Cross-Cultural Managerial Behavior – a Comparative Study Between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America

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Abstract

Among the many trade partners the United States engages with, the Republic of Korea is the nation's seventh largest trading partner – exchanging over $154.9 Billion in 2020 (USTR, 2021). Despite this strong economic relationship between these two nations, the cultural distance that these societies have is one of the largest within anthropological academia (Hofstede, 2017). This reality creates the need for a solid framework of a management-focused, cultural understanding between these two countries.

In this study, academic literature will be collected and reviewed to lend insight into particular areas of culture that an American and Korean perspective would be most likely to conflict. To increase depth to this study, primary, qualitative research has been conducted within stakeholder populations.

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The purpose of this study is to create a bidirectional, managerial framework for business leaders with oversight of cross-cultural teams that possess Korean and American workers. Through an academic literature review and conducting primary research, managers should be empowered to increase workplace productivity and value created in workplace collaboration. Upon implementation of the recommendations in this study, managers can expect improved working relationships between employees, increased productivity, increased innovation, and reduction in errors and other non-value-adding activity. While no given management style is inherently superior, managers who are able to strategically cater to differing cultural perspectives in the workplace will deliver superior value from business operations.

Bringing people together to formulate a unified effort toward a common goal has been the focus of many great thinkers and the greater field of management for centuries – and for good reason. The Society of Human Resource Management has estimated that employee turnover in the United States has cost American businesses over $223 billion between 2015-2019 with 58% of those turnovers being directly tied to conflicts with management (Mirza, 2019). In addition to this, studies by the Queens School of Business and Harvard Business Review suggest that employees who do not feel well-supported by leadership are 37% more likely to exhibit absenteeism in the workplace and 60% more likely to make mistakes on the job (Seppala & Cameron, 2015). Whatever the circumstances might be, potential for detriments to business objectives abound in scenarios where workers are not clearly, safely, and confidently guided to achieve organizational goals. This managerial hazard only increases in caution when considering

a diverse workforce with members of cultures that possess conflicting values or lifestyles (SHRM, n.d.).

Clearly, quality leadership is valuable and has the power to contribute to organizations in a myriad of ways. Leadership – that is, a mutually understood and accepted influence of one person or group's will over another person or group – is a necessary foundation to an organization's success, regardless of context, situation, or desired outcome. Differences in leadership styles, culture, ethnography, individual personalities, and a host of other factors can shift what would make an ideal foundation for leadership – and by association a foundation for management – from one work environment to another. In this sense, the idea of cross-cultural leadership or management is an inherently paradoxical task and requires the most careful combination of awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge to successfully navigate. Looking forward, one must learn these ethnographic origins individually to understand them solely in reference to their own environments. Once this knowledge has been gleaned, a qualitative dialogue surrounding the topic can ensue to discover an ideal form of synergy between Korean and American managerial cultures. Upon refining this constructive dialogue, the construction of a unified foundation for leadership can begin – albeit subject to the consideration and incorporation of the knowledge brought into this study. Having a foundation to build cross-cultural affinity, strategies can be formed to practically create cross-cultural relationships in the workplace and establish meaningful business partnerships internationally.

Ethnographic Motivators

In this study, ethnographic motivators – that is, a combination of human compulsions which inherently stem from social norms and routines – will be analyzed to better understand how cultural differences will subsequently catalyze different interpersonal dynamics and

operating conditions within the workplace (Princeton University, 2022). From an academic perspective, a preliminary understanding of national cultures must be formulated from existing academic literature on the topic. This comparative analysis will be completed using the Hofstede cultural analysis framework, given the framework's academic recognition and historical reliability. Having created unique concepts of each national culture that this study focuses on, an identification of potential areas for contention, as well as affinity, will be identified. Upon classifying given areas of interest within cultural exchange, pathways for bridging cultural differences and fusing shared cultural characteristics can be discussed and attempted to create meaningful cross-cultural ecosystems. After making an informed methodology based on this qualitative analysis, a period of testing and stakeholder evaluation can begin to confirm or deny this qualitative framework within the final operating environment. Assuming the adoption and continuous improvement of the procedures suggested by this framework, this resource can continue to be used by professionals, government officials, and all other interested stakeholders.

Hofstede Analysis – South Korea

In order to provide a more structured, comparative analysis, Hofstede's cultural framework will be used as a preliminary tool to outline some of the more notable differences in cultures. Each dimension of Hofstede's analysis will be discussed individually for each country, and subsequently reviewed to highlight some notable convergences or discrepancies in cultural values. This first section will be focusing on South Korea's cultural values and how said values might affect individuals' behavior and embrace of leadership or collectivism in the workplace.

Table 1

Summary of Hofstede Analysis valences (Hofstede Insights, 2017).

