

TLIC PAPER

Into Multicultural and Virtual Teamwork: Insights from a Tentative Participant Observation Study in an East Asian Context

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ABSTRACT

Extending an earlier conference paper by the authors, this report of a participant observation study provides an in-depth discussion on how cultural dimensions and hyper-personal effects might function in a specific context of computer-based communication (CMC) for remote teamwork. Adopting a cyber-ethnographical approach, a researcher engaged in a virtual group, which was working with a Consulate General in Shanghai, China, to observe the intragroup CMC behaviors, interactions, and practices of the participants, while also being involved in the teamwork. The group members were from either China or South Korea, mainly working remotely with one another and rendering this temporary workforce both multicultural and virtual. Paralleling the job tenure, a considerable amount of experience materials had been accumulated, as the product of a nearly 1-year data collection, which laid the foundation for a critical reflection and ad hoc analysis. Insights were drawn from the participant observation to address what could be the most suitable mode of teamwork for a certain multicultural and virtual group. Moreover, limitations of the present study were discussed; and implications were provided for multicultural and virtual teamwork, within and beyond the East Asian context.

KEYWORDS

multicultural teamwork, remote work, hyper-personal communication, participant observation, East Asia

1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of international corporations and other transnational organizations represents a significant facet of globalization, profoundly influencing scholarly and managerial discourse on multicultural management, teamwork, and leadership across cultures. Another pivotal aspect of organizational transformation is the rise of remote working, made possible through widespread access to the

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Internet and advanced communication technologies. Remote working, which gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the prolonged closure of physical workplaces, continues to offer rich avenues for research on computer-mediated communication (CMC).

In a previous conference paper, the authors proposed integrating multicultural contexts within a CMC framework by applying the hyper-personal model to address culture-based intragroup conflicts in virtual teams. Building upon earlier reflections on Hofstede's cultural dimensions in CMC settings, the current study aims to extend the theoretical contributions made by the conference paper. Specifically, this paper revisits Hofstede's dimensions through the lens of multicultural and virtual teamwork within an East Asian context, offering new insights into the interaction between cultural diversity and virtual collaboration. This extension underscores the relevance of examining cultural dynamics in modern, tech-enabled work environments and adds to the growing body of research that seeks to reframe Hofstede's cultural dimensions and other traditional cultural theories in light of contemporary communication technologies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Preceding the case study, a look at the ongoing transformation of workplaces should be necessary. Thus, this study begins by selectively reporting what has been reviewed and identified in the earlier conference paper, which covered the key elements of multicultural remote working. In what follows, several foundational concepts, along with empirical issues drawn from the relevant literature, are clarified to provide a theoretical grounding. This preliminary discussion serves to contextualize the case study, offering insights into the evolving nature of remote work and its implications for multicultural team dynamics. By doing so, the authors aim to ensure that the readership is equipped with at least a basic understanding of the conceptual frameworks underpinning multicultural and virtual teamwork.

2.1 Multicultural teamwork

On a global scale, the emergence of multicultural societies is increasingly evident, driven by the constant exchange of information, knowledge, and cultural elements across borders. This trend has been the focus of extensive business scholarship, highlighting its potential impact on the successful day-to-day operation of companies (for a comprehensive meta-analysis on multicultural management research, see [6]). While cultural diversity within a workforce brings substantial benefits, such as enhanced creativity and broader perspectives, it also introduces potential challenges, including higher turnover rates, interpersonal conflicts, and communication breakdowns [4]. A significant challenge that multicultural organizations face is managing the cultural distance and conflicts among staff members [15][16]. This necessitates robust leadership that can ensure harmonious and efficient teamwork by employing management skills and strategies that not only embrace multiculturalism but also foster cultural competence and synergy in collaboration [1].

In practice, effective multicultural management and leadership are crucial for navigating the complexities of culturally diverse teams. Leaders must be adept at recognizing and bridging cultural differences to minimize conflicts and

enhance collaboration. This involves developing a deep understanding of various cultural backgrounds, adapting communication styles to suit diverse teams, as well as promoting an inclusive environment where all cultural perspectives are valued. By doing so, a team leader can leverage cultural diversity as a strategic asset, turning potential challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth. To sum up, multicultural management and leadership play a pivotal role in achieving organizational success in an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world.

2.2 Virtual teamwork

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working became the predominant option in most situations, as face-to-face interactions were largely discouraged to prevent the spread of the virus. The need for physical distancing made CMC technologies and virtual collaboration tools essential for maintaining workplace productivity. This shift not only highlighted the importance of remote work as a viable alternative but also accelerated the adoption of CMC across industries. Consequently, remote work emerged as more than a temporary solution, providing a blueprint for future workplace practices in a post-pandemic world. In corporate contexts, the ability to collaborate effectively across time and space has become an increasingly vital skill [19]. From a corporate management standpoint, remote working offers distinct advantages by overcoming the constraints of traditional office settings [8]. This flexibility highlights the potential productivity of virtual organizations, particularly in addressing the demands of cross-functional collaboration and fostering greater organizational efficiency [23].

A virtual organization refers to a geographically dispersed entity whose members are united by a long-term shared interest or objective, with communication and coordination facilitated through information technology [2]. Meanwhile, as modern companies increasingly adopt a blended working mode, employees may need to interact online rather than in person [12]. In such scenarios, project teams or task forces may only function on a relatively short-term or temporary basis, as virtual groups. It is common for a small subset of team members to be physically co-located, while others, such as independent contractors, participate in the teamwork remotely. One notable benefit of remote working in such situations is the reduction of exposure to office politics and interpersonal conflicts.

