with diverse experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives [4].

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Mentioning building trust and fostering collaboration gives the perception of solving conflict issues raised in a multicultural team, but the ways to build trust and foster collaboration remain unclear. This paper explores the strategies suggested by researchers on the widely accepted practices of building trust and fostering collaboration in managing multicultural teams after familiarizing them with the key terms trust and collaboration. In a later section, this study intends to provide a subjective reflection before concluding.

2. Definition and Strategies to Build Trust

2.1. Definition of Trust

The concept of trust is challenging to elucidate. Also, different definitions of trust have been presented by different researchers and are distinguished by different aspects [5]. This diverse concept ranges from personal sense to abstraction [5]. According to Arola [6], trust is an individual's vulnerability and reliability to another person's actions with the hope that the other person will fulfill his commitment. Clarification of the concept of trust is complex unless different forms of trust, including personality-based, cognitive, affective, conative, institutional, and swift, are mentioned [5].

Personality-based trust is the inherent type where a person is perceived as reliable and trustworthy based on traits and consistent behavior. Another two types of trust, cognitive trust and affective trust, are distinguished by logic and feelings. Arola [6] mentioned that cognitive trust comes from the brain and relates to the belief about the competence of others, and affective trust is from the heart; in other words, this type of trust is the feeling related to concern and care for others.

Similarly, another type of trust related to interpersonal relationships, conative trust, is a form of trust determined by a person's acts or responses under the influence of his judgments, decisions, intentions, and the tendency to rely on others' actions. [5]

According to Arola [6], swift and institutional trust are other types related to organizations and people involved. Swift trust, which is typical for temporary project-oriented virtual teams, depends on knowledge sharing rather than depending on interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, institutional trust is based on the fear of consequences for not complying with the organizational rules.

Different forms of trust have been briefly introduced in this paper to get a closer look into trust so that the process of building trust can be defined manifestly. However, the question remains to discern: What trust is in a team setting Arola [6] answered that it is the shared willingness of team members to stay vulnerable to the other team members' actions without any monitoring with a shared expectation that the actions are beneficial for the team.

From a subjective perspective, the definition of trust in a team or for an individual can be put in writing as a feeling that involves an individual's hope in others' judgment, behavior, or actions, which are expected to be beneficial either on a personal level or in a group setting, working together to achieve shared goals or mutual benefits.

With that idea of trust in mind, it is crucial to know the strategies to establish trust in individuals involved in a team, specifically a cross-cultural team, because there are more geographic and cultural differences in such teams, which poses a barrier to building trust among team members, unlike monocultural teams.

2.2. Strategies to Build Trust

Building trust in a team is important for a leader in overcoming challenges and issues of team members raised due to cultural diversity or differences in perceptions [4]. To build a relationship by establishing trust amongst the members, researchers suggested their researched insights on the techniques.

According to Arola [6], practicing meaningful conversation to display goodwill, ability, and integrity is key to building trust. Another critical point he mentioned was arranging kick-off meetings at the beginning of a project to emphasize team composition and shared interests. Investment in conferencing is required for team members to build trustworthy relationships by seeing or meeting each other. The creation of trust is also based on the technological facilities provided, for instance, giving all the team members similar kinds of computers to work on. Arola [6] conducted three (3) interviews to learn about the steps that interviewees use to build trust, from which it can be elucidated that giving everyone the scope to speak and asking for opinions from everyone creates chances of getting feedback or asking for

feedback, clarifying tasks and responsibilities, being active in contact even if it is about informal topics, turning the camera on to familiarize in case of conferencing online, will develop and increase trust in a team.

Another research [7] added several more techniques and more specifically to build trust relationships:

- Speaking straight or telling the truth
- Showing respect and care
- Practicing transparency sharing necessary information
- Disclosing wrong matters and fixing it
- Being ready to be apologetic in case of wrongdoings
- Showing loyalty and giving credit to others
- Getting better by seeking feedback
- Keeping commitments
- Prioritizing listening and avoiding thoughts about an answer

In recent research, Altwaian [8] mentioned several factors related to the development of trust among multicultural team members, including honesty, reciprocity, reliability, support, shared understanding, loyalty, and dependability. During communication, if those factors are adopted, a multicultural team can perform at its most efficient point of performance without any conflicts.

