

Mentoring relationships in cross cultural research collaboration teams: An exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, more and more scholars, especially Europeans, tend to collaborate with international colleagues in order to achieve their research goals, indeed publish in the top journals. Scholars, seeking for international colleagues, meet some difficulties in the management of their specific background and different cultural orientation; there are many challenges in terms of cross-cultural management. This paper aims to identify factors that either enable or constrain the success of international collaboration research teams; in particular, we consider one important kind of relationship within international collaboration teams: Mentoring, described as a learning and competence development goal-driven process. This is an exploratory study conducted through a qualitative approach by using interview techniques in order to understand factors that might help to manage cultural diversity within international collaboration teams. The findings show that international scholars involved in mentoring relationships were more successful in their cross-cultural research collaboration teams. This study has important managerial implications within firms where international workers from different culture and countries interact.

Key words: cross cultural management, mentoring, diversity management, international research collaboration teams.

1. Introduction

In the recent decades, the workplace has been dramatically transformed especially for some phenomena such as the globalization, the increasing use of the Internet and the new technologies also for the management education, the financial crisis, and so on. In this world trend, more and more scholars, especially Europeans, tend to collaborate with international colleagues in order to achieve their research goals, especially to publish in the top journals. In this context, it is difficult for scholars to manage these collaborations because of their specific background but more for their different cultural orientation, so there are many challenges in terms of cross-cultural management. Some studies on academic collaborations have provided explanations of the success of these collaborations but there is a lack of theories and systematic studies to identify factors that contribute to successful international collaborations. In this paper, we aim to identify factors that either enable or constrain the success of international collaboration research teams in the top journals; in particular, we consider one important kind of relationship within international collaboration teams: Mentoring.

Mentoring is described as a learning and competence development goal-driven process. In the management literature, most authors consider mentoring as an instrument for learning process and also an effective technique that supports diversity management policies; mentoring has been considered as a relationship that contributes to personal growth and as an important organizational process. Mentoring relationships are one vehicle through which individuals can enhance personal learning and can develop and share their knowledge and skills in order to manage different organizational settings. More specifically, in academia mentoring relationships, senior scholars guide, assist, support junior scholars, especially in an international research context, in order to transfer skills, competences, and knowledge on research (theoretical background, framework, research design, methodology, etc.) and also knowledge on different cultural orientations in the research context. Senior scholars (mentor) share their personal experiences with junior scholars in order to manage the challenges related to the work with people from another culture and different background.

We propose that international scholars would benefit from collaboration teams that have inside or outside a deep form of mentoring relationship in order to manage the high level of diversity especially in terms of culture.

This is an exploratory study conducted through a qualitative approach by using interview techniques. We conducted 23 semi-structured interviews (international scholars) in order to explain and understand factors like mentoring that might help to manage cultural diversity within international collaboration teams. Most scholars interviewed, who had collaborated with others outside their home countries, found in their experience mentoring relationships necessary for successful international research collaboration teams.

2. Globalization and internalization in academia

The world becomes more and more globalized, in fact, “although all businesses increasingly operate across cultures” (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2006: 264); this trend in direction of globalization of market and internationalization of any kind of activities concerns also the academia context, in which many scholars tend to focus more on cross-culture management topic: some scholars investigate the influence of national culture on leadership practices (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2006), others try to find effective instruments to manage cultural diversity such as mentoring relationships (Chandler et al., 2011; Carraher, Sullivan and Crocitto, 2008; Linehan and Scullion, 2008). In the academic journals market, Editors, especially of North American (NA; refer to United States and Canada) management

journals pay increasing attention to globalize their journals (Kirkman and Law, 2005; March, 2005; Tsoukas, 2008) by publishing more and more work by international scholars. In recent years, many scholars seek for international collaborations in their research activity in order to publish their studies especially in NA journals. In this scenario characterized by an increasing globalized and internationalized academia context, scholars meet many challenges related to the different background and especially the cultural diversity of their collaborators, for this reason, it would be interesting to analyze how scholars manage this culturally diversified research collaborations and which factors can contribute to the success of these international research collaborations especially in publishing in high impact factor journals.

Some previous studies in the literature on academic publication have to find some interesting and valuable recipes for success (Judge, Cable, Colbert, and Rynes, 2007; McFadyen and Cannella, 2004; Newman and Cooper, 1993), such as descriptive accounts of international collaboration processes (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Mezias, Chen, and Murphy, 1999; Teagarden et al., 1995), and prescriptive advice on publication success (Eden and Rynes, 2003; Kirkman and Law, 2005; Peterson, 2001). However, too few theories and systematic studies identify factors that contribute to successful international collaborations. In this paper, we report the results of an empirical study, qualitative methodology using personal interviews.

According to the resource-based view¹, we propose that international scholars would benefit from collaboration teams that have high complementary resources (different background, research methods, theoretical knowledge, and so on) and low transaction costs (high level of diversity in terms of geographic distance and cultural diversity, and so on). We suppose that successful cross-cultural research collaboration teams depend on the chance for international scholars to manage effectively and efficiently the different culture orientation. Most scholars interviewed evidence that in their own experience they were involved in mentoring relationships with senior colleagues, usually their

¹ In the resource based theory complementarity means that one party's resources complement another party's resources and provide synergy through "economies of scope, economies of scale, or increased market power" (Harrison, Hitt, Hoskisson, and Ireland, 2001: 681).

supervisor during the PhD program or visiting scholar period; their mentor helped them to understand the different way to work around the world (culture diversity) depending on the country origins.

