

# Maximizing Project Management Through Understanding Cross-Cultural Diversity

International and cross-cultural projects

Society of PM Professionals

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# Agenda

- Objective
- Introduction – cultural background
- Cultural adjustment
- Work experience
- Vancouver 2010 projects
- The importance of understanding language
- Understand and respect cultural difference
- Encourage and support team members
- Closing Remarks

# Objective

- Provide an insight into cross-cultural diversity and how to leverage these understandings to maximize project management
- Cultural awareness - share cross-cultural differences encountered over the years
- To be a cultural leader within your project team

# Cultural Background

- Chinese born Indian
- Lived in India for 17 years; being different from others
- Came to Canada in 1988 via Thailand, Singapore, and Hong Kong with \$20 USD
- Went to Britannia Secondary School in Vancouver
- My wife is Japanese
- Family members with different passports
- Received my Canadian Citizenship in 1996
- Speaks Hindi, Chinese (Hakka), some Japanese

# Cultural Adjustment

- Welcome to Canada! Bienvenue au Canada!
- First bus trip to downtown – culture shock, line up, duration
- Canadians are friendly and polite
- High school experience
  - Memorizing versus understanding
  - Respecting teachers – eye contact
  - Do you understand? Yes/No
  - Worked on accent
  - Don't touch me
- English as a second language – Grade 12 English exam
- East Indian vs. Native Indian; Asian and South Asian
- Passport swap in College

# Cultural Adjustment

- Canadian weather – cold!
- What am I? Indian or Chinese? Asian?
- Parking incident at Metrotown
- First trip to Japan
  - I look like them as well; felt tall
  - New gadgets (video camera, cell phones)
  - Not just sushi; eating style is different
  - First hot spring (onsen) experience
  - Politeness or awkwardness

# Work Experience

- Looking for my first job – Canadian work experience or something else
- First co-op job @ BC Motel Campground Resort Association (BCMCRA)
- Co-op term at Skeena Cellulose, Ministry of Social Services, BC Tel
- BC Tel / ISM-BC / TELUS
- Chartwell Technologies Inc.
- Accenture @ Best Buy
- HSBC
- Atos Origin – World Wide Olympic Partner

# Vancouver 2010 Olympic Experience

- Venue Technology Manager (VTM) for Olympic Family Hotel (OFH)
- Hotels - Westin Bayshore, Marriott, and Renaissance
- Clients - International Olympic Committee (IOC), NOC (National Olympic Committees), ANOC (Association of National Olympic Committees), CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sports), WADA (World Anti-doping Agencies), Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs)
- IOC headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland
- Languages spoken – English, French, Spanish
- Partners: VANOC, Bell, Acer, Panasonic, Samsung, Omega, Purolator, VISA, VISU



## Fun Facts on OFH

- Installed over 500 services to support the Olympic Games at the hotel.
- This required approximately 23km of copper cabling (CAT5e and COAX) and about 4 km of fibre optic cabling
- Installed 72 strands of brand new fibre to the building
- The Olympic network provided to OFH was the same as a competition venue
- 150 Acer Desktop Computers, and 82 RICOH printers and copiers; 68 Panasonic TVs
- Different terminology and power requirement

# Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Experience

- Paralympic Family Hotel (PFH) @ Hilton Hotel
- The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the global governing body of the Paralympic Movement
- The world Headquarters of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) are located in Bonn, Germany
- Paralympic time - no Olympic rings please
- Languages – English, Germany, French, Spanish
- Services provided were quarter of OFH
  - 48 Acer desktop computers
  - 21 RICOH printers and copiers
  - 12 Panasonic TVs

# The importance of understanding languages

- India has 18 national languages. The spoken languages in India are 347.
- Popular Chinese dialects – Mandarin, and Cantonese; but writing is the same
- People talking in different languages in meeting; be respectful (is it necessary or offensive?)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
  - Words can mean different thing; keep it simple
  - Idiom and slang usage
  - How are you? How`s it going? How`ve you been?
  - Talk slowly and clearly (KISS); not too slowly
- Learning other language; speaking their language?
- Understand their body language

# Understand and respect cultural differences

- Know your clients/team and be prepared; not knowing can affect relationship
- Judging people's origin by looks
  - Physical appearance or by their last names
  - Pakistanis are not Indian
  - Some Taiwanese are not Chinese
  - Korean are not Japanese
- Accent can usually tell where people are from
- Respect culture by trying their food; can be a good conversation topic

# Understand and respect cultural differences

- Religion/Culture vs. professionalism (get help from HR)
  - Prayer before sunset; people fasting (Ramadan)
  - Not working on Sundays
  - Caste issue in India; taught to respect elders
  - Eye contact may be interpreted as rude
  - Siesta - a nap in the early afternoon (especially in hot countries)
- Different ways of greeting people
  - Namaste
  - Bowing
  - Hand shake
  - Kissing on cheek
  - Rub noses

# Understand and respect cultural differences

- Confidence or showing off
- Tall people vs not so tall people
  - Most Asians are small; it is what it is!
  - Some find tall people intimidating and they push back
- Some people appear to agree to everything but they were just listening; double check to make sure
- Attitude towards time – time means different to different people. Indian Standard Time(IST), Trinidadian time
- Respect timezone when scheduling meetings
- Japan has long work hours; do not leave before boss
- Adapt to make other feel more comfortable

# Understand and respect cultural differences

- Some culture focus on status and hierarchy
- Understand the hierarchy and title; know the decision makers; who to escalate issues
- Invite the right people to the meeting
- Allow more time in meeting (language vs. strategy)
- Send out meeting minutes right away to avoid misunderstanding; Know who to include on email
- Double check understanding in writing (use diagram when possible)

## Encourage and support team members

- Hiring new immigrants? New immigrants are keen to contribute/learn but low confidence level; SUCCESS organization helps new immigrant
- Help new immigrants adapt to Canadian way of life
- Hire new immigrants or play it safe?
- Give them opportunity to speak; ask for input from quieter participant
- Mentor and lead your team; don't avoid and ignore
- Be the cultural leader within your project team
- Share culture – happy new year, festival, food
- Build trust and relationship



## Closing Remarks

- The face of Canada is changing - population is rapidly diversifying and will get more diverse in the next two decades
- My children are exposed to different culture
  - Canadian or Chinese-Japanese Canadian
  - Inter cultural marriages are evident in their school
  - Exposed to different religion and food
  - Racism – scared of other cultures
- Where are you from? Can be interpreted differently
- Share, trust, and learn from each other to make a better project team
- Build trust and relationship

Questions?

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Thank you for your time!