Generally, remote work and virtual teamwork should now occupy a central position in the operational strategies of modern companies, given that many will inevitably adopt hybrid working modes. Despite this, few established rules or guidelines exist for effective virtual collaboration, meaning that team management in remote settings often starts from scratch upon the formation or integration of virtual teams. Culturally adaptive teamwork styles may serve as an essential starting point in this process. Moreover, significant differences have been observed between purely virtual and traditional face-to-face teamwork [28]. Some of these differences, such as the non-hierarchical and decentralized nature of virtual organizations [2], may present advantages. Given these distinctions and their practical implications, there is a growing need for academic research to explore how to optimize performance within virtual groups.

For starters, Social Networking Services (SNS), along with other supportive communication platforms such as Zoom or Tencent Meeting, serve as the most

common environments for remote workers collaborating with physically distant colleagues. A growing body of empirical research indicates that while the effective use of SNS is achievable—often measured through metrics such as response time or the frequency of miscommunication (see [22] for a discussion)—relying solely on these communication tools is insufficient for maintaining a high standard of virtual teamwork. These platforms provide the infrastructure for basic communication, but additional strategies are necessary to enhance the utilization of remote working environments. Specifically, improving team performance requires a focus on individual factors, including personality traits (for a deeper analysis of personality and performance in remote work settings, see [20]), as well as cultural dimensions that influence collaboration. Tailoring communication and teamwork approaches to account for these variables can significantly boost both individual and team outcomes in virtual workspaces.

2.3 Hyper-personal communication for multicultural and virtual teamwork

A widely observed phenomenon in CMC is the tendency for individuals to idealize others in the absence of nonverbal cues, which are typically present in face-to-face interactions. This idealization is central to the hyper-personal model, as addressed by CMC scholarship, particularly when it comes to text-based communication. The asynchronous nature of CMC allows individuals to carefully manage their impressions and perceptions through a joint meaning-making process [29]. In contrast to face-to-face settings, where personal presentation is immediate and less controllable, the hyper-personal environment enables selective self-presentation and selective perception. This could result in heightened feelings of liking and intimacy, as individuals tend to present themselves in a personable manner and selectively interpret the messages they receive [30].

Participants in CMC often leverage the hyper-personal model to shape their interactions, manage impressions, and facilitate desired relationships, particularly in text-based communication, where nonverbal cues are absent [29]. Without the influences from face-to-face communication, hyper-personal effects mainly result from cues perceivable in CMC behaviors – defined as the behavioral options provided by the computer-based environment for an individual to self-present and engage in online communication. It is noteworthy that the definition proposed here manages to distinguish the purely behavioral aspect of CMC from the messages/contents, or the cues/contextual variables, conveyed through CMC behaviors, as these two aspects should be examined separately, in line with the hyper-personal literature. During interactions (not necessarily virtual ones), people process myriads of verbal and nonverbal cues, namely the contextualization cues [10][11], based on which interpretations are made about each other. In this sense, while CMC behaviors serve on the end of message senders to deliver the cues for contextualization, it is CMC messages, including contextualization cues, that reach the end of receivers and are processed in ways that might diverge from what is meant by the senders. This discrepancy between message delivery and interpretation can be attributed to the lack of immediate feedback and the absence of nonverbal cues in CMC, making the process of impression formation more subjective and prone to idealization. Therefore, the hyper-personal model provides a useful framework for understanding how relationships and impressions develop differently in CMC, compared to face-to-face communication.

In one stream of hyper-personal research, scholars have explored how contextual variables, such as the attractiveness of a profile photo or the absence thereof, influence impression formation and a viewer's willingness to initiate any virtual friendship. These studies often consider moderating factors like gender, demonstrating that visual cues in CMC settings, different from those in face-to-face environments, can significantly shape social judgments and interactions [30]. Another significant yet underexplored factor in hyper-personal communication is the role of cultural background. Since perception, as well as what is perceived and how it is interpreted, is largely culturally conditioned or learned, a CMC participant's cultural background can profoundly influence their behaviors and messages in virtual settings.

Given the widely established effectiveness of the hyper-personal model in fostering idealization and facilitating the development of favored relationships, it is natural to reason that this model could help address culture-based relational issues among coworkers in virtual teams. These challenges, which might not be easily addressed in traditional face-to-face environments, can be navigated more effectively through hyper-personal interactions. Consequently, a hyper-personal team-building program, as proposed in the earlier conference paper, should not limit its focus to drafting context-specific messages but also include comprehensive training on how to comport oneself hyper-personally, emphasizing the importance of hyper-personal communication skills.

In practice, the combination of multicultural teamwork and virtual teamwork (referred to as M&V teamwork from here on) frequently exemplifies the principles of hyper-personal communication, where interactions are intensified and reshaped by the use of various CMC channels. In multicultural teams, the diversity of cultural backgrounds offers a broad range of perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. When these interactions take place in a virtual context, the absence of physical presence often encourages more strategic and deliberate intragroup communication, as individuals craft their messages carefully to manage impressions and navigate cultural differences. This type of hyper-personal communication could enhance both the depth and quality of interactions within the team. For text-based communication, team members may be able to focus more on the content and context of messages, rather than non-verbal cues, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings as in face-to-face settings. In this view, M&V teamwork can foster more effective collaboration, encouraging participants to engage more thoughtfully, purposefully, and hyper-personally. This could lead to a deeper understanding among team members, contributing to a more cohesive and productive teamwork dynamic.

