

Constructive Intercultural Management

Integrating Cultural Differences Successfully
Edward Elgar (2021)

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CONSTRUCTIVE INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Integrating Cultural Differences Successfully

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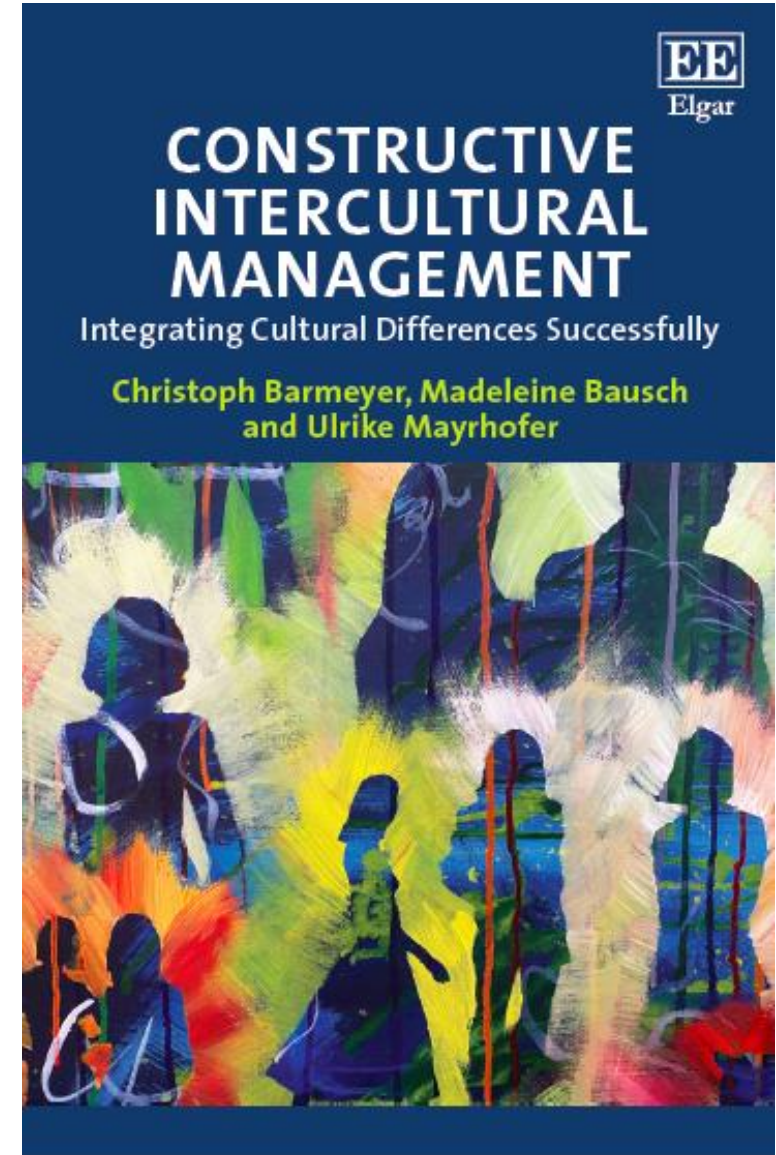
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Chapter 7: Intercultural teams

