

# Executive Summary



This report first presents a summary of findings based on our first assignment. It shows the overall ratings under the Hofstede's cultural dimensions study. This is then followed by the summary on the expectations on management in their managerial functions of planning, leading, staffing, controlling and organising.

This report also explores the managerial implications of an international manager on cultural conflicts amongst his staff. It gives an insight into the potential sources of conflict due to these differences, as well as the other sources conflicts like: age, sex, communication and language barriers etc.

Our study also looked into how these conflicts, if analysed from a reserve angle, can actually present opportunities for synergy at the workplace.



## 2.0 Introduction

“Conflict is a condition in which the concerns of two or more parties appear incompatible” (Davis and Schulte, 1997, p214).

To an international manager, managing subordinates of different nationalities can be quite a challenge as their cultural differences may present grounds for conflicts. The surface culture of all nationalities can be likened to an iceberg but their assumptions; beliefs; perceptions and values remain “submerged” and unseen.

Rigid management of the international workforce is not advisable. This is because “failure to acknowledge the below-surface portions (of submerged cultures) is likely to result in collisions” (Engholm and Rowland, 1996, p59) and sink the entire operations. (Please refer to Appendix A for Dimensions of culture and conflict)

Are conflicts always bad? The answer is “no”. Different cultures, to have survived for so long, definitely have their own merits. Conflicts occur because others do not see each other’s cultural merits. An international manager has to understand these merits and administer appropriate measures to allow his charges to see the merits of other cultures. Once they do see it, it can turn their conflicts into potential energy and fuel greater work synergy.



### 3.0 Summary of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

| Hofstede's Dimension / Country | Singapore | Hong Kong | Japan | France |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Power Distance                 | 74        | 68        | 54    | 68     |
| Uncertainty Avoidance          | 8         | 29        | 92    | 86     |
| Individualism                  | 20        | 25        | 46    | 71     |
| Masculinity                    | 48        | 57        | 95    | 43     |
| Long Term Orientation          | 48        | 96        | 80    | n/a    |

**Table 1: Percentile Ranks For Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions For Selected Countries By Cultural Cluster (100=Highest; 50=Middle)**

Source: Hofstede, 1997

#### 3.1 Power Distance

Power distance refers to the degree to which “power differences are accepted and sanctioned by society” (Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks, 1995, p293).

- ◆ Singaporeans and Hong Kongers display high power distance due to their upbringing. They have been inculcated to obey and show respect to others of higher authority.
- ◆ The Japanese display high power distance as it is in their culture to show respect to their seniors. This can be seen as promotions and salary increases are based on age and years of service, seldom on merits.
- ◆ Most French managers graduated from “elite schools” that tutor the best students in France; hence their subordinates feel that their managers are very capable. They respect and accept the disparity in power.

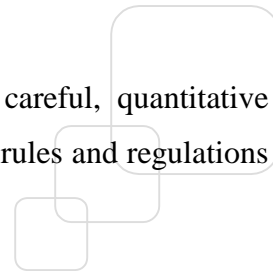
### 3.2 *Uncertainty Avoidance*

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“Uncertainty Avoidance measures the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations” (Phatak, 1997,p.156).

- ◆ Validating Singaporeans’ high tolerance for ambiguities is the encouragement from the government to aspiring entrepreneurs to start up their own business. One of the more successful brave men was Mr. Sim Wong Hoo with his Creative Technologies Pte Ltd.
  
- ◆ Hong Kong’s uncertainty avoidance, though relatively low, showed that it may gradually move higher. This is because recent findings proved that Hong Kongers are concerned with job security and long-term employment (Chow, 2000). Also, a possible reason could be due to the re-unification with Mainland China.
  
- ◆ The Japanese believe in life-long employment and this evidently is a factor of stability and certainty.
  
- ◆ The French make decisions that are based on careful, quantitative analysis (Mendenhall et al, 1995). They welcome rules and regulations as guidelines to follow.



