

Review of research on national cultures' influences on achieving efficient and innovative product realization processes for global collaboration

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Abstract

Increased globalization provides challenges as well as opportunities and requires new ways of developing cross-national collaboration within functional groups, processes, and projects in product development and industrialization processes. The objective of this paper is to review of relevant research on national culture issues related to global multicultural collaborations in product realization processes. Findings are reported regarding 'highlighted national cultures', 'cultural challenges' and 'key findings'. The results show that that literature highlights important cultural dimensions influencing product realization processes where specifically power distance, individual vs. group identity, and relation to time and environment are considered key culture factors as they have impact on innovative knowledge transfer process. However, there is a potential to further explore culture research in this field. Further research is suggested to address how to utilize, integrate and operationalize culture research into a wide span of business practices in different phases of product realization processes.

Keywords: Innovative work systems, efficient product realization, international collaboration, national cultures, organisational performance

1 Introduction

As product life cycles decrease, the window of opportunity for new products decreases (Schuh et al., 2006). This puts high demands on an efficient overall product realization process. Along with decreasing life cycles strong global competition challenges companies to raise their processes' efficiency, innovation level and capacity to manage frequent changes in products, processes, systems, and organizational structures. To meet these challenges, companies employ various models, methods and technological solutions to manage and improve work processes, communication, learning, and management, e.g. Lean Production (Liker, 2004). However, despite support from technology, methods and models, collaborative work needs to become more efficient.

The product development and industrialization process consists of a number of phases: concept development, product planning, product/process engineering and production ramp-up (Wheelwright & Clark, 1992). This requires collaboration between functional groups, processes, and projects which increasingly takes place across national cultural barriers, e.g. within a function or with product design, production and suppliers found in different countries. This paper focuses on the parallel work processes for product and production development, with the overall aim of increasing efficiency and the innovation level in the product development and the industrialization process. The principal idea targeted is that efficient collaboration among people representing different national cultures is a key factor for achieving innovative, flexible and competitive organizations. Not only is there a great potential in avoiding problems and misunderstandings, but a multi-cultural work environment can also enhance quality and innovativeness (Page, 2008). Phillips et al. (2009) further show in their research that homogeneous groups feel better about the group process but they don't perform as well as diverse groups.

The objective of this paper is to provide a base for future research by presenting a review of relevant research on national cultures which are related to multicultural collaborations in product realization processes. The review highlights specific challenges, opportunities, and main findings in earlier research.

The paper is organized as follows: Chapter 2 gives an overview of national culture research and terminology. In chapter 3 the research review methodology is described and in chapter 4 review results are shown. Finally in chapter 5 and 6 the results are discussed and conclusions presented.

2 Dimensions of national cultures' characteristics

Cultural characteristics can be attributed to many different groups of people: e.g. based on gender, religion, or organization. This paper concerns culture differences on a national level. Hofstede et al. (2010) define culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another”. Based on empirical studies, models have been developed and below, briefly shown, are the four most referenced models that describe cultural differences.

- Hofstede et al. (2010) uses six dimensions to characterize culture.
- The World Values Survey using two dimensions (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).
- Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997) with seven dimensions.
- The GLOBE project's model has nine dimensions (House et al., 2004).

Each of these sets of dimensions presents a complete model of world's cultural variations. A comparison reveals differences in focus and dimensions used, but also major agreements. Table I gives an overview and abbreviations for all cultural dimensions. Below and in Table II, a suggestion for a grouping of the dimensions is presented. The grouping is based on each dimension's main aspects and the grouping should be seen as an indication of major similarities.

Table I. Abbreviations of cultural dimensions used in this paper.

Abbreviations of cultural dimensions			
AS	Assertiveness	LTO	Long term orientation
AvA	Achieved vs. ascribed status	MAS	Masculinity (life quantity) vs. femininity (life quality)
AvN	Affectivity vs. neutrality	PDG	Power distance
COG	In-group collectivism	PDI	Power distance
COI	Institutional collectivism	PO	Performance orientation
FO	Future orientation	SEI	Survival vs. self-expression of individuals
GE	Gender egalitarianism	SRC	Traditional vs. secular-rational community
HO	Humane orientation	SvD	Specific vs. diffuse
IDV	Individualism	SvS	Sequential vs. synchronic time
IvC	Individualism vs. communitarianism	UAG	Uncertainty avoidance according to GLOBE
IvO	Inner vs. outer directed	UAI	Uncertainty avoidance according to Hofstede
IvR	Indulgence vs. restraint	UvP	Universalism vs. particularism