Wodarczyk [9], in her research, first emphasized engaging team members in the purpose of the organization or team goals, supporting growth personally and professionally, and developing personal relationships amongst team members to build trustful connections between team members. Secondly, she pointed out concern as another factor in building trust by promoting an environment for shared responsibility and success, building a model for emotional intelligence, providing opportunities for social and emotional group interaction, and assisting members in solving personal and professional problems. Thirdly, after all her interviews, her dissertation focused on honesty and straightforwardness, directly addressing subjects, and financial transparency during communication. Finally, she listed the facilitation of cross-level decision-making, acknowledgment, learning from failure, and consistency in behaviors like regular communication about personal and professional values.

Most research outcomes explicitly specify the importance of communication in building trust in a multicultural team regardless of the work environment, virtual or face-to-face. In summary, researchers' suggestions for managing a multicultural team are related to open communication, developing personal bonds outside of the workplace, preserving time for socializing before or after, even during meetings, practicing consistent and predictable behavior, understanding personal challenges, and creating regular moments for seeking feedback.

3. Definition and Techniques to Foster Collaboration

Following steps to build trust in managing a multicultural team, collaboration in such a team is indispensable. Understanding what collaboration means before discussing fostering it in the workplace is also necessary.

3.1. Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration is frequently used interchangeably with coordination and cooperation in different literatures, where it is conceptualized as a subset of cooperation or coordination while referring to similar interactions [10]. The origin of the term "collaboration" suggests that it came from the Latin word "collaborate," meaning "to labor with or together." The best definition of collaboration was given by planning, social work, and community development researchers, which is the process of deliberating jointly, making decisions, and taking actions based on participative and interpersonal relationships. Another definition described by Stout and Keast [10] is making decisions as a group about an outcome by authorizing each other in the group to take steps on behalf of the collectivity. A very brief annotation about collaboration was shared in their book: collaboration is the interaction that leads to a developed synthesis.

Other scholarly work of Stapleton [11] went with a simple analog by phrasing the term as working together in a joint intellectual effort. From another disciplinary perspective, Stapleton [11] defines collaboration as cooperating with the enemy.

Based on different scholars and their works, finding a simple definition for collaboration is laborious because it is significantly more complicated than interpreting it as working together close to each other.

However, from a subjective viewpoint, considering the idea of a multicultural team, collaboration is the combination of coordination and cooperation between individuals to collectively act, as specified by a joint decision-making interaction, to reach a common objective.

3.2. Techniques to Foster Collaboration

Achieve a shared goal based on collective efforts requires the practice of specific strategies for which numerous studies were conducted, among which Stapleton [11] enlisted critical ways to foster collaboration based on his perception, which includes communicating openly and honestly, developing mutual trust, support and respect, understanding and valuing everyone's viewpoint and way of thinking, familiarizing each member's working style, willing to openly discuss differences and financial issues, devoting time and energy to build relationships personally and professionally. According to the research, to manage a multicultural team, a leader must create scope for open communication so that team members do not shy away from discussing conflict and argument. Another technique is to recognize each other's knowledge, talent, and skills in a team, which consequently develops trust and respect for one another. As everyone comes from a diverse background and culture, each member's thinking becomes unique to others in a team. Therefore, appreciation of all the unique perspectives will foster efficient collaboration. Suppose members invest time and energy to discuss their differences openly and share even uncomfortable financial issues. In that case, a personally and professionally strong relationship among the team members will be established. Such a coordinative and cooperative environment can foster collaborative practices.

Similarly, Meluso [12] published a list of activities such as embracing empathy, building trust, balancing time, communicating intentionally, educating shared reality, promoting diversity, and creating psychological safety to foster collaboration. Developing the content for intercultural campaigns, creating awareness of cultural norms and values, and involving the same members longer for projects are the suggestions by Cagiltay [13] unique to the other studies mentioned in this paper.

Overall, exploring different publications reveals that the most stated skill is communication between team members, which can fruitfully foster collaboration. Considering all the strategies, arranging a workplace environment for team participants to hone intentional communication skills will encourage collaborative behavior in team members, contributing to the management of the cross-cultural team.

4. Maintaining Trust and Collaboration

The majority of the research shows the very generic way of building trust and fostering collaboration to manage a multicultural team, but what remains to review is what skills of a leader can help build trust, foster collaboration, and maintain such an environment at the workplace or even in a cross-cultural virtual team setting. Leaders are known to be confident, optimistic, dedicated, sociable, neutral, and knowledgeable [14]. As mentioned above, to create opportunities for team members to communicate honestly and intentionally about differences, ideas, viewpoints, and other matters, a leader must have one critical skill: sociability. Mokgwane [15] states that team members usually mirror their leaders' characteristics and activities. A sociable leader who connects to teammates by remembering names, important dates related to cultural festivals, and birthdates of teammates, walks around asking personal and professional questions, making personal connections by exhibiting care and understanding, practice humor at the workplace to maintain a flexible environment, will be encouraging for team members to express freely and share views without any hesitation resulting in increased interaction among members of the team building relationships of trust and collaboration. Thus, it makes the team setting into a social network, although divided by culture but connected through trust and collaboration.