Collaboration is an important mechanism for advancing scientific knowledge creation (Katz and Martin, 1997), and its benefit for academic productivity is well documented (Lee and Bozeman, 2005; McFadyen and Cannella, 2004; Wuchty, Jones, and Uzzi, 2007). Collaboration stimulates intellectual creation by encouraging scholars to share their ideas; it integrates skills and resources necessary for fruitful analyses; and it allows solitary scholars to find enjoyable companionship in their often lonely scientific journeys (Bozeman and Corley, 2004; Gersick, Bartunek, and Dutton, 2000; Katz and Martin, 1997; Lee and Bozeman, 2005). In the past thirty years, a new collaboration trend have emerged: scholars outside NA actively search for collaborators in their efforts to publish in NA journals (Peterson, 2001). Despite this trend, little research has identified factors contributing to the publication success of these collaboration teams. Addressing this issue is important both theoretically and practically as international scholars are increasingly eager to publish in NA management journals (Baruch, 2001; Tsui, 2007).

The current academic productivity literature has tended to focus on individual attributes in predicting scientists' scholarly outputs or impact. Publication records are associated with social networks (Bozeman and Corley, 2004; McFadyen and Cannella, 2004), aptitude and ability (Bayer and Folger, 1966), personality traits (Helmreich, Spence, Beane, Lucker, and Matthews, 1980; Miner, 1980), demographics (Rodgers and Maranto, 1989; Zuckerman and Cole, 1975), and reputational standings of affiliated institutions (Crane, 1967; Helmreich et al., 1980; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Bachrach, 2008). However, studies have failed to address factors relevant to collaboration teams, particularly international teams.

Studies devoted to international academic collaboration are mainly descriptive or normative (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Mezas et al., 1999; Teagarden et al., 1995; Eden and Rynes, 2003; Peterson, 2001; ; Tsui, 2004, 2007). Few studies on international academic collaborations focus on mentoring as a tool and source for their success, in particular some scholars tend to investigate the positive effect of mentoring inside academic collaborations (Reohr, 1981; Merriam, 1983; Hall and Sandler, 1983; Simpson, 1984; Hite, 1985; Prehm and Isaacson, 1985; Klein et al., 1986; Blackwell, 1989; Sands, Parson and Duane, 1991; Gersick, Bartunek and Dutton, 2000; McGuire and Reger, 2003; Williamson and Cable, 2003; Ortiz-Walters and Gilson, 2005; Poteat, Shockley and Allen, 2009) in order to share knowledge (skills, competencies and experiences) and to keep an effective

learning process especially in collaboration teams in which individuals from very different countries, that is several cultures, are involved. Most studies focus on mentoring relationships in order to manage different groups of workers within organizations, i.e. expatriate workers (Mezias and Scandura, 2005; Carraher, Sullivan and Crocitto, 2008).

3. Mentoring: functions and implications in cross-cultural research collaboration teams

Considering the learning process, some scholars evidence that individuals learn a great deal through their interactions with others, especially those with different background, expertise, and seniority in their organizations (Hayes and Allinson, 1998). Otherwise, applying the resource-based view, international research collaboration also can achieve resource synergy or economy of scale². For example, collaboration can create synergy by division of labor (Laudel, 2001); that is, some scholars focus on theorization, research design, and grant acquisition, while others collect and analyze the data, and report the findings. Eventually the whole team interprets and discusses the results together. Collaboration can also create synergy by sharing resources that individual authors lack. For example, international scholars who have access to data or research grants may need collaborators who are good theorists or data analysts (Lee and Bozeman, 2005). Alternatively, collaboration can create economy of scale. As the saying goes, “many hands make light work.” More “hands” allow scholars to work more efficiently, tackle more complex research questions, collect more data, and increase the accuracy of data analysis and interpretation (Beaver, 2001) .

One important relationship that can serve as a forum for personal learning and knowledge sharing is mentoring (Kram, 1985, 1996). Somewhat surprisingly, personal learning has not been empirically studied in the mentoring literature (Lankau and Scandura, 2002). Mentoring is also described as a learning and competence development goal-driven process (Godshalk and Sosik, 2003).

The main studies evidence that mentoring is a relationship where there are two individuals, a senior person (mentor) who, thanks to his/her advanced experience and knowledge and maturity, has the duty to guide, to advise, to suggest junior individual (protégé/mentee) in his/her professional and

² The resource-based view suggests that the success of joint ventures lies in the creation or acquisition of complementary resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, nontradable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991; Das and Teng, 2000). Such success relies on synergizing resources via vertical integration or achieving economy of scale via horizontal integration (Hennart, 1988).

personal development; it is an exclusive relationship "person to person" between protégé and mentor, there is a dyadic personal and constant relationship (one-to-one) (Levinson et al., 1978; Kram, 1983; Burke, 1984; Thomas and Kram, 1988; Fagenson, 1989; Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992).

Last studies evidence that a protégé can establish relationships with more than a mentor within organizational context. Mentoring is a multiple developmental relationship phenomenon (Higgins, 2000; Higgins and Kram, 2001; Kram and Hall, 1996; de Janasz and Sullivan, 2004), where a protégé has not only one mentor, but he/she has multiple relationships with several and distinguished actors who has typical functions of mentoring. In Higgins and Kram's model (2001), mentoring is a process where young people look for a guide for their development within network of persons, establishing multiple simultaneous relationships. This developmental network perspective suggests that individuals are better served, if supported from a variety of mentors, who give more contributions in terms of perspective, knowledge and skills.