Table II. Grouping of dimensions that characterizes national cultures, to indicate similarity: Hofstede et al. (2010), Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997), GLOBE (House et al., 2004), and World Value Survey (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

Groups of cultural dimension	Hofstede	World Value Survey	Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner	GLOBE
Power distance	PDI			PDG
Individual vs. group identity	IDV		IvC	COI, COG
Indulgence vs. restraint	IvR	SRC, SEI		
Relations and Motivation	MAS		AvA	GE, PO, AS, HO
Uncertainty Avoidance	UAI			UAG
Relation to time and environment	LTO		SvS., IvO	FO
Specific vs. Diffuse			SvD	
Showing Emotions			AvN	
Universalism			UvP	

Note: Empty cells indicate that the category is not directly focused by any dimension, but probably considered to some extent within other dimension(s).

Individual vs. group identity (IDV, IvC, CIG, COI): Degree to which people see themselves function more as a community or individuals. China is a highly collectivistic society where individual self-image is based on belonging to groups in which taking care for each other and also affecting promotions and hiring. Commitment is first to the group, then to the organization. In Sweden individuals first take care of themselves and relations in social network are loose. Relationships between employers and employees are based on mutual advantage, while hiring and promotion decisions are mainly based on merit. Also, management is of individuals.

Power distance (PDI, PDG) is high in e.g. China, India, France, and Belgium. Inequality is accepted and expected, so people should not aspire beyond their rank. In Sweden, power is decentralized with low hierarchies, equal rights and coaching leaders that facilitate and empower experience. Attitude towards managers is informal with direct communication, and control is disliked. Related to this is also the way the company is viewed: as a group of people working, or as a system providing functions with help of people.

Specific vs. Diffuse (SvD) is about how far we get involved. In a specific culture like Sweden, France, Germany, and Belgium, ones can go directly to the point- i.e. products, contract, problems, while in a diffuse one like China, India, and Japan, it takes time to get to know the persons involved, history, and contexts.

Relations and Motivation (MAS, GE, AvA, PO, HO, AS) includes dimensions which direct personal way of working, including equality, respect, humanity, and results orientation. Sweden is the world's most “feminine” culture, where people value equality, solidarity, life quality and life/work balance are important, and decisions are made by consensus and everybody involvement. Status is something that must be proven and achieved. On the contrary, China is a masculine society – driven by competition and success, sacrificing family and leisure for work, and status is naturally ascribed from birth, age, gender or wealth.

Indulgement vs. restraint (IvR, SEI, SRC): Sweden and China differ in terms of individuals' possibilities to make their choices, promoting quality of life, well-being, and self-expression which emphasized by community constraining human choices (from religion, nation, authority, family, obedience, etc.). Sweden is ranked high on self-expression and has a strongly secular and rational community allowing for individual freedom (free expression, tolerate non-conformance, human trust), while China has low respect to self-expression possibilities.

Showing Emotions (AvN): China and India are generally more neutral, while Japan and South Korea are much more neutral at work. In South America and Southern Europe, including France, people are generally more affective.

Universalism (UvP): Sweden, USA and Germany have high universalism- giving high value on law and principles. In particular culture such as China and India, a specific situation and people/relations may easily override general principles. Also, Japan and France are less universal than Swedes.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI, UAG): Sweden, China, and USA score low in this dimension which means practice is more important than principles, deviation from norms is tolerated, innovation is not threatening, and no more rules than required. Countries preferring to avoid uncertainty include Belgium, Japan, and France.

Relation to time and environment (LTO, SvS., FO, IvO) includes a sequential or synchronous way of working. USA is more short-term-oriented than Sweden which is even more than e.g. Japan, China, Germany, Belgium and France. China is very long term oriented, high propensity to save, and investing in future long-termed projects. Regarding relation to nature, many countries strongly believe in controlling nature, like USA and France, while Swedish people generally think that it is possible. China, Japan, and India have harmony view toward environment and see mankind as a part of nature.

3 Review methodology

Since the main purpose was to present a review of relevant research on national cultures related to multicultural collaborations in product realization processes, international peered review journals were considered as a suitable source for examination. Initially no time span or journal ranking were applied.

3.1 Identification of articles

Several databases were searched extensively with the following keywords related to the research topic: national culture – product realization, national culture – product development and national culture – production development. The number of results varied dramatically between different databases and keywords. Overall, the selected literatures were from the following sources:

1. Databases – i.e. Scopus, Science direct, Emerald, Scirus
2. Google scholar
3. Reference list of related theses and project works
4. Reference list of related articles

In total, 15 articles were identified within the period of 25 years (1988-2012).