2.4 Possible teamwork styles in CMC environments

Previous literature in intragroup dynamics has indicated that how people work together within a team can be divided into different styles. Based on a classroom context, Forman and Cazdan [9] found that there were three styles of working together: Parallel Interactions, Associative Interactions, and Cooperative Interactions, as shown in Figure 1. This classification of teamwork styles addresses how group members may work together and produce a final product, which should be applicable to not only classroom-based teamwork. The authors attempt to apply it to multicultural teamwork in a CMC context, as a lens for observing the intragroup dynamics, especially the leadership and management styles.

	Parallel interactions	Associative interactions	Cooperative interactions
How group members work together	Group members exchange comments about the task but do not monitor each other or share thinking.	Group members share some information about the task but do not coordinate roles. There might be some monitoring of others' contributions and some interchange of ideas.	Group members constantly monitor each other's work and play complementary roles in completing problems. There would be a robust interchange of ideas.
Final Product	An accumulation of individual contributions.		Jointly created

Fig. 1. Summary table made by the authors, based on Forman & Cazdan [9]

In Parallel Interactions, team members work on individual components of a task without actively monitoring or engaging with each other's contributions. This type of interaction is common in groups where tasks are highly compartmentalized, and each person is responsible for a distinct aspect of the project. Although members may exchange comments about the task, they primarily focus on their own work, and the final product is an accumulation of everyone's contributions rather than a collaborative, integrated outcome. For instance, each member of a marketing team, tasked with developing a campaign for a new product, is assigned a different aspect of the task: one handles surveys, another manages promotion design, and a third focuses on media content production, to name but three. In this case, the team members may share updates on their progress, but they do not actively coordinate or adjust their work based on others' input. The final campaign could be a compilation of these independent pieces of personal work, lacking the cohesive integration that might come from deeper collaboration.

Associative Interactions involve slightly more collaboration than Parallel Interactions, as members frequently share some information about their tasks and occasionally monitor each other's work. However, it is still not common for the members to coordinate their roles or responsibilities closely. That is, some exchange of ideas occurs, but the team does not work as a fully integrated unit. The final product is still largely an aggregation of individual contributions, though there may be more cohesion than in Parallel Interactions, due to some level of shared knowledge or mutual monitoring. Take a team working on a group presentation for example. While each member is assigned a separate section of the presentation (e.g., introduction, main body, conclusion), they may share their progress and provide feedback to one another: one member might suggest adding a statistic to another's part or recommend altering the design of the slides. Despite such exchanges of ideas, the team members work mostly independently, and the final presentation could be found still as a collection of individual efforts rather than a fully integrated piece.

Cooperative Interactions represent the highest level of collaboration among the three teamwork styles. In this style, team members actively monitor each other's work, share ideas, and play complementary roles when completing a task. Coordinating individual efforts, Cooperative Interactions adjust each member's work

based on feedback, and jointly develop solutions. Thus, the final product is usually found as a collective creation, showcasing the group's cohesive efforts and shared understanding of the task. In a software development team, for example, cooperative interaction might occur when a front-end developer, a back-end developer, and a project manager work together to build an app. It is not hard to imagine such scenes: they constantly communicate about each other's progress, ensuring that the design and functionality are aligned well; the front-end developer needs to adjust their work, based on the database structure that the back-end developer is implementing; and the project manager must ensure that all aspects fit the client's requirements. In this case, the final product, namely the app, can be seen as a cohesive effort that integrates the work of all team members.

These three teamwork styles could navigate team management across various professional contexts, yet so far mostly discussed in face-to-face situations. In the earlier conference paper, the authors added another vantage point to recent practices of team management in corporate contexts: managers should train the virtual groups that work for them, combining the hyper-personal model with cultural protocols across countries to tailor a teamwork style. Extending this concern, to address what should be considered as the most suitable teamwork style for a certain M&V team, the authors seek to first identify what kind of teamwork style is displayed in the team, based on Forman and Cazdan's classification [9], as their work could in part remain a useful guideline for approaching teamwork styles in CMC environments, while the limitations, due to its root in face-to-face conditions, are also expected.

3 METHODOLOGY

From August 2020 to July 2021, one of the authors worked with a Consulate General in Shanghai as a member of its civil youth diplomat team. While embracing a hybrid mode, this team worked remotely for the most time, which can be seen as an M&V teamwork experience. Based on the observational data collected during the tenure, a critical reflection was done, followed by a discussion concerning M&V teamwork across two East Asian cultures.

3.1 Participant observation and critical reflection

The authors employed an observational approach involving direct interactions with participants, which allowed for heightened control over ethical considerations. To ensure the minimal risk of the current study, the subjects' identities will not be made public in this paper; and the following reflection involves no sensitive information. Although informed consent might be warranted due to the semi-private nature of the observed setting (i.e., the team's online chat rooms), the authors instead ensured the anonymity of the data sources when presenting the findings. The reflective analysis, although not like a traditional content analysis, is non-invasive, very similar to other observational studies, as it relies on preexisting data rather than active engagement with participants. The reflection process was initiated only after the observation phase concluded, reducing potential biases and/or unintentional influence on the data production. By combining participant observation and critical reflection, this tentative approach strives to mitigate ethical concerns typically associated with online participant observation (as discussed in [13]), while capitalizing on the strengths of the observational design. In this view, this research project does not necessitate an IRB review.

