



## The impact of culture differences on project management in the mining sector (Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Banamuhere kahambu Esther<sup>1</sup>, Yan Feng Chu<sup>2</sup>

College of Economics and Management, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, China

### Abstract

In today's international industries people find themselves working in cross-border project, therefore the work environment is composed of people from different, the understanding of cultures has become important to create a mutual understanding and also crucial for project success. This research aims to explain how culture differences can impact the working environment in a company, and how cultural differences can impact on a project team and its outcome with focus on Mining Company in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Interview of two project managers and four team members with different nationalities were conducted to collect the appropriate information. The empirical findings were analyzed according to the six interviewees and the appropriate literature. The research finds that cultural differences that occur in Mutanda mining company tend to influence communication but does not influence much the project outcome but causes delay on the project. However, when the project team is composed of same nationality or similar culture it usually does not cause delays and a multinational team influence in such a way that employees learn from each other culture.

**Keywords:** culture, project success, project management, diversity

### 1. Introduction

Culture has a significant power to impact on any business activities. In the globalized world today national borders are being wiped off and people move out of their natural environment and overseas.

In situation related to a work environment, culture interactions occur frequently in many different situations; in a non-familiar environment, there may be big cultural challenges such as communication and respect to language, politics, religion and many other misunderstandings can occur due to cultural diversity. Therefore, the diversity found naturally among co-workers of a company requires so much attention from the management to differences so that relationship between employees is kept professional.

### 2. Literature review

Nowadays project managers and skills needed have changed during the last decades, among the requirement skills of a manager is the ability to understand the culture of the people working in his or her team, awareness about multi culture differences helps these managers develop and manage their teams more effectively. The definition of culture is different according to the research fields. Hofstede's (1984) an organization is defined in terms as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group from another". Kernzner (2006) said that "project management role has changed from being a technical manager business manager" one of the components that affect this change is globalization, and that organizations today work not only in their origin country but also overseas. Larson and Gray (2011) said that "project team consisting of employees from different countries and cultures is known as a global project team". He also said that "There is no specific framework for project managers working internationally or with a global project team".

However, project managers often will experience difficult problems in relation to for example, cultural differences, language and work ethics.

Hofstede (no date) explains that cultural differences might vary both between nations and organizations. While cultural differences between nations are based on organizational cultural differences are related to practice and value. Therefore both value and practices are important elements when working in an international company.

Hall (1999) [7] investigated the links between cultural diversity and international activity from a British perspective. He found that British companies adopted an ethnocentric response to the cultural differences that they encountered when working overseas. Mahalingam *et al.* (2005) investigated which institutional or cultural differences had the most significant impacts on global projects. Liu and Fellows (1999) investigated the impact of culture on construction project goals.

Mining industries in Congo have experienced an increased employment rate both local and international workers which as bring some international knowledge and the benefit it can bring to the industry, it's evident that mining in democratic republic of the Congo known as the richest country in the world in natural resource will always have a high demand for labor force in all sectors of this industry.

This research aims to explain how cultural differences have an impact on the environment in the Mutanda mining that employs over 2000 thousand foreigners and around 3000 national workers, a project team and the outcome of a project with focus on the Mining Company in Congo.

### 3. Objectives of the study

#### The research seeks to

- What cultural differences exist in Mutanda Company?
- To what extent does cultural differences influence the communication between the team members?

- How can project manager deal with cultural differences?

**4. Method and research technics**

A case study approach was used for the research and conducted interviews as data collection technique. The case study approach was necessary because the research had to use a qualitative research in order to gain insight into the experience of the interviewees, and descriptive research approach with mostly semi open questions, the sample consisted of four team member and two manager with different cultural and national background the interviews were conducted face to face with the team member and managers, which helped to understand the environment.

For the study of these different data sources, the technic used was content analysis of the interviews, the responses to the interview and questionnaire were subsequently evaluated comparing them between themselves, the analyzed data were divided into categories (positive and negative influences and suggestion on how to deal with the impacts of culture).