### 3.3 Individualism

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“Individualism is a concern for yourself as an individual as opposed to concern for the priorities and rules of the group to which you belong” (Hoecklin, 1995, pg35).

- ◆ Studies showed that Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore embrace collectivism due to the fact that they are all Asian societies. Confucianism (advocating group harmony and communitarianism) had been inculcated into their values system.
- ◆ On the other hand, the French value individuality as a way of life. They tend to put themselves and their families first before other things (Taylor, 1990).

### 3.4 Masculinity

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Masculinity pertains to societies in which assertiveness, material success, achievement etc are the key values whereas femininity takes on the view of modesty, caring and are concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 1997).

- ◆ Singaporeans are somewhere on the continuum between being a masculine and feminine society. They believe success should be based on the 5“C”s criteria while at the same time, take a balanced view on the quality of life.
- ◆ Hong Kongers have a high masculinity rating due to the fact that their emphasis on wealth and recognition as a measure of success. Japan is somewhat similar in these areas too.
- ◆ The French have a slower pace of life, work relatively shorter hours and take more vacations. This is evident enough to show that they believe more in the quality of life than the measure of quality.

### 3.5 *Confucian Dynamism*

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“Confucian dynamism refers to long –term versus short-term orientation in life”(Hofstede, 1997, p164). It indicates the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective rather than a short-term point of view. (<http://www.afs.srg/efil/old-activities/dimjan98.htm>, Downloaded 24/3/2001).

- ◆ All three Asian countries in the study displayed long-term orientations. Singaporeans and Hong Kongers prioritise growth and long-term objectives and are very future-oriented. On the other hand, Japanese Organisations stresses on long-term survival and have always planned long periods into the future.
- ◆ The French, though not rated, are believed to be more short-term in their orientations. This is due to their individualistic nature to look after short-term benefits rather than long-term goals.

## 4.0 Summary Of The Expectations Of Managerial Functions

|   | Singapore<br> | Hong Kong<br> | Japan<br> | France<br> |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Planning</b>                               |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Strategies Issues</b>                      | Risk tolerant  | Risk tolerant  | Risk Adverse  | Risk Adverse  |
| <b>Time Horizon</b>                           | Long Term  | Short-range  | Long Term   | Short-range   |
| <b>Leading</b>                                |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Leadership Style</b>                       | Paternalistic  | Paternalistic  | Paternalistic   | Paternalistic   |
| <b>Motivation</b>                             | Social   | Social   | Security  | Social  |
| <b>Rewards</b>                                | Group  | Group  | Group   | Individual  |
| <b>Organising</b>                             |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Centralisation/Decentralisation</b>        | Centralisation   | Centralisation   | Centralisation  | Centralisation  |
| <b>Degree of Formalisation</b>                | Moderately Formalised  | Moderately Formalised  | High Formalisation  | High Formalisation  |
| <b>Organisation Structure</b>                 | Personnel Bureaucracy  |  | Full Bureaucracy  |   |
|   | High Power Distance and Low Uncertainty Avoidance  |  | High Power Distance and High Uncertainty Avoidance  |   |
| <b>Controlling</b>                            |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Organizational Design</b>                  | Family Bureaucracy   | Family Bureaucracy   | Full Bureaucracy but incline to Consensus Bureaucracy                                       | Full Bureaucracy  |
| <b>Type of control</b>                        | On a continuum of bureaucratic & clan control  | On a continuum of bureaucratic & clan control  | Bureaucratic but incline to cultural control  | Bureaucratic control  |
| <b>Staffing</b>                               |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Recruitment and Selection</b>              | Team-oriented  | Team-oriented  | Team-oriented   | Individual performance  |
| <b>Training and Development</b>               | Group discussion and sharing   | Group discussion and sharing   | Group discussion and sharing  | Individual achievement and needs  |
| <b>Compensation and Performance Appraisal</b> | Seniority and Competency   | Seniority  | Seniority   | Competency  |

Table 2: Summary of findings on the 5 management functions

## 5.0 Sources Of Conflict

### 5.1 Leading

“Leading is the process of influencing people to direct their efforts towards achievement of some particular goals” (Hodgetts and Luthans, 2000,p363).