Mentors provide career development support, which involve coaching, sponsoring advancement, providing challenging assignments, protecting protégés from adverse forces, and foresting positive visibility. Moreover, mentors provide psychosocial roles, which include such functions as personal support, friendship, acceptance, counseling, and role modeling (Kram, 1985). Some authors consider these two mentorship factors of career development and psychosocial functions (Noe, 1988), others found role modeling to represent a third factor that is distinct from psychosocial support (Scandura, 1992). In fact, according to some studies mentoring has three distinguished functions: career development, psychosocial support activities and role modeling (Scandura, 1992; Scandura and Ragins, 1993). Role modelling is recognized like distinguished function of the mentoring in psychosocial dimension, with reference to the behaviour model that is defined usually with care to the reaction of the protégé, in terms of attributions and acknowledgments for the mentor.

However, mentor can supply all or only one of such functions (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). These approaches differ for the composition of mentoring functions and so for the number of mentoring functions (two or three), but both of them consider advantages of mentoring in terms of outcomes in two different areas of protégé: personnel and professional areas.

Mentoring is an innovative learning technique, an effective tool for knowledge and skills sharing. It is really important in academia, where it is more relevant the assistance activity to the scholars, especially junior scholars; this type of relationship could have an important role in the career development of individuals, and more in their psychosocial development process. In this case it is important to introduce and improve different and flexible systems for personal and professional development of people.

Mentoring studies consider organizational settings, where mentoring is an effective instrument in socialization process (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004), training and learning process (Boldizzoni and

Nacamulli, 2004) and career development; there are outcomes of mentoring in this case in terms of higher levels of job satisfaction and promotions (Fagenson, 1989; Kram, 1985; Riley and Wrench, 1985). Psychosocial dimensions are associated to support, counseling, friendship (Kram 1983; Allen et al., 2004). According to Kram's mentor role theory, career functions help protégé "to learn the ropes" and mentor can facilitate his/her advance within organizational context.

Furthermore, some studies distinguish formal or informal mentoring programs in terms of formality and length of the relationship, and purpose of the relationship meant like specific objective (Ragins, 1989; Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Zey, 1985; Kram, 1985; Murray, 1991).

Some studies examine training and more specifically mentoring as "the best available means of ensuring the integrity of science" (Anderson et al., 2007; p. 853). In particular, Anderson and colleagues (2007) have evidenced how mentoring can affect behaviour in order to decrease the likelihood of problematic behaviours for scientific researchers, especially for early-career researchers. In this perspective, we can evidence the chance to introduce and apply mentoring programs in order to guide, to suggest, and to advise junior scholars in their academic career.

In this way, thanks to a specific mentoring program, we could manage difficulties within international collaboration teams, especially cultural diversity, or at least we could reduce the negative effects of this factor in terms of misunderstandings or different goals perspective. Mentoring programs could be one of the innovative tools to support an effective cross-cultural management process within international research collaborations. In the past, scholars have pay more attention to mentoring in the perspective of diversity management policies³, indeed interesting studies investigate both the different effects of diversified mentoring relationships, especially gender, and the main function of mentoring in diversity management process, especially in order to manage positively cross-cultural collaborations.

Diversity management is a key initiative, together with such reconciliation policies in support of work-life balance, to favor also corporate social responsibility and improve the quality of life of

³ Diversity Management (DM) stands out as a phenomenon of increasing interest to scholars and practitioners. The globalization process of markets, as already evidenced, has given a strong push to the company through the spread of multinational and inter-company collaborative agreements.

DM approach was born in the United States (U.S.) in order to prevent workplace discrimination against ethnic minorities, women and disabled people, it qualifies as a mode oriented management to know and value the differences among individuals who work in organizational contexts.

The literature on International Human Resource Management from the end of the eighties has provided numerous theoretical and practical proposals on how organizations can manage, effectively, the growing diversity of the workforce, market and business. Diversity management focuses on the personal needs of each individual (age, stage of the cycle of life and work, motivation, etc.) and the contributions they can make to the organization.

Adopting the perspective of diversity management means, first, to recognize these differences, not ignore them or reject them but actively manage and leverage them to increase the competitiveness of the organization and the chances of success. Diversity management, focusing on the person in human resources management, stands as cultural and organizational change which aims to create an "inclusive" in which the differences of groups and individuals are not a source of discrimination, but subject to real attention and listening. The enhancement of the person constitutes a benefit for the benefit of the individual and the organization.

people inside any organizations, also international academia, in this perspective, mentoring can also be used as part of proactive policies on equal opportunities within the corporate landscape for minority groups (women, ethnic minorities, and so on) (Clutterbuck, 1998). In the research on mentoring, the existence of heterogeneity among the partners is the basis for a relationship.

On the one hand, studies and practice show that the DM organization derives benefits if you angle the heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, and respond more effectively to the changing environment, and secondly, even in the literature on mentoring, some contributions tend to emphasize factors such as diversity may help to define diversified mentoring relationships more effective. Moreover, mentoring is conceived as a tool that can facilitate the management of diversity, along with the traditional policies of diversity management, such as initiatives to recruit disabled people, the adoption of flexible forms of work, scholarships for people with high growth potential, training courses, etc. There are numerous contributions by scholars on the topic of mentoring who devote their attention to the issue of diversity in mentoring relationships. In particular, some researchers conducting an analysis of the effects of different composition as a culture in the report can exert an influence on the effectiveness of mentoring (Turban et al., 2002; Scandura and Williams, 2001; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000a; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). The element of diversity most frequently analyzed is represented by the gender (Scandura and Williams, 2001; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000b; Akande, 1993; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Other determinants of differences concerning the age and racial and ethnic origins, though scholars devote limited attention to these aspects. Indeed, past research on mentoring has some limitations in terms of both of their lack of consideration of issues of diversity, both in the scarce attention is also devoted to other determinants of diversity, especially racial and ethnic minorities.