Cultural Dimension	Rating
Individualism / Collectivism	91/100
Power Distance	60/100
Masculinity / Femininity	39/100
Uncertainty avoidance	85/100
Long-short term	100/100
Indulgence	29/100

Power Distance

One of the most noticeable and impactful cultural differences between South Korea and the United States that Hofstede's framework can provide insight into is the category of "power distance". In the words of the Hofstede Insights organization, power distance is, "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power [is] distributed unequally," (Hofstede Insights, 2017, para. 10). With South Korea measured as having a somewhat high-power distance score (60/100), one would assume, from Hofstede's (2017) analysis, that Koreans in the workplace would be more likely to behave in ways that convey deference to authority figures and indifference to comparably lower or equally ranked members of an institution/organization. In this same breath, South Koreans would be less likely to consider a direct approach to collaborating with leadership figures or making suggestions to upper-level management. Appropriate settings to share ideas with upper-level management as a lower-level employee in Korean culture are rare at best and almost only in

circumstances that possess a high gravitas (Lee, 2014). Such mannerisms might be misinterpreted to create a perception of Koreans as being overly-formal, distant, or even "disingenuous" from others in the workspace according to global court reporting company, (Planet Depos, 2017, para. 11). With this, westerners may possibly consider Korean individuals who exemplify these traits as being less trustworthy, given their (perceived) limited openness to others in the workplace – especially when looking at the Korean concept of "Chaemyeong" or "saving face" (2017, para. 10). For example, an American employer or work superior might not enjoy hearing less attractive aspects of a given subordinate's character or learning about areas where the individual could improve; however, an individual's openness in sharing areas of weakness related to work functions is a sign of honesty and intentionality to improve and contribute better to the organization over time. From a Korean perspective, sharing these areas of weakness is not encouraged to be shared openly, but rather a discussion on how an individual can grow holistically with one's strengths being the talking point of the conversation (Richard, 2023, para. 35). From the available academic literature, Horak and Yang (2017) attest to this importance of seniority and deference to authority within employee advancement and managerial decision-making.

Individualism/Collectivism

Another notable cultural feature of South Korea that Hofstede's framework displays is its intense collectivist mindset. As is common in many East Asian countries, a long history of strong Confucianist values reinforces a societal structure that controls many facets of society – from common practices to etiquette and other observable behaviors (Berling, 2023). In relationship to workplace behavior, certain themes derived from this collectivist viewpoint serve as indicator to areas where managerial friction could arise within a multicultural workplace. Primary features of

Korean culture that could clash with other managerial styles include the social concepts of "Jeong" and "Woori" which describe group harmony in everyday behavior and, "a shared feeling of belongingness [which] dedifferentiates individuals from the collective whole," in society (Kim et al., 2019, para. 2). Conjoined with the Korean cultural aspect of Chaemyeong, that is "saving face", the commitment to collectivism found in traditional Korean organizations may seem suffocating to those who are not comfortable with embracing a group identity or fade one's own personality to assimilate into a cohesive group unity (Planet Depos, 2017). Denial of self-interest, self-expression, and creative freedom are not absolute by any means, however – as Kim et al. would describe coaching as a form of empowerment that serves as one of the most indicative signs of accepted creativity (Kim et al., 2019). More specifically their study on Korean leadership style, Kim et al. describe coaching as a process of developing an "engaging relationship and emotionally investing in others, [which] encourages another person's success" (2019, para. 32). To this end, Korean workplaces are unique in their adherence to a Confucianist ideal of group harmony and submission to authority, while also being uniquely caring and intentional with human relationships among team members. Studying the behavioral and psychological development of nursing students in South Korea – a workforce of people who would naturally be supposed to create more personalized, individual identities as healthcare professionals – Lee and Yang found that the most influential aspect of these professional journeys were marked by time spent in collectivist, social environments where mentorship and leader advocation was present (2019, para. 56). Knowing this, cross-cultural managers must be conscious of their emotional connection to their co-workers and demonstrate empathy towards subordinate development, even in professional service industries that would naturally cater to individualistic work styles/environments.

Masculinity

The next main concept the Hofstede framework offers academia is the concept of "masculinity" or the extent to which, "…society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success as being defined as… [being the] best in field" (Hofstede Insights, 2017, para. 8). This aspect of culture is a determining factor when considering how to motivate employees and create goals that a group of people can gather around. Having a relatively low score within this index at 38/100, Korean society would be considered feminine by Hofstede's analysis (2017). To engage with a culture of this sort, one must be considerate of collective goals and group harmony. One of the easiest paths to frustration and miscommunication between a "feminine" and "masculine" culture in Hofstede's framework is for an individual of a masculine culture to propose seemingly divisive practices or policies within an organization. While an individual from a masculine culture would naturally be inclined to create plans and operating procedures centered around extrinsic outcomes, an individual from a feminine culture – such as South Korea by Hofstede's standards – may find said masculine figure(s) to be threatening or even untrustworthy.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede's next cultural component of interest is the concept of uncertainty avoidance. Simply put, this concept relates to the manners in which people of different cultures respond to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the future (Hofstede Insights, 2017). On one end of the spectrum, South Korea holds a high rating of 85/100 for uncertainty avoidance, meaning that Koreans are much more likely to invest time, thought, and energy into controlling and monitoring uncertain areas or variables in work or even in personal life. As Hofstede (2017) would describe it, within high uncertainty avoidance cultures, "…there is an emotional need for

rules (even if the rules never seem to work)… people have an urge to work hard… security is an important element in individual motivation" (para. 12). This extreme individual aspect of Korean culture pervades into nearly every aspect of every life for an average Korean, and it is an area that can act as a strong barrier to improved collaboration in cross-cultural teams.

