Unveiling Cultural Components: Japanese And Mexican Traits In Intercultural Work Teams

Y. D. Cisneros-Reyes[1*], E. Conraud-Koellner[2], M. G. Arredondo-Hidalgo[3], G. M. Ortega-Hernandez[4],

[1*]Universidad de Guanajuato (DICIS), ycisneros@ugto.mx,
[2]Universidad de Guanajuato (DCEA), evac@ugto.mx,
[3]Universidad de Guanajuato (DCEA),mg.arredondohidalgo@ugto.mx,
[4]Universidad de Guanajuato (DICIS) gm.ortegahernandez@ugto.mx

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Cultural components encompass a wide array of elements that collectively define a culture. These include values, norms, customs and traditions, language, symbols, and social institutions. Cultural components are fundamental in intercultural work teams as they contribute to better communication, collaboration, creativity, and overall team effectiveness in today's diverse and interconnected world. In this qualitative study a case of a Mexican Japanese multicultural work team within the Automotive industry, is presented. The scale proposed in the Cultural Map of Erin Meyer is used as a basis for the survey. The novelty of this work is that for the referred study the Persuading section of Japanese culture was not included while it was considered in our survey. In conclusion, it is evident that the coexistence between the two cultures has resulted in the emergence of similarities in several domains

Index Terms— Erin-Meyer scale, Japanese, Mexican, Workteam**.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the study of international work teams is relevant for organizations and enterprises due to several reasons such as the globalization, the diversity and necessary inclusion, and the crucial market expansion. The companies interested in knowing the cultural components of their intercultural work teams could also acquire and retain talent, make profit of the technological advances, and successfully manage crisis while reaching resilience, which finally leads to a competitive advantage.

The approach of this work is to consider an intercultural work team as a group of people from diverse cultural backgrounds who work together on projects within an organizational environment.

The fundamental is that intercultural work teams play a crucial role in the modern business world, their dynamics could promote the organizations to exploit the benefits of diversity and to be inserted in complex cultural environments to reach their institutional goals.

However, to get the benefits of an intercultural work team interaction, it is necessary to deeply knowing and understanding the characteristics of their members. That is the aim of the present research which focuses on an intercultural work team of a Japanese company subsidiary installed in Mexico in the context of the automotive industry.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Multicultural workteams
According to Cox [1] multicultural work teams are groups composed of persons from different cultural backgrounds, including but not limited to nationality, ethnicity, race, and religion. These groups exist in environments where cultural diversity is recognized and valued, while they also aim to leverage this diversity to promote innovation, creativity, and inclusive decision-making processes.

A similar concept, intercultural work teams is defined by Jackson [2] as that one formed of individuals from different cultural backgrounds who collaborate and interact to achieve common objectives. These teams require members to negotiate and adapt to cultural divergences in communication styles, norms, and values.

According to Stahl et al. (3) the cultural diversity leads to process losses through task conflict and decreased social integration, but also to process gains through a major level of creativity and satisfaction.

Cultural components of multicultural work teams

Cultural components encompass a wide array of elements that collectively define a culture. These include values, norms, customs and traditions, language, symbols, and social institutions.

Cultural components are fundamental in intercultural work teams as they contribute to better communication, collaboration, creativity, and overall team effectiveness in today's diverse and interconnected world. The study of cultural components is relevant for the organizations, and it has been a research topic from different perspectives of several authors. In one of these studies, Hall [4] focused on communication and stated that the cultural differences impact in a notable way the styles, norms, and preferences; concluded that when it is possible to understand these cultural variations within the teams, the misunderstandings reduce as well as the conflicts and the breakdowns.

In the trust and relationship building phenomena, Hofstede [5] found that culture influences the formation of both within the teams, specifically cultural values such as collectivism versus individualism or high against low context communication influence the way trust is created and preserved in the work teams. Also, it was stated that recognizing, understanding, and respecting the cultural differences promotes the trust and unity within the team.

The apparition of conflicts and the mechanisms to solve them was the interest of Ting-Toomey [6] who found that different perspectives, approaches, and priorities might produce certain problems and concluded that understanding certain cultural dimensions like the conflict management styles and attitudes toward confrontation might support the teams in their process of solving conflicts constructively and adopting mutually acceptable solutions.