The existing research on mentoring suggests that male Caucasians mentors are particularly influential on career advancement among the protégé. For example, some scholars have pointed out that as a group, female mentors tend to be less powerful than male mentors (Ragins and Sunstrom, 1989). Due to a position of less power for women, the latter could prove less effective in promoting the careers of protégés. Male mentors may be better able to confer legitimacy to his protégé and provide organizational resources required for success (Ragins, 1989). Mokros and Erkut (1984) conducted an empirical study confirming these propositions, and they, in fact, showed that male students were preferred in the selection made by mentors than women because the latter were seen as less powerful and with a lower status. A significant proportion of the different influence among white males and other groups, gender and race is derived from differences in the legitimacy of power that is inherent to the organizational position held (Fierman, 1990; Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990; "The Corporate Elite", 1991).

Although the impact of differences in authority between white men and other categories is evident, it is important to note that among the other white men might be more influential in providing

support to have a career as broader informal power (Lincoln and Miller, 1979; Brass, 1985; Thomas, 1990) and also more powerful and satisfied (Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley, 1990). These aspects, gender, race and organizational position, affect mainly the professional sphere of action of mentoring, that support career development. Some scholars recognize that the psychosocial support of mentoring could be better provided by a mentor who belongs to the same group of protégés in terms of race or gender, or other dimensions conceived as an expression of diversity (Dreher and Cox, 1996).

An interesting cross-sectional study of 729 MBA students (Master for Business Administration) of white and black (Cox and Nkomo, 1991) showed that students reported for black significantly less support mentoring than students with similar seniority Caucasians who worked in similar industries.

Some authors agree, however, in that the training and the effectiveness of mentoring relationships are influenced by socio-cultural identity such as gender and race (Dreher and Cox, 1996). In fact, the success of career employees in organizations dominated by male individuals of white race depends on the ability to establish mentoring relationships with white men, but this assumption does not imply that the formation of mentoring relationships with women or other groups of different racial is less important. Research on similarity-attraction paradigm has also shown that the similarity between individuals may lead to more frequent communication, a high social integration, and a desire to retain membership (Lincoln and Miller, 1979). The contexts in which individuals have similarities in terms of population may, therefore, offer individuals the opportunity to “interact with other like-minded individuals and create stronger working relationships” (Wharton and Baron, 1987). Considering the main functions attributed to mentoring, we note that a mentoring relationship otherwise made a deficiency could result in personal support with other individuals, a relationship is less strong, and a communication deficient or absent (Ragins, 1997a, 1997b). This theme combines different effects to the formation of diversified mentoring relationships, has not yet been extensively investigated, but studies recognize its importance.

Some studies show that diversity can have different effects for the two actors mentor (Ragins, 1997b) and protégé (Lankau et al., 2005); for example, regarding mentors there are more effects of gender and race in terms of barriers for interpersonal stereotypes or performance, less than protégé. The studies recognize, first, that the presence of relationships between different individuals by gender, age, ethnicity, etc., requires a different perspective of the management of those relationships by virtue of the consequences, on the other hand, mentoring can support policies to manage diversity effectively in its various manifestations (Turban et al., 2002; Ragins, 1997b). Regarding the age, Ragins and McFarlin (1990) showed that the protégé of a younger age are more likely to receive the function of role modeling from their mentor than the older protégé. Whitley et al. (1991) have shown that there is a negative relationship between age of the protégé and the amount of career mentoring received. Furthermore, Ragins and Cotton (1991) assume that individuals with previous experience of mentoring

may have learned from those experiences and are more understandable information on how to become a mentor and start the relationship. It shows, according to the literature, the impact of the experience with reference to the age factor, is similar for both counterparties. With regard to nationality, Feldman et al. (1999) showed that the differences in nationality of the mentor and protégé may have a direct influence on the extent of mentoring received by protégés. Although it is natural to argue that in a mentoring program multinational corporations, having a mentor could help the host nation's protégé who finds herself in a foreign country, but who is better understands the culture of different nationalities. In conclusion, the study by Feldman et al. (1999) has shown that it may be more beneficial if the mentor and protégé were of the same nationality, because they share the same cultural values by facilitating effective communication. In studies on the relationship between mentoring and diversity, a significant and substantial attention was always directed to the factor of gender, because guided by the desire to understand the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in organizations.

This study considers a specific context, academic institutions, where in different ways, there are mentoring relationships. We want to analyze the mentoring relationships as an effective instrument in the diversity management among scholars, more specifically in the management of cultural differences in international research collaboration teams.