This methodology serves to provide valuable insights into how individual CMC behaviors might coalesce into meso-level social phenomena, a perspective that might be challenging to capture through traditional experimental or survey methodologies. Yet, as the collection and organization of information for a single case report usually involves no data analysis for testing any hypotheses, the current study does not qualify for a systematic investigation. Conducting an examination on a specific work experience, retrospectively, the authors were restricted to data that was available to them, which may not fully represent the phenomenon being studied. Besides, any reliable causal inference was nearly impossible; and any estimates could only end up as associational interpretations. Even so, some descriptive research questions can be partly answered this way, without any causal notions, such as: How may cultural dimensions function in a specific M&V team?

3.2 Data collection background

The youth diplomat team initially comprised 15 Chinese members (including the observer) and 15 South Korean members, though a few resignations occurred later. All participants were of a similar age and shared a strong interest in fostering intercultural communication between China and South Korea. Shortly after the recruitment process by the Consulate General, the team was organized into five squads (sub-teams). These squads, along with the youth diplomat team as a whole, can be considered an example of M&V group, rather than a formal M&V organization, due to its temporary nature and the absence of predetermined protocols. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the group structure, highlighting the division of the team into smaller working units.

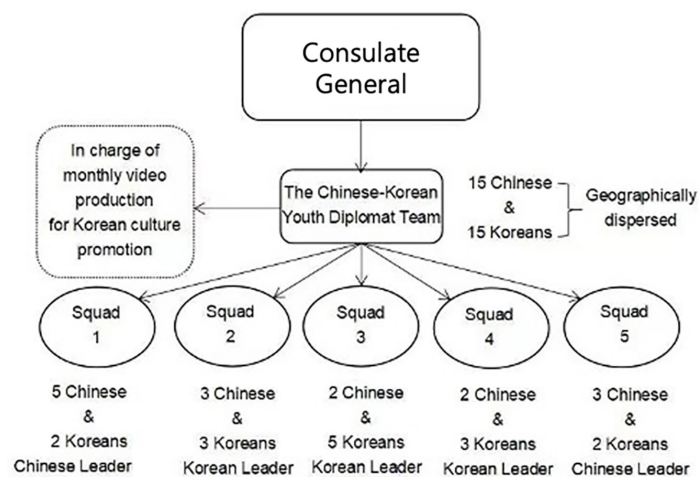


Fig. 2. Structure of the youth diplomat team

The two Chinese squad leaders were self-nominated, while the Korean squad leaders were appointed by the Consulate General, primarily due to their proficiency in the Korean language. All youth diplomats were bilingual, speaking both Chinese (Mandarin) and Korean, though their fluency levels varied. Consequently, the team’s daily communication relied on a combination of Chinese and Korean, with English occasionally used for clarification when necessary. Despite adopting a hybrid work mode, the team members mostly interacted online rather than in person, as only a small number of participants were based in Shanghai. The majority of the team

members were either located in South Korea or in other provinces of China, making virtual teamwork the primary mode of collaboration.

4 CRITICAL REFLECTION

A critical reflection is supposed to connect personal experiences with relevant theoretical frameworks to provide deeper insights into those experiences. In this study, the authors sought to analyze the observational data collected during participant observation with a theoretical framework that would aid in examining the experience material. As previously mentioned, the current study employs the hyper-personal model to approach M&V teamwork, placing its virtual aspect within the broader context of cultural differences in workplace communication. This approach highlights the importance of using a framework specifically designed to analyze cultural diversity within communication processes. To address this need, the authors have selected Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which will first be revisited with CMC concerns. The insights gained from Hofstede's work will then be applied to reflections on the hyper-personal communication observed in the M&V teamwork process, offering some explanations of how cultural differences and virtual collaboration intersected in this case.

4.1 Reapproaching Hofstede's cultural dimensions with CMC concerns

Hofstede's model, despite its arguable aspects, remains a highly influential framework for understanding cultural differences at the national level. Developed over several decades, Hofstede's work is built on the calculation of scores (on a scale of 1–100) across several proposed cultural dimensions through statistical analysis of survey data and personal observations [14]. This approach has been widely used to highlight systematic differences between national cultures. Over time, Hofstede's model has gained recognition as a valuable theoretical tool, with extensive applications in various fields, such as branding and advertising, as demonstrated in previous research [5].

Notably, the primary data in Hofstede's work [14] were derived from employee attitude surveys conducted across IBM subsidiaries in different countries. Given its origin in the workplace, the model is considered relevant for comparing and analyzing cultural differences in professional settings, providing a potentially fruitful starting point for exploring multicultural communication in teamwork. However, as organizational practices evolve with technological advancements, it is evident that theoretical innovations are necessary. One key challenge to Hofstede's model stems from recent technological breakthroughs, which question the assumption that individuals from different cultures interact primarily in face-to-face environments when working together (see [17] for a review). In reality, with the increasing prevalence of CMC applications, the perception of an individual's image can be shaped by situational and dispositional factors that have become further complicated in virtual settings. This complexity can lead to deviations from what Hofstede's cultural dimensions might predict.

In this light, Hofstede's model may still stand to offer insights into static cultural differences, but it can fail to account for the dynamic, evolving nature of modern workplaces. Therefore, cultural differences derived from this static model may unintentionally reinforce cultural or national stereotypes, far from facilitating a deeper understanding of individual personality traits and the cultural influences

behind them. To address these concerns, refinements to some of the original cultural dimensions have been made, and distinctions between nation-level and individual-level differences have been explored with updated data, aiming to offer a more nuanced understanding of cultural variations. Documenting such data and insights, [theculturefactor.com](https://www.theculturefactor.com) (<https://www.theculturefactor.com>) is run by a globally recognized consultancy and research organization that specializes in cross-cultural management, organizational culture, and global strategy. This website is renowned for advancing and applying the cultural dimensions theory, which could help businesses and organizations better understand the impact of culture on workplace values, behavior, and communication. In the current study, the authors turn to this website as a source for the statistics regarding the cultural dimensions of interest.