“The basic motivational assumption in high power distance countries is that people dislike work and try to avoid it and so managers believe they must adopt an authoritarian style to deal with these Theory X people” (Cullen, 1999, p63). However, “effective leaders do not use any single style” (Robbins, 1996, p444). Therefore managers have to adopt different leadership styles to lead a diverse workforce.

All the countries are identified to be having high power distance. Yet, if the autocratic style is employed, they may react differently. Those in highly masculine cultures such as Japan and Hong Kong will prefer this style as shown in the table but feminine cultures like France and Singapore may not like it as they emphasise the quality of life such as shorter working hours (Cullen, 1999).

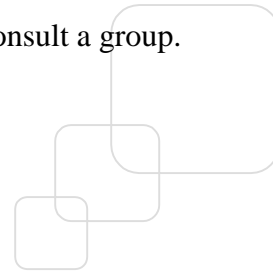
Herein lies a potential source of conflict. Certain leadership style could lead to disharmony within the group as one party would feel that they were overly supervised and harshly treated than the other party. Perceptions on favouritism and jealousy might soon brew leading to undesired consequences.



| <b>Management Processes</b>     | <b>Low Masculinity</b>  | <b>High Masculinity</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Leadership Styles</b>        | More participative  | More Theory X, authoritarian                                   |
| <b>Motivational Assumptions</b> | Emphasis on quality of life, shorter working hours, vacations | Emphasis on performance and growth, job recognition important. |

*Table 3: Summary of characteristics of leadership styles and motivational assumptions with relation to masculinity index. Adapted and modified from Cullen, 1999.*

According to Fiedler's Contingency Model as shown below, task – motivated leaders tend to adopt a minimally consultative style that fits France's highly individualistic culture. Relationship- motivated leaders use group-orientated consultative styles which blends in well with collectivist cultures such as Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore (Wren, 1995). Hence, a manager using task-motivated leadership may find that staff from collectivist cultures may feel neglected that they are omitted from the consultation session. Yet, if he uses a relationship-motivated leadership, he may find that the French staff may not like the idea as they are used to doing things individually rather than consult a group.



## 5.2 Planning

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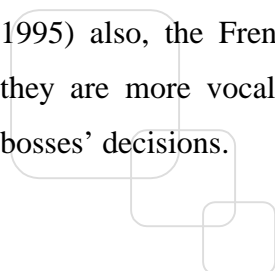


Planning is the process of setting goals and deciding how best to achieve them. It is also the process of allocating and arranging human and other resources so plans can be carried out successfully (Bartol, Martin, Tein and Matthews, 1998). Planning also attempts to reduce uncertainty (Hofstede, 1984)

Long-term planning is one of Japan's distinguishing qualities (Hickson, 1997) whereas the French are inclined towards short-term planning and operational basis (Schneider and Barsoux, 1997). In the case of Japanese multinationals, all plans must be approved by their headquarters in Japan (Putti, Koontz, Weihrich, 1998). The French may see this as wasting time and money if decisions have to be discussed with the headquarters.

The design of French organisation reinforces the isolationist behaviour (Mendenhall et al, 1995) thus French managers are expected to do planning on their own most of the time. For example, the French manager is unlikely to engage in a more participative planning, as he know that he would probably not be seen as a leader. However in collectivistic societies such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan, participative planning is valued. Hence, the French manager is likely to create conflicts with employees from collectivist cultures.

In a paternalistic society such as Hong Kong, the people will not challenge the bosses' decisions and will just accept it. They just let the bosses do the decision-making and planning (Hickson, 1997). The French however, make decisions, after careful, quantitative analysis (Mendenhall et al, 1995) also, the French are "active communicators" (Hall, 1995) hence they are more vocal about their dissatisfaction than to just accept the bosses' decisions.