Studies on team composition in international research collaboration teams can provide valuable insights regarding factors constraining team functioning and affecting the potential success of international collaboration teams. Among these factors, diversity is regarded as a double-edged sword (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Some scholars (e.g., Wittenbaum and Stasser, 1996) argue that diverse teams have more access to information, enabling them to be more creative and make better decisions. On the other hand, some scholars draw on similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) and social categorization theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1987) and argue that diversity increases conflict and tension, hinders collaboration, and lowers team performance. Empirical findings on diversity are inconsistent. For observable diversity in gender and ethnicity, Chatman and Flynn (2001) found that they were negatively related with collaboration success, whereas Tyran and Gibson (2008) found that they had no effect on group efficacy. These conflicting findings have prompted two meta-analyses (Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007; Webber and Donahue, 2001), and both found that observable diversity had no significant main effect on team cohesion and performance. However, many scholars (Bear and Woolley, 2011; Joshi and Roh, 2009; van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998) notice that the effect of diversity is more complex than previous studies have suggested, and scholars must adopt a contingency perspective on diversity.

Diversity of a certain attribute can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the context. For example, gender is traditionally regarded as a salient attribute to probe social categorization (Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly, 1992); it also implies various life experiences and

perspectives that can enrich information processing. Woolley and colleagues (2010) found that the proportion of women was positively related with collective intelligence. Pearsall and colleagues (2008) found gender diversity to be disruptive in gender-conscious tasks but beneficial for creativity in gender-neutral tasks.

In fact, abundant research has identified diversity contingencies including task characteristics (e.g., interdependence and complexity), team characteristics (e.g., tenure, time), and organizational characteristics (e.g., organizational culture, human resource practices, and strategy) (e.g., van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Joshi and Roh's (2009) meta-analysis found that gender diversity had a stronger negative effect in a male-dominant setting and in a high-technology industry. Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin (1999) found that the positive relationship between race diversity and emotional conflict became stronger when task complexity increased. Likewise, Earley and Mosakowski (2000) found that high cultural diversity could become beneficial when team members formed a hybrid culture.

Academic research teams engage in highly complex and interdependent tasks. Theorizing and forming research ideas demands cognitively complex knowledge integration and creation. Designing and implementing data collection procedures involves countless details, each essential to maintain research rigor and ensure success. Data analyses and interpretation requires mastery of the newest sophisticated methods and disciplined imagination. Team members must collaborate closely and communicate smoothly to assure that research manuscripts are integral, and they can receive a specific and effective support by creating mentoring relationships. However, in circumstances of such task complexity and independence, diversity increases social categorization and destructive conflict. Supporting this argument, diversity is found to associate with more conflict (Pelled et al., 1999) and less effective communication (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010) especially when task complexity is high; and conflicts, in turn, damage team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Furthermore, working in dispersed geographical areas, as would be the case with international collaboration, reduces communication frequency and effectiveness (Van den Bulte & Moenaert, 1998), limiting scholars' capability to reap the informational benefit of diversity.

Besides the two characteristics of international collaboration teams that limit informational benefit of diversity in general, diversity of national culture has its unique challenge. National culture characterizes distinctive ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are shared among members of a national group (Earley and Gibson, 2002). Different expectations of communication practices can easily cause misunderstanding, distrust, and stereotyping (Adler and Boyacigiller, 1995). Some studies investigate more specifically this subject founding a negative relationship between national diversity and innovation (Gibson and Gibbs 2006), evidencing association of cultural diversity with higher conflicts, lower social integration, and less effective communication (Stahl et al., 2010: meta-analysis on cultural diversity in 10, 632 multicultural teams). These results suggest that geographically dispersed teams cannot realize the informational benefit because of reduced communication and increased conflicts. Based on our discussion on cultural diversity, and less on gender, we propose that mentoring could manage effectively this attribute making successful international research collaboration teams.

4. Methodology

In this study, we interviewed 23 international scholars to further understand which factors contribute to the success of their international collaborations more specifically how mentoring relationships can manage cultural diversity, conceived as transaction cost, inside them. Indeed, we try to investigate if and how existing mentoring relationships inside international collaborations can make them successful thank to a positive cross-cultural management process.

We adopt a qualitative method to enrich our understanding of international collaboration teams by applying literature on mentoring topic and cultural diversity. Previous research on academic collaboration is either quantitative (McFadyen and Cannella, 2004) or qualitative (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Teagarden et al., 1995), and only partially explains the phenomenon (Weick, 2007).

Sample and Data Collection

We conducted 23 semi-structured interviews to understand if and how mentoring can help to manage cultural diversity inside international academic collaboration teams. Interviews and qualitative methods are appropriate for studying underexplored phenomena and developing theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski, 1999). To learn how scholars transform costs such as cultural diversity into resources, and more specifically if they were mentored this diversity management process was more effective; we interviewed only scholars who had collaborated with others outside their home countries. We invited international scholars from different countries, ages, ranks, and genders to compare patterns from different cases. We followed the principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to select participants and used the principle of theoretical saturation to stop data collection (Yin, 2003).

The final sample included 23 scholars from eight countries in four continents outside NA: Asia (4), Europe (17), Oceania (1), and South America (1). These scholars were 30 to 55-years-old, five were female, and 70% had successfully published in NA journals with collaborators outside their home country. Fourteen (60%) were assistant professors, and the rest were associate or full professors. We interviewed more assistant professors because university pressures that raise the bar for tenure and emphasize publishing in internationally recognized journals (Leung, 2007) strongly motivate assistant professors to seek collaborators and to publish in NA journals.

The semi-structured interviews lasted 30-70 minutes each. We asked interviewees about their experiences in recent international collaboration projects and experiences with their most important collaborators. In particular, we asked about the challenges they faced, how they resolved these challenges, and the factors that contributed to their collaboration success or failure. We asked them to elaborate the points with examples. In addition, we explored whether cultural diversity was a challenge. We asked them if they were mentored in their academic experiences. We tape-recorded all interviews and then transcribed them for coding.