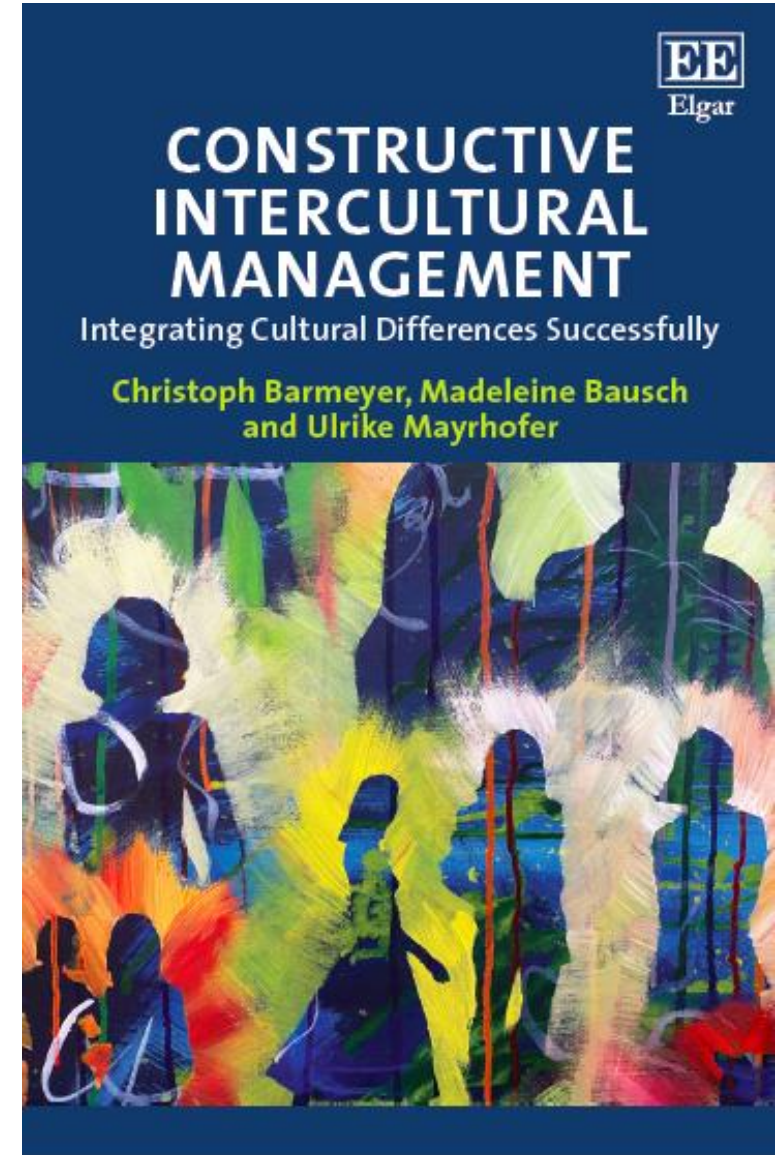
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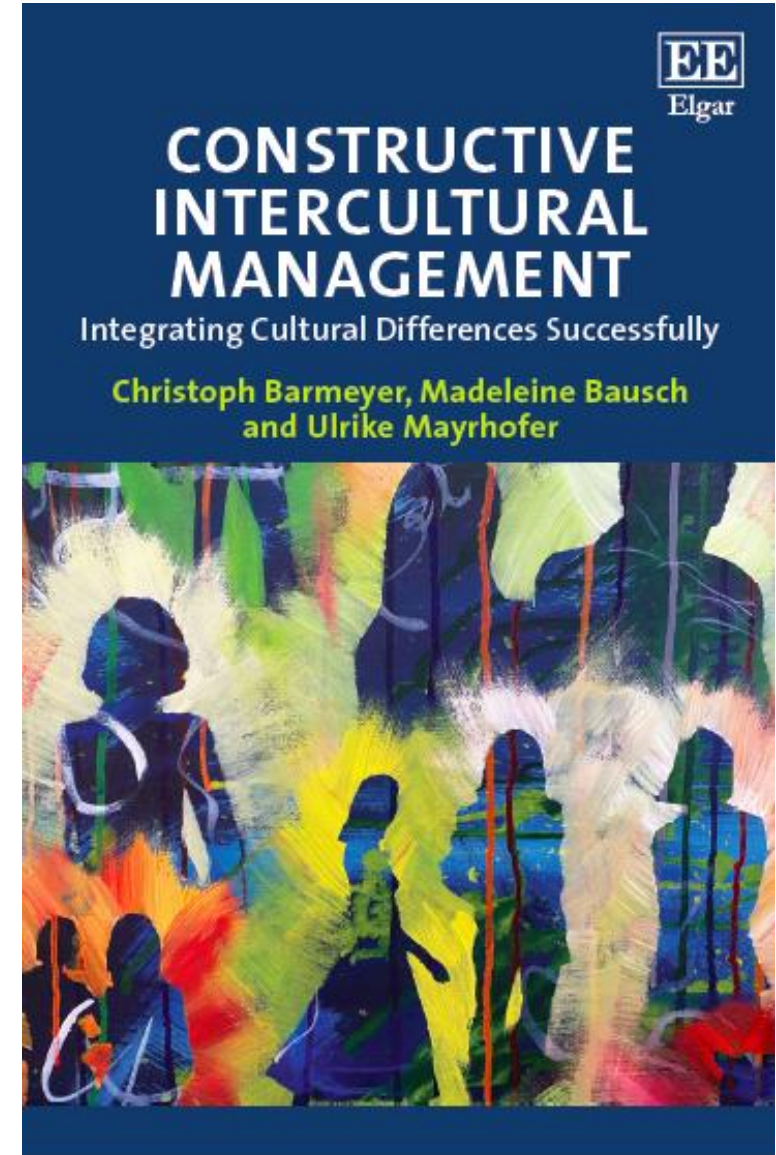


Learning objectives

- Define the main characteristics of intercultural teams
- Know the required leadership skills for intercultural teams
- Be aware of the challenges linked to intercultural virtual teams
- Identify the appropriate mechanisms for intercultural team development

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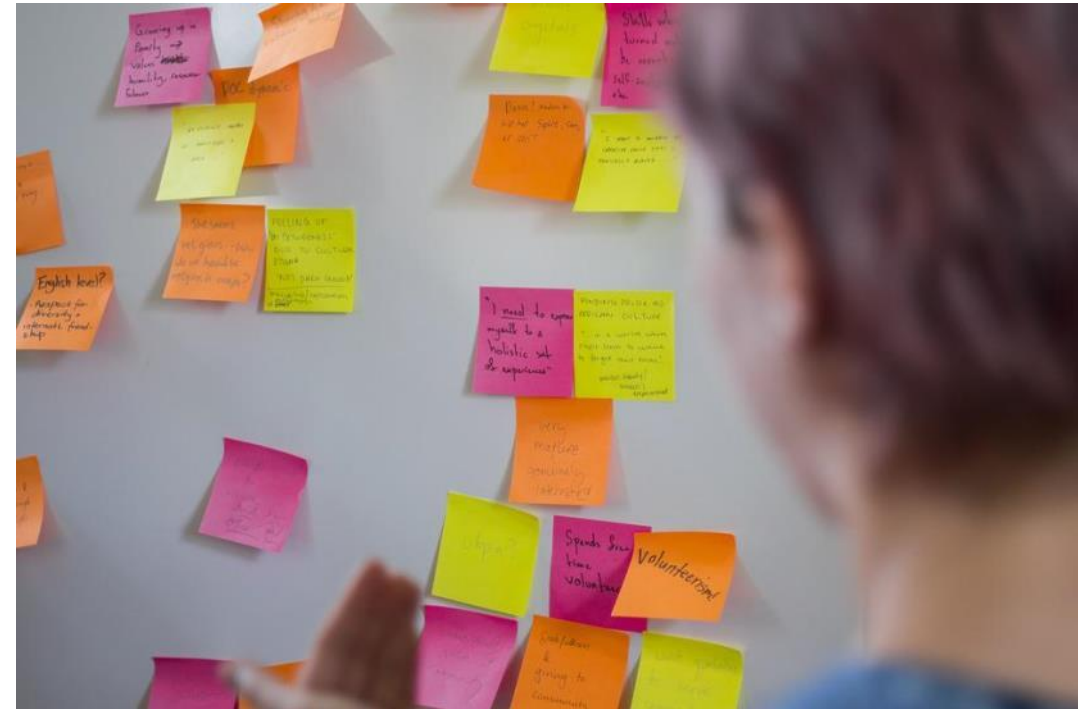


Intercultural teams

- Teams composed of individuals with **diverse cultural affiliations and experiences**, and thus diverging meaning systems (Adler & Gundersen, 2008)
- They can be used to:
 - Disseminate information across locations
 - Achieve uniform socialization and identity formation
 - Develop creative problem solutions
- Team members often have limited common knowledge and experiences, and different ideas about teamwork.