5. Impacts of Building Trust and Fostering Collaboration

Regarding trust, a study [7] mentioned that a lack of trust could destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, and the most influential leadership. In any situation, even in a crisis, trust impacts positively in many matters from various aspects [16]. Many advantages can be experienced if trust is built and maintained in multicultural team settings, namely,

- Easier collaboration and increased productivity [16]
- Increased level of confidence within relationships [16]
- Reduced risks in projects [6]
- Reduced organizational costs [6]

- Increased respect between team members [6]
- Promotion of open and equal debate [6]
- Improved uncertainty tolerance [6]
- Enhanced sense of belonging [6]
- Enhanced competitiveness of companies [8]
- Heightened team performance and functionality [15]
- Increased acceptance of more alternatives of solutions [1]

In the case of collaboration, which is interdependent on trust [16], if fostered in a multicultural team, it results in noticeable benefits like the advantages of the development of trust:

- **Productivity:** Fostering collaboration in a cross-cultural team is more significant as members are from diverse cultures, languages, histories, and beliefs, which increases productivity [13].
- **Achievement:** Members maintaining collaborative interactions in a multicultural team are more likely to reach individual and team goals [12].
- **Contribution and Satisfaction:** In a multicultural team setting, collaborative practice assists in maximizing the contributions and satisfactions of every member involved, consequently bringing more actions that lead to more significant accomplishments of individual works [11].
- **Resolution of Conflicts:** Building collaboration heightens the level of trust, which results in stronger relationships, helping in resolving conflicts or coping with clashes [6].

A multicultural team brings numerous advantages, but trust and collaboration in such a team promise more significance for the leadership to manage the team [1][6].

6. Gaps in Literature

The supporting publications for this study exhibit a few research gaps. There are empirical, population, and theory-application gaps in the studies. Empirical gaps are the inadequacies that indicate insufficient observations, experience, and experiments to verify a theory explored in a study [17]. In Arola's [6] study, only three interviews were conducted, which is a direct indicator of the existing empirical gap. Also, there is a population gap, which appears when the researcher under-represents the population [17] present in the study. The paper also mentions the failure to collect data as the interviewees did not admit when asked about the presence of conflicts in their teams.

Another study by Altwaian [8] only considered collecting data from 38 participants residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in his study which shows that the presence of population gap and the outcome of the study was enlisted generically but lack transferability, in other words, the study has a methodological gap [17].

In the rest of the chosen studies, publications of Mokgwane [15], Cagiltay [13], Meluso [12], and Stapleton [11] narrated the analytical reflections on the strategies and techniques for building trust and fostering collaboration in a multicultural team but lacks real-life experience or any evidential experimentation which would prove the effectiveness and practicality. Hence, those studies have a theory-application void gap[17].

Future research could involve regulated experiments or longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of proposed strategies for building trust and fostering collaboration. For instance, implementing trust-building workshops in diverse organizational settings and evaluating their impact on team dynamics and performance could deliver valuable empirical evidence to validate or refine existing theories.

7. Final Thoughts

This review synthesizes various studies to explore the concepts of "trust" and "collaboration" and outlines strategies for building these within multicultural teams. While the review identifies strategies from the literature, it highlights a theory-application gap, as many strategies have not been extensively tested in real-world settings. Nonetheless, the article provides a foundation for future exploration of practical techniques that could be applied across different professional contexts.

The insights gathered in this review contribute to the current body of literature by offering a structured guide for building trust and fostering collaboration in diverse team environments. Future studies could focus on testing the real-

world applicability of these strategies, as well as exploring the psychological mechanisms behind trust-building and collaboration in multicultural teams.

8. Conclusion

The paper has systematically explored the strategies for building trust and fostering collaboration within multicultural teams. Synthesizing diverse perspectives from existing literature has defined the keywords of interest and techniques to cultivate trust and collaborative environments. In managing a multicultural team, a leader experiences different advantages but encounters several challenges, which can be overcome by practicing open communication and interactions to understand each other's differences. However, voids remain in the applicability of the strategies, which will hopefully be bridged in future studies.

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