As noted earlier, one promising approach for revisiting Hofstede's cultural dimensions is to examine the increasing role of CMC in workplace interactions. This shift has catalyzed a growing body of research investigating how individuals evaluate and respond to colleagues in the construction and interpretation of messages in virtual settings. Some scholars seek to re-explore the effects of cultural diversity within virtual teams in comparison to face-to-face teams [25]. The concept of hyper-personal communication has emerged as a key theoretical framework in this area, explaining the differences in dynamics between virtual and face-to-face teamwork in culturally homogeneous or heterogeneous teams. Supported by empirical studies conducted over the past decade (e.g., [27]), this promising perspective highlights distinct patterns of engagement in virtual teams across cultural contexts, particularly as CMC allows for more controlled and strategic self-presentation. The current study builds on this expanding research field by extending Hofstede's cultural dimensions into a specific CMC context. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how certain dimensions manifest within virtual environments, enriching the ongoing discussion around cultural diversity and communication in contemporary workplaces. By integrating Hofstede's model with CMC, the present study sheds light on the evolving nature of M&V teamwork, seeking implications for team management in this increasingly diversified and digitalized age.

4.2 Examining hyper-personal teamwork experience with Hofstede's model

In this section, the reflections on the teamwork experience not only seeks to analyze the observer's personal experience working as a youth diplomat but also aims to examine how Hofstede's cultural dimensions can provide insight into those first-hand experiences. Leveraging Hofstede's model, the authors attempt to better understand the team-level factors that can contribute to efficient problem-solving and productive intragroup interaction within M&V teams. In addition, the present study also seeks to assess the applicability of Hofstede's model in the case being studied. This dual focus allows for an analysis that both validates and challenges Hofstede's framework within a contemporary M&V team setting.

Despite later revisions and additions, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are far from being all-encompassing. His model mainly serves as a quantitative tool for describing national idiosyncrasies. Additionally, online environments present a socially, culturally, and technologically complex landscape for learning and working [24], where some cultural dimensions may function differently or may even become less relevant to a virtual group, as implied by the hyper-personal model. This raises the question of which cultural dimensions should be prioritized for examination in the current study. Based on earlier research, three dimensions have been selected

for further discussion. For ease of reference in this study, the abbreviations of each dimension differ slightly from Hofstede’s original terminology:

- Power Distance (PD): This dimension is defined as the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally [14]. At the intragroup level, PD determines the hierarchical structure that emerges through message exchange, reflecting how individuals position themselves in relation to others in terms of authority.
- Individualism vs. Collectivism (IN vs. CO): This dimension addresses the degree of interdependence or independence within a society. It deals with whether individuals define their self-image in terms of “I” (individualism) or “We” (collectivism) [14]. In the present study, only individualism (IN) will be analyzed for simplicity, as collectivism can be seen as the inverse of individualism.
- Uncertainty Avoidance (UA): Countries with high UA tend to maintain strict codes of belief and behavior and are less tolerant of unconventional behaviors and ideas [14]. Within a team, this dimension measures the extent to which rule-breaking or divergence from the majority is accepted by team members.

The present study, falling within the tentative and exploratory research category, aims to re-examine the impact of cultural dimensions within the context of a M&V group. This area of study, particularly in the East Asian context, has received relatively little attention from academia. Using quantitative comparisons of China and South Korea across three key cultural dimensions mentioned above (as represented in Figure 3), the authors analyzed how various experiences aligned with these cultural scores. Through the observer’s insights, the study reflects on how each dimension influenced team dynamics and interactions, and highlights both the strengths and challenges that emerged in the M&V teamwork of this Chinese-Korean virtual team.

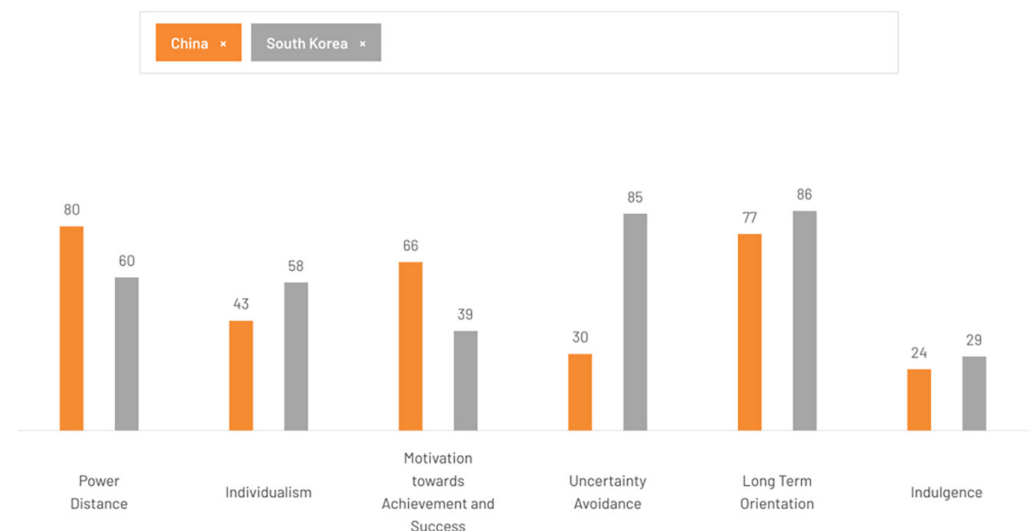


Fig. 3. Latest screenshot from theculturefactor.com [3], comparing China and South Korea