Benefits of intercultural teams

- Increasing creativity
- Developing different views
- Producing numerous ideas
- Enabling participants to better understand the contribution of other team members



Risks of intercultural teams

- Lack of team cohesion
- Distrust and stereotyping
- Communication difficulties due to several languages
- Stress and tensions due to different behaviours and communication styles



Forms of intercultural teams



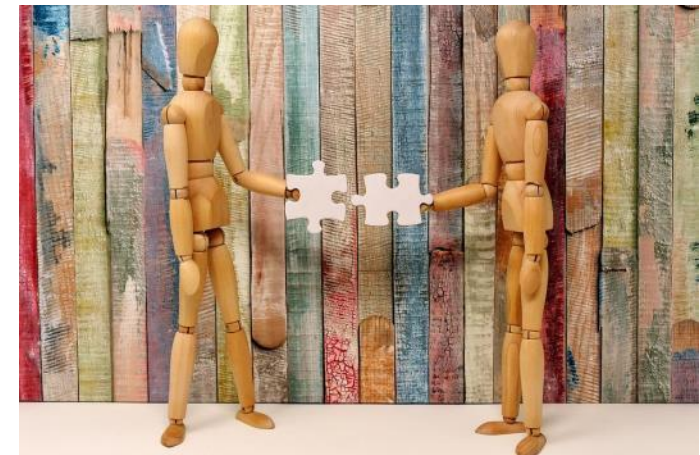
Bicultural teams



Multicultural teams

Bicultural teams

- Composition: **members from two cultures**
- Are often used in the context of cross-border alliances, mergers and acquisitions
- Great potential for synergies if both sides bring their respective strengths and perspectives to improve processes
 - Conflicts are likely to arise if members of one culture are in a dominant position
- Competition between team members can have stimulating and sometimes discouraging effects.
 - Clear rules
 - Strong managers with high intercultural sensitivity

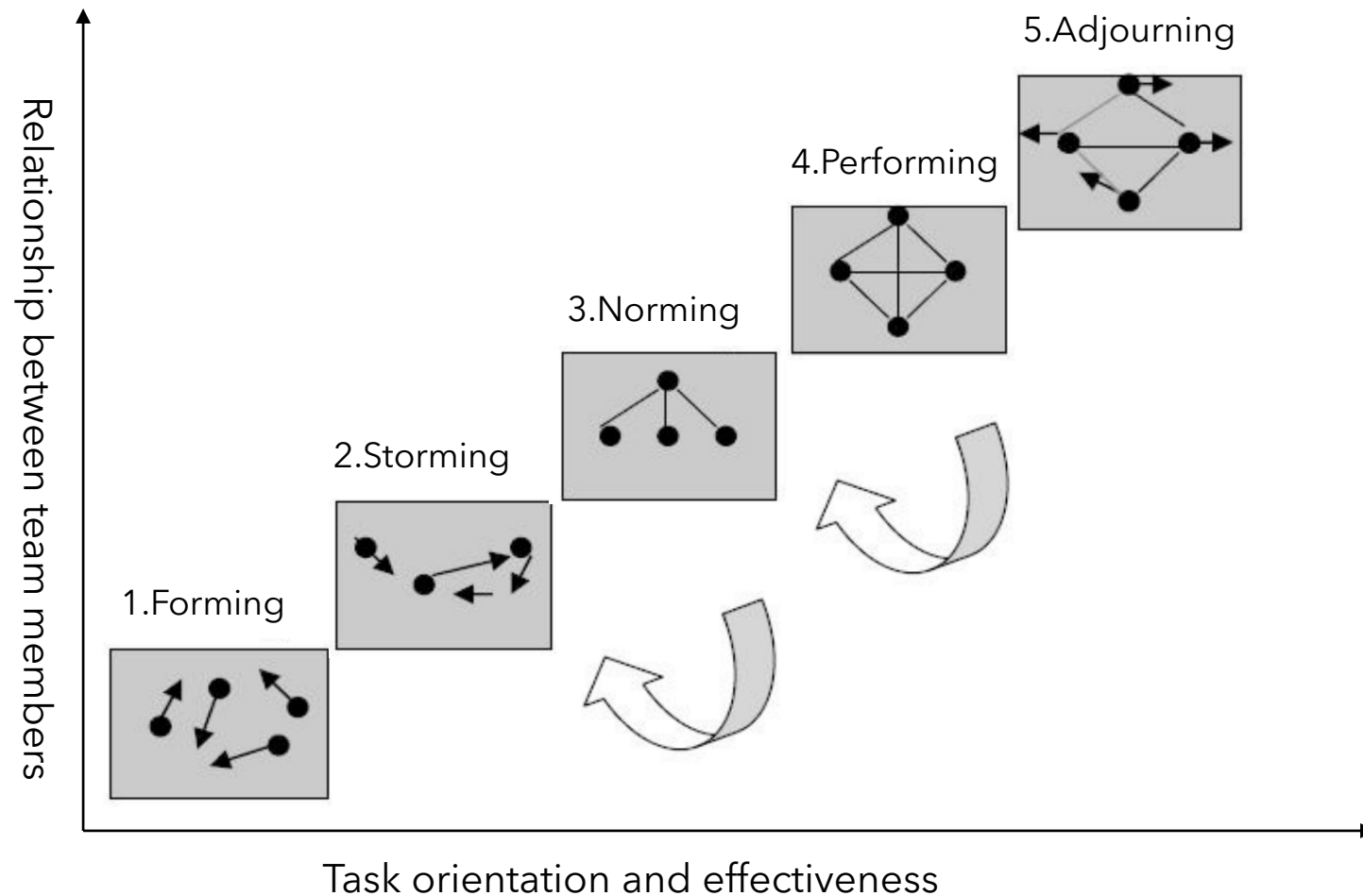


Multicultural teams

- Composition: **members from at least three different cultures**
- Less pronounced power imbalance and competitive thinking compared to bicultural teams
- Members can propose a variety of ideas, rules of conduct and working methods, and adapt more easily by finding solutions through consensus
 - Working language (e.g. English as lingua franca)
 - Choice of team manager

