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Leadership Job Requirements in Multicultural Virtual Teams: Which Behaviour and Skills Do Leaders Need to Manage Multicultural Virtual Teams Successfully? A Review

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Abstract

Multicultural virtual teams have become increasingly relevant. Organisations and leaders face different challenges in managing these teams. This review analyses and identifies the challenges in multicultural virtual teams and the job requirements for leaders to face these challenges. It answers the question of which behaviour and skills leaders need to manage multicultural virtual teams successfully. A literature review was conducted in which thirty-five publications and their key findings have been considered, analysed, and systemised to derive a concrete requirement profile for leaders of multicultural virtual teams. The results present the challenges that can occur in multicultural virtual teams and the behaviours leaders can demonstrate when facing these challenges. The challenges arise from multicultural differences as well as from the virtual environment. The most important behaviours to face most of the challenges include raising awareness of language barriers and cultural differences, enquiring about team members' needs and expectations, clarifying expectations about the collaboration, establishing binding norms, ensuring compliance, adapting flexibly to individuals and situations, using 'rich-media', and synchronising work schedules. The findings also identify leaders' traits, attitudes and skills to execute the recommended behaviour. Leaders of multicultural virtual teams require sensitivity, flexibility, assertiveness, personal initiative, mastering different leadership styles, negotiation competence, and active listening. The outcome of this paper is a practicable overview of possible challenges and required behaviours as well as traits, attitudes, and skills of leaders when managing multicultural virtual teams. Leaders can benefit from this helpful guide for appropriate behaviour in specific challenges. Recruiters can use the findings as a helpful tool for selecting appropriate leaders for multicultural virtual teams.

***Keywords*:** Multicultural Virtual Teams, Leadership, Job Requirements, Management, Challenges

1. Introduction

Due to the major trends of globalisation and digitalisation, Multicultural Virtual Teams (MVTs) have become increasingly relevant and will continue to do so in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has further reinforced their relevance, whereby MVTs became increasingly common. Organisations and leaders face new and unfamiliar challenges in managing these teams. The research field is still relatively young, and evidence is consequently thin. Over the last 20 years, several studies have been conducted on managing multicultural or virtual teams effectively. Few of these studies specifically investigate MVTs, and even fewer are based on real-world experience.

Consequently, this paper aims to collect the most significant scientific insights from different studies and identify a requirement profile for leaders of MVTs. This review article summarises existing knowledge and gives a practicable overview for leaders and recruiters looking for appropriate leaders for MVTs.

MVTs combine the characteristics of multicultural teams with those of virtual teams. Multicultural teams are defined as a group of people who originate from different nations and cultures (Stahl et al., 2010). The individuals have spent most of their lives in different countries, therefore learning different languages and acquiring different values, expectations, and behaviours (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Virtual teams are essentially characterised by the fact that they communicate and coordinate predominantly through electronic media (e.g., e-mail, telephone, or videoconference). Often, team members are geographically dispersed or work in different time zones (CIPD, 2020; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Hertel et al., 2005; Powell et al., 2004). Both characteristics can be assumed to define MVTs. Accordingly, MVTs are groups of people originating from different nations and cultures, they are often geographically dispersed, and their communication and coordination depend on electronic media. In the literature, terms like Multinational Virtual Teams (MNVTs) or Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) are used interchangeably. In this paper, the term MVTs will be used.

2. Methods

A literature review was conducted between 3rd and 26th January 2022 to examine which skills and behaviours leaders need to manage MVTs successfully. A keyword search of Google Scholar was undertaken using the following terms (a) Multination Virtual Teams (MNVTs), (b) Global Virtual Teams (GVTs), (c) virtual teams, (d) geographically distributed teams, (e) multinational teams, (f) multicultural teams, (g) intercultural teams, and (h) cross-cultural teams. These terms were subsequently used in combination with one or more of the following keywords (i) cultural differences, (ii) challenges, (iii) leadership, (iv) management, (v) intercultural communication, (vi) computer-mediated communication, and (vii) online-communication channels. In total, 35 publications have been considered and analysed for this paper.

The analysis followed a four-step process. In step one, the relevant evidence from the different sources was analysed. In step two, the content was categorised according to the different types of challenges (e.g., language, cultural communication problems, geographical distance problems, media communication problems etc.). In step three, each challenge's content was subdivided into reasons and ideas for resolutions. In step four, the necessary characteristics, skills, and behaviours that leaders of MVTs should fulfil were derived.