Reflections on PD-related experiences. South Korea, with a PD score of 60, is generally classified as a moderately hierarchical society. In contrast, China, with a score of 80, is considered highly hierarchical. This suggests that both South Korean and Chinese cultures accept hierarchical structures, albeit to varying extents, where

the place of each individual in the social order is clear and unquestioned. In such contexts, hierarchical teams often reflect inherent inequalities, leading to a preference for centralization. Subordinates are typically expected to follow directives without question, and the ideal leader is often seen as a “benevolent autocrat” (see [7] for more details regarding this concept). Accordingly, Chinese leaders may exhibit more authoritative behavior, and Chinese team members might show greater compliance compared to their South Korean counterparts.

However, such expectations were not entirely consistent with the observations from the youth diplomat team. Although previous studies have indicated that virtual teams tend to be less hierarchical and more decentralized [2], elements of PD were still found evident within the virtual team, particularly among South Korean members, while not so much among Chinese members. For instance, in Squad 1, where the observer participated, South Korean members exhibited greater concern for politeness and vertical distance between members. Korean etiquette, for example, required the use of honorifics, which was less emphasized by Chinese members. Additionally, opinions from senior members, such as the squad leader, were rarely challenged by South Korean members, even when constructive debate was expected. In contrast, disagreements were more common among Chinese members, regardless of their roles. Further details are illustrated in Figure 4, a chat log from WeChat, translated into English. The original log is available upon reasonable request to the first author.



Fig. 4. Chat log on the first day in the group chat, with the observer as “me”

Reflections on IN-related experiences. As their scores on IN are relatively low (both below 60), China and South Korea can be considered as collectivist societies, where people belong to certain groups that take care of them in exchange for loyalty. This was generally in line with the observer's experience, but still left behind some details worth further notice. To begin with, a discrepancy was noted between the latest IN scores for China and South Korea and the scores recorded when the observation was completed. Although the earlier version of the scores is no longer accessible on the website, a screenshot from that time was documented in November 2021, providing evidence of the previous figures. This archived version is also available upon reasonable request to the first author. The variations in the IN scores of two cultures, if considered reliable, underscore the dynamic nature of cultural dimension, and reflect how societal values and norms might evolve over time.

In line with the earlier scoring, South Korea scored lower on IN (18) compared to China (20), indicating a stronger collectivist orientation. This cultural tendency was found evident in the group work: squads with a higher proportion of Korean members demonstrated a more collectivist approach, whereas squads dominated by Chinese members leaned more towards individualism. These cultural differences manifested in various aspects of teamwork, including leadership styles, decision-making processes, task assignment, and overall efficiency. For instance, parallel interactions, as defined earlier, were found more common in squads with more Chinese members, while squads with more Korean members displayed more associative and cooperative interactions. However, behind such differences, distinguishing the influence of personality from cultural factors remains challenging. In Squad 1, while the two Korean members clearly embodied team-oriented behaviors, the five Chinese members exhibited a range of engagement levels: some were less participative and only focused on completing assigned tasks, while others were more enthusiastic and willing to take on additional responsibilities. These variations suggest that personality traits may also play a significant role alongside cultural influences. Additionally, concerns about connecting with both Chinese and Korean colleagues arose, after the first team meeting, where a lack of willingness to socialize and engage was observed, particularly when the leader's requests for feedback were met with silence. Intriguingly, as the team dynamic evolved, members became increasingly active, indicating that the individualism-collectivism spectrum can sometimes be overshadowed, at least temporarily, by the team's developing atmosphere. For a discussion on group development and teamwork, the readership is encouraged to return to the authors' earlier conference paper.

Yet, given the updated cultural dimension scores, with South Korea now scoring higher on IN (58) than China (43), one might anticipate notable shifts in the dynamics within a Chinese-Korean team compared to the observations above. If South Korean team members are found increasingly individualistic, a change could be expected in their approach to teamwork. They might prioritize personal goals and individual responsibilities more than they did previously, which could lead to less emphasis on collective decision-making and more focus on personal achievement. This shift could also influence leadership styles, with South Korean leaders potentially becoming less authoritarian and more inclined towards empowering individual team members, reflecting a broader cultural trend towards the appreciation of personal autonomy. On the other hand, while also seeing a large increase, China's score on IN was surpassed by the IN score of South Korea. Accordingly, Chinese members may exhibit a more collectivist orientation compared to their South Korean colleagues, emphasizing group harmony and cooperative decision-making. It is also natural to assume that this difference in IN scores between the two countries might lead to a

more pronounced cultural divide within the team, possibly resulting in challenges related to coordination and integration of differing work styles. For instance, South Korean members might expect greater personal recognition for their contributions, while Chinese members may focus more on ensuring that the team's collective efforts are recognized. As for the factors that could contribute to this shift, the authors will return to a related discussion later.