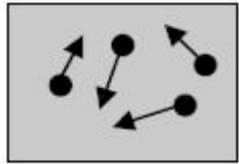


Five development stages of intercultural teams



(Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Barmeyer, 2018)

(1) Forming



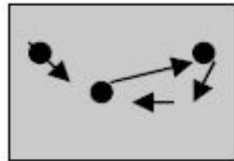
Monocultural teams

- Getting to know the team members
- Exchange of personal and task-related information
- Polite, impersonal, tense and careful (mutual relationships are still unclear)

Intercultural teams

- This stage can be easily mastered by multicultural teams.
- Team members begin to interact with curiosity and politeness.
- The atmosphere is pleasant since cultural differences do not cause tensions yet.

(2) Storming



Monocultural teams

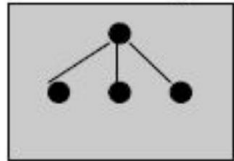
- Emergence of tensions and disagreements about work processes, attitudes, behaviour, role allocation, tasks, working styles, meanings or team leadership
- Surprises, enthusiasm, but also conflicts, confrontation and clan building, with success being achieved with difficulty

Intercultural teams

- Team members become aware of their different expectations and perceptions about their tasks, working methods and management styles.
- Divergent opinions can either cause conflicts or produce original ideas and new approaches to problem solving.

(Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Barmeyer, 2018)

(3) Norming



Monocultural teams

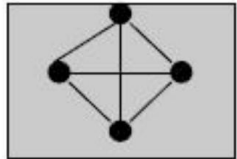
- If the team is able to control the differences through explicit norm setting or implicit negotiation, good relationships with mutual support can develop, with the distribution of roles and tasks.
- Development of new know-how and new behaviours, sense of belonging, feedback, clash of perspectives and conflict resolution

(Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Barmeyer, 2018)

Intercultural teams

- Intercultural moderation and team leadership should favour cohesion to develop team motivation and joint efforts to reach the goal.
- Clear allocation of roles and the establishment of functional rules can help to bring team members to agree with each other.

(4) Performing



Monocultural teams

- Relationships and operational activities reach a mature stage.
- Team members work actively together, solve problems and are productive.
- Inventiveness, flexibility, performance-enhancing openness and willingness to perform

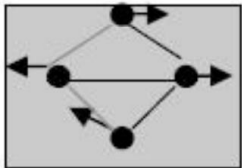
Intercultural teams

- Cultural diversity can be an asset.
- Team members build on their complementary resources to create competences adding value to goal achievement.

(5) Adjourning

Monocultural teams

- The goal has been achieved or it is impossible for the team to continue working together.
- Celebrating success, less interactions between team members and termination of project



Intercultural teams

- Team members who have worked together with pleasure and enrichment in a culturally diverse working environment must return to their original contexts.

Managing intercultural teams constructively

Attention to the functional effects of cultural differences: divergent working styles might form a considerable potential for complementarity and synergy.

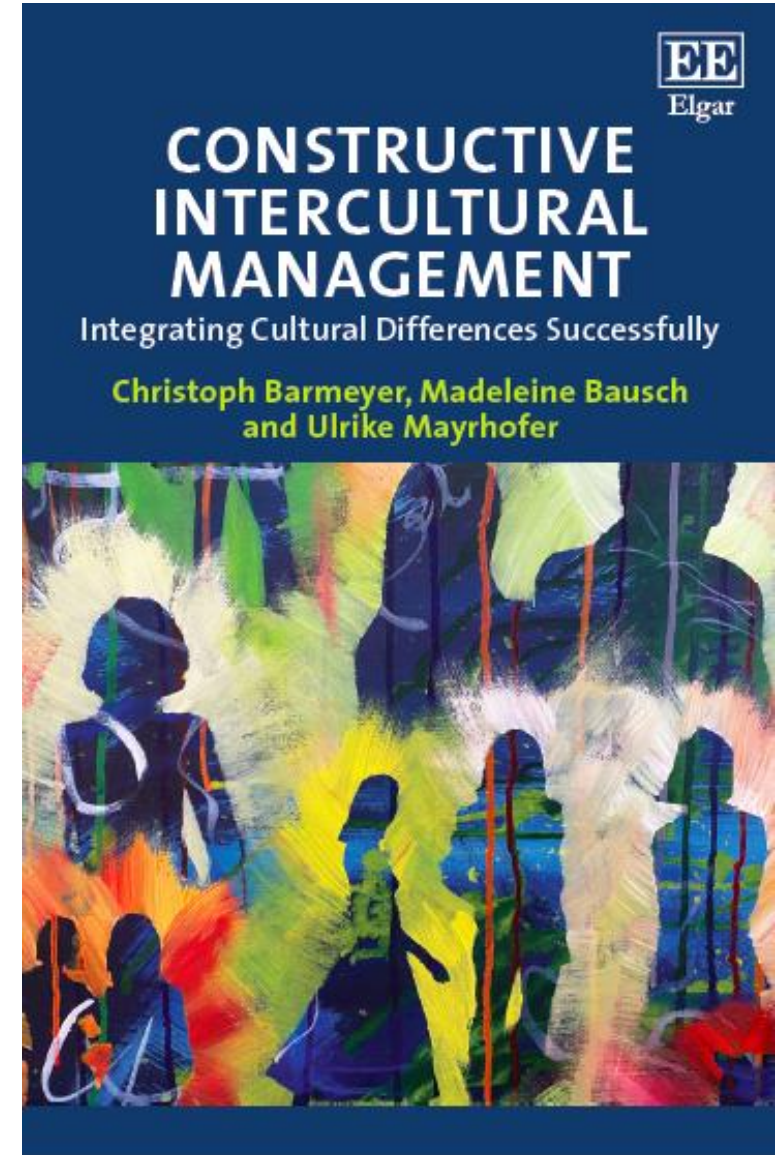
A third (hybrid) culture could also develop, created or negotiated through mutual adaptation and learning processes.

