

A Culturally-Attuned Distributed Decision Making Model of Global Virtual Teams in World Summit on the Information Society

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a rich description of people from diverse cultural backgrounds participating in distributed decision making process using email. The qualitative model was driven based on Adler's (1997) culturally bound decision making model and Kingdon's (1994) public policy making process. Our research question is 'how does the globally distributed decision making process different compared to Adler and Kingdon's proposed theoretical frameworks? This study analyzed the archival email messages (n= 1760 emails) from Civil Society team members in the World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) over the period of six months. The findings help to explain the way people from diverse cultural backgrounds participate in a virtual environment that's consistent with the sequential of Adler and Kingdon. In addition, our study also further exemplifies the dynamic and iterative process of distributed decision making among members of Civil Society.

1. Introduction

One of the growing phenomena in multinational corporations (MNCs) today is the increasing need for globally distributed collaboration with the use of global virtual teams (GVTs). Without a doubt, GVTs have become the prevalent work structure for many multinational corporations. With such a working arrangement, MNCs rely heavily on the use of technology as the main medium not only for communication, but also for other key management functions such as decision making, negotiation, planning, collaboration and many others. Thus, distributed decision making can be one of the most challenging processes to coordinate and manage since it involves people from all parts of the world with different time zones and cultural backgrounds.

Empirical studies that describe or explain the impact of cultural diversity on communicative behaviors for effective decision-making in GVTs are still deficient. The contradictory findings on the impact of culture on GVTs and specifically on the way people collaborate effectively clearly reveal a

gap in the information system literature as well as in the intercultural communication literature. Given the increased need for globally distributed collaboration, this is a serious oversight, which this study at least partially addresses. The fact that Civil Society participants come from all parts of the world and participate in WSIS Geneva using in email as one of the communication mode, the nature of their collaboration is similar to GVTs—a combination of global and distributed. Thus, it is essential to note that effective and efficient decision making is one of the most important aspects of doing business in MNCs. The challenges can stem from differences in decision making styles, time, culture, and technology use and preferences.

The purpose of this paper is to present an in-depth description of the decision making process. In order to illustrate this process, we have developed an empirical distributed decision making model with several new perspectives which are: (1) the decision making process is driven by global virtual team members who originate from diverse cultural backgrounds; (2) they use email as their primary medium of participation; and (3) their goals were to produce two specific documents within specific timeframe.

2. Decision Making Theoretical Models

In exploring the impact of culture on decision making processes, we used a combination of two frameworks (Figure 1.0): (1) cultural contingencies of decision-making (Adler, 1997) and (2) public-policy making processes (Kingdon, 1995). Adler proposes five sequential steps in decision-making that have cultural consequences: problem recognition, information search, construction of alternatives, choice, and implementation. Kingdon's (1995) model identifies four steps: agenda setting, specification of alternatives, choice among specified alternatives, and implementation.

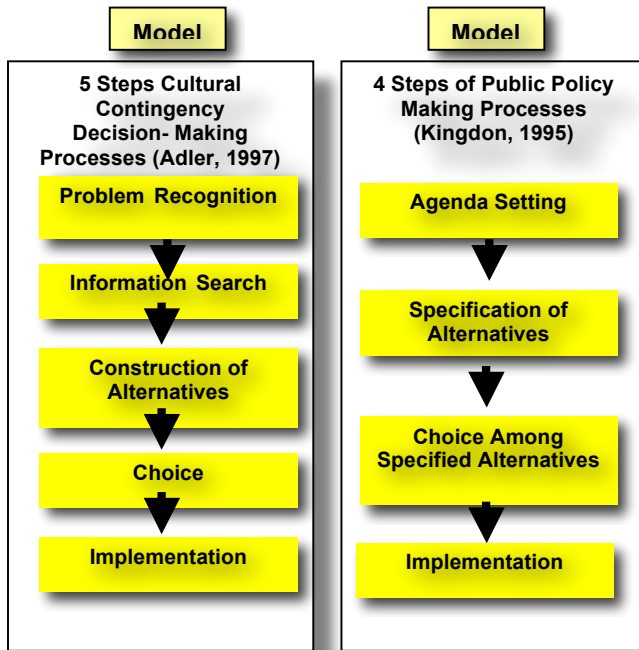


Figure 1.0: Sequential Models of Decision Making Processes (adapted from Adler, 1997 and Kingdon, 1995)

