

# Chapter X

## Cultural Implications of Collaborative Information Technologies (CITs) in International Online Collaborations and Global Virtual Teams

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter introduces and explains some critical issues regarding Cultural Implications of Collaborative Information Technologies (CITs) in International Online Collaborations and Global Virtual Teams. This chapter attempts to address some of the cross-cultural issues in international online collaboration, which include but are not limited to language, culture, trust, and technology along with the implications for organizational virtual collaboration. The chapter also provides useful recommendations and strategies for improving international online virtual collaboration with CMC.*

### INTRODUCTION

The explosion in computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies created increased access to information and online interactions that span across the globe. International online collaboration among organizations, institutions and

individuals is experiencing significant growth. As international online collaboration grows, there is an increasing need to focus attention on the issue of culture and its effects on communication interactions. This chapter attempts to address some of the cross-cultural concerns in international online collaboration, which include but are not

limited to: language, culture, trust, and technology, along with the implications of culture for organizational virtual collaboration. The primary goal of this chapter is to identify key challenges in online and virtual collaborations while attempting to provide some useful recommendations for effective interaction within that context. The chapter also provides useful recommendations and strategies for improving international online virtual collaboration with CMC.

In the age of globalization and a global economy, the idea of international teams and group collaboration are ever present and represent the norm in many organizations. The importance of group work and collaboration has increased considerably as organizational performance and productivity represent the measures for organizational survival (Olaniran, 1994; 2004). Organizations and individuals have come to rely significantly on communication technologies for facilitating communication and coordination activities across different geographical locations (i.e., non-co-located groups). In addition, the resulting globalization trend necessitates virtual collaborations where time and space are no longer mutually exclusive concepts. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies enabled through the Internet allow for global collaboration activities (Davidson & Vreede, 2001; Olaniran, 2001a; 2001b; Solomon, 2001). The term global virtual team refers to the use of collaboration information technologies (CITs) for supporting collaboration among organizational members in international or multinational contexts.

## **Background and Literature Review**

Finding ways to make teams effective is the primary concern facing organizations and teams using communication technologies as their collaborating tools. Added to this challenge is culture, which varies across different geographical locations. Thus, the challenge with groups and virtual collaborations with communication tech-

nologies is compounded by cultural differences. Consequently, CMC media represent collaboration information technologies (CITs) that offer both economic and convenient means for groups to collaborate on projects virtually (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), nevertheless, the members' different cultures and value preferences create challenges for the collaborations (Keenan & Ante, 2002; Olaniran, 2004).

Hofstede (1996) stresses that culture is the "software of the mind," indicating that individuals carry within them certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaviors that were learned through their development. People bring with them experiences, expectations, and histories that shape their participation and general communication interactions providing a direct implication for participants in collaborative virtual teams (Cobburn & Levinson, 2003). The next section of the discussion provides an overview of some challenges facing virtual collaboration teams.

## **Challenges in Online Virtual Group Collaborations**

There are problems and challenges in virtual teams using CITs in co-located or non-global contexts. However, cultural challenges, language, trust, and different IT proficiencies are inevitable in virtual groups that span across several countries. These challenges also influence the effectiveness of virtual teams as a whole, along with the usage of CITs (Dube & Pare, 2001; Olaniran, 2004; Munkvold, 2005;).

While the motivation to use virtual teams is often economically driven (i.e., cost cutting, speed, and efficiency), there are some key challenges that hinder their effectiveness and the team's success. Armstrong and Cole (2002) found that while distributed groups sometimes become integrated over time, they nonetheless experience problems due to distance (Olaniran, 1996; Crampton, 2001a; 2002; Solomon, 2001; Walther, 2002). Problems in virtual teams include misunderstandings and

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