The concept of Chaemyeong also creates a compound affect on Koreans in the workplace because the concept of saving face adds a layer of consideration to any process – be it a business negotiation, buying new office furniture, buying a gift for one's co-workers at the office…etc (Planet Depos, 2017, para. 12). Articles from the Localization Institute, a global leader of educational advancement surrounding international localization, suggest that Koreans' demand for certainty permeates into every part of a decision-making process (Lee, 2020). In the article, the Localization Institute describes the cognitive journey a South Korean customer makes when buying something and heavily considers word-of-mouth advice or similar trustworthy recommendations – making a successful interaction as defined by not only categorizable amenities and quantitative perks, but also by a collective, group consensus around the value of a given product, service, or business process (2020). In sum, Korea's high uncertainty avoidance requires cross-cultural managers to be ever considerate of all factors that contribute to the overall perception and operational integrity of a business strategy as well as investing more time, rather than less, into how they should approach more weighty interactions with employees.

Long-Term Orientation

Similar to uncertainty avoidance, the principle of long-term orientation in Hofstede's analysis is a measure of how given cultures prioritize existential goals and the extent to which time-honored traditions are maintained (Hofstede Insights, 2017). South Korea having a perfect score of 100/100 makes it a prime example of unfettered pragmatism and a relentless

commitment to virtuous living (2017). Naturally, this will create conflicts with most other cultures as Koreans could easily be perceived as being "out-of-touch" with immediate concerns or insensitive towards existing issues in society or an organization – all in order to protect the interests of long-term stability (Ryu & Moon, 2011). For a cross-cultural manager, this dimension of Korean culture will be important to navigate as effective collaboration across cultural lines will necessarily involve sacrifice from collective towards individuals of different cultures to receive the attention and personalized care they will consider themselves entitled to.

Indulgence

Lastly, an aspect culture that Hofstede's (2017) framework investigates is a dimension known as "indulgence" (para. 18). This characteristic of human culture is the degree to which people are expected to control their desires and impulses – in contrast to "indulging" in their desires and natural compulsions (Hofstede Insights, 2017, para. 19). South Korea having a measure of 29/100 in Hofstede's framework, Koreans are known to be a people of restraint and more focused on discipline in everyday activity (2017). Placing little emphasis on leisure time and "self-care" activities, Korean culture might appear harsh or even unrewarding to members of more indulgent societies, such as the United States (2017, para. 19). To ensure that all members of a cross-cultural team feel safe to celebrate their victories and express their desires, effective cross-cultural managers will be tasked with balancing opportunities for indulgent employees to actualize their desires while maintaining a status quo that delivers value to more restrained members of a given workplace.

Hofstede Analysis – United States of America

Table 2

Summary of Hofstede Analysis cultural valences (Hofstede Insights, 2017).

Cultural Dimension	Rating
Individualism / Collectivism	18/100
Power Distance	40/100
Masculinity / Femininity	62/100
Uncertainty avoidance	46/100
Long-short term	26/100
Indulgence	68/100

On the opposite side of the analysis, American culture serves as a sharp contrast to Korean culture in various ways and in varying magnitudes. Being a society that was originally composed of dominating European-based ideals, American culture has come to accept and be diplomatic with many different forms of expression, belief systems, and social norms. As open and curious as American culture can be, however, there are often limitations within an American cultural perspective due to members of this society considering themselves to be either enlightened or in possession of superior knowledge regarding ideal social dynamics (Justen, 2009). Clearly, this reality can function as an open door for ethnocentrism – that is, judging other cultures and people solely based on one's own experiences and surroundings – and prevent deeper cross-cultural relationships from taking place (Barger, 2019). In another sense, the moral flexibility and intellectual diversity that American culture provides can operate as an invitation to

cooperation between many different stakeholders – some that might more strictly-defined social codes would not permit.

Power Distance

The element of power distance in American culture is a steady evolving concept and has certainly changed drastically even within the past 40 years (PSU, 2020). With older American generations being more accepting of unequal distributions of power, younger generations in the United States demand flat hierarchies and organizational structures of what they would perceive to be equally distributed authority (2020). Academic literature supporting this assertion, American culture can best be described by stating that individuals have a propensity to believe that absolute authority corrupts absolutely, and accountability measures must be institutionalized due to a lack of self-control within leadership structures (Shea, 2012). Contrasted with higher power-distance cultures, American culture would be hesitant to contribute as freely and openly in an environment where they perceive an authority figure or leadership group to have too great of influence. As a cross-cultural manager, one must be careful to remain a strong and decisive leadership figure while not projecting an imposing image towards members of low power-distance cultures, such as Americans.