Thus, this framework is useful in understanding the policy-making processes in WSIS Geneva, beginning from the time the team members identify a problem or issue up till the time they reach a solution. Although Adler’s model has five stages and Kingdon’s four, both describe a similar sequence of actions. Adler underlines decision making processes as a crucial managerial task that is culturally bound, where as Kingdon’s model explicates the policy making processes. It is useful to note that in Adler’s model, steps 2 and 3 can be collapsed to correspond with Kingdon’s step 2, thus enabling us to use both models. For purposes of this study, we chose to model out the decision making processes based on the synthesis of Adler’s first four stages and Kingdon’s first three stages and the final stage—implementation is omitted since it is less applicable in the WSIS context (see Figure 1.0 and Figure 2.0).

3. Methodology: A Qualitative Content Analysis Design

We conducted a qualitative content analysis because it is an unobtrusive research technique and well suited for understanding distributed collaborative team behaviors for decision making. The data is used as it occurs in its most naturalistic setting, thus

facilitating external validity. The participation of transnational Civil Society team members was analyzed based on their contributions to decision-making in three areas: (1) problem identification, (2) proposal making including idea generations, giving suggestions or expressing opinions, and (3) solution (Adler, 1997; Kingdon, 1995).

3.1 Data collection procedures: Archival email messages

This study chose to analyze WSIS Geneva because that phase most closely reflected the dynamics of human collaboration in a globally distributed environment. The team members’ primary goal for this phase was to effectively make decisions based on the content of two documents (Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action) including resolving questions such as what principles were to be accepted and included, what problem areas should be looked at for further action plans, and so on. The content of the archived email messages covered a broad range of topics, from administrative information to technical issues, from questions of translation to specific wording of sentences in the two documents.

3.2 Data analytic framework

In this study, we focused on effective participation only in three stages of decision-making: (1) problem identification, (2) proposal making including idea generations, giving suggestions or expressing opinions, and (3) solution. In order to content analyze the decision making process, we used deductive coding based on the above mentioned theoretical models. The dimensions and codes were discussed with others in the research team and with professional colleagues, resulting in further modifications for clarity. For instance, initially, this study identified four stages based on Kingdon’s (1995) and Adler’s (1997) models. After the preliminary coding phase, the decision making stages were reduced to only three as abovementioned. The stage called responses and deliberation was integrated with the other three main stages because it was observed that team members continuously provided responses that became a cyclical feedback that fed into the three key stages. Thus the stage called ‘responses and deliberation’ was no longer considered one stage by itself. Instead, it plays the role as a feeder to the overall process.

Following the modifications and refinement mentioned above, the final decision making category had three codes. This resulted in a relatively parsimonious code scheme but at the same time provided sufficient richness to understand the

phenomenon being studied. Categories were also designed to be mutually exclusive (Neuendorff, 2004). These revisions were made in order to improve the way the data were to be analyzed.

3.3 Intercoder reliability testing

This study conducted two stages of inter-coder reliability testing. Neuendorf (2004) suggested that pre-testing of the coding scheme should undergo intercoder reliability test. Upon arriving at reliability at this stage, the coding scheme can be considered final because the dimensions and categories have been refined and clarified. In the first phase, during the pilot stage, the coders were instructed to apply the preliminary coding scheme to a sample data set of 100 messages. The level of inter-coder reliability agreement was 75%, an acceptable level.