The result of the literature review was a large worksheet, whose contents are explained in detail in the following sections of this paper. Furthermore, a summarised version of the worksheet was created to provide an overview of the challenges that can arise in MVTs, the behaviours required to overcome them, and the derived traits, attitudes, and skills that leaders should bring to their job. This practical overview (Table 1) can be found at the end of section 3.

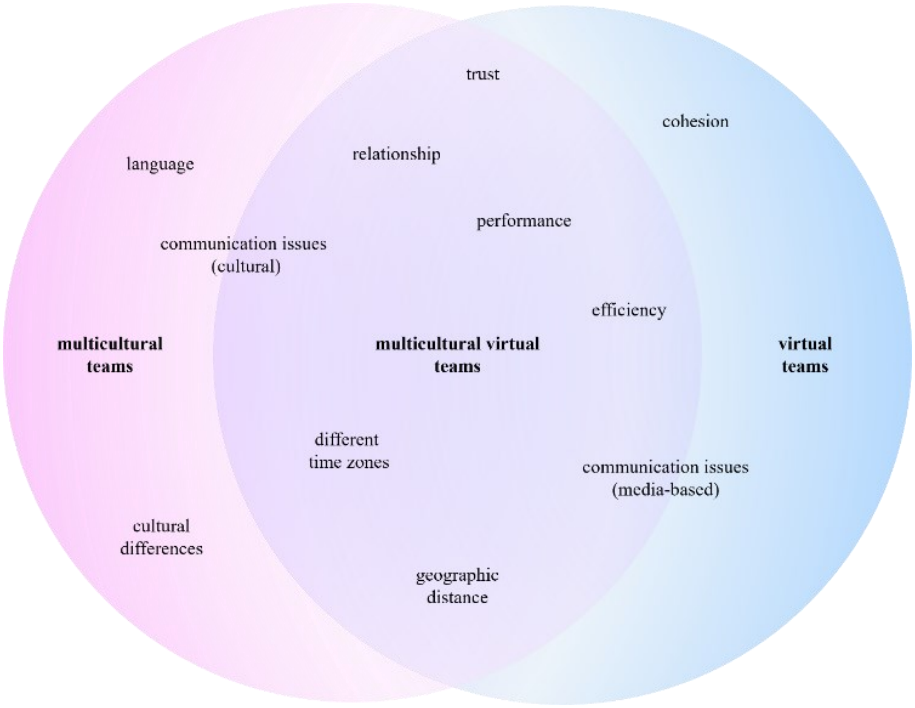
3. Results

The results consist of two parts. In part one, the various challenges will be described, as well as the necessary behaviour to face them. In part two, the traits, attitudes, and skills leaders of MVTs need to carry out the previously described necessary behaviour will be outlined.

3.1. Challenges and how leaders can behave to face them

Although all selected challenges affect MVTs, some are more characteristic of multicultural (e.g., language issues) or virtual (e.g., media-based communication issues) teams. Figure 1 shows the selected challenges and their assignment to multicultural, virtual, or MVTs.

FIGURE 1. CHALLENGES FACED BY MULTICULTURAL VIRTUAL TEAMS (MVTS)



Source: Author's own compilation, 2022

In the following, the different challenges will be explained in detail, and evidence-based resolution ideas will be presented.

3.1.1. Language

Imagine a multinational company where people from many different countries work together. Each team member speaks a different native language. Some have enjoyed an excellent language education since childhood and speak English fluently. Others have not had a good language education or have just started learning English and are acutely aware of the discrepancy between their abilities and those of some of their colleagues. For example, when engaging in a passionate discussion and trying to express your opinion or even follow their

viewpoint. Or when you have discovered a crucial mistake or come up with a great solution to a problem, but your vocabulary is insufficient to explain it accordingly. Or the feeling of being considered somehow more 'stupid' or less capable because you cannot express yourself appropriately. What would you expect from a leader? How would you act as a leader to overcome language insecurities within members of your team?

This brief selection of critical situations shows why language can be a fundamental challenge for multicultural teams. Misattribution is a serious problem when speaking a foreign language; language barriers can cause many misunderstandings. Team members who do not speak the team's common language well may be perceived as lacking ability, less dependable, and less trustworthy (CIPD, 2021). Speaking could trigger anxiety for individuals who perceive their language skills as insufficient (CIPD, 2021). A typical reaction of people affected by language barriers can be 'code-switching', which means switching from the common team language to one's own native language (CIPD, 2021; Harzing & Feely, 2008).