## 5.3 Organising



"Organising is determining what tasks are to be done, who is to do them, how the tasks are to be done, who reports to whom, and where decisions are to be made" (Robbins, Bergman and Stagg, 1997, p8). Essentially, organising deals with centralisation and formalisation.

According to Hofstede (1997), large power distance will see superiors and subordinates accepting each other's existential inequality. Organisations' hierarchical systems are viewed to be built on this inequality. They also centralise power within a small nucleus.

| Small Power distance   | Large power distance  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Inequalities among people should be minimized</li> <li>✓ Hierarchy in Organisations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience</li> <li>✓ Decentralization is popular</li> <li>✓ Narrow salary range between top and bottom of organization</li> <li>✓ Subordinates expect to be consulted</li> <li>✓ The ideal boss is expected to be resourceful democrat</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Inequalities among people are both expected and desired</li> <li>✓ Hierarchy in Organisations reflects the existential inequality between higher ups and lower- downs</li> <li>✓ <b>Centralisation is popular</b></li> <li>✓ Wide salary range between top and bottom of organization</li> <li>✓ <b>Subordinates expect to be told what to do</b></li> <li>✓ The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or a good Father</li> </ul> |

*Characteristic of small and high power distance*

*Adopted and Modified from Hofstede, G., 1997*

With the notion that large power distance organisations bear characteristics of centralisation, an assumption that higher power distance ratings would imply greater degree of centralisation was made for the purpose of this report.

### **Centralisation**

"Centralisation is the extent to which power and authority are retained at the top organisational levels" (Bartol et al, 1998, p363)

As all four countries are rated high in power distance, it showed that all of them bore centralised decision-making characteristics.

Although all countries were rated high in power distance, it also depend very much on where it laid on the continuum of power distance to determine how centralised they are. Therefore, though all countries are centralised in decision-making, their varying degree of this aspect might give rise to potential conflicts and misunderstandings.

Take for example, a French employee when involved in decision-making process with a group of employees from Singapore and Hong Kong might find it strange because the French have a highly centralised culture whereby decisions are made readily at the top (Fatehi, 1996). Therefore, during the decision-making on shopfloor matters, the French might feel awkward and not in his element to participate as he was never prepared for this. This behaviour could result in unhappiness and discontentment among rest of the employee, thinking that the French is uncooperative. Conflicts could easily be sparked off between them once such misunderstandings happen.

### **Formalisation**

"Formalisation is the degree to which written policies, rules, procedures, job descriptions and other documents specify what actions are (or are not) to be taken under given circumstances" (Bartol, et al, 1998, p357).

Being high in uncertainty avoidance, Japanese and French organisation put greater emphasis on rules and regulations to govern behaviours of employees so as to reduce uncertainties (Mead, 1998)

On the contrary, Singapore and Hong Kong are low in uncertainty avoidance, thus showing that they are more tolerant towards ambiguities.

Putting these two groups of workers together could spark off different perceptions on things leading to conflicts. An example would be that when tasked with a career advancement project with certain “grey areas” to tackle, the Singaporean worker might see it as an opportunity to display his creativity and capabilities. On the other hand, his Japanese counterpart may feel that the “grey areas” need further clarifications and was seen in the manager’s office every now and then. The former may feel that he had been disadvantaged as his colleague has got additional help from the boss, thus may show his displeasure at work, resulting in more conflicts.

## 5.4 *Controlling*

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Controlling is the “process of regulating organisational activities so that actual performance conforms to expected organisational standards and goals” (Bartol et al, 1998, p643). It is of particular importance in multinational firms because of the complexity of their operations and the physical and cultural distance between their parts.

High power distance and uncertainty avoidance societies, like France and Japan, have high needs for control on the behaviour of individuals (Segal-Horn and Faulkner, 1999). They are accustomed to bureaucratic control where rigidity is practiced. Singapore and Hong Kong, on the other hand, being high in power distance and low in uncertainty avoidance, take to a range of bureaucratic and clan control (Please refer to appendix B for characteristics of the control styles). However, they are inclined towards clan control as flexibility prevails.