In the second phase, after the coding scheme was revised, the coders assessed the dataset according to the different aspects, decision-making, and cultural orientation. Each coder independently coded the data. Subsequently they assessed their rate of agreements. With several training sessions, the intercoder reliability increased to 92%. With this percentage, then the coders discussed the differences, and as a result they resolved all confusions and misunderstanding about the codes that they applied.

4. Findings

The transnational Civil Society members who are involved in the decision making processes comprised of approximately 47 countries and it was further refined to three different categories of participation which are highly active, moderately active, and least active. The countries that are listed as the most active participants comprised of France, Switzerland, Canada, USA, UK, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Argentina and Japan. The participation of the GVT members can also be grouped into four main regions which are Asia, South America, Africa and North America. Basically, the composition of the GVT members is largely heterogeneous in nature.

In this study, we are interested to explore the process of distributed decision making processes in which the team members originate from many parts of the world. Hence, our findings provide a rich description of how the process is driven and how different it is from the face-to-face decision making as illustrated by Adler and Kingdon (refer to Figure 1.0). Zakaria and Cogburn (2010) have clearly shown that they are cultural issues impacting distributed decision making processes in terms of the mannerism, strategies, and approaches people employed.

Based on the empirical data, the findings indicated there are three distinct sequential stages of decision making similar to what was illustrated by Adler and Kingdon. In addition, we found that Civil Society teams were also engaged in a more dynamic and iterative process in which the responses and deliberation occurred continuously. The stages comprised of four main stages (see Figure 2.0). Each of the stages used a different name than the adapted models to reflect the exact activities that took place which are: (1) problem identification, (2) proposal making, (3) solution and (4) responses and deliberation. Although we used a different name but these three sequential stages are consistent with the models adopted.

The contribution made on a distributed model is that there is another dynamic process observed which was supported by a fourth stage called responses and deliberation. This stage underpinned the other three activities because every response received was fed into the decision making process until a viable solution was achieved. This stage is not clearly stated in the model by Adler and Kingdon but was evident in our analysis of the email behaviors.

In the first stage, one or more team members would state a problem, followed by other team members responding to the problem by proposing solutions. Most of the time team members came up with many ideas and suggestions on how to solve the problems faced or how to improve a draft document. At other times, team members simply acknowledged problems without offering any ideas or solutions – for example, “I do experience the same problem” or “I agree with your sentiment.” Under rare circumstances, a problem was immediately resolved because a leader took independent or unilateral actions without going through the proposal stage.

For the second stage, once proposals were made by the team members, the proposals received reactions or feedback from other team members; sometimes this generated more ideas and alternative solutions. If people were supportive of the proposed language in the draft document, then they would endorse the draft document. But if some team members did not agree with the suggested proposals, then counter proposals would be presented in a search for more viable solutions. This stage was often a long process as team members took the time to really look at the document and then provide thoughtful suggestions on how to improve it. Sometimes, however, the process was shortened because the document needed to be finalized within time constraints. In this iterative process, the multitude of responses received eventually led to the best solution that team members could offer.

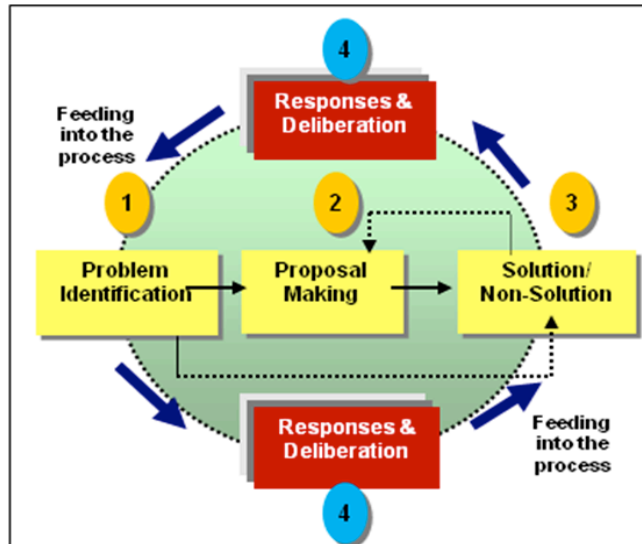


Figure 2.0: Empirical Model of a Culturally Attuned Distributed Decision Making Processes