3.2 Classification of articles

First, the different phases of the product realization process were focused i.e. concept development; product planning; product engineering; process engineering; and pilot production/ramp up (Wheelwright & Clark, 1992). The main criteria used to categorize each selected article were product realization phase and research discipline. As a result, two classifications were developed:

- 1) Cultural issues in relation to product development
- 2) Cultural issues in relation to production development

3.3 Analysis of articles

In order to analyze the reviewed articles, the set of questions below were deployed:

- Cultural challenges
 - What are challenges in cross-national collaboration in product realization process?
 - Which businesses, operations, industries are mentioned?
- Research focus and domain
 - What are focused issues?
 - In which area of product realization process that the cross-national relationship is found?
- Highlighted national cultures
 - Which national cultures are reported?
 - In what sense is the Swedish cross-national collaboration reported?
 - Which aspects of Swedish national culture appear in the literature?
- Main idea, comments, contribution, and research methodology

4 Review results

4.1 Highlighted national cultures

Regarding national cultures in relation to product development, most of the studies were comparison of different national cultures, usually from different regions in the world. The most studied national culture was American compared to either European or Asian. However, a cross-cultural collaboration between Brazil, two European countries and USA was described (Parente et al., 2011) and an extensive mathematical modelling of 18 national cultures (Nakata & Sivakumar, 1996). The papers in relation to production development focused on

national and organizational culture's effect on different aspects in production development. Among the reviewed papers in production development, all compare USA with countries from Europe and/or Asia, except for Hirt (2012), who only includes Asian countries. Japan is included in five papers, Germany in four, China in three, and Sweden in two papers.

4.2 Cultural issues in relation to product development

Eight papers dealing with cultural issues in relation to product development for new products (NDP) were identified, see summary in Table III.

Table III. Summary of reviewed paper focusing cultural issues in relation to new product development (NPD = New Product development)

Author (year)	Research focus	Cultural challenges	Key findings
Nakata & Sivakumar (1996)	Multinational NPD	To maximize benefits of cultural strength	Conceptual model links between five dimensions of national culture and two stages of NPD
Souder & Jenssen (1999)	NPD strategies and project management	Different focus and management style	The US NPD is task focused with organizational method and formal project team, while Scandinavian is customer focused by self-organizing project team
Kleinschmidt (1994)	NPD process and factors	National culture impacts NPD process and factors	European firms have more positive view toward NPD programs and more formal NPD process, supportive organizational culture, better management support, and clearer NPD strategies compared to the US.
Sivakumar & Nakata (2003)	Multinational NPD	Designing global NPD team with optimized performance	Mathematical simulation based on the conceptual model they proposed in 1996, in order to get the best global NPD team based on varying cultural dimensions and NPD stages
Parente et al. (2011)	Dynamic capabilities in NPD	Cultural distance effects on dynamic capabilities	Cultural distance negatively affects on dynamic capabilities in NPD process- e.g. knowledge transfer, resource flexibility, coordination and control, but could be mitigated by product modularization.
Lee et al. (2000)	NPD organizational characteristics	National culture effects on NPD organizational characteristics leading to NPD performances	Korea and USA representing eastern and western countries have many common features in NPD processes, so a global solution for multinational NPD might be available.
Gupta et al. (1992)	NPD management's critical variables	National culture influences on NPD management perspectives	US companies have slower new product launching though they are the first one developing technology since they focus on cost and product performance. German managers emphasize on time followed by product performance and cost is of the least.
Kedia et al. (1992)	R&D productivity	National culture impacts on R&D productivity	Low PDI and high MAS culture promote R&D productivity, while UAI is not a significant predictor.

4.2.1 Cultural challenges in product development

Differences in national culture dimensions irresistibly create challenges in cross-cultural NPD processes starting from management perspectives (Gupta et al., 1992) by diverting management focus and style (Souder & Jenssen, 1999). Also, Kedia et al. (1992) proved that national culture influenced R&D productivity among countries that it affected NPD processes

and factors (Kleinschmidt, 1994), as well as organizational characteristics (Lee et al., 2000). According to the multinational NPD team, cultural distances play significant roles on dynamic capabilities (Parente et al., 2011). Therefore, national culture strength optimization while designing a global NPD team is an ultimate goal of the cross-cultural NPD study (Nakata & Sivakumar, 1996; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2003).