The involved team members might need to change their initial goals, adapt their behaviours and revise their usual ideas about work processes.



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Intercultural virtual teams

Temporary groups of people:

- Members come from different cultural backgrounds
- They are separated from each other in space and time.
- They work towards a common goal by using organizational and digital resources (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).



Example: Virtual teams at Google

- Google employs more than 100 000 people in 170 cities across 60 countries.
- Important number of intercultural virtual teams, with team members working in different parts of the world
- Google sets guidelines for distributed work behaviour for employees, 'buddys' (trustworthy contact persons), managers and leaders.
- For leaders, the 'distributed work playbook' sets the following recommendations:
 - Set team visions at work
 - Reach out
 - Traverse time zones
 - Appreciate differences



(Google, 2020)

Virtual teams

Virtual teams have their own characteristics and it is thus necessary to adapt management practices accordingly.

They are often temporary and decentralized, and require more flexibility and coordination.

Essential to agree on the objectives and to delegate precise tasks to all team members who then work relatively autonomously

Difficult to build trust since team members do not know each other personally

Example: PocketConfidant AI

- French start-up proposing digital coaching powered by artificial intelligence
- Founded in 2016 by three entrepreneurs, with backgrounds in coaching, human-machine interaction, neuroscience, innovation, and enterprise and education management
- Develops a digital coaching experience, which listens to people and helps them question themselves to discover their own solutions
- The management team works as an intercultural virtual team, with the ambition 'to be attentive listeners, lifelong learners and to pioneer capacity building through AI':
 - Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is **French**, with professional experience in Europe, Asia and the United States, and lives in France
 - Chief Technology Officer (CTO) is **Ukrainian**, with study experience in Italy and France, and lives in Ukraine
 - Chief Learning Officer (CLO) is **British-American**, with work experience in Europe and the United States, and lives in France and the United States

(Mayrhofer, Didi Alaoui & Papetti, 2020)

Advantages of virtual teamwork

- Expertise from around the globe being integrated and combined to foster creativity and innovation
- Multiplicity and diversity of perspectives and ideas enhancing performance
- Spontaneous calls and meetings accelerating search for information and decision-making
- Time savings: working 24h around the globe, fast exchange via digital communication tools
- Cost savings: saving travel costs
- Fast adaptability and flexibility to respond to external pressures (accelerating solution seeking and new product development)

Challenges of virtual teamwork

- Lower employee commitment and identification with the organization
- Coordination and leadership challenges
- Team managers often leading several teams at the same time
- Lack of intercultural leadership competence
- High complexity slowing down decision-making
- Misunderstandings due to missing personal dialogue
- Technological problems due to missing resources, infrastructure or slow internet connection

Example: Mixel Agitators in China

- French SME, specialized in industrial mixers, who has established a production and sales subsidiary in Beijing (China)
- Chinese subsidiary must interact regularly with the French headquarters.
- The company uses videoconferencing (rich media) and e-mailing (lean media) to manage communication between the Chinese and French teams:
 - The French CEO and the Chinese subsidiary manager mainly rely on videoconferencing to coordinate business operations.
 - The other team members prefer to use e-mail communication, mainly because of their lack of English proficiency.

(Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2018b)

Example: Mixel Agitators in China

- In the Chinese subsidiary, only three employees speak English and they have to translate the messages of their colleagues.
- The use of e-mail communication facilitates the translation into English, but the use of lean media also generates misunderstandings, for example:
 - The time requested for answering e-mails and providing solutions is negatively perceived by the Chinese team: they have the impression that their French colleagues are deliberately slowing down processes.
 - For the French team, the time spent for responding to their Chinese colleagues shows that requests are handled seriously.

(Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2018b)

Intercultural virtual teams

- It is necessary to consider the way team members experience cultural differences.
- Micro-interactions (interactions between two or several people) are likely to influence team-level dynamics.
- Organizations should pay particular attention to cultural differences that can be perceived as stressors, for example language and communication difficulties.
- It can be useful to enhance the team members' awareness of such issues and to implement learning processes based on their respective reflections (Zaidman & Cohen, 2020).