Individualism/Collectivism

With one of the highest global ratings of 91/100, American culture is fiercely independent and hyper-concentrated on individual needs, goals, thoughts, and mannerisms (Hofstede Insights, 2017). From Hollywood to sports teams to customer service and product design, the ability to customize and create attraction to the uniqueness available in every aspect of life (in this case, the workplace) is essential to maintaining a competitive edge in American society. While there are some growing signs of Americans desiring to form deeper affinities to

certain groups or causes – such as the prevailing expansion of employee resource groups in American workplaces – the predisposed inclination of the American workplace will be concentrated around the concept of bringing individuals, all with unique characteristics to accomplish a similar goal (Taylor, 2019). At the same time, the American focus on individualism can create interpersonal boundaries between co-workers that is centered around personal privacy, that is, not to share personal information that might create an unwanted connection or threat of being leveraged by another person. These expectations of American workers can place an additional pressure on cross-cultural managers to be mindful of personal boundaries while also allowing individuals in a work team to showcase their unique contributions to a project. This dimension of Hofstede's framework is one of the greatest value discrepancies between the United States and South Korea.

Masculinity

American culture, though it has evolved and changed drastically over time and in line with cultural trends, has been historically a masculine or dominating culture. This trait of culture is usually best observed through everyday behavior of Americans and the widespread compulsion to impulsive behaviors and spontaneous task completion. Usually prompted via advertising, peer-pressure, or self-impressed goals, Americans often act out of a "can-do" attitude where results and being able to prove one's worth based on the value of said results is paramount to improving one's quality of life, personal image, and access to greater resources (Hofstede, 2017, para. 9). In many circumstances, conflicting interests can be decided based on a self-centered evaluation process – a situation where relationships, human connection, or even likability can be sacrificed in order for someone to gain access to a seemingly invaluable position or status in life – such as in a career or popularity standard. As Hofstede's analysis would say it,

"…Americans 'live to work' so that they can obtain monetary rewards and as a consequence attain higher status based on how good one can be" (2017, para. 10). Another area of probable contention between American and Korean workers, masculine and feminine-leaning cultures must sacrifice preferences to cater towards the emotional and psychological needs of their cultural opposites.

Uncertainty Avoidance

With a relatively low score of 46/100, the Untied States is a context where people are open to trying new things, accepting new ideas, and implementing new business practices (Hofstede Insights, 2017). In comparison to higher uncertainty avoidance cultures like South Korea, Americans may seem to be unassuming and haphazard in decision-making processes that pertain to future planning in a business or career mapping. This concept of uncertainty avoidance also determines the type of goal that people of different cultures will create. In an American context, for example, university students expect that truth can be relative and discussions around different situations should be open-ended, without a seemingly exclusive "correct" answer in mind (CGE James Madison University, 2012, para. 1). By contrast, students in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, like South Korea, would expect professors to provide structured learning environments and seeking after "right" answers to problems, or at least provide a methodology to provide the "most correct" resolution to a given scenario (2012, para. 1). Placing these considerations in perspective of one another, an American workplace remains a dynamic and bombastic place for employees to showcase their skills in a flexible environment. Cross-cultural managers who wish to leverage the value of this viewpoint will be careful to provide American workers with some degree or sense of freedom, while maintaining a group harmony that can provide a sense of stability to a larger audience.

Long-Term Orientation

In terms of time orientation, American culture has a strong fixation on the short-term with a Hofstede rating of 26/100 (Hofstede Insights, 2017). With large American corporations reporting on a quarterly basis and average American attention spans decreasing substantially over the past 10 years, Americans are both incentivized and accustomed to focus, plan, execute, and deliver results in short periods of time – having considered only recent, immediately-accessible data to support one's conclusions (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). Overt pragmatism that is commonly found in American workplaces can somewhat act as a balance to the shock of such as short-term consideration process in the eyes of more higher uncertainty avoidance cultures. Nevertheless, for a cross-cultural manager to bring stability to diverse work environment, strategic moves away from the complacency that is somewhat inherent to short-term mindsets are of utmost importance to fostering stronger, more internally-dependable and trusting work teams – especially when individuals of higher uncertainty avoidance cultures have an emotional need tied to operational structure (Kim et al., 2019).