Reflections on UA-related experiences. South Korea, with a score of 85 on UA, ranks among the most uncertainty-avoidant countries. This tendency was particularly evident in the Chinese-Korean team, especially in terms of how members addressed language barriers. In a multicultural team, language barriers inevitably impact intragroup communication, though the extent may vary. As could be easily noticed in the chat room, Chinese members generally seemed more inclined to compromise when faced with language challenges, whereas South Korean members demonstrated a stronger determination to overcome these barriers, as they seemed to believe that no miscommunication due to language barriers is a must-follow code. One Chinese colleague even confessed that when South Korean colleagues struggled to convey certain ideas in Chinese or resorted to a mix of Korean and English, she often just smiled, nodded, and pretended to understand. In contrast, South Korean members appeared to be meticulous in ensuring clear communication. They would persistently clarify any misunderstandings, even if it might require significant time, to guarantee accurate exchanges of information, like a proposal or feedback. Such pursuits for accuracy, potentially as a strict code among Korean colleagues, while perhaps somewhat time-consuming, are admirable in most work contexts, and shed light on a cultural trait that seems to be less emphasized in China.

Ruminations on the failures of Hofstede's dimensions. In the following discussion, the authors focus on why the three dimensions sometimes fail to account for the observations. One possible explanation is that Hofstede's framework, while influential, may be somewhat oversimplified and outdated. It requires reassessment in terms of reliability, validity, and model fit within the current context, especially considering the influence of CMC technologies. For instance, Sundong and Taeha [26] found in their study of cultural differences among SNS users in South Korea, China, and the U.S. that the PD ranking was Korea > China > U.S., which differs from Hofstede's ranking, China > Korea > U.S. – except for the U.S. as the lowest. The observer's work experiences in a Chinese-Korean context also align with their findings. Such updated results underscore the importance of continuously updating the understanding of national cultures, especially considering the impacts of rapidly changing media technologies.

Moreover, Hofstede's model has been accused of merely being a product of stereotypes and assumptions [21], without fully accounting for the dynamic nature of culture itself. The original data for Hofstede's model were drawn from IBM employees, with the assumption that the IBM group was sufficiently diverse and representative to support national cultural determinism. However, it is possible that the collected data at best reflected IBM's corporate culture for the most part, rather than national cultures. More importantly, the data collection happened between 1967 and 1973, which is now several decades ago and thus could fail to explain certain shifts since then. For starters, the PD scoring may not fully reflect the persistence and even intensification of hierarchical traditions in contemporary South Korean society, where social hierarchies and vertical interpersonal distances are, as can be told by the authors, still rigorously observed. Despite modernization, hierarchical structures rooted in Confucian values continue to play a significant role in professional and personal relationships. Respect for authority and seniority

remains a prominent feature, influencing workplace dynamics, communication styles, and decision-making processes. Conversely, as observed by the authors, these hierarchical traditions and customs have diminished considerably in modern Chinese society. The rapid economic and social reforms in China, particularly since the late 20th century, have contributed to a more egalitarian social structure, especially in urban settings. While respect for seniority still exists, the rigid hierarchies that once defined Chinese interactions have gradually weakened, reflecting broader societal changes. Such changes may have significant implications for studies that rely on cultural metrics, emphasizing the need for continual updates and validations of these scores to ensure that they accurately represent current cultural realities.

In sum, the failures of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, even only in this specific case, highlight the need for regularly updating cultural models to reflect current realities, rather than relying on potentially outdated and stale data [31]. The updated IN scores, as reported above, can be seen as a reflection of this need. Rapid economic development, globalization, and increased exposure to Western values might explain a growing emphasis on individualism in South Korean society. Meanwhile, the influence of social media and various CMC platforms, promoting self-expression and individual branding, could also play a considerable role in this cultural evolution. Such driving factors can also be found in the current Chinese context, contributing to a similar increase. In general, the generational changes, with younger Chinese and South Koreans being more influenced by the cultural trends that promote self-centeredness, might further explain the surge in IN.

5 DISCUSSION

While the reflections above have certain limitations, as with most other observation studies, what has been addressed so far nonetheless could provide valuable insights for enhancing the performance of M&V teamwork. The following discussion will look beyond the case being studied, moving on to practical strategies and theoretical considerations that can further inform and improve M&V teamwork. This extended discussion will cover communication practices, leadership styles, and the integration of CMC technologies, which can be instrumental in bridging cultural gaps and fostering more cohesive and productive team environments. Limitations of the current study will also be discussed, pointing out future directions for research with similar concerns.

5.1 Insights into intragroup communication with South Korean colleagues

Given the observer's Chinese background, implications were drawn to specifically enhance the understanding of intercultural communication and cooperation with South Korean colleagues. In the current study, South Korean colleagues were generally observed to be diligent workers, perhaps driven by an internal compulsion to remain busy, while emphasizing precision and punctuality. This characteristic is closely related to South Korea's high UA score, which underscores the advantages of having South Korean members in a multicultural team. Their cultural inclination towards high PD implies that South Korean colleagues are more likely to demonstrate compliance towards superiors. While this can be beneficial in ensuring that tasks would be executed exactly as instructed, it may also hinder open communication, creative thinking, and innovation.

To effectively collaborate with South Korean seniors, it is important to be mindful of polite language usage, such as employing honorifics when possible, and to show respect for their opinions while expressing your own views with caution. Conversely, when working with South Korean subordinates, it is crucial to maintain the hierarchical structure without overstepping boundaries in relationships, becoming overly familiar with them, or behaving as though you are one of them. This also suggests that maintaining an appropriate level of formality may help preserve the trust and respect of South Korean subordinates. Meanwhile, it is also advisable to encourage South Korean colleagues' expressions of creative ideas, especially in the face of their leaders, which could foster innovation and bring more possibilities to the team.