For example, a manager employs the use of bureaucratic control on his employees of diverse cultures may stir discontentment from them. Bureaucratic control may not be the right key to every employee’s doors.

French and Japanese are accustomed to rigid and well-defined rules and regulations may reflect peak performance. However, Singaporeans and Hong Kongers who are more inclined towards clan control may find it to stifling on their side.

The French and Japanese, seeing their counterparts not performing may feel that they are not putting in enough effort and hence may want to distance themselves from them. On the other hand, the latter group may feel disadvantaged (as in previous example) and this could spark off a mini office warfare between the two camps.

The younger workforce in Singapore today are more flexible and spontaneous may feel tie down. The rigid hierarchical controls may be a hindrance to the young and innovative minds to exhibit their talents and initiative in their jobs. Thus, this group of people may be less productive and not work effectively with their rigid counterparts who “ go by the book” and rarely think out of the box. The differing styles of control in each country’s culture can spark the start of conflicts.

## 5.5 Staffing



Staffing is the process of attracting and selecting individuals for positions facilitating organisational goal achievement (Bartol et al, 1996). It includes recruitment and selection, training and development and compensation and performance appraisal. (Griffin and Pustay, 1999)

### **Recruitment and Selection**

Recruiting and selection of staffs are usually decided by the management. However in a multi-cultural company proper care has to be taken into consideration, else conflicts might arises.

For instance, in the event if management should recruit employees who show competence in job rather than age. It might cause some cultural

conflicts between the Japanese and Hong Kongers with Singaporeans and French with the former group valuing seniority and the latter group emphasizing on competency.

If the management engaged a young but very qualified superior to lead the Japanese, he might not be able command respect from them and get them to do things as the Japanese maybe biased against him due to his age.

They may think that he is too young and believe that he may not have the necessary knowledge and experience to lead them

### **Training and Development**

Whenever planning training session for the multi-cultural teams, certain factors have to be taken into consideration, for instance the group composition, process, training material and test of knowledge of the teams (Elashmawi and Harris, 1993).

Group composition can create a source of conflict between the multi-cultured teams, for example when the Japanese and French are grouped together to attend training, the Japanese may feel irritated by the attitudes of the French during the training, due to them being more outspoken. Should the trainer share something which contradicts their views, they will just point it out and question the trainer about it. To the Japanese, it is a sign of disrespect and not giving of “face” to the trainer.

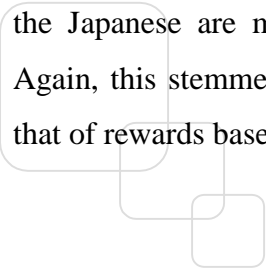
### **Compensation, Performance Appraisal and Rewards**

Reward and pay-for-performance schemes are often the core compensation component and motivator in industries.

Conflicts may arise when different compensation strategies are being applied. For instance, a Japanese who value a system of pay based on seniority, may expect his salary to depend principally (if not wholly) by his rank (also years of service) and not the job (Humes, 1993). If this form of compensation strategy is applied it may caused displeasure to the French or Singaporeans who believe that the company should compensate

them by their competence that they have shown in their work and not by rank.

Rewards given to staff may also generate conflicts. An example would be if rewards are given based on group performance, the Singaporeans and French may feel that they are not being appreciated. It is because they prefer rewards that are based on their own individual performance whereas the Japanese are more interested in getting rewards on a group basis. Again, this stemmed from the Japanese beliefs on group rewards against that of rewards based on individual meritocracy.



## 6.0 Other Sources Of Conflict



### 6.1 Stereotyping

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Stereotyping is “ the tendency to attribute characteristics to an individual on the basis of an assessment of the group to which the individual belongs” (Aldag and Stearns, 1991, p381).