Indulgence

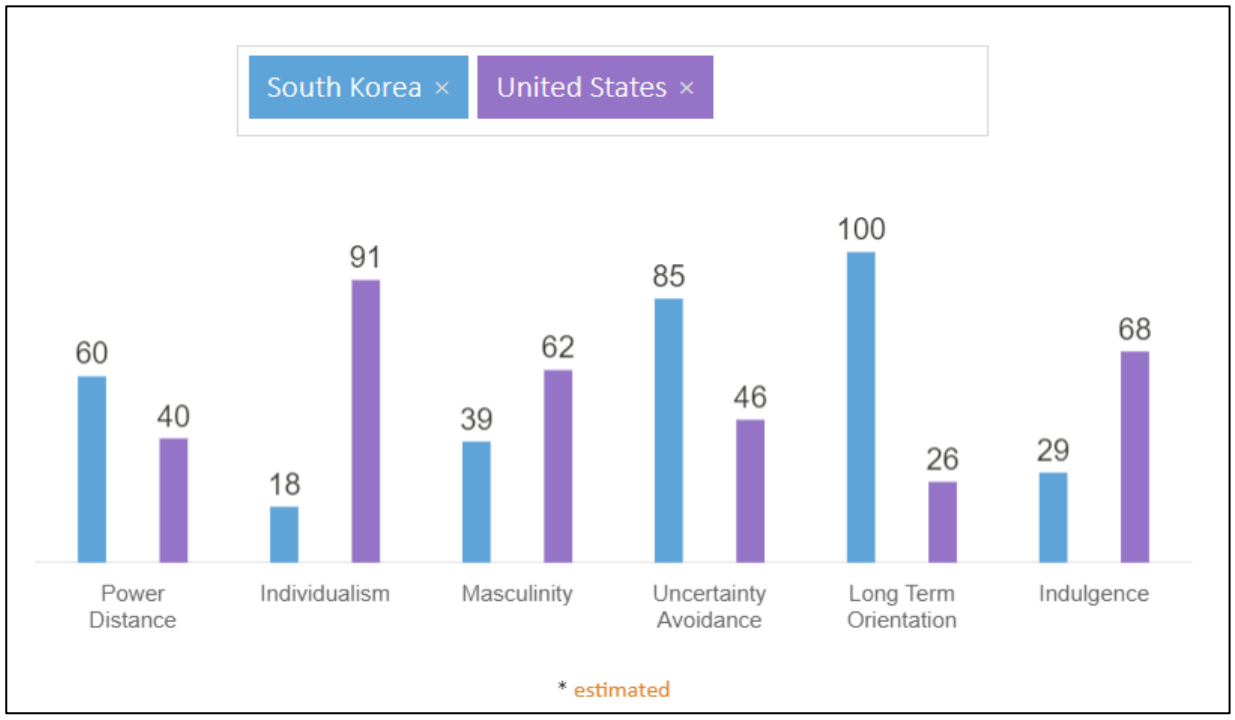
Combining previously discussed cultural elements, American culture ranks high in Hofstede's "indulgence" factor at a rating of 68/100 (Hofstede Insights, 2017, para. 18). In simple terms, American culture subscribes to a "work hard, play hard" mentality, with low uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity traits contributing to, what some cultures would consider, an abrasive, competitive environment that is driven by selfish interest. Moral discipline being less commonly prescribed, American culture can appear to be immature or even suspect of being immoral to members of restrained cultures that value discipline and control over one's emotional expression (Enkh-Amgalan, 2016). Most Americans would still expect a degree of

professionalism in the workplace and modify their behavior to match said expectations, but an underlying cultural gap in this area can always create tension in a cross-cultural workplace where teammates hold differing views on acceptable behavior (Hofstede Insights, 2017). To protect against instances of offense or stifling more "indulgent" members of a cross-cultural team, a manager must be careful to draw clear boundaries and set expectations for how emotion and politeness can be expressed in the workplace.

Compare & Contrast

Table 3

Summary of Hofstede Analysis cultural valences (Hofstede Insights, 2017).



Cultural Trait	**South Korea**	**United States**	***Divergence***
Individualism / Collectivism	91/100	18/100	<73>
Power Distance	60/100	40/100	<20>
Masculinity / Femininity	39/100	62/100	<23>
Uncertainty Avoidance	85/100	46/100	<39>
Long-term / Short-term	100/100	26/100	<74>
Indulgence	29/100	68/100	<39>

Not lacking in discrepancies, American culture and Korean culture possess some substantial differences in values and mannerisms toward every day and work behaviors. To summarize some of the deepest value gaps, the topics of long-term orientation, individualism vs collectivism, and cultural masculinity vs femininity as defined by Hofstede (Hofstede Insights, 2017). Specifically, the cultural component of individualism vs collectivism serves as a strong determinant to what an optimal organizational structure would look like and how people within said organization should conduct themselves. From a Korean context, denial of self-interest and group harmony are the foundation of a meaningful and effective team environment. On the other side of this study, American culture thrives on self-driven motivators and extrinsically valuated benefits within their work.

In order to merge these values and build affinity across these cultures, cross-cultural managers must be careful to provide a sense of autonomy within the work environment for individualistic members to feel free and confident to contribute their own insights and accomplish tasks in a manner best suited to the individual, while also maintaining a sort of

procedure or structure for collectivist persons to find a sense of security and stability within their workplace (2017). In Hargittay et al.'s study on Korean business that have successfully offshored operations to American soil, the researchers found that traditional Korean business keep around, "80 percent of the authority… in the upper management level, with middle or lower management having very limited authority" (Hargittay et al., 2005, p. 60). These researchers continue this dialogue of Korean-American business practices in saying that effective Korean business leadership that presides over operations in individualistic contexts are most successful when said leaders are able to reward creativity and provide a unique feeling of recognition to high-performers (2005). All insights considered, Hargittay et al. admit in their study that, "…a perfect mixture of the two [management] systems," does not exist, but cross-cultural leaders should always be willing to "experiment on a continual basis" in order to optimize an organization's operations (2005, p. 63).

Regarding time orientation, a cross-cultural manger overseeing traditional Korean and American workers must be sensitive to protect long-term sustainability within an organization's operations while also creating recurring opportunities for short-term-focused individuals to receive satisfaction in their work. Creating an executive plan to protect an organization's long-term viability at the expense of internal stakeholder desires will necessarily neglect essential human needs of individuals who are more short-term oriented (Ryu & Moon, 2011). Alternatively, if a cross-cultural manger leaves too much room for interpretation and flexibility within a workplace, members of a long-term cultural orientation will not be able to commit their best efforts to the organization's goals because the organization will appear to be unsafe and inconsistent in its commitment to stakeholders.