5.2 Insights into multicultural and virtual leadership

By establishing a Chinese-Korean youth diplomat team, the Consulate General might aim to leverage the diverse perspectives and skillsets of the young from both countries for generating more effective strategies in terms of promoting South Korean culture in China. Despite the presence of language barriers, differences in communication styles, and varying teamwork habits, the formation and operation of such an M&V team proved valuable. For a manager leading such a team, it is crucial to prioritize the solutions to language and cultural barriers, which can start with understanding and respecting different communication styles and maintaining an openness to all cultural differences. Without multicultural leadership in this concern, not only might the benefits of a multicultural team be lost, but the entire team project could be compromised. Additionally, as argued by Lowes [19], the ability to collaborate across time and space is increasingly becoming a standard requirement in the corporate world. Effective management of virtual teamwork, therefore, also demands significant attention. SNS, alongside other online communication platforms, when utilized effectively, can be powerful tools for remote teamwork. The observant's work experience demonstrated the effectiveness of the platforms usually used for remote working in China, like WeChat, Tencent Meeting, and Baidu Cloud, showcasing their potential in facilitating virtual collaboration. However, the successful application of such tools requires a well-thought-out strategy tailored to the team's specific needs and objectives.

In light of the potential changes that may happen in a contemporary Chinese-Korean virtual team, as discussed above, the authors suggest that managing cultural differences within a team may require more nuanced and dynamic approaches. Strategies that utilize hyper-personal communication to promote mutual understanding and to address the conflicts that may be caused by differences on a certain cultural dimension, such as the IN-CO divide, could be essential in sustaining the effective collaboration of an M&V team.

5.3 Limitations and future directions

The experience of M&V teamwork discussed in this study is predominantly confined to the online interactions between Chinese and Korean team members during a relatively short period of time (for nearly one year), limiting the scope to this specific East Asian case. Considering the cultural similarities between the two nations (rooted in their shared values and traditions), this study lacks the broader

perspectives that could be gained from including participants from Western or other non-Asian cultures. Recognizing this gap, future research could extend the current study to a more diverse range of cultural backgrounds, especially by recruiting some Western participants, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of M&V teamwork dynamics.

Furthermore, the participants in the youth diplomat team were primarily college students, which also limits the generalizability of the findings. College students may not fully represent the broader cultural norms and behaviors of their respective nations. Consequently, the results observed in this study may differ significantly from those that might emerge in teams comprising individuals of varying ages, social classes, and educational backgrounds. Such variations highlight the potential for more complex intercultural interactions that could arise in more diverse team compositions, which merits further notice. In addition, although the youth diplomat team primarily engaged in remote collaboration, some members did have the opportunity to meet face-to-face for on-site tasks. Those in-person interactions added another facet to the M&V teamwork experience, making it go beyond hyper-personal communication. The on-site interactions might even facilitate the development of a shared group identity, which likely had a significant impact on the subsequent dynamics of the team during online interactions. For instance, the Consulate General organized a visit for the youth diplomat team to a series of historical sites in and around Shanghai, where some shared historical memories for both China and South Korea could be found (e.g., the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai); the team members were tasked with creating a documentary video to record their experience. This kind of offline activity per se constituted an opportunity for team members to become more familiar with each other and deepen their mutual understanding. Besides, the specific discourses stemming from such vast experiences likely served as a strong bonding element, fostering camaraderie between the Chinese and South Korean members (for a discussion on the identity development and the on-site interactions in museum-like institutions, see [18]). Such factors, however, were not accounted for in the observations and reflections. The influence of in-person interactions on the overall team cohesion and effectiveness is an important aspect that was overlooked in the current study and should be considered in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how a hybrid teamwork mode may shape multicultural collaboration.

Moreover, to approach the influences of cultural dimensions in hyper-personal communication, the study primarily focused on the analysis of text-based communication within CMC environments, particularly relying on chat logs, while overlooking other CMC behaviors that might also have considerable effects. These behaviors include, but not exhaustively, the use of stickers and emojis, self-representation through profile photos, video background settings, and self-naming in a group chat. Although the observation touched upon some of these aspects, it did not delve deeply into how they might contribute to the hyper-personal effects within a virtual team. This oversight suggests that further investigation is needed to explore the impact of these CMC behaviors, which could provide valuable insights into the nuances of multicultural teamwork across virtual settings.

To sum up, while the current study has offered important insights into the M&V teamwork of a Chinese-Korean team, its limitations also underscore the need for more extensive research. Future studies should aim to include a broader range of cultural contexts, participant demographics, and work modes, as well as more detailed analysis of CMC behaviors based on a diachronic data set, to better understand the complexities of M&V teamwork.

6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, the reflections on a researcher's observation, while focusing on a specific case in an East Asian context, shed light on some critical aspects that could serve as guidelines for M&V (again, multicultural and virtual) teamwork, particularly in contexts that involve diverse cultural backgrounds and virtual collaborations. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding and adapting to cultural differences in virtual teamwork settings, acknowledging the evolving nature of cultural norms, and updating theoretical frameworks to address these dynamics. Such insights serve to address one core question: what makes a good team with cultural diversity, taking the impact of virtual teamwork into account. Although some of the insights are tailored to the case being studied here, implications for M&V teamwork can be drawn in general to navigate cultural complexities, optimize international cooperations, and improve cross-cultural communication and remote collaboration, with the help of CMC technologies and hyper-personal communication strategies.

Multicultural teamwork has long posed sophisticated issues that require systematic investigations, leave alone the virtual environments on the rise. The current study has only examined a tip of the iceberg regarding M&V teamwork, as only three cultural dimensions and one specific M&V team have been considered. With a full awareness of the limitations alongside the implications drawn above, the authors have also pointed out some directions for future research, in hopes of both the academia and the industry delving deeper into this increasingly valuable and complicated topic.

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