

Exploring the Impact of Cultural Context in Management Education: A Pre- and Post-course Assessment

Salman Ali, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, India

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, cultural agility is essential for effective cross-border collaboration. This study explores the role of experiential learning in developing cultural agility through the X-Culture Global Collaboration Project, which was run as a credited course for MBA participants. Participants engaged in global virtual teams to solve business challenges, promoting intercultural cooperation and enhancing key competencies. A pre- and post-project survey was conducted among over 100 participants to measure changes in cultural agility across dimensions such as tolerance for ambiguity, cultural curiosity, perspective-taking, and relationship-building. Findings indicate a significant improvement in overall cultural agility, with notable growth in cultural curiosity, perspective-taking, resilience, relationship-building, and communication styles (direct/indirect and task/relationship orientation). Additionally, participants demonstrated a shift towards collectivist tendencies and a more adaptable approach to time perception, reflecting increased flexibility in cross-cultural settings. However, aspects such as egalitarianism and cultural humility remained relatively unchanged. This study highlights the impact of immersive, team-based global projects in strengthening cultural agility, particularly in enhancing adaptability, diverse perspective-taking, and relationship-driven collaboration. It contributes to the discourse on experiential learning and global business education, offering insights into how structured international teamwork fosters essential cross-cultural competencies. Future research could examine the long-term effects of such interventions and compare outcomes across diverse participant groups.

Keywords: cultural agility, global virtual teams, experiential learning

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Introduction

Globalization has fundamentally transformed the nature of work, requiring professionals to collaborate across cultural, geographic, and institutional boundaries with increasing frequency. As organizations expand their international footprints and adopt globally distributed work structures, the ability to function effectively across diverse cultural contexts has become a core managerial competency. Cultural agility—defined as the capacity to adapt behavior, communication, and decision-making to different cultural environments—has therefore gained prominence in both academic research and management practice (Caligiuri, 2012).

For management graduates in particular, cultural agility is no longer an optional or peripheral skill. Managers are expected to navigate cultural differences related to communication styles, power distance, time orientation, and relationship norms while maintaining productivity and trust. Traditional classroom-based instruction, however, often struggles to convey the complexity and lived experience of cross-cultural interaction. As a result, business schools and executive education programs have increasingly turned to experiential learning approaches to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Johnson et al., 2020).

This study examines the impact of experiential learning on the development of cultural agility through participation in global virtual teams (GVTs), facilitated by the X-Culture Business Project. By placing students in diverse, international teams and tasking them with solving authentic business problems, the project creates a setting in which cultural differences are not merely discussed but actively encountered and managed. The central objective of this research is to assess whether such an intervention leads to measurable changes in key dimensions of cultural agility, as captured through a pre- and post-course assessment design.

Literature Review

Cultural Agility and Its Importance

Cultural agility refers to an individual's ability to work effectively, respectfully, and productively across cultural boundaries. It encompasses a set of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional capabilities, including openness to difference, adaptability, and sensitivity to cultural norms and values (Bird et al., 2010). Individuals with high cultural agility are better equipped to interpret ambiguous situations, adjust their communication styles, and build trust with culturally diverse counterparts.

Prior research has consistently linked cultural agility and related constructs—such as cultural intelligence—to improved leadership effectiveness and performance in international contexts (Ng et al., 2012). Exposure to diverse cultures, whether through international assignments or structured learning experiences, has been shown to enhance individuals' awareness of their own cultural assumptions while increasing their ability to adopt alternative perspectives. These findings underscore the importance of intentionally designing educational interventions that promote sustained and meaningful intercultural engagement.

Experiential Learning in Global Business Education

Experiential learning theory, as articulated by Kolb (1984), emphasizes learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Within the context of global business education, experiential learning

methods enable participants to engage directly with complex, uncertain, and socially embedded problems. Rather than passively absorbing knowledge, learners actively construct understanding through interaction and reflection.

Research suggests that experiential approaches—such as international projects, simulations, and cross-border collaborations—are particularly effective in fostering intercultural competence (Rehg et al., 2012). These methods allow participants to confront real tensions arising from cultural differences, including misaligned expectations, communication breakdowns, and conflicting work norms. Importantly, such challenges serve as catalysts for learning when supported by appropriate structure and feedback. Virtual team collaborations have been particularly effective in developing cultural competencies (Taras et al., 2021).

Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) and Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Global virtual teams consist of members from different countries and cultural backgrounds who collaborate primarily through digital communication technologies. While GVTs offer flexibility and access to diverse talent, they also present unique challenges related to coordination, trust-building, and communication (Hajro, 2020). Differences in language proficiency, time zones, and cultural norms can complicate collaboration, particularly in the absence of face-to-face interaction.

Despite these challenges, GVTs provide rich opportunities for developing cross-cultural competencies. Prior studies indicate that participation in virtual international teams enhances skills such as perspective-taking, intercultural communication, and relationship-building (Gibson & Gibbs, 2014). As such, GVT-based projects represent a promising pedagogical tool for preparing students to operate in contemporary global work environments.

Methods

Participants

The study involved over 100 participants enrolled in a management course that integrated the X-Culture Business Project as a core component. Participants were drawn from multiple universities across different countries and were assigned to culturally diverse global virtual teams. Each team collaborated over an eight-week period to address a comprehensive business challenge.

Data Collection

To assess changes in cultural agility, a structured survey instrument was administered at two points in time: prior to the commencement of the project and upon its completion. The survey included 14 items designed to capture multiple dimensions of cultural agility, including cultural curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, perspective-taking, resilience, relationship orientation, and communication style preferences.

Data Analysis

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-course mean scores across each cultural agility dimension. Statistical significance was evaluated using conventional thresholds

($p < 0.05$). This approach allowed for the identification of dimensions in which meaningful changes occurred following participation in the experiential learning intervention.

Data Analysis

The results indicate statistically significant improvements in multiple dimensions of cultural agility. Key findings include:

- **Overall Cultural Agility:** Mean increased from 6.88 (pre) to 7.69 (post), $p < 0.001$.
- **Cultural Curiosity:** Increased from 5.22 to 7.32, $p < 0.001$.
- **Perspective-Taking:** Increased from 6.46 to 8.14, $p < 0.001$.
- **Resilience:** Increased from 6.35 to 7.09, $p < 0.01$.
- **Relationship-Building:** Increased from 6.36 to 7.36, $p < 0.001$.
- **Communication Styles:** Improvements were observed in indirect-direct communication ($p < 0.01$) and task-relationship orientation ($p < 0.01$). These findings confirm that experiential learning in GVTs significantly enhances cultural agility.

Discussion

Implications for Business Education

The findings reinforce the pedagogical value of experiential learning in management education. By embedding students in authentic global collaboration contexts, educators can facilitate the development of cultural competencies that are difficult to cultivate through traditional lecture-based methods alone. Integrating GVT projects into curricula may therefore better prepare students for the realities of globalized work environments.

Challenges and Considerations

While the X-Culture Business Project offers a structured platform for intercultural learning, it also presents challenges. Time zone differences, digital communication constraints, and cultural misunderstandings can create friction within teams. Addressing these challenges through facilitation, reflection exercises, and instructional support may further enhance learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that experiential learning through global virtual teams can significantly enhance cultural agility among management students. By providing empirical evidence of measurable changes in key cultural competencies, the research supports the integration of cross-cultural virtual projects in business education. Future research could explore the long-term persistence of these effects and examine variations across different participant populations and instructional designs.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Chat-GPT tool was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Chat-GPT, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in

writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Contact email: salman@iimk.ac.in