Cultural gaps between masculine/feminine cultures and high/low uncertainty avoidance orientations also function as considerable obstructions to effective cross-cultural collaboration. These different traits play a combined role with one another in situations involving task completion, interpersonal dynamics in the workplace, and strategic decision making. Masculine cultures, for example, will often create employees that are more likely to be driven to excel in their job functions for the sake of being "the best" compared to feminine cultures which pursue having a sort of internal harmony – success based on a group's cohesion towards a goal – in connection to what one is doing in his/her work (Hofstede Insights, 2017, para. 9). When these conflicting motivational perspectives are in the same workplace, masculine employees can be frustrated with feminine employees who do not share the same intensity and drive to create outputs and achieve success by their definitions (2017).

These frustrations might be displayed in situations like a culturally masculine employee updating a culturally feminine employee on a project that is new to them. Typically speaking, a culturally feminine employee is going to want more information surrounding the "why" and "how" in a given project over a culturally masculine employee, who, will likely just want to be given a task and complete it quickly to receive recognition and status (SHRM, n.d.). Another scenario where these cultural differences are likely to be displayed is during a work meeting. Since culturally masculine employees are more inclined to act on their impulses and desires, they might be more willing to control and dominate the course of the conversation, leaving culturally feminine co-workers being left unheard or depriving them of what they would consider to be an appropriate time to speak (Hofstede Insights, 2017). Obviously, these are situations that can hamper the creation and sharing of new ideas as well as erode work dynamics within an organization. In order to cater towards differing communication styles in the workplace, an

effective cross-cultural manager could provide employees avenues to contribute their thoughts in an anonymous dialogue or survey that would be subsequently included in the action items of a weekly meeting (Mahoney, 2019). This provides culturally feminine employees with the opportunity to contribute their insights without requiring them to abandon their own unique cultural values and communication styles.

To be clear, Korean culture is very competitive with intense working conditions and high expectations are common, but, for a cross-cultural manager, one must differentiate the Korean's need for high-quality outputs from the American's needs to do the same (Lee, 2020). The former's motivations will stem from a journey of maintaining one's honor, whereas the latter will strive for excellence out of desire for self-validation (Murphy, 2018). When considering these ideas within the realm of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension, similar themes arise. Americans, having a lower uncertainty avoidance score, are more likely to implement a business plan or practice that lacks a complete rationale than Koreans who, will demand a rigorous, well-made plan and execution for a given project. Naturally, this will create variances in how an American would approach a project, or even an individual task from a Korean who would likely be more thorough in his or her process. In order to overcome these differences, a successful cross-cultural manager must be intentional to provide formal, written guidelines for how processes should be conducted in order to satisfy the high uncertainty values of Korean workers (Norman, 2015). At the same time, a successful manager will also provide spaces for open dialogue to exist between co-workers for times when an organic approach to completing a work assignment might prove to have competitive insights (2014, para. 5). Even in this situation, however, it would be wise to provide a framework for what might define a scenario to be unique enough for special consideration and completion techniques.

Looking even further, one will likely find a correlation between long-term and short-term oriented mindsets and masculine/feminine identities within this study. If Americans are naturally more short-term focused and are motivated by selfish interest, a Korean perspective will have a compounded cultural divergence since the values a typical Korean holds will produce differing behaviors. In total, the elements of uncertainty avoidance and masculine/feminine orientations are multidimensional and require participants to be observant towards the needs and signals of their counterparts in the workplace. Managers can overcome these differences through establishing formalized meetings to review teammate dynamics and their perceived team's effectiveness towards completing organizational goals. In order to cater towards both feminine and masculine work types, surveys or anonymous comments can be written by team members prior to team collaboration reviews (Brooks, 2023). This pre-written content can then serve to be opportunities for feminine employees to raise their voice in a safe, non-confrontational manner while also providing structure for long-term oriented employees to trust for continuous group improvement over time (2023).

From a positive perspective, Korean and American workplaces also possess areas of affinity to one another which can be used to inspire productive management techniques. While Korean culture scores lower than American culture in Hofstede's indulgence dimension, the reality of Korean materiality remains to be explored from an incentive-based perspective. A recent report demonstrates that young to middle-aged Korean adults are now the largest spending populations of luxury brands in Korea (Fendos, 2018). With this knowledge, a cross-cultural manager may be able to cater to two different cultures by offering more personalized incentives that attract the indulgent traits of American culture and the Korean concept of "saving face" (Planet Depos, 2017 para. 10).

Workplace Dynamics

Given the cultural background of each society involved in this study, this next section will serve as a more practical dialogue of the two management perspectives. In order to categorize the ideas of this section, managerial dialogue will be divided into sections with each cultural perspective serving as a unique reference point in the qualitative dialogue. This structure will allow managers who would have greater affinity towards a given perspective of leadership – in this case, Korean or American – to experience a constructive discovery from a familiar point of reference and glean the value of this study in a more organic manner.