Another cultural component studied in the intercultural work teams is the decision-making process in which cultural backgrounds has an important role which includes the extent of hierarchy, the tolerance for ambivalence, as well as the reliance on consensus. When these cultural influences are recognized, the teams are helped to accommodate different viewpoints, promote inclusion, and achieve more effective and sustainable decisions (Triandis [7]).

Also, another perspective is the team dynamics and performance since it has been found that cultural diversity influences the team dynamics in aspects as leadership styles, role expectations, and collaboration patterns. Harrison & Klein [8] have also stated that leveraging cultural diversity enhances creativity, problem-solving, and general performance by making use of the unique strengths and perspective of every one of the team.

Some other authors have also analyzed the relevance of the cultural elements in intercultural work teams highlighting the diverse perspectives and creativity (Horwitz & Horwitz, [9]), the cultural sensitivity and adaptability (Adler [10]), the market understanding and localization (Bartlett & Ghoshal [11]), the uninterrupted operations and flexibility (Jarvenpaa & Leidner [12]), and the knowledge sharing and learning (Majchrzak, Malhotra, A., & John [13].

Thus, it can be noticed that understanding and managing cultural elements in intercultural work teams is crucial for promoting efficient communication, building trust and relationships, solving problems, making decisions, as well as optimizing team dynamics and performance in different organizational contexts.

In the field of intercultural work teams some authors have made notable contributions for the understanding of this phenomenon. For instance, the cultural dimensions theory of Hofstede [14] is still a fundamental in comprehending how cultural variances shapes the work behavior and the team dynamics. This theory identifies six dimensions of any national culture that influences workplace interactions and categorize them according to: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint.

Among the authors who have contributed to this field of knowledge, Trompenaars' [15] research highlights the centrality of cultural differences in the understanding of global business and develops models for interpreting and coping with cultural disparities in teamwork. The scholar's contributions elucidate the role of cultural dimensions in instilling communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and decision-making mechanisms across different cultures.

Another significant contribution has been made by Nancy Adler's [16] whom research focused on the interaction of culture, leadership, and organization behavior in the global context found the significance of cultural sensitivity, cultural flexibility, and cross-cultural competence for efficient operations of multicultural teams. The findings of Adler added that the creation of a diverse and inclusive culture help companies to gain from the use of cultural differences as a source of competetive advantage.

More recently, in a book by Lewis [17] When Cultures Collide, which is also widely cited, its author describes how to take cultural differences into account in business situations. Lewis classifies national cultures based on the criteria of communication style, attitude to time, and hierarchy. The management and business leaders use Lewis' results to better predict culture-oriented problems in international collaboration.

These authors have significantly influenced the study of intercultural work teams and have provided valuable frameworks, insights, and practical guidance for navigating cultural differences in organizational settings. However, the theory used as a basis for the methodology of this research was the one created by Erin Meyer's [18] who deepens in the cultural dissimilarities in the workplace.

Her research offers practical strategies for improving communication, collaboration, and leadership effectiveness in intercultural teams by understanding cultural elements such as communication styles, feedback preferences, and attitudes toward hierarchy. This cultural map considers the following elements:

• *Communication*. The communication styles are divided by the author into those of low context (simple, clear and explicit) and those of high context (unconscious assumptions about common references and shared knowledge, Japan).

• *Assessment*. How to handle negative feedback. In direct cultures (intensifier); in indirect statements, such as the Japanese one, attenuators are used to soften the criticism.

• *Persuasion*. When it comes to convincing, people from cultures such as Italy or Spain begin by presenting their positions and then add theories that support them. However, other cultures, such as the American culture, are based on principles and follow the opposite order.

• *Leadership*. The author distinguishes between two styles. A more hierarchical one, where the boss-employee distance is wide, status is important and organizational structures are fixed. Another more egalitarian one, in which the boss-employee distance is short and the best boss acts as a facilitator between equals.

• *Decision*. There are countries in which companies make decisions by consensus, each choice is made as a group. On the other hand, there are those in which a single person makes the decision that affects all or part of the company.

• *Trust*. Trust is a very important issue when it comes to communicating, but companies in each State manage it in a different way. Meyer distinguishes between those in which trust is generated through activities associated with the business – a trust that is based on tasks – and others in which it is generated from "meals, going out for drinks or meeting at the coffee machine" where the development is slower and is based on personal relationships.

