Plan for today

• Cross-cultural teams
  – Team dynamics
  – Conflict resolution

• Group Exercises

• What is culture?

• Final Exam (preview)
Cross-cultural Conflict Resolution in Teams

The impact of culture on the prevention and resolution of conflict in teams.

One reason that teams fail to meet performance expectations is their paralysis through unresolved conflict. Therefore, it is important to talk about conflict prevention and resolution issues up front. It will go a long way to the enhanced productivity that is expected from a team that is performing well.
Teams Dynamics

Team development phases:
- 'forming'
- 'storming'
- 'norming'
- 'performing'
- (and, often 'adjourning')

A successful (North American) team will:
- be comfortable dealing with conflict
- be committed to resolving disputes close to the source
- solve disputes based on interests (over rights and power)
- learn from experience with conflicts.
Comfort with Conflict

Collectivists, who place a high value on harmony, getting along and 'face' see conflict as a sign of social failure. As a result, comfort levels with conflict situations, especially of an interpersonal nature are low. Conflict is often avoided.

While many individualists also feel discomfort with conflict, it is acknowledged as an inevitable part of life that must be dealt with. However, being in conflict with another is not necessarily something to be ashamed about.
Involvement of Third Parties

Team members from a collectivist culture will probably be more comfortable with a fellow team member addressing a conflict, rather than bringing in someone from the outside.

Individualists, on the other hand, may prefer an impartial outsider, whose relationship to the team is remote, eg. external mediator.

- In western, individualistic cultures mediation has evolved as a process in which the third party does not make decisions for the disputants.
- In collectivist cultures, mediators are often expected to provide counsel, evaluate and advise in an effort to restore harmony.
Expressive or restrained? Some team members may have been socialized to reveal strong emotions and to feel comfortable with prolonged eye contact and touch. Others may be more stoic, and mask emotions with a poker face, use monotone speech and avoid eye contact. Problems arise when value judgments are made on the basis of the different styles.

Directness: Some cultures are very direct. They like to 'cut to the chase' and get frustrated with someone who 'beats around the bush'. Indirect cultures prefer to deal with relational aspects first, and to restore harmony before addressing substantive issues.
Negotiation Style

During negotiations, cultures that prefer a direct communication style will seek direct, face to face communication rather than indirect shuttle diplomacy. There are other cultural factors that have a bearing on the way a team will approach conflict prevention and resolution:
- our relationship to time
- our relationship to rules
- our relationship to venue
Lessons

1. **Know Yourself and Your Own Culture**: Being aware of our own cultures helps us to be open to different ideas. We are able to compare and contrast different approaches without being threatened.

2. **Learn Others’ Expectations**: "expect different expectations."

3. **Check Your Assumptions**: Develop acceptable communication protocols to check out the basis of our perceptions.
   - One approach is to give specific feedback on the behavior you observed.
   - Another variation is to give feedback on how you felt when the specified behavior occurred.
4. Ask Questions: Rather than assuming you know, you ask to clarify why things are being done differently. Open ended questions are generally less threatening, but close ended questions will often eliminate confusion on a particular aspect of culture.

5. Listen: Not all cultures are comfortable expressing feelings in public. A compromise over cultural norms is better than imposition of values by a dominant group.

6. "The Platinum Rule": Treat team members as they would like to be treated rather than the way we like to be treated. It is similar to the difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy is not about "walking a mile in his moccasins" but imagining "how he feels walking in his moccasins."
Attributions

- Robert Paterson
- Barsness and Bhappu
- Nipporica.com
- John Ford
Group Exercises

1. Manager asks the team to come up with one member to give an achievement award. Describe the process whereby you will select the member.

2. One of the team members is leaking information to a rival company. What do the other team members do?

3. Boss’s incompetent nephew is put on your team. What do you do?

4. The manager has asked out your female colleague who is unwilling. The colleague requests your help. What do you do?
FINAL EXAM

("mental programming": individual patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting)

1. Please tell about examples from your own experience of differences in behavior among people, groups, or institutions which differ in their nationalities but are otherwise comparable.
(final exam, cntd.)

2. Please describe any incidents from your own experience of cultural conflict: differences in mental programming of people from different national backgrounds which were misinterpreted by at least one of the actors and led to difficulties in productive collaboration.
3. Please describe any cases from your own experience of cultural synergy: the successful overcoming of differences in mental programming due to different national backgrounds, or even the use of different mental programs as a source of additional strength in a multicultural team.