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Virtual Chaos at WORLDWIDE Rx: How Cultural Intelligence Can Turn Problems into Solutions

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1 Possible answers

1.1 Using your understanding of CQ, suggest what Jake and Chang Su should do to handle this situation. Refer in your answer to the CQ capabilities.

CQ Drive (motivation): Interest, confidence, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.

Jake needs to begin with identifying how to motivate his team to see the value of getting everyone's perspective, including the varied regional, cultural, and functional perspectives they offer. Instead of shying away from the dissident viewpoints or keeping them to himself, he needs to find a way to creatively bring them into the shared understanding of everyone on the team. But this is going to require time to build trust and to help everyone see the benefits of utilizing the differences in perspective and opinion.

Chang Su needs to consider how he can relay his concerns and voice his feedback in a way that the whole team will hear. He needs to develop the drive to understand the varied perspectives of his team members and the regions they represent, and determine how to make his point effectively and respectfully. If he doesn't feel comfortable speaking up on the conference call, he should calculate what the risks are of not doing so or consider alternative strategies that would be better received by Jake than the post-meeting emails he has been sending.

CQ Knowledge (cognition): Understanding intercultural issues and differences.

Jake needs to promote an understanding of the various mindsets represented by the different participants. Some basic reminders on how culture influences the way colleagues will engage and participate on this team can make a significant difference in the process and outcome for a taskforce like this one. Early on, Jake could intentionally walk the team through the varied ways participants may view speaking up and arrive at a creative solution for the company.

For example, Jake could point out that when a low power distance influencer on a team tells a high power distance junior team member to "speak up", the junior member without CQ hears that as "Praise me!" So when the senior team member asks, "What do you think about this idea?" the junior-level person will inevitably respond, "Oh, it's a most wonderful idea!" regardless of what he or she really thinks.

However, a low power distance junior team member may believe he's demonstrating initiative and good participation by frequently offering input and suggestions to a senior member on the team. But the high power distance senior member without CQ will hear that unsolicited input as disrespectful and insubordinate: Why is he always trying to be in charge and share his opinions?

And when there's an absence of high CQ among peers, the colleague who is always "speaking up" is viewed by her high power distance peers as the smart alec in the group: "Ah. Here she goes again. Why must she be so cheeky? The nail that stands up is the one the hammer smacks down."

A culturally intelligent approach will help everyone on the team understand the differences that exist across the team and, more importantly, across the company and its various regions and customers. And it's an approach that will include an understanding that some on the team will perceive power differences among various members and regions, even if everyone is officially at the same "level" within the organization. Both Jake and Chang Su will be much more effective at accomplishing their objectives – personally and on behalf of the company – if they demonstrate better understanding of the varied cultural values and norms at work among their team and across the company.

CQ Strategy (meta-cognition): Making sense of culturally diverse experiences and planning accordingly.

In light of the diversity of the team, Jake needs to plan for how to best get its input and agreement as a unit. First, he needs to underscore the importance of participation from everyone but clarify what that means by that. The objective is not necessarily to have everyone talking on every call. Nor is it just to make everyone "feel" like they're part of the team. It's to gather ideas and innovations from every team member so that all the regions and viewpoints are shared and so that the team comes up with the best solution for the company.

Second, Jake needs to plan by providing plenty of advance warning. If you're an introvert and/or if you have high "uncertainty avoidance", providing a spontaneous response on a virtual conference call can be very intimidating. And for non-native English speakers to "speak up" often means translating the question back into their native language, constructing a response, translating it back into English, and feeling confident about sounding competent. That's a tall order but easier if there's time to anticipate how to respond.

Presumably Chang Su knew this decision was going to be made soon – if not during the phone meeting last night, at least in the near future. More intentional planning on his part could have allowed this whole thing to run more smoothly. If he assures Jake that he wants him to succeed, Jake may be much more open to considering his input and dissident perspective. And given that Chang Su needs to continue working with these colleagues across the company, his future effectiveness with them will be enhanced by greater awareness of how his second-guessing of Jake and the team decision may be perceived by them.

CQ Action (behavioural): Changing verbal and non-verbal actions appropriately when interacting cross-culturally.

Finally, Jake needs to offer multiple ways for each team member to participate. Since the goal is participation and the generation of ideas, not people "talking", he can provide various ways to offer input. We've learned this in the classroom. Some students aren't comfortable saying much in a large classroom setting but will provide excellent input in a small group, one-on-one, or in an online forum. This dynamic is accentuated among individuals from certain cultural backgrounds.

For team members who are more reticent about speaking up, Jake could get them to write down some ideas ahead of time and talk with a partner in their office before joining the call. This allows them to introspectively think about the ideas and then "rehearse" communicating them with a partner before sharing them with the larger group. Chang Su could have used this kind of process himself. Or he could have shared his input with the team sooner, even if voicing disagreement to the whole group is not his preferred way of relating with a team. Or Chang Su could have called Jake first thing the next morning and asked him to hold off going to management with the decision. This would be less likely to put Jake on the defensive than receiving the kind of urgent emails Chang Su sent.

And if every team member is expected to weigh in on the decision, the facilitator should be explicit about that expectation. If Jake expects everyone to provide some response, he should make that clear. He could say something like:

> "I need to hear back from everyone by Friday at 5 p.m., Indianapolis time. You can either offer your input at our meeting this week, by talking with me one-to-one, or by collaborating with others and sharing your collective input – verbally or in writing."

An essential part of all of this is for leadership to provide a safe environment where speaking up is rewarded and to create a flexible approach for how individuals participate. All these strategies can be used when eliciting feedback from any group of people, but they're particularly relevant for working with culturally diverse teams. CQ improves the way you lead any group of diverse people.

Epilogue

After Chang Su's second email, Jake decided he had no choice but to go and talk with Diane Sully. He told her everything that happened. Diane was understanding but she told Jake he should never have gone into the senior management meeting and made the announcement about TechKnow until things were resolved with Chang Su. Diane facilitated a conference call with Chang Su and Jake.

WORLDWIDE RX ended up using Jung & Co. and Chang Su was actually given the vice-president of IT role, which he fulfilled from Seoul. Jake continued to function in his role as a project manager. Jake admitted that he could have done some things differently but he also believed Chang Su behaved inappropriately and disrespected him as a colleague as a result, although Chang Su seemed to have excellent relationships with many other North American colleagues.

Soon after this experience, Jake signed up for an intercultural development programme his company offered. He received 360-degree feedback on his CQ capabilities and met with a coach for the next six months. He discovered that he had underestimated the level of influence and authority Chang Su had on his team and across the company as a whole. His coach helped him see that it would have been beneficial to spend some time one-to-one with Chang Su before the taskforce ever got started and to work with him as an ally in coming up with the best solution for the company.

Jake recently volunteered for a new assignment managing a globally dispersed project team. Ironically Chang Su was the one who decided Jake was the ideal person to lead the team and this time it went much better. Jake started the whole process by creating a team charter where team members explicitly agreed upon a process for how the team would interact and make decisions. In addition, Jake facilitated some discussion around the four capabilities of CQ and regularly referred back to the importance of bearing in mind the differences on the team.

2 Further reading for the lecturer

Ang, S. & Van Dyne, L. (Eds) (2008). *Handbook on Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement and Applications*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Earley, C. & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W. & Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Livermore, D. (2009). *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The New Secret to Success.* New York: AMACOM.

Visit www.culturalq.com/tmpl/research/researcharticles.php for the seminal journal articles on cultural intelligence research.

For information on how to use CQ Assessments with students in your class, visit www.culturalq.com.