4.2.2 Key findings regarding cultural issues in product development

All articles agreed that national culture influenced NPD processes in many ways. However, there could be a global solution for successful multi-cultural NPD. Though national culture has both direct and indirect impacts on NPD organizational characteristics leading to NPD performance, Korea and USA - representing eastern and western countries, have many common features in NPD processes (Lee et al., 2000). Furthermore, cultural strengths optimization of multinational NPD team is developed by mathematical simulation between cultural dimensions and importance of the initiation stage of NPD based on global NPD conceptual model showing that different stages of NPD influenced continuously by various national culture dimensions (Nakata & Sivakumar, 1996; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2003). However, this theory and model are still at a very early stage and still need further practical prove. According to national culture dimensions, low PDI and high MAS culture promoted productivity of R&D while UAI was not a significant predictor (Kedia et al., 1992). This conclusion is supported by Gupta et al. (1992) that German (low PDI and high MAS), who emphasized on the time perspective followed by product performance but treated cost as the least importance, turned out to bring new products out to markets faster than the Americans (middle PDI and high MAS) though they were the first one developing technologies. Moreover, European as a whole seemed to have better R&D performance than American due to more formal NPD process, supportive organizational culture and climate, better management support and commitment and clearer NPD strategies (Kleinschmidt, 1994). Also, US NPD was task focused with organizational method of R&D and marketing integration as well as formal project team while the Scandinavian was more customer oriented by self-organizing team without the need for US-style project management due to low PDI (Souder & Jenssen, 1999). However, this is too early to make a conclusion like this since there are many differences in national culture dimensions across Europe or Scandinavia itself.

4.3 Cultural issues in relation to production development

Seven papers dealing with cultural issues in relation to production development were identified, see summary in Table IV.

Table IV. Summary of reviewed paper focusing cultural issues in relation to production development

Author (year)	Research focus	Cultural challenges	Key findings
Bergen & McLaughlin (1988)	R&D and production interface, focusing on management.	National culture effects on R&D and production interface	Clear differences in the product launch productivity depending on the managerial cultures.
Graen & Hui (1996)	Cross-cultural and change management in production development	Establishing the third culture as bridge between business partners	A "third culture" is proposed for successful cross-cultural collaboration with requirement of developing "transcultural managers", following a five-stage process.
Hirt (2012)	Technology transfer in relation to production outsources	Difficulties in technology transfer across broader	Five success factors for cross-cultural technology transfer are identified.
Pagell et al.	Operations	National culture	Managers must understand effects of each

(2005)	management decision-making	effects on operational decision-making.	national culture dimension before making decision in multinational companies.
Naor et al. (2010)	Operation performance / organizational vs. national culture	Organizational and national culture impacts on operation performance	Among GLOBE's cultural dimensions; PDI, FO and PO seem to be most influenced by national culture, whereas the other dimensions where not affected as much by national culture.
Jung et al. (2008)	Total Quality Management performance	Innovative knowledge transfer	PDI and LTO positively affect Total Quality Management performance, while IDV negatively does.
Matten & Geppert (2004)	Globalization and multinational management	National culture effects on globalization management	Globalized strategies and structure of multinational company allow national institutions of subsidiaries to influence, while decentralized organization tend to dominate by its origin national background and adapt better to local opportunities of subsidiaries.

4.3.1 Cultural challenges in production development

Inevitably, national culture significantly affects production development same as product development. Various cultural challenges in production development were identified from different perspectives. From a technical point, national culture directly influences product launch productivity (Bergen & McLaughlin, 1988), operation performance (Naor et al., 2010) and knowledge transfer (Jung et al., 2008; Hirt, 2012) in which cultural differences establish difficulties in the process. According to management issues, national culture affects globalization management (Matten & Geppert, 2004) and operational decision-making (Pagell et al., 2005).