Very often, people engage in prejudiced stereotyping of others. People often have a fixed idea or image of others even before assessing their abilities or understanding how they operate. These generalisations drawn through stereotyping are only a general map into the insights of others. However, People have this tendency to turn these generalisations into rigid preconceptions of others which often lead to conflicts.

For example, a French individual may brand a Japanese colleague to be a workaholic. The French on the other side values Quality of life and seldom sacrifice enjoyment of life out of dedication to work. Thus, they may feel that their Japanese counterparts do not know how to enjoy quality of life. On the other hand, Japanese may see the French as being lazy and not serious about their work. Conflict may arise due to the differing perceptions as Japanese would think “ rather than saying we don’t know how to enjoy life, it’s better to say there was just no tradition of doing that here” (Fernandez, 1993, p42).

### 6.2 Ethnocentrism

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Ethnocentrism is the “attitude that your culture is intrinsically superior to others, and that its way is the right way” (Engholm and Rowland, 1996, p51).

When working with people from diverse cultures, the existence of ethnocentrism will lead to severe cultural myopia, and consequently to

resentment of the other side. This is evident in the Japanese Culture where they develop a very strong “us” versus “them” mentality (Fernandez, 1993). Ethnocentrism inhibits individuals of their ability to work effectively in other cultures, thus leading to a decline in work performance.

### 6.3 *Communication*

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Communication is such a familiar part of our everyday life that we tend to take it for granted and see it from a limited perspective (Putti, Koontz, Weihrich, 1998). Almost any form of interaction between two people is a cross-cultural communication experience. Differences in language styles, non-verbal cues and cultural values affect our ability to accurately understand one another. Poor communication would lead to breakdown of cooperation, and hence result in inefficient operations.

For example, the French has a habit of expressing their opinions (Morrison and Conaway, 1997) and by simply being themselves, they create conflict because they operate from a different value base [compared to Asians]. Directness, confrontation and candid outspokenness are valued and expected in Western culture. However, from the Asian point of view, these same values, even when demonstrated respectfully, are considered ill-mannered, unrefined, rude and even contemptuous. It is easy to see how quickly misunderstandings and conflict will emerge (<http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr4/rosen.htm>, Downloaded on 24/3/2001).

## 6.4 Equality In Sexes



As we move with times, sexual inequality has become lesser of an issue. However, that does not mean that it cannot give rise to conflicts.

This chauvinistic view still holds in some countries and is evidently present in Japan. A very good example would be having a female colleague from Singapore, Hong Kong or even France to work with a Japanese male counterpart. Conflicts could easily be rubbed on between the two of them due to the high masculinity portrayed by the Japanese culture.

## 6.5 Language Barriers



| Countries                           | Singapore                                     | Hong Kong   | Japan      | France   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|------------|----------|
| Language commonly spoken or written | ❖ English<br>❖ Mandarin<br>❖ Malay<br>❖ Tamil | ❖ Cantonese<br>❖ Mandarin<br>(Pu Tong Hua)<br>❖ English | ❖ Japanese | ❖ French |

*Table 4: Summary of the Languages most commonly spoken by each country.*

Language is a fundamental aspect of culture, each language will describe and categorize the world differently, according to different fundamental principles. Different language is a different version of life (Nolan, 1999).

In general all the four countries are able to communicate with each other with the common spoken language, however the way they present their view are still geared towards how they phrase for their official language. Which may create some communication breakdown when negotiating or working.

This can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding between colleagues. Investigating the cause and source of the problem will be a

problem itself as the involved parties may point fingers at one another. It is difficult to ascertain the culprit, thus leading to frustrations and increased tension at the work place.