• *Disagreements*. Countries like France or Germany tend towards confrontation, they understand disagreement and debate as something positive. Others, such as Japan or Thailand, see the debate as something negative; for them, confrontation is inappropriate.

• *Planning*. Companies in countries like Germany or Switzerland carry out the stages of a project in order, completing one before starting the next, following an order, respecting the deadline and the calendar. However, companies in India or Nigeria approach the stages of a project fluidly, changing tasks as the opportunity presents itself, the goal being adaptability.

III. OBJECTIVE

This study aims to conduct a qualitative analysis of the intercultural work dynamics between Japanese and Mexican cultures within an automotive company. Specifically, it focuses on understanding the behaviors, differences, and potential barriers that emerge. Utilizing Erin Meyer's proposed 8-factor scale, the research seeks to evaluate areas of opportunity and recommend strategies to enhance the synergy between these two cultures in the workplace.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The present research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on a single case study of a medium Mexican subsidiary of a Japanese company within the automotive industry.

This is an intrinsic case study of particular interest to the research due to its unique characteristics of the creation of an 8-year-old multicultural Mexican Japanese work teams.

It is presented in the form of a descriptive case study focused on provide a detailed description of the case.

This is an embedded case study which focuses on the following 8 factors that conform the cultural map of Erin Meyer:

1. Communication
2. Assessment
3. Persuasion
4. Leadership
5. Decision
6. Trust
7. Disagreement
8. Planning

The study is cross-sectional since it examines the case at a specific point in time, providing a snapshot of the case at the year 2022, 8 years since the starting of operations of the company when the multicultural work team is already consolidated.

This is an inductive case study which begins with the collection of data and exploration of patterns, leading to the development of conclusions about the multicultural work team dynamics of the company.

The instrument developed for this study is conformed of 10 questions of General Information and 24

questions of the Cultural Map in a 5-level Likert Scale (from Totally agree to Totally disagree).
The application of the instrument was performed virtually using a Google form in October 2022.

V. RESULTS

A total of 11 answers were received from 7 Mexican members and 4 Japanese members of the multicultural work-team.
Firstly, regarding the composition of the sample it can be mentioned the following from the Japanese participants: the gender distribution of the sample is 100% male; regarding marital status, 50% of the sample is married, while the remaining 50% is single; the age range of the sample is as follows: 25% are between 50 and 59 years old, 50% are between 30 and 34 years old, and the remaining 25% are between 25 and 29 years old; regarding their formal education, 25% reported having studied for 16 years, 25% for 17 years, and the remaining 50% for 18 years or more; with regard to their position in their organization, 50% indicated that they were academically trained professionals, 25% were managers of one or more subordinates, and the remaining 25% held other positions; the majority of respondents (50%) are secretaries or office workers with general training; of this sample, 75% have previous experience in another multicultural team, while the remaining 25% do not have it; furthermore, 50% of respondents have been working in Mexico for seven or more years, 25% have been working in Mexico for five to six years, and the remaining 25% have been working in Mexico for less than one year. In this sample, the participants indicated that they had collaborated with other multicultural teams, including those from the United States and Spain.
Regarding the sample of seven Mexicans, the following results were obtained regarding their profile: 57.1% of them are female and 42.9% are male; 57.1% are single, 28.6% are married, and 14.3% say they are under another status; with regard to the age range of the sample, 42.9% of respondents are between 25 and 29 years old, 28.6% are between 35 and 39 years old, 14.3% are between 50 and 59 years old, and another 14.3% are between 30 and 34 years old; with respect to their formal education, 57.1% of respondents indicate that they have studied for 18 years or more, 28.6% for 17 years, and 14% for 16 years; the sample consisted of 100% of the respondents who indicated that they held a position in their work as an academically trained professional; of these, 71.4% reported having worked in multicultural teams for between five and six years, 14.3% for between one and two years, and 14.3% for less than one year; finally, 71.4% of the respondents indicated that they had already had experience in multicultural teams, while 28.6% had not. The sample included participants who had collaborated with multicultural teams comprising North Americans and Japanese.
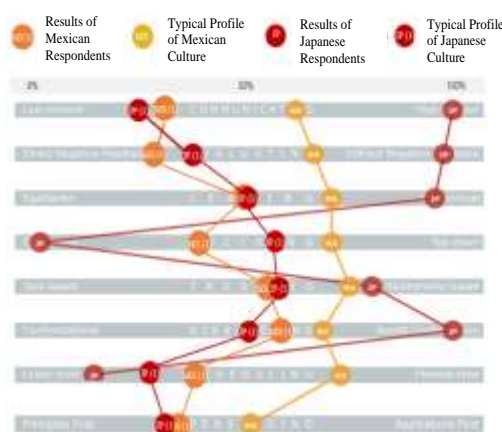