For the third stage, a solution took one of two forms. When team members faced a problem, the solution took the form of actions to remedy the situations or issues faced. For example, team members requested and received answers that clarified their concerns, or action was taken by the authoritative people (like the Bureau or secretariat) to provide facilities needed. Sometimes alternative solutions were proposed when team members were not satisfied with the offered solution. If there is an agenda to be met, like providing comments to a draft document or selecting or nominating speakers, then a different set of solutions is achieved. For such agenda driven issues, the solution came in the form of endorsements. The more and the faster endorsements were received, the easier for the Civil Society to reach consensus. For example, in the case of a speaker's selection, team members went through many cycles of nomination and counter-nomination; the solution was achieved when the name of the speaker was finalized. In some cases, despite team members' best efforts, proposals were made and suggestions were given, but no solution was achieved; the decision-making process failed.

As a conclusion, this empirical qualitative-driven model showed that there was an additional process that emerged such as the responses and deliberations which occurred continuously. The model developed illustrated a cyclical process within the sequential stages as suggested by Adler and Kingdon's models above-mentioned. More importantly, we also concluded that with the use of technology, team members were not at a disadvantage or denied the ability to participate at a distance. The efficiency and

effectiveness of such processes can thus be facilitated if the technology provides ample opportunity to do so. The implication of this finding to multinational companies therefore is to develop strategic ways to manage the challenges of cultural differences that exists in a distributed environment, particularly when decision making process is essential for cross-cultural collaboration. The following sub-sections provide descriptions of the decision making process through verbatim examples from the archival email messages.

4.1. Problem Identification

According to Adler (1997), the process of decision-making begins with problem recognition, which I refer to as "problem identification." The findings showed that there were two types of situations that took place during this early stage of decision-making: (1) Civil Society team members discussed their problems and concerns, and (2) Civil Society team members discussed an agenda that was clearly identified—for example, based on a list of problems or topics to be addressed. After a problem was brought up by a member, other team members responded by either providing their ideas and opinions, or making suggestions. Some responses were simply feedback or comments about the problem identified, but some were more concrete suggestions on how to solve the problem. It is important to note that at this stage, Civil Society team members only responded to problems that were identified by others. If a problem was not clearly raised or mentioned in the email, then the issue could not be discussed. Thus, this initial stage is critical because unless and until people identify the problem, a solution could not be achieved. The findings also showed that agenda driven discussions seemed to make the decision making process within and among the Civil Society team members go in a more directed manner and spurred discussed more often.

This study showed that the problem identification instances were highest in November (n=143), and December (n=103). This pattern is consistent with the overall pattern of Civil Society participation in WSIS Geneva. Overall, the central topic of discussion throughout the six months was the language of the two primary document, Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. However, there was also a distinct agenda in some of the months. For example, in July (n=87) team members were concerned about the setup of the infrastructure such as availability of computers, Internet and wireless connections, working space and room, and the structure and mechanism of the Civil Society. In November, team members were more concerned about nomination of the speakers as well as the time slot, and in December, they focused on

finalizing the language of the document as well as selecting their speaker in order to be fully prepared for the Summit that took place in mid-December 2003.

Problems that Civil Society team members identified in WSIS Geneva include:

- a. Infrastructure – technology issues of connectivity, wireless, and logistics such as meeting room and working space;
- b. Language – the problem of using English in email, translations, and the use of other languages such as Spanish, French, or other UN languages;
- c. Structure – the mechanism, organization, and coordination of civil society;
- d. Resources – giving out badges or limited passes for entrance to precoms’ meetings and WSIS;
- e. Coordination – problems in coordinating the efforts within civil society in terms of sending the comments of the document, and datelines to submit comments.