Workplace – South Korea

To start, an individual's ability to influence and direct an organization is largely dependent upon their rank or position in the hierarchy (Jung, 2022) (Philipp, 2022). This human valuation system necessarily leads to managerial and promotional selection processes that could be considered discriminatory from an American perspective (Philipp, 2022). As a system that normally places professional or family-related connections over technical competency or experience, Korean leadership must learn to adjust the allocation of their respect to a broader, more generalized audience (Warburton, 2022). In a cross-cultural work environment, this means that Korean managers will have to adjust their focus and attention – or lack thereof – towards their American colleagues who might have similar or lower-ranking positions within the organization (2022). Failing to demonstrate a unique interest in all members of the organization will cripple a Korean business leader's ability to influence and build meaningful relationships with Americans in a cross-cultural work environment. This relates back to the short-term time orientations and masculine cultural leanings of American culture described by Hofstede (2017).

To maximize the productivity and output of American workers in a cross-cultural workplace, Korean managers must also be willing to sacrifice a level of stringency to their ideal structure of workplace dynamics (Choi et al., 2022). Prohibiting American workers from contributing their unique and creative insights to the organization will cause prolonged dissatisfaction in a cross-cultural work environment and American workers may even loose interest in working at such an organization entirely – given this workplace tension remains and does not adjust appropriately (Kocken, 2015). In some cases, avenues to overcome this cultural gap will include frank, personalized conversations between manager and subordinate in order to form and commit to a new standard of work expectations (Arsenault, 2020). For Korean business leaders, this will require a sacrifice of time, energy, and thoughtfulness towards members of the organization that traditional Korean culture would dismiss due to rank and status inequalities (2020) (Kocken, 2015).

Workplace – United States

As an American business leader, one must be willing to expand their scope of understanding to incorporate many vital Korean workplace values. Namely, an American in a cross-cultural work environment must be intentional to think about and re-evaluate their approach towards positive reinforcement towards their co-workers. For example, while most Americans would appreciate a manager who takes time to personally assist and individually support their team members' development (Gallup Inc., 2022), a Korean worker would likely be embarrassed, or even feel dishonored, to have an authority figure in an organization "single them out" in a training or professional development context (Lee, 2014). This is primarily because such an action would betray the Korean cultural concept of saving face or "Chaemyeong" (Planet Depos, 2017, para. 11). Since casual leader-subordinate relationships are more common in

American workplace culture, an American manager must be intentional in order to increase their awareness and sensitivity towards these interpersonal concepts which convey an important degree of respect in Korean culture (ADBI, 2007).

Americans in leadership over cross-cultural teams must also be careful to re-align their concepts of charismatic empowerment in the workplace (Shephard, 2020). For example, while Americans might enjoy having a sort of special recognition after accomplishing a daunting task in workplace, Koreans workers will not desire the same sort of spotlight in return (Gallup Inc., 2022) (Shephard, 2020). In Korean workplace culture, leaders are expected to respond to the vigor and excellence of their subordinates through taking on a unique sense of ownership and responsibility unto the larger group – some might even describe this as a leader increasing his/her "devotion" to the collective good in the workplace (Sohn et al., 2016). Professional studies have also suggested that this sort of "social support system" in the workplace is also one of the largest determinants in preventing employee stress and burnout (2016, para. 4). To satisfy this expectation of Korean workers, Americans must be willing to re-evaluate what their commitments to their work teams should look like inside and outside regular work hours. Doing such may be received with greater positivity than a bonus or another transaction of value.

Compare & Contrast

To summarize, business leaders who normally follow traditional management techniques of their native culture will have to sacrifice certain familiarities and adopt unfamiliar practices in order to create greater unity within their workplaces. Adjustments to their operating practices should not be made merely in response to a known cultural difference, but rather in aspiration towards the ideal of the unfamiliar culture present in the workplace. In other words, a Korean or American business leader should not try to solve an issue in their cross-cultural workplace

merely in reference to what they would consider an improved condition, but in aspiration of the entire team's desires. Modifications made to a work environment should always be internationally-minded and made with a vision of how to build the best workplace for everyone in the organization – not merely as accommodation to an unfamiliar segment of the workforce.

Solutions

Having formulated the elementary steps in the managerial journey for cross-cultural managers, this section will describe practical strategies for cross-cultural managers to use in their work settings. Namely, example scenarios will be provided to give context to the tactics discussed, thereby providing the reader with increased managerial utility. Given a manager consistently and intentionally employs these techniques, one could expect drastic cost savings from improved retention and productivity throughout the organization – the later issue costing U.S. businesses $1 trillion annually (McFeely and Wigert, 2019).

Solution #1

For an American business leader with oversight of Korean workers, one simple strategy for a manager to use can include making routine efforts to learn more about one's co-workers on a personal level. Examples of this could include having candid, non-work-related conversations with one's co-workers whenever there is lag time between projects in the office or during travel time on a work-related business trip. Since Korean culture traditionally values leaders who take on a paternalistic personality, Korean workers who notice an American manager investing time and energy into forging meaningful interpersonal connections within his team will more than likely develop an admiration of said leadership figure. This newfound bond of trust and respect can empower both managers and subordinates towards improved communication experiences and greater mutual satisfaction in their work. Naturally, these positive team development

practices will create momentum for continuous improvements in productivity, job satisfaction, and retention from a managerial perspective.