## 6.6 Age



Amongst other cultural differences, age is an issue in leading a diverse workforce. This is especially evident with Japanese employees who treat seniority as an essential tool in promotions. Hence if managers decide to promote someone younger or less experienced to be in charge of Japanese employees, this may incur their wraths as this is considered to be going against the norm. For example, according to Mr Cheong Choong Kong, CEO of Singapore Airlines, he said he prefers to hire young people as managers (Rosen, Digh, Singer and Phillips, 2000). Thus if he hired a young Singaporean to be the manager of a Japanese employee, this employee will feel unhappy and insulted. Even Mr Jean-Marie Messier, CEO of Vivendi, a French company said that he is a “big fan of young people as managers”(Rosen et.al, 2000,p279).

However there are always exceptions for example, “Sony ' s CEO Nobuyuki Idei surpassed at least fifteen executives more senior than himself for this position” (Beck and Davenport, 2001,p31). This shows that Japan may be starting to deviate from the common norm of senior promotion with evidence of the Japan's top firm Sony doing so.



## 7.0 Sources Of Synergy



“Synergy is cooperative or combined action” (Harris and Moran, 1996, p94). Its objective is to increase effectiveness by sharing perceptions, insights and knowledge. Most of the time, conflicts arise due to cultural differences. If, with an open-mind, these differences can be looked at from another angle, it will reveal certain aspects that are worth emulating. Hence, it can help harness synergy when and if we look at conflicts constructively.



## 7.1 Prevention Of Groupthink



Groupthink is when concurrence seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive group that it overrides realistic appraisal of alternatives (Bartol et al, 1998).

The danger of this is that each individual will not just fail to rebut what others propose but also consider the proposal as good enough without analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the options (Wren, 1995).

Thus, putting people from diverse cultures together can deter this problem as these people with their own attitudes and beliefs do not have to adhere to majority.

They all come with different mentality and perceptions, often questioning and clarifying doubts and explore all options, weighing all pros and cons. This will allow the best choice to be made and the bad effects of

groupthink such as failing to appraise alternatives can be prevented too. This also shows that synergy can be harnessed by involving people from different cultures, even at the expense of having heated arguments in the boardroom.

## 7.2 *Creativity & Innovation*



Conflict, depending on the outcome, can be a positive or negative experience for an organization. We no longer live and work in an insular market place but are now part of a worldwide economy competing globally. For this reason we need every bit of diversity that will make us more creative and open to change.

Cultural uniformity causes us to “filter” out ideas that are in line with our culture. It prevents us from seeing the world through different viewpoints. Exposure to a variety of cultures challenges us to question our individual biases and values. Cultural diversity brings fresh inspiration; differing insights and can spark off new ideas. When more people from differing background participate in brainstorming, it leads to more alternatives of ideas created and hence more innovative ways of solving problems.



## 7.3 *Shared Learning*



Globalisation forces people to capitalise on their differences (Harris and Moran, 1996).

Bringing two diverse cultures together provides an opportunity for one to explore out of their comfort culture zone. Putting the French and Japanese, who are more task-oriented and abide closely to rules and procedures, with the Singaporeans and Hong Kongers who are low in uncertainty avoidance allows room for learning. Synergy can be built when the French and Japanese learn to be more flexible and engage in mutual influence. This encourages the French and Japanese to learn to be more spontaneous and innovative. On the other hand, Singaporeans and Hong Kongers can learn to strike a balance between being flexible and adopting a systematic way of operation when appropriate.



# Shared Learning



## 8.0 Conclusion



Cultural differences and misunderstandings often generate conflict. When conflict happens in the workplace, it affects the productivity and morale of everyone in the unit. Differences in professional cultures and the lack of familiarity with each other's working methods increase the likelihood of misperceptions and misunderstandings which in turn may lead to poor coordination and handicap any work progress.

In order to achieve more effective performance and productivity from a culturally diverse workforce, the international manager should take into consideration the potential conflicts and resolve them. It is imperative that the manager make the subordinates look at different angles where their cultures clash, and appreciate the fact that there might exist better ways of handling conflicts. What is of utmost importance to the manager is to stay open-minded and be flexible enough to adapt to different cultures and aid in creating opportunities for synergy at the workplace.



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