Additionally, Civil Society team members were engaged in agenda-driven discussions in respect of: (1) language of the two drafted documents, and (2) nomination of speakers (speakers are team members chosen by consensus to represent Civil Society team members in the Summit). The main goal was to influence these two documents. The findings indicated that a member in a leadership role often took up the task of “agenda setting” based on her or his own initiative. The leader would set a certain agenda and request attention and/or action from the Civil Society team members. For example, Benjamin clearly set an agenda by asking for comments for a draft document as follows:

All¹,
Attached is the latest draft of the Civil Society priorities document for Paris. Please send comments by Friday to ct@wsis-cs.org.
We must produce the final document by the weekend.
BI

The data also showed that in certain situations, people responded to the agenda at different times. Some agendas generated many responses while others did not get a single response; this seemed to depend on the nature of the agenda and whether it caught team members’ attention. For the three months that generated the highest number of messages, the team members responded more vigorously because there

¹ Typographical or grammatical errors in the messages have not been corrected because the excerpts were taken directly from the dataset. The only exception is that when messages include organizational names or other identifying information, all of that specific information will be removed or left blank in the messages as quoted in this study.

was a deadline in the agenda (for example, language for the drafted documents or problems regarding the infrastructure).

Adler (1997) suggests that once people recognize a problem the next stage is “information search,” a question of how people find and gather information to solve the problem. In WSIS Geneva, this stage was obvious during the iterative response to and deliberation on the problem or agenda, so in this study the “information search” stage is actually embedded in the response and deliberation stage. Therefore, I did not explicitly differentiate the information search stage in the empirical model.

4.2 Proposal Making

The second stage is called proposal making in which team members contributed to a wide range of ideas and made a large number of inputs. In this stage, team members first presented their proposals, followed by dynamic behaviors of proposing, receiving responses, criticizing, and deliberating, all of which exemplify what Adler (1997) and Kingdon (1995) referred to as “constructing or specifying alternatives.” This stage is crucial because the numerous responses ease the process of shaping constructive proposals in an attempt to find a solution. At any point in time, many people presented several options or alternatives. Then, team members discussed and deliberated on the ideas and suggestions at length. Similar to the problem identification stage, there were also times where ideas or proposals received no response or minimal response, while others received a very contentious response or highly supportive comments. Again, the responses depended largely on the types of proposals or ideas generated, whether it was acceptable or non-acceptable, viable or non-viable to follow through by the team members.

The proposal making activities arose from the problems discussed or agenda set in the plenary listserv. When the team members began to respond to the problems or agenda, they often presented ideas in the form of a proposal. Following are examples of the many proposals made as well as the responses received in light of the two crucial agendas:

a) Language to be included in the document

Proposal Made:

Dear All,
We (-----) propose to include at the end of the section: "Literacy, Education, and Research" next statement:
[----- should become "backbones" for nation-wide promotion and distribution of science and education information covering all categories of inhabitants. Governments under must support them continuous programs

of creating and maintaining research and education resources and services.]
Best regards,

Dr.Veache Siren

Response received:

Dear Dr Siren

I'd just suggest that these networks also commit themselves in the inclusion and support of DCs Education networks (as far as there are or will be in a foreseeable future) and Institutions such as Universities, highschools and specially technical (Engineer) schools.

Why not stress particularly those institutions pertaining to the ICT sector? This would be a positive act of solidarity between the North and the South (between "haves" and "have nots")

Regards
Jaquelin Floss

b) Nomination of speaker and time slot at the Summit event.

Overall, the responses to the proposals made by Civil Society team members were encouraging. The responses were given in a continuum—from positive through neutral to negative. On the extreme end of the positive scale, people were very supportive of the proposal made and they fully backed up the suggestions and ideas given. For example, the following quotation from Adam indicated a positive response for a nominated speaker:

I strongly support the idea that the name of Mrs. Farah would be suggested to Secretary General Kofi Annan as well as to the president of the PrepComs and ITU for addressing the General Assembly of the WSIS on behalf of the CS.

