

The Competency Model of Movie Producers for Cross-Cultural Co-Production Projects

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Abstract

Movie producers are the de facto managers and leaders of movie crews who demand a comprehensive set of communication skills to solve the hundreds of problems during daily productions. The recent rise of international co-production movies has created more and more workspaces with multicultural teams. This calls for additional cross-cultural communication skills for producers to resolve new intercultural conflicts and communication issues that have emerged in this new working environment. This paper examines the competency model of movie producers in the context of cross-cultural communication. This paper also presents a co-production case to illustrate the findings of cross-cultural communication competency theories.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the perception of most people, the movie industry is a weird mix of art, entertainment, and business. The public imagination is overflowed with exaggerated versions of drama – producers and directors lashing out at each other over creative control in the artistic endeavor. This is not entirely unfounded. After all, the euphemism for producers to fire someone in the film crew is called “creative differences.” Nevertheless, a movie set is just like any other organization that provides work, with producers, the de facto leaders of movie projects, acting as managers.

At the same time, a movie crew is a distinctively different type of workspace. It is a temporary entity that combines participants to accomplish a rather short-term task. The participants disband after task completion and the project team ceases to exist as a formal entity. This ephemeral nature combined with the intensive work often result in concentrated negative emotions and conflicts among the crew members. All the above calls for extraordinary communication skills on the part of the producers. With the rise of international co-production projects, there has been an inclination by movie studios to develop and undertake such projects in partnership with other companies as joint ventures, often collaborating with local companies based in the territory where the movie set will be located. This makes it even more challenging for producers to manage people from different cultures and facilitate communication between them.

Multicultural project teams have become more common in recent years, and contemporary international management literature has identified that the management of multicultural teams is an important aspect of human resource management. In a multicultural team the ability to communicate effectively can be a challenge. Even when both parties speak the same language there can still be misunderstandings due to ethnic and cultural differences. Over the last decade, there have been countless examples from the business sector that demonstrate how poor

communication can lead to poor organizational performance. Communication is necessary for individuals to express themselves and to fulfill basic needs. Without the ability to communicate and understand each other, there would be chaos. Communication that is based on cultural understanding is more apt to prevent misunderstandings caused by personal biases and prejudices.

In the last twenty years project management has developed considerably with a much greater understanding of the key variables that lead to project success. Project performance has been widely researched by a number of researchers (Baiden, 2006; Cheng et al., 2006; Chervier, 2003; Kumaraswamy et al., 2004; Ochieng, 2008), and the findings have clearly illustrated that best project performance is achieved when the whole project team is fully integrated and aligned with project objectives. Recent studies have proven the positive effects to achieving this by having multicultural teams. For example, Earley and Mosakowski (2000) stated that multicultural teams are used because they are perceived to out-perform monoculture teams, especially when performance requires multiple skills and judgement. Despite all this, many movie organizations, while expanding into global operations, do not fully appreciate the implications and are often unable to respond to cultural factors affecting their project teams.

Understanding the impact of cross-culture communication is therefore imperative for movie organizations seeking to create a competitive advantage in the global market. More specifically, for producers involved in global movie operations the relationship of managers and local subordinates is extremely important. In research conducted by Thomas and Ravlin (1995) it was found that participants to whom nationality was more important indicated lower perceptions of similarity with the manager, lower intentions to associate, and lower perceptions of managerial effectiveness. The results of the study strongly indicate that teaching members of different

cultures to behave like each other is an ineffective approach to improving intercultural interactions in team settings. Cultural proficiency does not mean memorizing every cultural nuance of every market and conforming to them. It is knowing when to listen, when to ask for help, and when to speak.

While extensive research has been conducted on the subject of cross-cultural communication in team settings, there has been little research into film-specific multicultural teams and the role of producers on these teams. This reason together with my own personal experience in the movie industry on co-production movie sets have prompted me to conduct this research to examine what qualities and competencies are required for producers to resolve intercultural conflicts and organizational communication issues.

