

Ellen moore living and working in korea management essay



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In recent years, globalization has accelerated the emergence of many global companies that operate across geographical borders and require high levels of cross-national interdependence and cross-border flow of products, technology, capital and people. Businesses are expanding internationally through alliances and joint ventures, as well as mergers and acquisitions. This driving force has resulted in a growing number of people seeking international careers outside of their home countries. Ellen Moore, an experienced systems consultant who worked for Systems Consulting Group (SCG), a unit of Western Systems Inc. (WSI), was sent to Korea to manage a project involving a team of North American and Korean consultants. WSI newly entered the Korean market in 1990 through forming a joint venture (JVI) with Korean Conglomerate Inc. (KCI). Ellen was selected based on her strong background in project management, her creativity and technical abilities. She also had successful international experience working in Bahrain before, which may be helpful to her journey working in Korea, a new different foreign country.

Ellen Moore- the international manager

For Ellen, an expatriate manager who has limited knowledge of Korea and did not obtain any training from SCG prior to her arrival in Korea, living in Korea produced constant and unexpected challenges to the ways of perceiving, acting and valuing things, making it difficult for her to correctly process and act on information. However, Ellen made a lot effort to overcome the cultural barriers and to establish trust with the Korean consultants. She possesses certain competencies that are needed to successfully manage teams in new cultural surroundings.

First, Ellen is willing and motivated to take the risks of working and living abroad. When being asked to join the project in Korea, she accepted the assignment, getting ready to immerse herself in a new culture. Second, she takes every opportunity to learn and build up her understanding of the Korean culture, language, lifestyle, and business etiquette. In other words, she prepared herself a good foundation, decentering from her own thinking and opening herself to exploring and comprehending these differences. Such motivation to bridge a foreign culture is among key ingredients to the successful adaptation of any expatriates. Third, she seems to be good at getting along with colleagues, exhibiting patience and respect to others. She was committed to building good relationships with the Korean consultant subordinates. With respect to the lead Korean consultant- Jack, although he made his own decision on pursuing the marketing research project and did not discuss the plan with her beforehand, she behaved respectfully and “ did not interrupt his presentation or disagree with him publicly.” (case page 14)

Overall, Ellen possesses both technical expertise, and some adaptive characteristics that should be of help in managing across cultures. She developed her cross-cultural skills and abilities relating to social interaction across cultures by paying attention to, appreciating and striving to bridge and integrate critical differences between one self and others in culture and background.

Challenges of managing cross-culture

Sensitivity to cross national differences is only one aspect of managing in a global environment. Learning how to manage successfully across those differences is another. While Ellen took the initiative to learn and become

acquainted with the Korean culture, her efforts in trying to integrate and come to grips with the cultural differences did not have the expected impact, leaving her feeling confused, frustrated and uncomfortable. Being the co-manager of a consulting project that was among the largest ones JVI had carried out in South Korea, Ellen was responsible for the overall planning, execution, monitoring, control and closure of the project. Her objectives were to ensure the project is to be delivered within limits of time, budget and stakeholders' satisfaction. She also aimed at implementing project communications and oversight, successfully coaching, directing and collaborating with local consultants as well as attaining their willing commitment to assigned tasks. The key for a project to achieve excellent outcome is strong delivery capability made possible by uniform and well-defined processes, structure, and discipline of planning, coordinating and monitoring initiatives that translate strategy into reality.

Nevertheless, Ellen confronted difficulties in fulfilling her objectives. The project was falling behind schedule, and the local consultants were not taking directions from her. As the joint venture cut across cultures, issues of communication, differing expectations, and personality came into play. Problems arose right at the planning stage: information about the scope of the project as well as the role of project managers and their responsibility for decision-making were not clearly defined and communicated to all appropriate stakeholders in a timely manner. Initial project agreement between KCI and WSI was later on belied by conflicting decisions and actions, and a lack of parental support for joint venture activity. Not only did Ellen find out that the Korean consultants were far less

skillful than she had expected, she also discovered that Jack was told to be the sole manager of the project, rather than co-managing the project with Ellen as Andrew had previously communicated to her. There was an apparent miscommunication within the joint venture and both parties did not seem to have a common understanding of the project execution's agenda.

Managers in the international joint venture JVI also differed on the use of authority and power. Cultural differences in values, beliefs, traits and decision styles lead to different management practices. Cultural factors influence the decision making process both at the individual and organizational level. Conflicting cultural orientations can be a severe barrier to joint-decision making. At the individual level, culture affects the attitudes and values of managers who make the decisions. At the organizational level, the structure of decision making mechanism, including the gathering and processing of information will be culturally influenced. According to Geert Hofstede's study on culture differences, the USA, which ranks low both on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, would be less hierarchic, and more decentralized; while Korea, which ranks high on both power distance and uncertainty avoidance, would be more hierarchic and centralized.[1]A leader's potential capacity to influence others is potent in Korean culture that is dictated by Confucian ideals of strongly hierarchical power stratifications, collectivism and clearly defined masculine-feminine roles within society.