Or this response from Sandy

Thank you for your comments regarding my prior message! I think Adrian is addressing one important procedural issue that we should take the decision making power to nominate for speaking slots. First, that should be sorted out. And basically fully agree with Alim that the nomination of Mrs. Farah for a key speaker could have very strong message itself. And IF we decide to use the speaking slots for our strategy, I fully support that idea.

4.3 Solution

The last stage is called “solution.” Adler and Kingdon called this stage “choice.” In particular, the Civil Society teams during this period were working towards nominating speakers for the Summit and

finalizing language for the documents, decisions which all required endorsements and consensus. Once most of the Civil Society members came forward to endorse a draft document, a consensual decision could be reached about the language of the document. There were several levels of consensus building. On one hand, Civil Society members totally agreed with the language of the document and thus enthusiastically endorsed the document:

- a) Thanks everyone who supported construction of this document. It is constructive, positive and diplomatic but clear! -----² endorses it! Good luck in Paris!
- b) Please include the endorsement of ----- Venezuela. Thanks.

On the other hand, some people sent an endorsement with reservations:

- a) Dear Benjamin,
I can endorse the final version (still with some reservations concerning the ICT Governance para :-() on behalf of the following institutions:
- Global Society Dialogue
- Global Contract Foundation
- International Association for Media and Communication Research
I am accredited under "-----". That is, when you collect primarily "registered" observers, you can add also "-----"

Best wishes, thanks and admiration for the work and see you Tuesday.

Wutz

At other times, people could not endorse a document because they disagreed so strongly with the language:

- a) All, Participants agreed to remove the last paragraph of the Governance section. The latest document is attached, without endorsements.
- b) Dear Sandra and Benjamin,
----- cannot endorse the document entitled "Civil society priorities Document" even under its last issue (07.12.03) for several obvious presentation and content reasons. It's a pity for that good and intensive job done (mainly by yourself and Sandra I suppose), which I recognize and therefore thank both of you. Nevertheless, I'm sure we could reach an agreement if our main contribution is taken in account for a further final issue of that kind of document. Unfortunately neither of you will attend the Paris Meeting, and as for me, I can't be present at the first day. But I'll continue as usually my job in the CS CT working group during the three days left in order to re-integrate into the Action Plan these goals ----- considers as its main ones, namely for bridging the N/S communication divide.

² In order to protect confidentiality, the names of the organizations were stripped from the message even though data were taken from a public archive.

This final stage was the most challenging because consensus did not mean unanimous decisions. In fact the team members debated this issue in the listserv, revealing that there was a misconception among them on the meaning of consensus. As one of the team members clearly stated:

First, just to say that consensus is not synonymous with unanimity: it means that in the spirit of achieving a common position, there are no overriding objections. However, concerning your point, it has been clear from the outset that documents produced by the Content and Themes group express the consensus of those who sign them and not an overall consensus of civil society organizations attending the WSIS.

In other situations, Civil Society team members failed to achieve a solution because the problem was beyond the team members' control or capacity to solve it (for example, a problem with infrastructure). These kinds of problems had to be taken up by a higher authority, for example the Bureau or Secretariat. Finally, in rare instances, the solution was achieved without going through the typical stages because some of team members voluntarily and unilaterally created a solution to the problem:

Dear Friends,

As you know the WSIS intersessional is only days away, from July 15-18 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France. This communication is to inform you that Timothy Rhodes and Rince Plum will be working with the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with ----- (CONGO) during the intersessional meeting in Paris to report and analyze the negotiations as they are happening. News, reports, and links to relevant civil society documents will be provided at: <http://www.prepcom.net/wsiv>. (This site will go live late tomorrow, Tuesday 8 July, if you want a preview.)

