

## Cultural Competence for Building a Confident Innovation Space

Diversity and distance have both positive and negative effects on innovation. Culturally competent leaders can create a confident innovation space, and enhance creativity

**Diversity and Innovation.** Innovation today involves cooperation from people from many different countries and professions. Teams are characterized by an increasing level of diversity, which is recognized as a key source of creativity, making firms smarter and more ready to create new business opportunities.

However, diversity can also trigger biases and conflicts, reducing the productivity of the team. Differing cognitive schemes, due to different cultures, may limit members' capacity to work effectively together and undermine their capability to share common goals and create a unique identity. When team members do not respect diversity, and a pluralism of ideas doesn't emerge from effective dialogue among different cultures, the team is not truly multicultural, but only a combination of different cultures: pluralism is then replaced by homologation, with negative effects on innovation.

**The effects of culture on innovation.** Culture affects every step of innovation. Culture influences the generation of ideas, because it reduces or reinforces individual awareness of creativity. It also impacts individual's inclination to accept creativity training. Culture affects the transformation of ideas into innovations, because it influences the way people manage knowledge, and their inclination to share knowledge. Finally, culture impacts the implementation of innovations, because it has an effect on the inclination to protect innovations and the way they are introduced on the market.

**Cultural competence in team building.** Team leaders who are aware of the underpinnings of culture on creativity can work to shape a context in which members feel their ideas are valuable and welcome. If people feel their ideas are valuable, they will be more confident in their capability to find creative solutions.

People are creative if they are confident in their ideas and in the possibility to transform them into new products. Self-confidence depends not only on individual values, but also on the collective culture and social legitimization individuals get in their team: while some cultures value innovation and divergent thinking, other cultures prefer to keep harmony through homogenization and do not encourage the expression of individual, different ideas.

Therefore, team leaders need to create a context in which members are empowered to express their values connected with innovation, such as stimulation and self-direction. Leaders also need to be aware of their own perceptions of unexpected behaviors of team members. If the leader sets this tone, team members will feel trusted, and will be more inclined to respect others.

**Cultural competence in critical times.** Cultural competence becomes even more crucial when external shocks, such as COVID-19, increase the distance among people. In many cultures, such as in Latin or South-East Asian countries, people value interpersonal relationships and contacts with their colleagues, and they need to learn how to work in a new virtual environment. In high context-cultures, communication is only partially explicit, and it's enriched by implicit elements, such as face expressions, body language, the level of self-disclosure. When team members work at a distance, many of these elements are not easily transferred, making mutual understanding more difficult. ICT gives the idea that everything is easy and fast, but if people do not understand each other, miscommunication and conflict easily arise. A confident innovation space requires a leader who takes into account these communication difficulties, and prepare members to work within this context.

### Literature

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