To avoid misattribution and to enhance mutual trust in employees' expertise, it can be helpful to focus on task-oriented communication (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2007). Task-related achievements of each team member can be highlighted in every meeting (CIPD, 2021). To avoid anxiety, leaders should guarantee a secure and inclusive environment that encourages open communication despite language barriers. Furthermore, it can be helpful to propose and approve English as the official language (CIPD, 2021). Leaders should be assertive to encourage employees to uphold language discipline, including guiding 'code-switchers' back to the shared language (CIPD, 2021). Using asynchronous communication could positively impact language accuracy because people have more time to process the message (Gareis, 2006). However, it can cause other communication misunderstandings because nonverbal signals are missing. More on this can be found in the section on media-based communication issues.

3.1.2. Cultural communication issues

Even in teams where all the members share a common language, cultural communication issues can arise. In an HBR article in 2013, Andy Molinsky, a Professor of Organizational Behaviour and International Management, reports the difference between people from the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) in their workplace communication (Molinsky, 2013). While Americans do not hesitate to promote and sell themselves all the time, this is a taboo for the Brits, who often describe their accomplishments as non-exaggerated and fact-based. Both might recognise each other either as pretentious or as inhibited. That is not the only difference between Americans and Brits. Molinsky also reports on the different ways of expressing emotions at work. It is common and expected to show enthusiasm in the USA, while in the UK, there is more emphasis on moderation and self-control. For Americans, an idea could often be 'great', while for Brits, it is 'not bad'. These different communication styles, rooted in different cultures, can lead to many misunderstandings, even when speaking a common language.

As Molinsky's examples visualise, communication issues are a significant challenge for multicultural teams beyond language (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Han & Beyerlein, 2016). Studies show that different culturally determining communication styles can lead to intercultural misunderstandings (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011; Monalisa et al., 2008; Shachaf, 2008). Members of multicultural teams have spent their formative years in different countries or

cultures and have accordingly learned different values and behaviours. This includes cultural nuances in communication, for example, remaining silent to respect the speaker (CIPD, 2021). A virtual environment can amplify these challenges and misunderstandings because many social cues are missing (Berg, 2012; Han & Beyerlein, 2016). More on this topic is discussed in the section on media-based communication issues. Some managers report that it can be challenging to adapt to the different needs of their team members, find the appropriate level of contact, and communicate concisely and empathetically (CIPD, 2021).

A leader should be aware of and understand different forms of communication (CIPD, 2021). This includes understanding cultural nuances and communication styles, being patient and sensitive, showing empathy, and ensuring active and attentive listening (CIPD, 2021). Leaders should enquire about the communication preferences of individual employees (e.g., due to language barriers, some feel more comfortable communicating in writing) and flexibly adapt to individual needs (CIPD, 2021). Allowing different types of communication is beneficial. For example, asynchronous communication could have a positive impact on reducing intercultural misunderstandings because the communication partners have more time to process a message (Gareis, 2006). Nevertheless, leaders should know that asynchronous communication via text- and audio channels can cause other communication misunderstandings because nonverbal signals are missing (see more in the section on media-based communication issues). Generally, the leader should establish binding norms for communication, considering the employees' practices and needs (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Johansson et al., 1999).

3.1.3. Cultural issues regarding different values, expectations, and behaviour

Many people who experienced working in internationally operating companies or multicultural teams report irritating situations in negotiations or meetings with people from another culture. A typical example is the different negotiation styles between low- and high-context cultures. Information is explicitly and directly shared in low-context cultures, while in high-context cultures, information is implicitly shared (Meyer, 2014). Imagine a project team consisting of German and Japanese members. While the Germans from a low-context culture will try to come to the point, discuss the facts and want to directly find solutions, the Japanese from a high-context culture will practice ‘nemawashi’. It can be translated as ‘turning the roots’ and means that they do not take a decision directly, they will gather support and feedback first, and agreements are made within coalitions. The different styles of discussing and finding solutions can be irritating and challenging for both sides. As a leader, how would you act to find a common approach within the team so that everyone feels comfortable? How do you prevent stereotypical judgments among team members toward each other?