Working in multiple teams

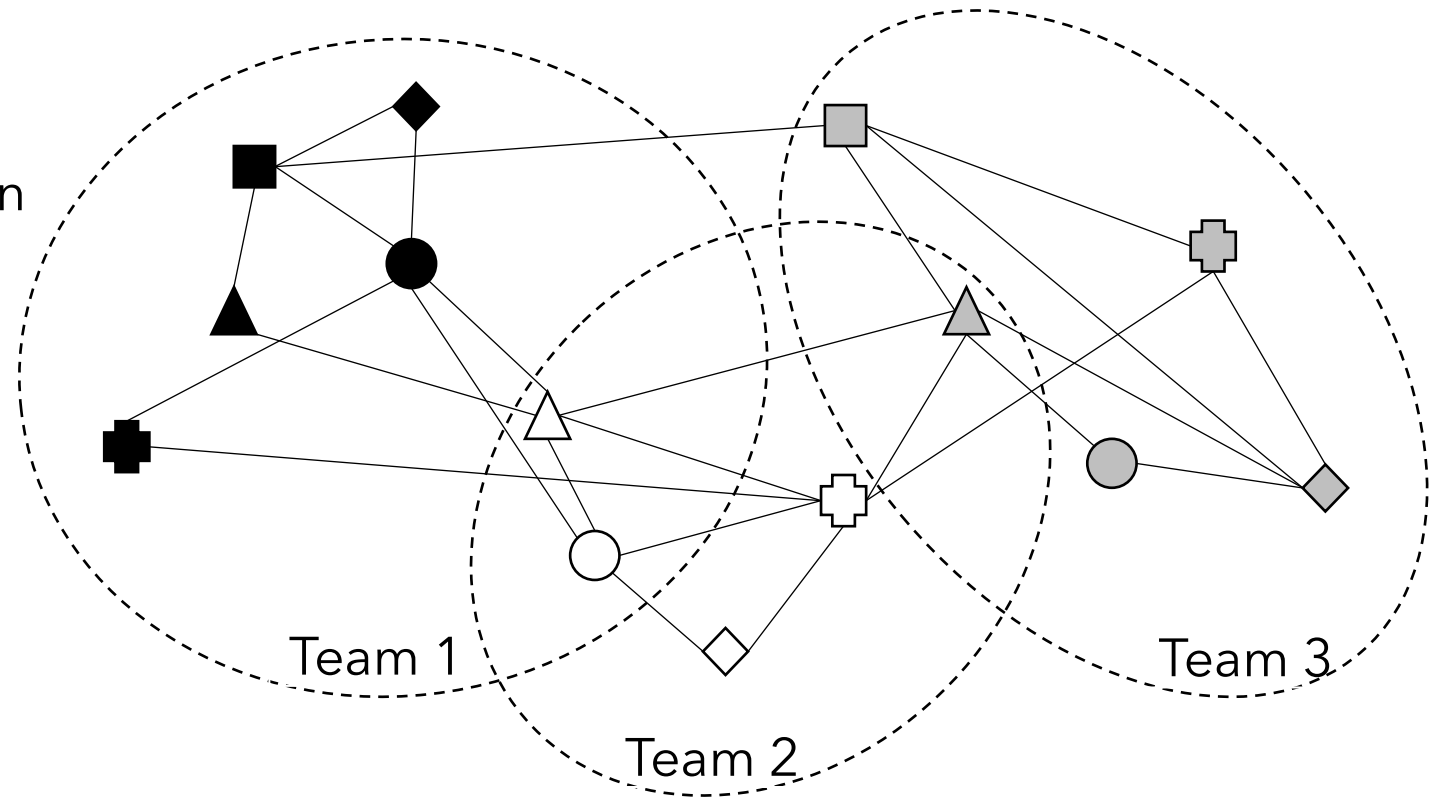
People in organizations are sometimes working in several teams: a person can be part of a cross-national team and at the same time of a cross-functional team.

Different teams build the network of the whole organization.

Multiple teams increase the complexity of organizations because of shared and overlapping responsibilities, but the constructive combination of resources and competences also facilitates the development of synergies.

Team networks in organizations

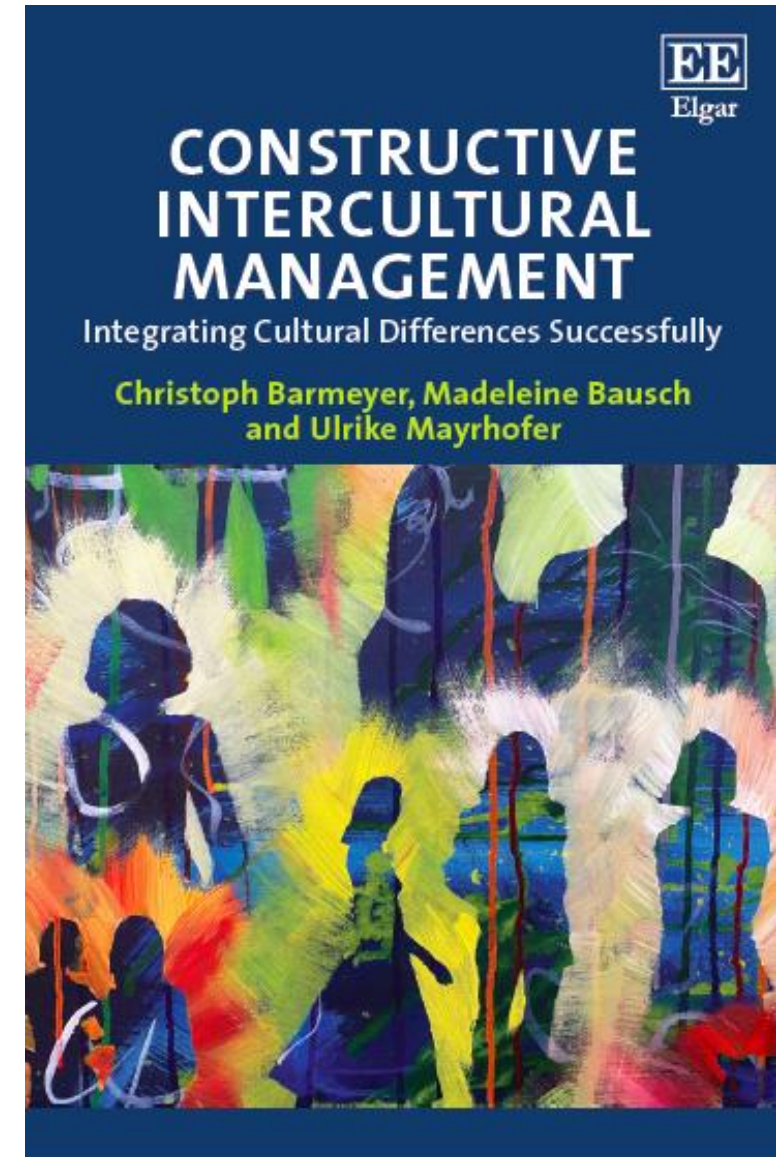
- Team members from different national cultures (expressed in grey tones) can belong to the main project team (marked by circles).
- They can also share their knowledge with regard to their function (marked by symbols) in other project teams.