Analysis

We applied grounded theory techniques to analyse the interview data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). With the assistance of NVivo 9, we analyzed the interview notes line-by-line and developed concepts by using the original words whenever possible or creating a simple descriptive phrase. These initial codes were added to an emerging dictionary with definitions and examples documented.

The interview analysis was carefully executed to ensure internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2003). First, using the triangulation principle (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) , two authors served as coders and one served as subject expert to assess whether the conclusions were plausible. Second, using the constant comparison technique (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) , we compared patterns found for scholars who successfully published supported by mentoring relationships with collaborators with those who failed without mentoring experiences, and we checked whether themes identified in one case could be replicated elsewhere. These procedures allowed us to generate logically coherent, parsimonious, and reliable findings (Eisenhardt, 1989) .

Findings

We obtained 165 comments from 23 interviewees. Interviewees consistently referred to cultural diversity as a challenge for international collaboration. Six mentioned language barriers, eight identified mindset differences, and seven addressed communication difficulties. Regarding language barriers, a male Dutch full professor said that he could not communicate effectively with his colleague because they had to use English, a second language for both. He concluded, “If you don't speak the language, cooperation becomes very difficult.” Regarding different mind sets, a male German assistant professor reported being unable to “find a common denominator” in collaborating with a Chinese colleague because of their different views. Regarding communication difficulties, a male German associate professor said that it would be “[it] is much easier to process a project when you see each other often and you can quickly bring it back into the awareness, into the working memory”. Such comments confirmed our previous theorization that cultural diversity would be a transaction cost.

Despite all these challenges, scholars found international collaboration necessary for publication success and more specifically commented that in their international collaboration experiences one most important successful factor was “to have a mentor”. One male Chinese assistant professor evidenced that in his experience “friendship improved also his success in research collaborations, more specifically Guanxi was very important”. In the mentoring perspective, he commented: “Guanxi is a personal relationship between Chinese and Chinese, it is very important for the communication and the collaboration between Chinese peoples. It is so dependent on the intimate friendships and it is also dependent on the person of climate”. In this direction, scholars tend to look for and choose as their mentor scholars from their home country, this happens more, i.e., for Chinese scholars because of Guanxi; otherwise, previous studies evidence that individuals, more specifically expatriate, are more supported and successful in their experience outside their home country if they have both a home and a host-country mentor (Baugh and Sullivan 2005; Chandler and Kram, 2005; Crocitto, Sullivan and Carraher, 2005; Mezas and Scandura, 2005). In an interesting study on mentoring across boundaries regarding expatriate career outcomes, Carraher, Sullivan and Crocitto (2008), reported that these home and host-country mentors can achieve different goals (p. 1312): “the host-country mentors typically assisted the expatriates with cross-cultural adaptation, and the home-country mentors usually linked the expatriates to the global organization and helped with repatriation issues” (Jassawalla et al., 2006). A female Australian assistant professor also commented: “in my international collaborations, one most important collaborator was a professor from Germany because he was my leader, my mentor. ... Having a mentor is also very good because the mentor comes in and will give out advice. Mentor can help to overcome challenges, can open the doors”.

Another male assistant professor from Germany commented: “you just don’t find the person within your university or even within your country, and so you have to look worldwide.” In fact, successful teams managed to transform this liability into an asset. Hence, they realized the benefits from cultural diversity. Our subsequent analysis focused on identifying factors that helped overcome the collaboration challenges, in particular mentoring relationships.

Some scholars identified personal enablers like characteristics of individual international scholars that contribute to effective collaboration; these factors are strong professional aspiration (39 comments) that motivated scholars to proactively seek international collaborations, and (2) interpersonal competence (11 comments) that allowed them to successfully avoid or solve conflicts during the collaboration process.

Strong professional aspirations, such as gaining research freedom, acquiring research skills or increasing publication quantity, motivate international scholars to actively seek collaborators from other countries, to proactively confront challenges, and to find solutions to conflicts in the collaboration process. More in details, some scholars interviewed commented that in order to achieve their research goals they look for mentoring relationships because they need a guide and support in their academic career and process of development and management of cross-cultural collaboration teams.

Some international scholars received their training outside the NA system, but they wanted to go beyond this personal constraint. They usually met their “mentor” outside their home country; their mentor was their supervisor or their first colleague in another university. For example, a male Spanish assistant professor said: “I want to get freedom to do what I want, such as going to other universities, moving around the world, being competitive in the market.” Many expressed strong learning motives to collaborate internationally. A male full professor in China said that he wanted to eventually become the principal contributor or driver of a research project, but he did not mind taking the role of assistant in his collaborators’ projects to learn from their writing, research methods, and publication skills. He tends to play a special role inside international collaborations, more like a mentor especially for younger scholars. Other scholars expressed similar motivations such as learning research design, scale development, data collection, and sampling procedures, or learning how to write and publish. Some scholars were motivated by increasing publication quantity. Most scholars interviewed evidenced that they could achieve their goals, especially in the learning perspective, thanks to a special trusting and intimate relationship with other senior and more experienced scholars; sometimes they talked explicitly about mentoring support in their experience and other times they talked about guide and

assistance but not a real mentoring relationship. For example, a female Singaporean associate professor said that rather than seeking to learn from collaborations she specifically looked for increasing research publications. Some scholars were driven by grant opportunities. A female Australian assistant professor started her first international collaboration because “this person is very keen on getting certain grants from the government”. She was supported and guided in her collaboration.