Cultural differences regarding different values, expectations, and behaviours make managing and coordinating MVTs extremely complex (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Kayworth & Leidner, 2000). For example, norming and goal-setting processes can be complicated and challenging because the team members do not share the same beliefs and expectations to agree on common goals (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; McDonough et al., 2001). Generally, cultural and national differences reduce the team's ability to share ideas (Gibson & Gibs, 2006; Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Newell et al., 2007). In addition, the perception of cultural differences fosters the division into in-groups and out-groups, which reduces the flow of information and knowledge sharing (Gibson & Gibs, 2006; Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Newell et al., 2007), and complicates relationships within the team (Mc Donough et al., 2001), reduces trust, and affects the quality of decision-making processes (Chiu & Staples, 2013). In the worst case, the different

backgrounds and beliefs reinforce conflicts (Chiu & Staples, 2013; Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Polzer et al., 2006), as well as form critical racial and national stereotypes between the team members (Au & Marks, 2012; Han & Beyerlein, 2016). Misconceptions and stereotypes can undermine team members' ideas (CIPD, 2021). Therefore, it seems essential to counteract such stereotypes right from the beginning. Studies have shown that an improved cultural understanding enables employees to coordinate their activities more effectively and overcome stereotypical expectations. Moreover, according to Anawati and Craig (2006), most multicultural team members want others to be aware of their own culture.

To meet these challenges appropriately, the two basic principles in multicultural teams should be to respect people who are different from themselves and be sensitive to different values, attitudes, and experiences (CIPD, 2021). In this case, leaders have an essential role model function for their team members (Kronawitter, 2013). Accordingly, leaders must have this attitude and practice it to expect it from their team members. It is recommended to explicitly clarify the expectations about collaboration in the team (CIPD, 2020). This includes clarifying which leadership style is expected and appropriate (e.g., egalitarian or hierarchical, transactional or transformational), which communication method is preferred (e.g., written or spoken), as well as how meetings and the decision-making process should be organized (e.g., consensual, top-down, or something in between) (Meyer, 2014; Warburton, 2021).

Furthermore, it is recommended to establish binding norms for collaboration based on these findings (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Johansson et al., 1999). The leader must ensure compliance. Team leaders must be flexible in dealing with different individuals independently and despite such agreements. This includes adapting the leadership style for different individuals, especially in one-to-one situations (CIPD, 2021). To prevent misconceptions and stereotypes, leaders must encourage themselves and their employees to suspend judgments about others until they have enough information about them, their cultural values, and whether these influence their behaviour (CIPD, 2021). The cultural understanding can be improved by encouraging team members to share their previous experiences with working in multicultural (virtual) teams (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Pauleen, 2003), as well as actively explore different attitudes and perspectives to learn more about each other (CIPD, 2021).

3.1.4. Performance and efficiency

Challenges that already occur in face-to-face teams can become even more prominent in virtual teams. The reason is the lack of exchanges between meetings or over a coffee in a shared communal space. It is more challenging to ask quick questions or to suggest and discuss an idea. Accordingly, virtual teams require much more intentional planning of the desired goal and the appropriate type of exchange. Do you want to develop new ideas and concepts? Then it makes sense to organise a virtual coffee meeting where the team can chat and exchange ideas in a relaxed atmosphere. Do you have to achieve concrete project goals? Then it makes sense for the manager to give detailed briefings and distribute tasks to the team members. It becomes evident that in the virtual environment, the type of leadership must be used more consciously.

MVTs face more significant challenges in achieving project goals, staying within budget, and keeping on schedule than face-to-face teams (McDonough et al., 2001). Leadership is said to be a critical factor in the performance and effectiveness of virtual teams (Walther & Bunz, 2005). Ambiguous is the evidence on how specifically virtual teams should be led best (CIPD, 2020). For example, transactional leadership's strengths are coordinating the team better to

solve specific tasks and achieve more results. The strengths of transformational leadership are to develop vision, strengthen social cohesion, foster creativity, and improve the quality of results (Huang et al., 2010; Kahai et al., 2012).

These studies suggest that the best fitting leader must be selected, or the leaders must adapt their leadership style to the challenge faced by the virtual team. For example, task-oriented leadership is appropriate if the team's task is focused on quantitative output. Whereas if the team is working on innovative and high-quality ideas, the leader should be visionary and more responsive to the needs and concerns of the individual team members (CIPD, 2020).