(adapted from Maznevski & Chui, 2018, 292)

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Constructive intercultural team development



Increase intercultural competence, performance and satisfaction of team members to optimize the quality and efficiency of teamwork (Stumpf, 2005)



Goal: build trust and strengthen a sense of togetherness



When: at the start of the project (teambuilding) or during the project to provide support for newly arising intercultural difficulties



How: formal *on-the-job* and informal *off-the-job* teambuilding activities (leisure activities)

Four leadership modes in intercultural teams

- (1) Single leadership
- (2) Paired leadership
- (3) Rotated leadership
- (4) Shared leadership

(based on Zander & Butler, 2010)

(1) Single leadership

Definition	Major advantages	Major disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership is appointed to one person (leader)• Decision-making and coordination lie in the responsibility of the team leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centralized and fast decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural dilemmas when team members expect different leadership styles

(based on Zander & Butler, 2010)

(2) Paired leadership

Definition	Major advantages	Major disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership functions are carried out by two persons• They share responsibilities and make joint decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leaders can share responsibilities and lead team members according to their culturally based leadership expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disagreements in decision-making• Takes more time

(based on Zander & Butler, 2010)

(3) Rotated leadership

Definition	Major advantages	Major disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership activities are distributed among several team members• Decision-making authority shifts over time from one member to another	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion of multiple team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contradictory leadership styles• Unsuitable for certain cultures (for example, high power distance cultures)

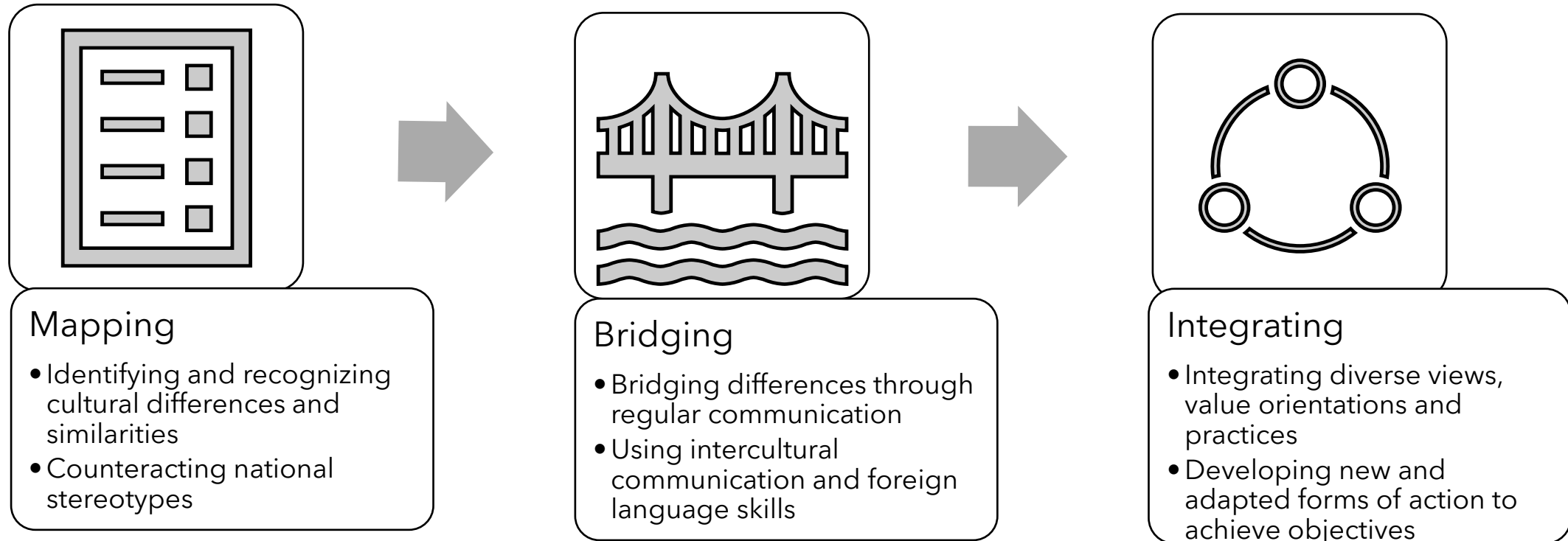
(based on Zander & Butler, 2010)

(4) Shared leadership

Definition	Major advantages	Major disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The team is self-responsible for leadership activities• Self-management ('holocracy')	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involvement and active engagement of all team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contradictory leadership styles• Unsuitable for certain cultures (e.g., high power distance cultures)

(based on Zander & Butler, 2010)

Intercultural design of team processes: MBI (mapping - bridging - integrating) model



(adapted from Maznevski & DiStefano, 2000)

Example: Team effectiveness at Google

Analysis of 180 project teams to understand what makes cross-functional teams more effective. The most important factors are:

- **Psychological safety**: Team members feel safe to take risks within the team without feeling embarrassed when making mistakes, ask questions and propose their ideas.
- **Dependability**: Effective teams are reliable (work completed on time, high quality work).
- **Structure and clarity**: Members understand their job expectations and the way how to accomplish their tasks.
- **Meaning**: Team members find a sense of purpose in their work and in the team output.
- **Impact**: Team members feel that they are making a difference with their work, which is important for the organization.

Boundary spanning

- **Boundary spanners** can fulfil several functions in intercultural teams (Di Marco, Taylor & Alin, 2010):
 - Representation
 - Information procurement
 - Coordination of tasks
- Boundary spanning, a global mindset, cultural intelligence and biculturalism are important competences in intercultural teams (Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012).
- **Constructive intercultural teamwork** varies according to the type of team and the context in which the team operates.