The researcher has explored data which has been related to literature and used an inductive approach defined as “a research approach which involves the development of theory as a result of analyzing data already collected” which is mostly chosen to conduct qualitative research with a small sample of subject. As a result, the six interviewees are able to express themselves freely concerning the subject and to reflect on things which they and myself, the interviewer deemed to be important. This methodology also allows a deeper and personal response to questions.

**5. Data analysis**

In this research the appropriate presentation of the data analysis method due to the number of responded is thematic analysis which is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or responded, data collected through interviews was summarized, structured and categorized when analyzed.

**6. Sample and Sampling Technique**

There are two sampling methods that can be used by a researcher, probability or non-probability sampling. “For non-probability sampling, the probability of each case being selected from the total population is not known and it is impossible to answer research questions or to address objectives that requires you to make statistical interference about the characteristics of the population” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill,2009)”. The researcher used non-probability sampling because, as mentioned earlier, it does not require a complete list of the population. Six project interviewees two managers and 4 team member) in the mining industry in the approximately 2000 thousand foreigners and around 3000 national workers.

**▪ Questions structures**

From literature review seven main questions in relation with the topic was asked and description of research were formulated:

1. How does the company relate to cultural differences in an international project management team, are they effective?
2. How is the communication between team members in general in your company?

3. What training is provided for project managers in relation to understand and deal with cultural?
4. The cultural differences interact with a set of individual group, factors and organizational issues in order to establish the impact of diversity in individual and organizational performance (Cox 1994), What cultural differences might have an impact on the project outcome and Why?
5. In addition to the project manager identifying the potential advantages and competitive disadvantages brought to the team by professionals from different cultures, regardless of the cultural orientation, it can be valuable if the manager knows how to handle it. What cultural differences in relation to the project outcome might impact the customers?
6. The project manager must address the cultural difference between team members, to facilitate a productive communication, interpersonal relations, the resolution of problems, team work and synergy required to conceptualize, implement, plan and evaluate project with success( Punzo 1996). What tools and techniques do project managers in the organization use when dealing with cultural differences use?
7. Having the appropriate knowledge about the culture of the team member is a challenge with which almost all the project managers have to deal with on a daily basis. A lack of this knowledge brings problems for the management due to the most varied types of misunderstanding Obikunle (2002). What measures have the organization done to prepare the employees regarding cultural differences?

**7. Result of findings**

The empirical findings consist of the data conducted in the interviews, the data will be presented in relation to each objective and will be separately presented to get a better overview of the data.

**A. Interviewee information**

The aim of this section is to gain an insight into the experience of some project managers, team member and learn about their educational background. They will be introduced in the terms occupation post in the company, experience and origins, six interviews were conducted:

3 weeks period of time of research, each interview took approximately two weeks to fill the answer the questions and two interviews were recorded.

**Table 2:** Interview information

Post	Nationality	Year of experience	Level of experience in multi-national company
Global operation manager	Congolese	11	Very good
Maintenance manager	Australian	7	Fair
Chemist	Zimbabwean	8	Good
Senior IT engineer	Congolese	7	Good
IT engineer	Switzerland	10	Good

**B. Interpretation, analysis and results presentation**

Based on the information collected through the interview in this research and literature review performed, the results shows that the cultural diversity that exists between those few national and foreigner employees are manageable, the data will be presented in thematic method because the data collected through interviews was summarized, structured

and categorized when analyzed. Below are the main opinions of the six interviewees:

**Question 1 answer**

The company has a department that deals with international matters, yes most of the time the problem is resolve as soon as reported

**Question 2 answers**

Senior IT: “The communication is just Fair; Language barrier is the problem because Congo is a French speaking country. Therefore, it is easy to communicate with most of the expatriates with an English background”