3.1.5. Relationship, cohesion, and trust

Everybody knows the feeling of joining a new group of people. Especially in the beginning, there are many insecurities from all sides. It takes time to get to know each other and the internal codes and rules. In face-to-face situations with people speaking the same language and coming from the same culture, it usually does not take long to get a first impression, but it still takes some days and maybe weeks or months to get a thorough understanding. But imagine you are new to a virtual team consisting of people from many different cultures around the globe. How would you feel, and what do you think how much time it will take to get a feeling for each other? How can team leaders facilitate this process for their team members to work together effectively?

For MVTs, building relationships, cohesion, and trust is a significant challenge. Research shows that virtual teams' social cohesion is even more important than face-to-face ones. However, it is more difficult to develop social cohesion and build relationships in virtual teams because important social cues are reduced or absent in communication via electronic media (Lin, Standing & Liu, 2008; see also in the section on media-based communication issues). In addition, it is challenging for team members in virtual teams to develop a sense of roles and responsibilities unless they are explicitly defined for all team members (Warburton, 2021). Studies show that teambuilding activities are essential in virtual teams. They are even more necessary there than in face-to-face teams (Cordery et al., 2009; Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Sivunen, 2006). Further research points to the fact that in virtual teams, trust is more likely to be built among team members when information is shared promptly, and others respond appropriately (Kirkman et al., 2002).

To face these challenges, team leaders should initiate team building and role clarification at the beginning of the collaboration (Kennedy et al., 2010; Tuckman's Stages of Group Development, 1965; Warburton, 2021). In MVTs, this occasion can also be used to learn about the different culturally determined needs, attitudes, and behaviours. In addition, rules for cooperation can be established (see section cultural differences and section cultural communication issues). To foster trust, the leader can bring the team together regularly for ‘catch-ups’ and ‘hangouts’. These do not have to be work meetings only; they can also be social meetings (CIPD, 2021).

3.1.6. Geographic distance and different time zones

Imagine a team consisting of members, some living and working in Boston, others in London and Berlin, and some in Delhi and Tokyo. In this team, we have five different time zones, and while the day has just begun for some, it is already night for others. Perhaps this example seems extreme, but it is not unrealistic. As a team leader, how would you plan meetings and coordinate work schedules in such a situation? It is a big challenge on top of the other typical work issues.

Globally organised virtual teams, in particular, face challenges related to their geographical distance. Factors such as different time zones, unequal technological infrastructures (e.g., access to the internet, availability of technical devices), and different competencies of team members in dealing with technologies affect coordination and work processes (Cordery et al., 2009; Gibson & Gibs, 2006; Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Kayworth & Leidner, 2000). Working in different time zones hinders the exchange of tacit knowledge, social cues, and nonverbal signals via electronic media (Kankanhalli et al., 2006; see the section media-based communication issues section). Moreover, it is difficult for team members to understand the context and setting and how it affects their work when team members are far apart (Hertel et al., 2005). Probably the more different the cultures, the greater the challenge.

Identifying the best time intervals for team members to meet and synchronising their work schedules is a crucial coordination task for a leader of globally dispersed teams. The objective is to achieve the longest possible common working time frame, with the most extensive possible work hours overlap. The less time members spend working simultaneously, the more difficult it is to coordinate meetings and share information quickly (CIPD, 2021; 2020; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). However, leaders must allow flexible working hours (CIPD, 2021). Further, they must ensure that members share location-specific information. This fosters a mutual understanding of underlying conditions (CIPD, 2020). They must also ensure that the team members have the minimum technical conditions to participate in team collaboration, including consideration of internet access and technical capabilities.

3.1.7. Media-based communication issues

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies abruptly switched their communication from face-to-face to online, which was a great challenge for many people, especially at the beginning when many technical infrastructures were still missing. The systems were overloaded, the internet connection was too weak, and the employees in their home office were not adequately equipped. Many felt left behind because the technology did not work well for them or they did not know how to use it. As a result, some were uncertain and frustrated, and others were angry or annoyed. Since most of us have probably experienced this situation, we know how important it is to meet these challenges right from the start.

Virtual teams depend on communication through electronic media, but various studies show that using electronic text- and audio-based communication media can hinder team processes and performance (Berg, 2012; CIPD, 2020; Han & Beyerlein, 2016). Furthermore, some studies show that the more electronic media is used, the less effective virtual teams are (Baltes et al., 2002; CIPD, 2021). This is because, through electronic media, less information is shared, information is less well understood and interpreted, and feedback is usually given with a delay. Furthermore, communication via text- or audio-based channels misses critical social cues and nonverbal signals, such as gestures, tone of voice, intonation, and attentiveness (CIPD, 2021; 2020; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, disrupting team processes and performance (Berg, 2012; CIPD, 2020; Han & Beyerlein, 2016). The culturally related differences in communication doubly challenge MVTs (see more in the section on cultural communication issues).