Leadership stimulates creativity (1)

Factors applying to all intercultural teams	Factors applying to virtual intercultural teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting clear objectives and a sense of purpose• Identifying the potential of the intercultural team• Recognizing the strengths of all team members• Motivating the team• Openness to cultural diversity• Boundary management between team• Members of different cultures• Open communication and positive atmosphere• Managing and solving conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing clear instructions• Leaving autonomy to team members• Regularly encouraging group dynamics• Developing sense of belonging• Creating a climate of psychological safety• Continuous communication and exchange

(based on Cagiltay, Bichelmeyer & Akilli, 2015; Lisak et al. 2016; Maznevski & Chui, 2018; Paulus, van Der Zee & Kenworthy, 2016; Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014)

Team structure stimulates creativity (2)

Factors applying to all intercultural teams	Factors applying to virtual intercultural teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defining the team size and composition (according to intercultural skills and experience)• Establishing a culturally balanced team structure• Structuring tasks and processes• Using intercultural individuals as boundary spanners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choosing a variety of communication tools that can be used by all team members (for example, email, telephone, videoconferences and online platforms)• Implementing a culturally sensitive interface design for digital communication tools• Considering time differences between locations of team members

(based on Cagiltay, Bichelmeyer & Akilli, 2015; Lisak et al. 2016; Maznevski & Chui, 2018; Paulus, van Der Zee & Kenworthy, 2016; Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014)

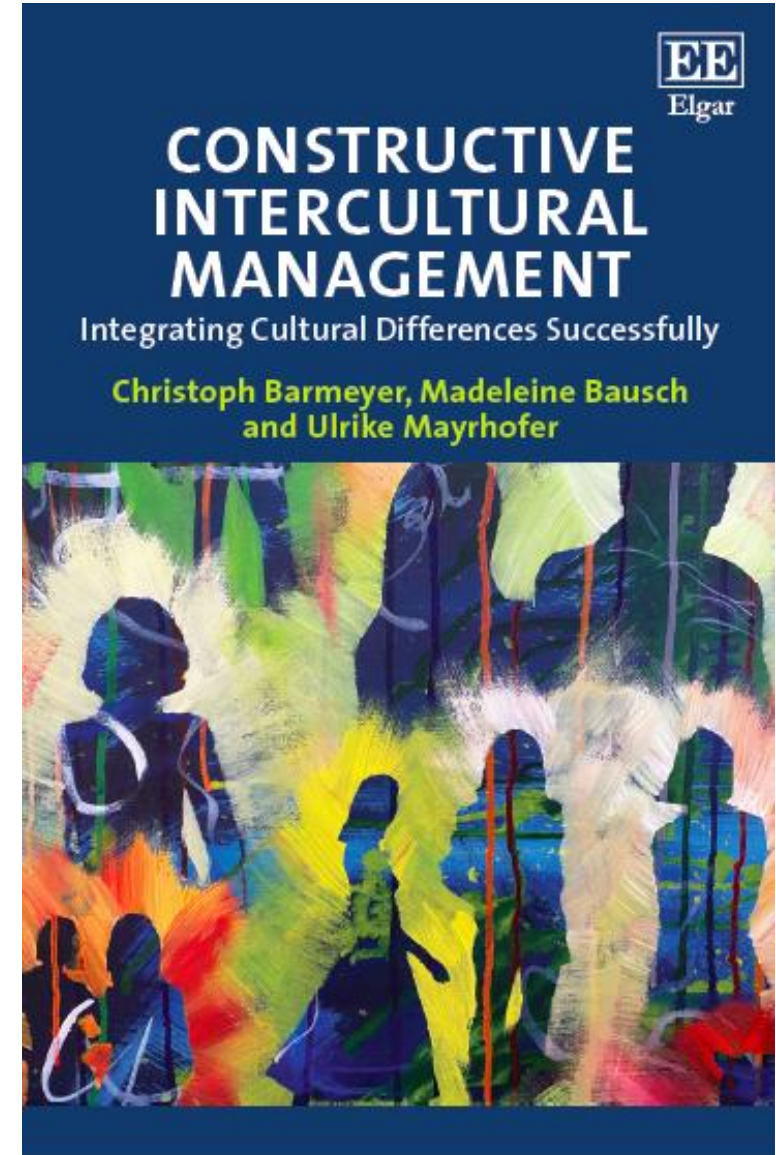
Team processes stimulate creativity (3)

Factors applying to all intercultural teams	Factors applying to virtual intercultural teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing positive attitudes and beliefs• Creating collaborative engagement, team cohesion and team identity• Trust-building between team members• Organizing regular team meetings• Making efforts to share diverging opinions and viewpoints• Structuring tasks and assigning roles as well as responsibilities• Similarities facilitate the start of teamwork, but differences and friction might then stimulate creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing a 'sense of urgency' to maintain discipline• Regular face-to-face meetings ('heartbeat'), especially at the start of the project• Establishing personal relationships• Trust-building• Intercultural competences to interpret verbal and non-verbal communication

(based on Cagiltay, Bichelmeyer & Akilli, 2015; Lisak et al. 2016; Maznevski & Chui, 2018; Paulus, van Der Zee & Kenworthy, 2016; Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014)

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Conclusion

- Intercultural teams, which can take the form of virtual teams, are an essential part of international organizations.
- Compared to monocultural teams, they are likely to increase the complexity of cooperation, but they can also generate multiple solutions due to complementary competences.
- The potential of team members and intercultural group dynamics is not always fully exploited and it is necessary to pay particular attention to intercultural leadership skills.
- Organizations need to adopt the appropriate mechanisms to stimulate team member collaboration and creativity.

Sources of pictures

- p. 9: <https://pixabay.com/photos/feedback-analytics-public-speaking-2849603/>
- p. 10: <https://pixabay.com/photos/group-team-balloons-question-mark-464644/>
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