4.3.2 Key findings regarding cultural issues in production development

The reviewed papers clearly show that national culture affects many aspects of the production development process. Various cultural dimensions stimulate operation performance adversely. From 9 dimensions of GLOBE, PDI, FO and PO differed a lot between eastern and western countries so they were treated as national culture dimensions, while the rest are non-significant and treated at organizational level (Naor et al., 2010). However, number of studies suggested that organizational culture was significantly affected by the located national culture (Tata & Prasad, 1998; Dastmalchian et al., 2000; Lindholm, 2000). Moreover, differences in new product launch performance were proved to be rooted from managerial culture affected by national culture (Bergen & McLaughlin, 1988). Another interesting area is technology and knowledge transfer where Hirt (2012) suggested five success factors for cross-cultural technology transfer, i.e. direct and indirect communication, status and decision making style, job loyalty and work attitude, and handling of emotions. Also, PDI and LTO positively affect innovative knowledge transfer in Total Quality Management, while IDV negatively does (Jung et al., 2008). Surprisingly, globalized multinational corporations allow national institutions of subsidiaries to influence their management strategies. On the contrary, decentralized structure preserves national culture of original company and allows subsidiaries to better adapt to local opportunities (Matter & Geppert, 2004). Therefore, managers must understand effects of each culture dimension before making decisions in multinational companies (Pagell et al., 2005). Ultimately, building a third culture acting as a bridge between national cultures of business partners and developing transcultural managers is one of the proposed solution for multicultural production development and management (Graen & Hui, 1996).

5 Discussion

The reviewed papers present a picture of national cultures having a great impact on the quality of cross-cultural collaboration, and thus the performance of processes e.g. product launch productivity and knowledge transfer. Most studies in the review report from an American perspective making comparisons with European and/or Asian cultures. However, considering entire world regions as the basis can be misleading since some countries in the same region have remarkably different level in some culture dimensions, e.g. differences between European countries and between China and Japan (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

According to the NPD process, two groups of national culture dimensions- namely power distance and relation & motivation (Hofstede et al., 2010), actively influence the R&D productivity. Organizational and project management style, which differ among countries, also play a significant role in NPD performance. Moreover, power distance, individual vs. group identity, and relation to time & environment (Hofstede et al., 2010) affect production development in terms of innovative knowledge transfer process. In conclusion, these four groups are key cultural factors impacting the product realization process. Low power distance and individual vs. group identity together with high relations and motivation and relation to time & environment are proposed to be the best combination of national culture dimension for successful product realization.

The challenges related to cultural issues and reported in the reviewed papers were e.g. related to diverting management focus and style and affecting the dynamic capabilities in new product development. For production development the cultural challenges included e.g. the need to understand that national culture directly influences product launch productivity and difficulties in knowledge transfer and operational decision-making. Along with increased globalization these challenges will be a matter to handle for more companies and there is a need to increase the companies' understanding about cultural characteristics. An important challenge is to raise the awareness and emphasis put on cultural impact to avoid problems and misunderstandings in the product realization process and to increase efficiency and innovativeness. Another important challenge is to support the maturity process of companies; from the naive, first attempts to collaborate globally and experiencing and solving problems ad-hoc; via a conscious pro-active consideration of differences and identification of potential difficulties; and towards a strategic collaboration where the diversity and specific cultural characteristics of the partners are regarded as a competitive advantage.

The development of efficient handling of cultural challenges and utilization of cultural differences is based on efficient collaboration. There are different ways to achieve efficient collaboration. Management need to be aware of the impact of cultural dimensions on the outcome of the product realization process, put national cultural issues on the agenda and prepare for and manage effects of differences in national cultures. Furthermore, there is a need for explicit ways of working which take cultural issues into account. This might be done through standardized development processes, company value models, and communication technologies actively complemented by methods, models, and work processes that focus specifically on managing the differences between individuals regarding cultural dimensions and behaviours. Finally, the utilization of existing knowledge about cultural dimensions could be developed, dispersed in the organizations and possibly integrated in work procedures to aid individuals in improving their cross-cultural collaboration.

This research has a specific focus on the parallel work processes for product and production development, but since the fundamental challenges of cross-cultural collaboration are not specific for these work processes, the ideas should be applicable to many international collaboration contexts, such as the companies' research and development work, employee union collaboration, or marketing and sales organization.

6 Conclusion

This review of papers concerning cultural issues in relation to product and production development shows that there are cultural challenges to achieve an efficient product realization process. These are related to diverting management focus and style in different cultures, varying dynamic capabilities, the need to develop further understanding about how national culture influences the product realization process and difficulties in knowledge transfer and operational decision-making. Possible ways to deal with cultural challenges include development of efficient cross-cultural collaboration, which in its turn may be built upon management awareness of the influence of cultural dimensions on the outcome of the product realization process, development of standardized development processes in which cultural aspects are taken into account, and a competence development to enhance individuals' improvement of cross-cultural collaboration. Further research is suggested to examine cultural issues in relation to the whole product realization process and study cross-cultural collaboration as practiced in order to better utilize, integrate and operationalize culture research into a wide span of business practices.

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