The literature concludes that people with different nationalities can be barriers to communication. The dialogue between co-workers can be disturbed by national differences. (Lauring, 2011, pp.231, 241) (Kerzner, 2006, pp. 229-230) Gong (2011, p. 101) state that cultural differences affect communication more frequently due to globalization. “At present, as powerful and insidious force in communication, cultural difference often exists visibly or invisibly in intercultural business” (Gong, 2011, p. 102)

**Question 3 answers**

Global manager: “Unfortunately There isn’t such program for cultural differences, but the manager learn from the environment everyday while relating to other training such as team building, Leadership people, project management”

Auto electrician: “I wish there were some sort of training preparation if not for language but for environmental lifestyle,

Chemist: “none, with time we learn how to react when problem occur”

The six interviewees emphasize on the importance of the

use of their knowledge based on cultural differences and experiences,

**Question 4 answers**

Auto electrician:“ Racial language is mostly forbidden in our environment, swearing words these are the major issues that we have come across”.

Maintenance manager “Poor internal communication due to cultural differences or miscommunications due to language barrier have a huge impact on the project outcome said”

**Question 5 answer**

Chemist: “In the mining company we usually don’t have feedback from our costumer because all our products are exported”

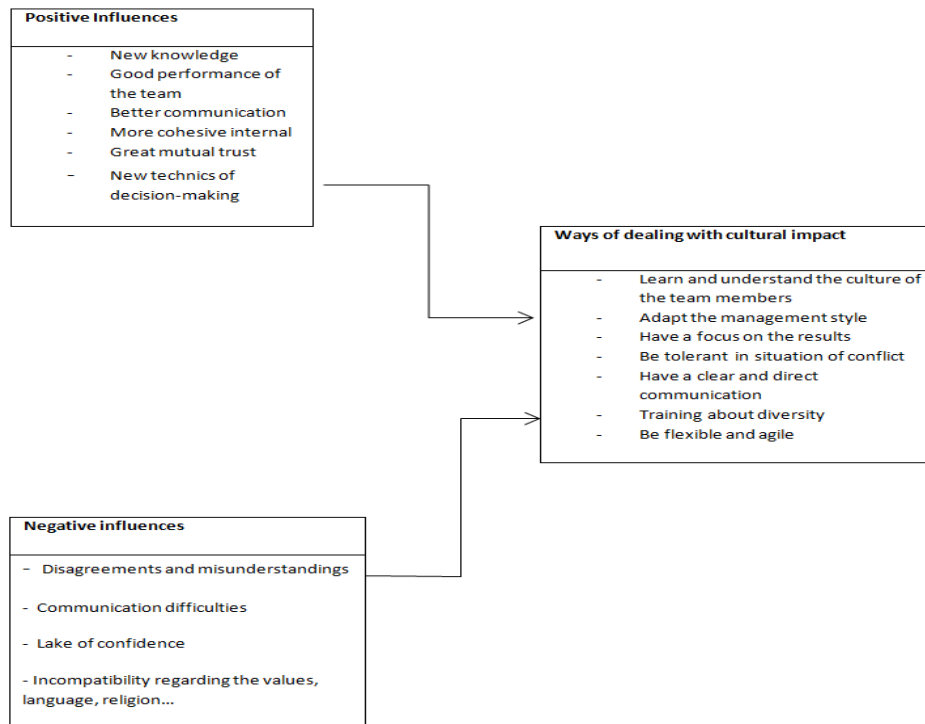
**Question 6 answer**

Global operation management: “Because most of the differences come from the communication issues, the first technique is always to find a translate, the organization informs in advance that the majority of the employees speak French and little English, and learn from each other culture to facilitate the integration said”.

The literature concludes that there is no specific framework for project managers when working internationally (Larson and Gray, 2011, p. 533). However, Knowledge, performance and personal skills are competences that are required for a project manager

**Question 7 answers**

Interviewees: “The organization informs in advance that the majority of the employees speak French and little English and ask as requirement to have basic knowledge of the language”



**Fig 1:** The culture influence and ways to deal with its impact (result of the interpretation of obtained data)

Based on the opinion of the six interviewees of Mutanda company and the literature review the result demonstrate diversity of culture background and cultural gap impact project but for this specific company the main consequence is mostly misunderstanding which leads to project delay, although background can be difference they all agreed that advantages that multicultural working environment brings some positive aspect such as new technics of decision-making and new knowledge.