Case exhibit 2 depicts a complicated organizational structure of the SI project team where overlap management was rampant. The Korean staff consultants had several superiors, including Jack and Ellen, both of whom

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reported to Andrew whose supervisors were Mr. Park and Mr. Song, upper manager and director of JVI and George Peterson, Senior VP of SCG. That subordinates' behaviors and actions are considerably more affected by their superiors in Korean culture explains why the Korean staff consultants just followed Jack's supervision. Strongly influenced by the Confucianism view of collectivism, the Korean personnel developed a strong embedded group, and it is hard for expatriates such as Ellen, Scott and Andrew to be part of that bonding because of the language barrier and cultural differences. JVI is characterized by centralized power that comes with "the boss is the boss" mentality. Control is exerted through authority, which is not questioned. The Korean consultants did not question or resist decisions made by Jack, their superior.

Constructing a shared reality with sufficient coherence to allow for effective operation seems to be the key problem facing the managers of JVI where the managers from the two sides of the joint venture held quite distinct understandings of the purpose, prospects and capabilities of the firm even after project agreement had been concluded. This led to the managers and their representatives in the joint venture working at cross purposes, or at least giving differential emphasis to competing goals. The lack of a shared understanding caused communication difficulties and even misunderstanding, making it difficult for conflicts to be resolved constructively.

Culture is linked to communication, impacting our relationship with the environment and with other people. As we communicate using different cultural norms, interactions can end up in either harmony or conflict. Hall
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makes the distinction between high- context and low -context cultures[2]. The American subjects are shown to exhibit tendencies that are consistent with low-context cultures where communications tend to be clear and direct or explicit. The Korean subjects reflect tendencies that are consistent with Hall's description of high-context cultures where communication is highly dependent upon the person and the situation. Hall's conceptualization indicates that in high-context cultures, indirect communication including non-verbal signs and body language is crucial. As evidenced in the case, the Koreans are prone to be more socially oriented and confrontation-avoiding. Team building activities of JVI were carried out mostly outside of the work environment. When the project was delayed due to the local consultants taking direction from Jack instead of Ellen, none of the Korean management team members of JVI wanted to conduct a deep analysis of the problems and figure out how to resolve them. All of the failure was simply blamed on Ellen. The case also shows how the management of international human resources also depends to a great extent on national context and culture. Different cultural assumptions regarding, for instance, organizations as system of tasks versus relationships and the role of the individual and the collective make human resource management practices culture-bound. In U. S. society that values individualism, employees are selected based on their qualifications: whether they have the desired skills and personality that fit the job. However, in Korean society characterized by collectivism and relationship bonding, " what you know" is not necessarily the number one criterion for employee selection. Human resources are managed more from a sociological perspective, which pays more attention to the social system, the

economic and political context and the nature of the relationship between key actors, such as government, unions and management. Although Jack did not have prior work experience delivering a system implementation project as Ellen found out, he was still selected to head the consulting project, probably because he, on the surface, had a good educational background with a PhD degree from a prestigious U. S. university, could speak English, and perhaps developed good relationship with management of the KSI. From KSI's viewpoint, Jack would represent the firm well and could maintain a good relationship with the Korean government, the major client of the SI project. Had Ellen been aware of all of these sophisticated underlying culture bound differences in managerial philosophy and expected behaviors, she may have been able to navigate and execute the project in a more effective manner.

What Ellen could do

To prevent the project from being further severely handicapped, Ellen must come to terms with a number of inevitable dilemmas. These tensions derive from her position requiring her to act as a mediator between the two cultures and the two sides of the same organization. Resolving these conflicts really boils down to addressing the questions of how much of her own way of doing things she is prepared to put aside and how much of the new ways she would be willing to embrace. Ellen was also caught in the dilemma of reconciling responsibility and power, invested with a great deal of responsibility but having to depend on local management and staff to achieve their objectives. She has to manage allegiances between JVI and WSI. As the cultural distance between involved parties expanded further, it is

crucial that Ellen take actions to bridge the distance and to eliminate the existing tensions between her and Jack so that the two can work cooperatively on the project.

It is advised that Ellen think and act locally to better adapt to local conditions. Ellen needs to take a modesty approach to show her respect and open-mindedness to the Korean managers and Jack. What is important now is to re-ignite trust, warm feelings of unity and empathy between group members to maintain good human relationships and to build satisfactory social interactions. Ellen should immediately have Andrew fly back to Korea and remain working there till the project finishes. Andrew had already been in Korea working on the project's proposal development and helped the JVI win the government contract. He is the key navigator that may have been able to build common relationship with the Korean government and local staff. His presence is critical to showing WSI's commitment to establishing a long term business in Korea.