Leaders should encourage using so-called ‘rich media’, such as videoconferencing, to improve productivity and effectiveness. It enables social cues and nonverbal communication, the immediate sharing of feedback and perspectives, as well as the quick resolution of differences.

All in all, videoconferencing can reduce textual misinterpretation (CIPD, 2021; 2020). It should be considered that videoconferencing can also be problematic in a multicultural context, especially in the case of language barriers. Accordingly, leaders must be sensitive to their team members and enquire about their needs (see the sections on language and communication issues). If leaders expect to use videoconferencing, they must ensure that team members have the minimum conditions to do so (CIPD, 2020).

3.2. Derived traits, attitudes, and skills for leaders

To execute the previously described behaviours, leaders should bring certain traits and skills to the job. Based on the findings of the previous part, these traits and skills were derived. First, leaders need *sensitivity*, *awareness*, and *empathy* to recognise cultural nuances, different communication styles, and uncertainties about language or technical issues among their team members. The *ability to listen actively* is equally crucial for this, as well as the attitudes of *respect*, *patience* and *understanding*. Furthermore, leaders should have a high level of *flexibility* and *adaptability* to respond appropriately to individuals, the team as a collective, and to technical and task-related challenges. To accomplish this, leaders should *master different leadership styles* (e.g., transactional and transformational leadership styles). As described in the previous section, clarifying expectations about the collaboration, team roles, and technical requirements at the beginning of the collaboration is helpful. To implement this, leaders need *personal initiative*, negotiation competence, and the *ability to encourage* their team members to share their needs and expectations. *Assertiveness* is vital to ensure that the derived and established rules are followed. In MVTs, it is essential to create an awareness of each other and prevent stereotypes. Therefore, important traits and attitudes of leaders are *openness*, *interest*, and *willingness to learn*. Leaders show this by constantly *enquiring* about their team member's needs, expectations, and requirements. Finally, leaders of MVTs should also have a high *sense of responsibility*, *reliability*, and a certain level of *media literacy* alongside their social and professional skills. Leaders should never forget that they have an essential *role model function*. They cannot expect their team members to do what they do not do themselves. Especially in MVTs, where many different types of challenges arise, leaders should keep this in mind.

Table 1 (next page) summarises the most important findings. It gives an overview of all challenges arising in MVTs, the required behaviours to face them, and derived traits, attitudes, and skills that leaders should bring to the job.

4. Discussion

This paper offers an overview based on scientific evidence from the literature and can provide helpful guidance for managers and recruiters. Nevertheless, it is not a universal scheme. Situational factors must always be considered. For example, on the topic of language, if the entire is proficient in French instead of English, then it makes more sense to communicate in French. Also, if a multicultural team operates only in a small market where most customers and stakeholders speak a common language that is not English, it may be more reasonable to agree to use that language instead. For example, in a private nursing service for older people in Germany, it is more practical for foreign employees to learn German because even with poor English, most customers would not understand them. Ultimately, it is always more important to adapt to the specific situation than to establish an 'ideal' yet an inappropriate solution.