**C. Effects of difference of culture on management practices**

Previous research studies have related the effects of cultural differences on management practices in a various type of companies, research showed that the effects were either positive or negative. However, how exactly culture impacts management is still a difficult question to answer (Shore and cross 2005).

**Table 2:** Advantages and Disadvantage of multi-cultural team

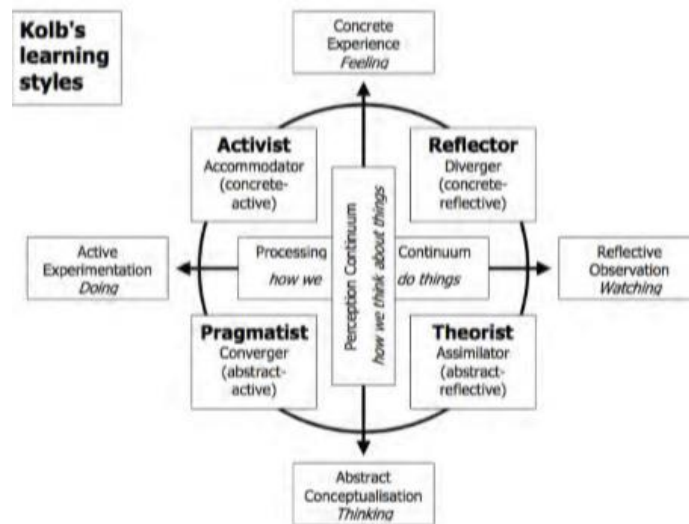
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New environment: experience different culture background</li> <li>▪ Benefice of learning other cultures: learning from another country’s culture                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge sharing (Dulaimi, 2006)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Enhance organizational effectiveness (Blake and Cox, 1991)</li> <li>▪ Innovation: more innovation in a team with diverse culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mismanaged: decrease in productivity, project failure.</li> <li>▪ Control and coordination issues: solve cultural problem when it occurs, maintaining the cohesiveness of the team (Horvath 2001 and Marquardt)</li> <li>▪ Miscommunication: caused by the lack of language basic which causes misunderstanding                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prejudices: different cultural backgrounds may lead sometime to serious conflict</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Culture shock: caused by the inadapation in a cross-culture environment</li> </ul>

**D. Employee adaptation (reflection on learning)**

Kolb has defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb 1984, p.41). Additionally, learning is also defined as an event that people have gained tangible knowledge about anything that they didn’t have before (Mumford, 1999).

In the lice cycle of learning four areas important and are presented by experiencing, acting, reflecting and thinking. The learning life cycle can start in either of these four areas

when a person is doing a specific action and experiencing the action and the effect of the action that was carried out form the person. In 2005(Kolb and Kolb, 2005) stated “concrete or immediate experiences are the basis for reflections and observations. These implications can be actively tested and serve as new experiences”. The four areas of learning cycle as can be observed in the image below, are describe as: Activist, Pragmatist, Theorist, Reflector. The learning cycle focus on activity and experience activity and continue in a logical order.



**Fig 2:** Kolb’s learning styles

The learning sequence can be presented as a life cycle because we learn mostly by and doing thing and thinking about how we have dealt with what we have learned.

**8. Conclusion**

In international company such a mining company there are many factors that have an effect on the success of the project one of the factors is culture differences; therefore, companies have to consider the cultural issues in their daily

operation, having experience in multicultural team projects and being familiar with national culture of the countries in which the companies operates are considered important to overcome cultural differences. Although the sample size was small and reflect the opinions of two managers and four team members, the analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the managers see a direct relationship between cultural differences and project success. Respecting, understanding and accepting different cultures are considered as keys

issues for a successful project management in a multinational company.

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