Successful international scholars, most of them with mentoring experiences, demonstrated high interpersonal competence. Specifically, they had agreeable personalities (4 comments), exhibited high cultural intelligence (4 comments), and were task-focused (3 comments). For example, a male Italian associate professor said: “I am pretty easygoing. Basically most of my co-authors are my friends.” These scholars usually had international experiences, such as acquiring doctoral degrees or being visiting scholars in other countries and actively attending international academic conferences. Such experiences increased their cultural intelligence; in particular mentoring experiences help them to overcome the main challenges related to international academia, indeed the cultural diversity. Thanks to their mentors scholars can open their mind and increase their knowledge about other way to work or other traditions and cultures. A male German associate professor said he had to “understand why someone from Portugal or from Italy would always do everything last minute, which could drive somebody from the North rather crazy because we like to have it on the desk on time.” At the same time, some scholars commented that they could overcome these difficulties thanks to the help and support of their mentors who give them the main rules and suggestions about the way in which international academia market works. International scholars avoided taking conflicts personally or becoming judgmental; instead, under conflict they managed to reorient the focus to the research project and to reiterate the common goals, especially thanks the counselling function of their mentor. For example, a female Chinese assistant professor said: “It’s again you [who] have to be able to compromise first. I mentioned to him again that we both wanted to get this interesting idea published.”

Regarding team facilitators, such as deep similarities (40 comments) and the communication process (54 comments), scholars reported that in their international experiences mentoring plays a key

role in order to overcome collaboration challenges. First, members in successful international collaboration teams possess similar publication goals (11 comments), research interests (18 comments), and working styles (11 comments), indicating deep-level similarities (Harrison et al., 1998). Participants reported that their collaboration team members shared the same research goals and publication motivations. Realizing that they could not finish their projects alone, they cherished their collaborative relationships and, in particular, look for a guide, a mentor in their academic career. One male Greek assistant professor concluded, “it’s important that both parties have equal interest in the collaboration.” He felt that his “collaboration success was because the collaborators were motivated to the same level.” In mentoring relationships, otherwise, the same orientation, same goals, working style, and so on, between mentor and protégé is very important in order to develop the relationship effectively. Besides providing complementary skills to the project, team members shared similar research interests. For example, a male German associate professor said: “We have the same research interests; his research projects are in line with my own. Therefore, his project motivates me to learn his methods and every other new aspect involved.” Other scholars mentioned the importance of having similar working styles. A female Singaporean associate professor shared her experience that collaborators “need to share similar working style,” and they “set up the terms and conditions upfront and make sure team members are happy with the collaboration.”

Second, successful international collaboration teams paid special attention to communication processes including frequent (6 comments) and open (7 comments) communication, appealing to common goals (13 comments), utilizing multiple communication media (5 comments), developing long-term friendship and trust (23 comments). A male Argentine associate professor regarded frequent communication as a key success factor: “all members try to have frequent interactions and communications.” A Dutch full professor said that the team openly shared every detail, from research issues to university administration information. When differing ideas escalated to relational conflicts, they managed to return to their original common goals and restart their conversations. A female Australian assistant professor said that it was important to be patient, and more important to have “the willingness to negotiate, the willingness to accommodate each other.” Recognizing the difficulty of

communication caused by long distance, scholars utilized multiple communication media such as Skype, phone, and email to obtain more contextual information and minimize miscommunication. A male Dutch full professor, a frequent Skype-user said that it could “clarify issues that cannot be resolved via emails.”

Scholars emphasized the importance of trust and friendship (23 comments) in the process of communication. Trust and friendship are more like the specific pre-conditions for effective mentoring experiences. A female Australian assistant professor mentioned that members on their team knew one another for at least a year before they started the project: “I’ve been working with American colleagues for years and we are good friends who regularly get together. ... When it’s more than a superficial connection, it is evidently easier to work together.” A male German assistant professor said: “especially when you work with people from other countries and you know you don’t meet them on a regular basis, you need to establish trust or find some means to deal with problems that could be arising due to low trust.” Such high-quality communication is likely to increase psychological safety among team members, which in turn facilitates team learning activities and performance (Kostopoulos and Bozionelos, 2011).

Discussion

Qualitative study identifies individual-level factors including professional aspiration and interpersonal competency, and it also provides team-level factors including deep-level similarity and communication management. All these factors are related to successful international collaboration teams, with a basic represented by mentoring relationships. These factors combine to plausibly explain how successful international collaboration teams manage to enjoy the benefits of diversity and avoid its negative effects.

Successful international collaboration teams manage difficulties more often thanks to mentoring experiences developed inside them. First, scholars ensure that the team has members who have complementary resources and become mentors; these members are strongly motivated and have advanced skills for conducting high-quality research. Second, successful teams use both individual and team efforts to mitigate transaction costs embedded in the team composition.

Successful international scholars manage to transform diversity into resources through individual and team efforts. Although individuals naturally prefer working with people who are similar to them, professional aspiration motivates international scholars to collaborate with people who are different and to proactively solve the associated challenges. Interpersonal competence enables them to be good problem solvers. This finding is consistent with Groves and Feyerherm (2011) who found that diverse teams functioned better with leaders of high cultural intelligence, characterized with knowledge, motivation, and ability to deal with people from different backgrounds. These leaders can be conceptualized as mentors within international collaboration teams. In this perspective, in the literature on mentoring, scholars look for mentors and leave themselves to be supported. Among team members, deep-level similarity such as shared goals, similar working styles, and research interests provides additional assurance that the team focuses on accomplishing common goals. These same characteristics (information sharing and experiences and similarity in goals, working styles and so on) are also very important in successful mentoring relationships. Being aware of potential detrimental effects of long-distance communication and cross-cultural differences, successful teams pay special attention to their communication processes so that team members share information openly (Lin, 2010).