Ellen can first schedule an informal meeting with Jack. At this meeting, she may need to personally apologize to Jack for an incident occurring the other day when a staff refused to do some work for Jack because that person was doing something for Ellen. Although it was not her fault assigning work to the staff, how the employee reacted at that time did upset Jack. Being a leader in the project, Jack did not want to lose face in front of subordinates. Ellen could take a step back and apologize for the sake of alleviating misunderstandings with Jack and making him feel respected. The next step she can consider implementing is to discuss openly how she thinks the marketing research project would slow down the pace of the entire project.

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She should be patient and listen attentively to how Jack would respond. It could be that Jack would like to please the client who is the Korean government, and thus insisted on executing the marketing research. It is essential for Ellen to not hurt the feelings of Jack, and to demonstrate her willingness and readiness to embrace the Korean way of doing business. It appears that a participative managerial style is not suitable in Korean culture due to different cultural dimensions with respect to power, individualism, competitiveness, and so on. Ellen can tactically negotiate and discuss with Jack to arrive at an agreed-upon way of working and managing the project together.

If this meeting goes well, then Ellen can call on another meeting in which all SI project management team would be presented. The goal of this meeting will be for everyone to re-plan how the project will be implemented from that point forward. The team should develop a clear shared sense of purpose regarding team's mission, objectives and priorities in terms of schedule, budget and quality management. It should also re-structure tasks (i. e. what can be done together? How will work be divided then integrated within the team? How important are deadlines? What happens if deadlines are not met?) It should also clearly assign roles and responsibilities (i. e. Will Jack be the sole leader? If so, what responsibilities will he undertake and hold accountable for?) The team can also discuss and come up with process strategies for team building activities, communication style, conflict resolution and performance evaluation.

If the proposed initial meeting with Jack would not produce fruitful results and Jack would still behave uncooperatively, then Ellen might as well
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voluntarily resign from joining the project and return home. She would have tried everything possible to break down the barriers and adapt to local culture, but several external factors are just simply beyond her control, making her process of cultural adjustment go astray.

Women and Leadership Careers

Gender issue has been much discussed in many different aspects of society. Yet, in the business world, it has not been often talked about in an insightful way, simply because the corporate environment is regarded as a planet mainly for men. Women in all cultures face resistance by some men when they try to advance their careers. This is often the case with management careers. The fact that senior women managers are few in number and complaint of glass ceilings has been much discussed in public. The gender gap will not be shortened unless there is a positive change in the male colleagues' perception towards women's advancement. That being said, if male colleagues, especially the ones in high ranking positions, would not take initiative in making change in the corporate culture and workplace, it would definitely be much more difficult to bridge the gender gap. Male colleagues at all levels should respect female managers, eliminate their prejudice on female's managerial effectiveness, and refrain from holding such biased attitudes towards female as stereotyping women as being "talkative" and "lack common sense." They should push for equality in pay, employment and advancement opportunities for their female co-workers. They should also be comfortable publicly to congratulate women on their professional achievements - as and when they are accomplished.

One of the most commonly discussed ways to resolve the gender issue is to empower women, that is, to give them choices and favorable conditions pertaining to making those choices possible. For example, senior male managers should be willing to provide mentorship to lower level female managers to help them break into the “ old boy’s network” and gain acceptance for their competence. Senior, subordinate and peer male managers can share networking opportunities with female managers so that they can get equal access to appropriate networks that may be beneficial for their career development.

Conclusion

Culture is a strong undercurrent in international management. As the world of business has become increasingly global, increased interactions among people of different cultural and institutional background mean that international managers must familiarize themselves with the desires and expectations of colleagues, superiors and subordinates from different locations, while concomitantly supporting control and coordination of dispersed activities that are crucial for success in a competitive global market place.

Whether engaging in strategic alliances, setting up operations abroad, or attracting local market, companies need to discover how culture can be harnessed to drive business forward. Companies also need to analyze the potential for cultural clashes than can undermine good intentions. Managers who are looking towards a global career need to be aware of how their own culture influences the way they behave and how others perceive and respond to that behavior.

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While the case of Ellen Moore indicates certain boundaries presented to cross-border movement for women, it also conveys a subtle theme that culturally mapping, bridging and integrating within the boundaries of the host country is not at all easy, irrespective of gender. A male manager might confront no problems in entering the country, but once there, it is his cultural intelligence that will help him motivate and establish trust with local employees and achieve organizational objectives.

Failure to address cultural differences and to agree on tasks and process strategies can sabotage group efforts. The more we understand each other's culture, the more feasible it will be to arrive at a shared way of working together, rather than imposing our ways on theirs.