Another incredibly important aspect of workplace dynamics that American managers will need to adjust to for a workplace with a considerable Korean population is the manner in which Americans typically approach employee training and development. Americans, having such an extremely individualistic society, will almost always defer employees to learn how to perform their job functions in a personalized way (APA, 2019). Inevitably, this mindset can reduce the level of involvement from a teacher/mentor in a given teaching or training process, if not completely replacing the existence of a teacher/mentor relationship altogether (2019). Korean culture, on the other hand, seeks to learn the "best way" to complete a task as though there is a more-or-less objectively optimal way of doing something (Lee, 2014, p. 4). In order to discover this ideal pathway for performing one's responsibilities, training and education while being closely accompanied by a talented professional is common (2014). This reality is affirmed by a study from the University of Venice specifically looking at the learning style preferences of Korean students which states that "field dependent individuals are more successful in communicative situations," (Fortuna, 2018, p. 11). Additionally, Korean employees who are made more confident in their work styles as a result of detailed, mentor-involved, training are more likely to be productive in their work environment.

Solution #2

Finally, as a Korean business leader with oversight of American workers, becoming an effective cross-cultural manager will require several cognitive remapping journeys. The first of these journeys will be creating a unique sense of sovereignty or individual recognition in the workplace. For a Korean manager, this understanding will have to come after a suspension of the

traditional, hierarchical perspective that forms the basis for Korean advancement and decision-making practices in the workplace. While a given business leader in an organization may possess ideal characteristics as a Korean manager – including having a sincere care for the collective group in all aspects of his/her employees' lives – if American workers do not feel that they are free and safe to share their recommendations to management, workplace stress and miscommunication will almost certainly become the norm.

Practically speaking, a Korean business leader can overcome this challenge by permitting or even empowering lower-ranking team members to voice their ideas in team meetings and allow said team members to have meaningful contributions towards the business operation. Intentionality to seek out the voice of the process in a given business operation is vital to creating a work environment where individualistic employees can thrive and deliver high value to an organization. To balance this dual need for systemic respect and individual recognition, Korean business leaders may need to create wholly different management feedback structures in order to provide management at all levels – especially positions with managers who have a deeper affinity to Korean leadership styles – a similar empowerment in their voice within the organization. Given this restructuring in management styles, Korean managers can expect higher productivity and reduced absenteeism among American workers who would otherwise feel unrepresented by the business. Obviously, this adjustment will require flexibility from American or other individualistic populations represented in the workplace.

Discussion/Analysis

In any managerial solution to culturally-related work conflicts, a vision of mutual value satisfaction must be constructed and pursued. This requires a manager to be aware of the desires of all involved stakeholders within a cross-cultural team. Upon identifying an ideal direction to

navigate towards as a work group, practical strategies can be employed and tested to improve workplace dynamics.

A process managers can use to structure this managerial development process is the "Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control," or DMAIC method outlined in lean six sigma methodologies (Purdue University, 2019, para. 2). Practically speaking, this method can be a tool for managers to identify the source and extent of cross-cultural issues in the workplace (Krause, 2008). The "Define" stage of the DMAIC in the context of a cross-cultural team would involve a manager or team members observing a key performance area that is consistently failing to meet expectations of primary stakeholders. Examples of this include a high median wait time for a customer service center, percentage of calls that resolve a customer's request, or a similar metric that can serve as a basis for continuous improvement (Six Sigma Daily, 2022). In a cross-cultural team, key metrics could be the number of clarifications required to process a cross-departmental request or number of traceable interactions between team members related to project communication. Through continuous monitoring of these interpersonal dynamics, key insights could arise related to where the most impactful conflicts or sources of conflict reside.

Additionally, a six-sigma methodology, such as the DMAIC, would prompt managers to encourage overcommunication between team members with considerable cultural variation (Krause, 2008). This is primarily because of the preventative benefits that overcommunication can offer, such as co-workers learning their teammate's work preferences and being able to appreciate their teammates (SHRM, 2022). A common problem that can arise when work project outputs and processes continually do not meet worker expectations is a resentment between workers with different cultural characteristics and work styles – something that can be prevented with intentional, conversations between team members.

In all cases, a manager must be able to define the root source of an issue in the workplace and measure its scope and influences. Given an understanding of the problem, managers can then create a dialogue around how to improve the situation and subsequently implement changes. Managers of cross-cultural teams must always be vigilant in being culturally sensitive while suggesting new managerial operating practices, but continuous efforts towards improvement can always create a more productive and valuable workplace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the topic of cross-cultural management is a complicated, and careful subject. Factors to be considered are numerous and require a long-term commitment to learning and growth in order for said insights to be effective and meaningful. Luckily, however, these are always pathways to greater discovery, understanding, and collaboration in the workplace. As Quinn Mills form Harvard Business School excellently describes Asian and American leadership, “[c]ultural differences are important, but primarily as a matter of emphasis,” (Mills, 2005, para. 9). With proper observation and consideration of cross-cultural workers and the environments they develop their workplace constructs, one can leverage said insights to be a more agreeable collaborator and effective negotiator in a Korean-American cross cultural work environment.

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