Our finding confirms that international scholars profit by joining international management associations or by seeking international collaborators.

International scholars alone, as suggested from our findings, may be unable to effectively convert their understandings about novel contexts into knowledge. Instead, international collaboration seems a better way to achieve synergy between scholars operating in the dominant paradigm and other scholars who carry insights about the new contexts.

An important surprise is that cultural diversity is positively related with publication success, although research on team diversity suggests that task complexity, interdependence, and geographical dispersion can reduce the informational benefit of diversity. This finding prompted us to qualitatively investigate potential moderators between diversity and publication success. Our analysis of the personal interviews reveals the role of strong professional aspiration and interpersonal competence in

dealing with cultural challenges. Consistent with this finding, previous research has found that conscientiousness (Barrick and Mount, 1991) and motivation (Klehe and Anderson, 2007) are positively associated with job performance. Cultural intelligence (CQ) (Ang, Van Dyne, and Koh, 2006; Earley and Ang, 2003) was identified as a key component of interpersonal competence, suggesting that CQ is not only important to managers and employees (Groves and Feyerherm, 2011) but also to scholars in achieving successful international collaboration.

In addition, we find that successful collaboration teams share deep-level similarity and effectively managed communication. Scholars have increasingly recognized that deep-level diversity strongly affects group cohesion (Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007; Harrison et al., 1998), and our qualitative data confirm that deep-level similarity enables scholars to avoid relational conflicts and reap the informational benefits of cultural diversity. The virtual team literature suggests that geographical dispersion reduces trust and increases conflicts (Armstrong and Cole, 2002; Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, and Kim, 2006). We find that scholars can offset such barriers by developing long-term friendship and trust, more specifically mentoring relationships help them to make their international collaboration teams successful.

In summary, our study contributes to the academic collaboration research by explaining resources and costs embedded in international collaboration teams and individual and team factors that transform costs into benefits. In particular, we investigate the role and the function of mentoring inside successful international research collaboration teams.

Our study has important practical implications for management scholars. First, international scholars seeking to publish in international management journals can draw evidence-based suggestions regarding benefits of strategically seeking collaborators, especially NA scholars. Copy editors are insufficient for providing this benefit, because they lack knowledge about management topics or publication processes. Second, we suggest that journal editors should act more proactively to help international scholars publish in NA journals. Third, scholars who mentor doctoral students can initiate more international collaborations during doctoral training, so that students develop necessary skills to collaborate globally. Cross-cultural collaboration will facilitate the examination of the cultural

boundaries of established theories and the development of universal theories valid and relevant in many cultures (Alon, Child, Li and McIntyre, 2011). Finally, scholars who engage in distance education are advised to focus on more than content delivery but rather to create opportunities for students to develop friendships and trust (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999). While distance education enables students to overcome educational barriers of time and location (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2009), adopting technology to foster student interaction and collaboration is essential to increase student satisfaction and performance (Beldarrain, 2006).

Limitations and future research directions

Our study has several limitations that inform future research directions. First, this is a qualitative study in which we only interviewed 23 scholars. The sample is very small but otherwise this is an exploratory study. We examine only one factor in team composition: cultural diversity. Future research can study other factors, potential costs, interaction among different costs, and moderators that facilitate the transformation. For example, as management knowledge rapidly cumulates, we do not know whether age diversity still bears informational benefits or becomes a liability of obsolescent knowledge. Chi and colleagues (2009) found tenure diversity to have a curvilinear relationship with team innovation, moderated by team-oriented human resource practices. Scholars can study these diversity attributes in the academic collaboration context. They can also examine the interaction between gender and cultural diversity. Although our post hoc analysis finds no interaction effects between gender and cultural diversity, more nuanced studies may be necessary to tease out the joint effect of gender and culture. For example, male professors in certain cultures may have problem working with women from cultures with different role expectations of women and where women may have different behavioral patterns. Further, the fault line literature suggests a detrimental effect when multiple demographic attributes align (Polzer et al., 2006). In addition to demographic factors, future research should examine personal attributes that are particular relevant for success in international arena. Our study has identified the contributing value of cultural intelligence. Related to CQ is the idea of bi-cultural identity (Mok and Morris, 2010). Those who identify with two or more cultures may be more comfortable and competent in cross-cultural collaboration, including in

academic projects. Regarding journal editors, they tend more likely to publish papers by international authors. For example, when authors submit papers with language problems, reviewers may be inclined to reject the papers because the content is obscured by the writing errors. Developmental editors can reduce such frustration by requiring the authors to rectify language problems before sending the papers out for reviews.

5. Conclusion

Understanding how international scholars can collaborate and achieve their goals, especially publish in high impact international journals, is important not only for their career success but also for the universities supporting their activities with financial resources. We evidenced as it was important for many scholars seeking for international colleagues in academia market to receive the support and the guide from a mentor. In this study, we conducted interviews with the objective of providing preliminary understandings of successful international academic collaborations. The challenges of international collaboration are enormous, and both individual scholars and institutions must work together to realize its potential. We hope that our insights provide guidance to support and manage the several and wide challenges in academia and also we hope that this study can suggest avenues for future research into enhancing international research collaborations.

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