We know that many groups are not able to send representatives to the intersessional meeting. We are committed to providing you as much information and news as possible on how the negotiations are proceeding, as well as providing a website where your views, proposals and papers can be shared. Please send any relevant documents to us at timothy.rhodes@ngocongo.org or rince.plum@ngocongo.org and we will see that they are uploaded to the site. During the intersessional, Rince Plum can also be reached at his French mobile number: +36-1254-56-7342.

If you are planning on being at the Intersessional and can volunteer to take notes for a particular session, that would be very appreciated, particularly if you can write in French or Spanish. So be sure and bookmark www.prepcom.net/wsiv and check back every day!

In Peace,
Timothy Rhodes

Rince Plum

5. Discussions: Distributed Decision Making Process for GVTs

Empirical research has shown that MNCs frequently and commonly use email as their communication medium, more so than any other CMC technologies (Kiesler and Sproull, 1992; Shachaf, 2008). Interestingly, the same is true for global virtual teams such as the civil society networks (Cogburn, 2005). As a lean communication medium, email technology poses several problems for intercultural communication, such as lack of visual cues, low contextual values, lack of capability for immediate feedback, lack of personalization, and reduced language variety (Daft and Lengel, 1986). These limitations matter because body language, gestures, tone of voice, and facial expression (collectively known as social and non-verbal cues) are critical elements of communication in certain cultures (Hall, 1976).

The use of CMC among people with different cultural values can facilitate or impede collaboration and communication in global virtual teams (Amant, 2002; Olaniran, 1994, 2001; Lee, 2002; Powell and Piccoli, 2004; Setlock and Fussel, 2004). Early scholars of CMC suggested that these tools are ineffective in several areas (e.g. establishing online relationships, building trust, producing effective communication, and expressing oneself or receiving feedback, scientific collaboration) due to the absence of contextual, visual, and aural cues (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Kiesler, Siegal, McGuire, 1984, Walsh et.al 2000). For example, electronic mail (email) is referred to as a "lean media" because it relies purely on textual elements. For people whose intercultural communication styles rely heavily on non-verbal or paralinguistic cues (tone of voice, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures) to interpret the information they receive, lean media was believed to pose a significant barrier to effective communication. With the range of cultural values, managing this new form of collaboration and communication in a distributed environment using CMC becomes more challenging and intense. These challenges arise because, as Hall (1976) asserted, high context cultures prefer non-verbal cues whereas email lacks this key feature.

However, later views of CMC challenged the notion of reduced social cues (Joinson, 2001; Lea and Spears, 1991; Walther, Loh & Granka, 2005). They argued that lean media actually encourages participation by providing anonymity, removing the necessity for socially accepted responses in expressing opinions and maintaining identity, increasing the

ability to control information about oneself, and offering a more liberated self-disclosure.

Moreover, it was also found that when people communicate using CMC—a reduced face-to-face encounter and lack of social presence, the effect of group polarization is reduced. In essence, people are able to voice out their opinions more independently and with more novel arguments (Sia, Tan and Wei, 2002).

People whose intercultural communication styles rely on non-verbal cues to interpret meanings normally dislike confrontation. When expressing their opinions, they prefer a harmonious and friendly atmosphere in order to save face and avoid humiliation or insulting situations (Ting-Toomey, 1999). However, very few studies have investigated whether CMC provides such individuals a comfortable way to be expressive and opinionated (Olaniran, 2001, Pekerti & Thomas, 2003).

On the other end of the spectrum, people whose intercultural communication styles value verbal communication feel comfortable using email because it is consistent with their normal patterns of communication. They readily use words to express their feelings and opinions in this text-based medium. Again, this perspective has not been adequately addressed in the study of culture and use of GVTs (Olaniran, 2001; Shachaf, 2008; Zakaria and Cogburn, 2010), a gap which this paper attempts to address.