Fig. 1 Results of sample's respondents compared to the typical Mexican and Japanese profiles

NOTE: request for color printing
The results of the Erin Meyer Culture Map can be visualized in the Fig. 1. Regarding the profile of the Mexicans: in the communication section they obtained 29.28%; in the evaluation section 25.7%; in the Leadership section 49%; in the Decision-making section 39.28%; while in the Confidence section 51.19%. in the Conflict Resolution section 52.38%, in the Planning section 38.09%, and finally, in the Persuasion section, 32.14%.
Conversely, the results obtained with the application of the Erin Meyer scale with respect to the Japanese profile yielded the following results: in the communication section they obtained 25%, in the evaluation section 39.58%, followed by the leadership section where 50% was obtained, in the decision-making section 54.16%, while in the decision-making section, 54.16%, for the Confidence section 54.1%, and for Conflict Resolution section 50%, in the Planning section, the results were 29.16%, and finally, in the Persuasion section 37.5%.

It is worthy to mention that the novelty of this work is that for the referred study of Erin Meyer the Persuading section of Japanese culture was not included while it was indeed considered in our survey.

VI. DISCUSSION

The interpretations of these results are summarized up as follows to address some of the most salient differences and similarities between the two cultures under study.

One notable similarity between the two cultures is their shared emphasis on the importance of family and a sense of belonging. This aspect can be leveraged in a multicultural organization to foster closer relationships between personnel in managerial and operational roles, which would help to balance the hierarchy.

The establishment of transparent communication channels, wherein personnel at all levels can engage in discourse and express their opinions, is of paramount importance for the cultivation of a sense of belonging within the company. This will permit employees to feel heard and included in decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging to the organization.

A comparison of the communication styles of Mexican and Japanese cultures reveals a notable discrepancy. Japanese culture is often described as high context, whereas Mexican culture is commonly perceived as lower context. Although this difference can act as a barrier to the relationship between the two cultures, it can be overcome through the use of mediators who facilitate clear communication and the implementation of formal means to avoid misunderstandings at any hierarchical level of the company. It is of the utmost importance to engage in workshops that facilitate the development of effective assertive communication techniques within the workplace. This allows for the formulation of a clear communication strategy and the utilization of formal means to prevent misunderstandings at any level of the company.

Another noteworthy distinction between these cultures is their approach to planning. In contrast to the Mexican culture, which tends to favor a more flexible approach to time, the Japanese culture leans towards more linear planning. Although there is a tendency toward linear planning in both cultures, as evidenced by the results, there persists a notable discrepancy, with the Mexican culture exhibiting a greater inclination toward flexibility in planning. This discrepancy may represent a significant obstacle, but it can be overcome through the implementation of time management courses that foster greater temporal and organizational awareness at both the professional and personal levels.

Upon examination of the differences in decision-making styles, it becomes evident that Japanese culture tends towards consensus, whereas Mexican culture leans towards a more hierarchical approach. Although there is a rapprochement in scale, the discrepancy persists and may give rise to conflicts within the organization. It is of the utmost importance to clearly establish the decision-making processes and to have an organizational chart that defines roles and hierarchy levels in order to avoid confusion.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is evident that the coexistence between the two cultures has resulted in the emergence of similarities in several domains. It is imperative to cultivate this coexistence in order to identify potential avenues for collaboration and enhance the compatibility between the two cultures, which will contribute to a positive organizational climate.

Furthermore, the degree of shared leadership between the two cultures is encouraging, facilitating the successful implementation of practices that foster a thriving organizational culture in a multicultural environment.

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