TABLE 1. CHALLENGES AND REQUIRED BEHAVIOURS, TRAITS, ATTITUDES, AND SKILLS THAT LEADERS NEED TO FACE THEM

Challenge	Behaviours of leaders to counter challenges	Required traits and skills
Language	• Raise awareness of language barriers and consequences. • Communicate and operate task-oriented. • Provide psychological security. • Identify and improve 'poor English'. • Encourage to uphold language discipline. • Allow asynchronous communication if requested	• Assertiveness • Empathy • Flexibility • Openness • Reliability • Sensitivity
Cultural differences	• Show respect for people who are different. • Be sensitive to different values and attitudes. • Clarify expectations around collaboration. (e.g., leadership style, communication method, decision-making process). • Establish binding norms. • Adapt flexibly to different individuals. • Encourage everyone to suspend judgements. • Encourage members to share previous experiences. • Explore different attitudes and perspectives.	• Active enquiring • Active interest • Adaptability • Assertiveness • Being respectful • Flexibility • Master leadership • Negotiation • Personal initiative • Role model function • Sensitivity • Willingness to learn
Cultural communication issues	• Raise awareness of particular forms of communication. • Recognise cultural nuances. • Recognise cultural communication styles. • Enquire about communication preferences. • Adapt flexibly to individual needs. • Establish building norms for communication.	• Active enquiry • Active listening • Adaptability • Assertiveness • Attentive listening • Awareness • Creating norms • Empathy • Flexibility • Patience • Personal initiative • Sensitivity • Understanding
Relationship, cohesion, and trust	• Initiate team building and role clarification. • Organise 'catch-ups' and 'hangouts'. • Encourage the exchange of information.	• Assertiveness • Personal initiative
Performance and efficiency	• Adapt leadership style to the task and challenge.	• Adaptability • Flexibility • Leadership styles • Sensitivity
Geographical distance and different time zones	• Identify the best time intervals to meet. • Synchronise work schedules. • Allow flexible working hours. • Share location-specific information. • Ensure minimum technical conditions.	• Coordination skills • Flexibility • Encouraging • Sense of responsibility
Media-based communication issues	• Using 'rich media' such as videoconferencing. • Enquire about team members' needs. • Ensure minimum conditions.	• Media literacy • Sense of responsibility • Sensitivity

Source: Author's own compilation, 2022

Moreover, the literature review highlighted areas where conflicting findings exist. For example, some studies suggest using rich media such as videoconferencing to avoid misunderstandings due to the lack of nonverbal cues. However, other studies suggest asynchronous communication to allow more time to process a message. Ultimately, there is no single 'perfect' or 'universal' approach. Each MVT and, accordingly, each leader must find their own routine. They need to test different communication styles in different situations to understand which way is best for their given circumstances.

Many people report that language barriers are often the biggest problem in multicultural teams. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of a manager should be to create a psychologically safe environment, as well as to offer language courses to their employees. Companies operating internationally or with many internal and external intercultural relations should invest in intercultural training and language courses.

The interventions must always be reasonable and appropriate. Moreover, they should not be at the expense of other vital interventions or conditions. For example, encouraging language discipline should be reasonable and not at the expense of a safe environment.

Managers typically have many duties and responsibilities for many things. It can sometimes be challenging to do everything equally and appropriately during a stressful workday. It can be unrealistic to meet all individual needs and demands concerning intercultural or virtual issues. Of course, it is part of their job, but the responsibility also lies with the individual team members to be open-minded to intercultural and technical challenges and to show a willingness to change for the sake of the team and the company. It can also happen that the managers themselves are overwhelmed with multicultural or virtual issues. In this case, colleagues and team members should also be open and willing to help. Just because one person is in charge does not mean leaving that person alone with that responsibility.

However, leaders of MVTs should have sensitivity, flexibility, and active listening skills. These are essential skills and attitudes to understand people and situations and respond appropriately. This is possible even if you are in experiencing a stressful workday or have limited time available for detailed teambuilding interventions or discussions about rules.

5. Conclusion

A literature review was used to analyse both the challenges that arise in MVTs and the required behaviours to face them. From this, required traits, attitudes and skills leaders should bring to their job were derived to answer the research question 'which behaviour and skills do leaders need to manage MVTs successfully'.

The most significant behaviours that contribute to the successful management of MVTs are the following (i) raising awareness of language barriers and cultural differences, (ii) enquiring about team members' needs and expectations, (iii) clarifying expectations about the collaboration, (iv) establishing binding norms and ensuring compliance, (v) adapting flexibly to individuals and situations, (vi) using videoconferencing (instead of audio- or text-based media) and (vii) synchronizing work schedules. To evidence these behaviours, leaders of MVTs should have the following skills and attitudes (i) sensitivity, (ii) flexibility, (iii) assertiveness, (iv) personal initiative, (v) mastering different leadership styles, (vi) negotiation competence and (vii) active listening.

Table 1, presented earlier, provides an overview of the results from the literature review. Furthermore, Table 1 has practical use for leaders and recruiters. Leaders can use the table as a

helpful guide to appropriate behaviour for responding to specific challenges and circumstances. Recruiters can use the table as a valuable tool in selecting appropriate leaders for MVTs. Additionally, the findings of this literature review should form the basis for further exploration and investigation since research on the successful management of MVTs still needs to be expanded. New insights from organizational practice need to be integrated into existing research. Therefore, the topic is and will remain relevant to academics and practitioners.

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