Based on the findings, it is evident that in a distributed decision making model there is a cyclical or loop process illustrating a more dynamic and iterative discussions that take place in between each of the sequential step-by-step decision making process. The dynamic process results from the participation of multicultural team members with many decision making styles. With such diverse and distributed participation, no one style dominates the process but rather a convergence and divergence form of participation is required to make the process a success. Thus, when decision making involves people with different cultural values, the model presents a more challenging and complicated process that may take a longer time than the sequential model suggested by Adler and Kingdon due to the iteration.

Although this study offers a rich description of the ways people participate using email, this study also recognized that there are other possible factors that contribute to the Civil Society's contribution in decision making process. One of the most important is the motivational factor. Civil Society belongs largely to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the nature of such organizations is based on the concept of volunteerism, which means that people who were actively participating had high motivation and willingness.

It is also important to realize that the vast majority of Civil Society works on an impromptu basis, recognizing a need or feeling it whether it is necessary or not, and without any coercion or tangible reward. For example, in the findings, there were several discussions about the problem of language where translation services were critically needed, and on many occasions, responses such as 'I volunteer to translate the document' or 'I am willing to do the translation' were evident. People seemed to contribute their expertise where, when, and to whom it was required without any monetary recompense. In fact, in the email listserv, it was made very clear to the team members that the translation job or assignment taken by anybody would not be paid, thus it is purely based on 'volunteerism.'

In addition, some people were seen as more generous and their behaviors and actions can be described as 'altruistic' as opposed to 'self-centered' (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Some of the key contributors to the decision making processes often seem to openhandedly offer help and services in terms of technological problems, resources, procedural matters, and many more. They were willing to share information and knowledge beyond what was sought out by other team members during their participation in the Civil Society Plenary listserv.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study have many important implications for MNCs and international organizations, particularly with respect to managing cross-cultural collaboration in the distributed environment. For example, organizations need to understand that the process of decision making can be time consuming. Some of the factors that will contribute to the time factor are geographical distance and reliance on computer mediated technology such as email. In our study, the Civil Society team members are heavily relying on email to participate in the WSIS.

A similar situation can exist in the MNC setting when global virtual teams are wide spread across the worlds. Technology is considered as a convenient tool of communication and collaboration; hence the participation in distributed decision making processes will be bounded by the time differences, geographical distance, and cultural diversity as highlighted in this study.

Specifically, the lessons learned from this study have several other important implications for effective decision making process such as ensuring higher cultural awareness and sensitivity, teaching appropriate behaviors for overcoming cultural

differences in globally distributed collaboration, developing intercultural online communication competencies, and designing culturally-sensitive IT applications for effective electronic communication. All of these practical contributions serve the goal of enabling people to collaborate effectively at a distance using a socio-technical infrastructure (Kling, 1996) that is compatible with their multiple cultural values.

It is essential to understand decision making process is important in any organizations. Thus, the key implication of this distributed decision making process to MNCs is that there is a crucial need to manage several challenging factors like different patterns of time orientation, geographical distance, and divergent decision making styles that stem from distinctive cultural values of the GVT members.

Decision making process will be made and will be effected by many factors. Decision making process has been discussed in the face-to-face environment. Yet the way people make decision in a virtual environment is less been discussed or understood. What is efficient and effective may no longer be the same. Inherently GVTs is crafting new ways of working that need to be managed so that people can work efficiently at a distance. No cultural and time barriers can provide challenges that are too difficult to handle. Thus, future research should aim at understanding to test the qualitative model so that predictive values can be obtained on effective decision making processes.

For future studies, there are several ways we can advance with the empirical model. First, it would be useful to test this culturally attuned model of distributed decision making processes to further understand how cultural values can impact the processes. With such understanding, MNCs can use strategic ways to overcome the barriers that exist with different patterns of behaviors affected by factors such as time orientations, diverse communication styles, decision making styles and cultural values. Second, we can understand the degree of cultural impacts on the effectiveness of decision making process in order to build a culturally sensitive IT applications that address the need for better decision making mechanism when GVTs operate at a distance.

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