This thesis is divided into the following chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the current movie industry and presents a couple of theoretical frameworks in the field of cross-culture communication. Chapter 3 lays out the methods used to collect data and examine the previous frameworks. Chapter 4 will outline the competency model of movie producers, paying specific attention to the context of cross-cultural communication. Chapter 5 offers a case study of the China-US co-production project *Step Up China*. Finally, Chapter 6 closes the paper with some concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2 Industry Overview and Theoretical Frameworks

Producers as Managers in the “Studio System”

The producer’s function in filmmaking has a multifaceted and complex nature. It can extend across the entire filmmaking process into marketing and distribution, which can range from creative or conceptual, to financial, managerial or administrative, and even promotional. A producer’s credit today, according to the PGA, means an individual has “taken responsibility for at least a majority of the functions performed and decisions made” in the various phases of the film’s production and distribution, in terms of the film’s creative and financial features.

Since the advent of commercial cinema over a century ago, the costs and complexity of filmmaking have encouraged producers to develop a factory-oriented approach to production. The benefits of such an approach include the centralization of both production and management; the division and detailed subdivision of labor; a standardized mode of production, film style, and type of product; cost efficiencies derived from economies of scale; consistent production values; and the cultivation of a brand name in the movie marketplace. This approach coalesced in Hollywood, California in the 1910s, when that locale became the nexus of commercial film production in the United States. The dominant firms referred to their production facilities as “studios,” which invoked the more artistic aspects of filmmaking, although operations were modeled on the kind of mass production that Henry Ford (1863–1947) was introducing to the auto industry at the time.

Today, Hollywood’s model of balancing artistic expression and a highly structured work routine serves as a blueprint for the streamlining of creative production in all forms of media and entertainment. The larger production companies refined, on a grander scale, the range of

production practices to ensure cost efficiency and quality control, including centralized management, shooting scripts as blueprints for production, and a clear division of work roles in an assembly-line operation. This has enabled them to produce an enormous volume of pictures—up to 250 features, shorts, and serials per year in the case of Universal Pictures.

For the scope and argument of this thesis, I shall examine movie producers that work as managers within the studio system or studio equivalent companies. The reason for this restriction of scope is twofold. Firstly, producers within the studio system have the opportunity to work on movie sets with a certain scale and formality. Under such circumstances, they are managing environments more closely resembling real workspaces. This allows me to more appropriately apply the management frameworks and theories. Secondly, producers within the studio system represent the production company, which is the most important stakeholder in the movie project. While they have a certain amount of creative control, their main responsibility is the profitability of the final product, which separates them from the creative executives. Unlike independent films or arthouse films where creative expression is more important than box-office numbers and the roles of producer and director are often blurred, mainstream commercial films contains an inherent tension between the two powers.

Rise of Co-Productions

The past decade has seen a tremendous uprising in the number of co-production films as increasingly complicated subsidy and funding structures are initiated with more and more international players now engaged in the movie business. The co-financing model has proven an increasingly attractive option, as it bypasses the various laws or bilateral legal frameworks that historically have often rendered treaty co-productions of more than two countries difficult to

navigate. Co-financing treaties ensure that the resulting product qualifies as "domestic," a category crucial for assuring that the co-produced material is eligible for government financing or investor tax credits in terms of national policies. Canada, one of the most proficient co-producers, has more than fifty-five co-production treaties worldwide. The United States, by comparison, has no treaties whatsoever, but works collaboratively with several countries (especially Canada) to make films and television programs through equity partnerships and other forms of private-sector financing.

In the case of mainland China, there are other reasons why co-productions are appealing. To begin with, for a film to have a theatrical release in China, it must pass the censorship laws of China's SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television). Both Chinese and foreign film companies cope with SARFT's laborious censorship rules and have mastered the art of appeasement to tap into the world's largest box office. However, SARFT is much more lenient with co-production projects in terms of censorship. On the one hand, co-productions can touch upon subject matters that are too sensitive for domestic Chinese films. On the other hand, the inclusion of Chinese capital and talents in co-productions ensure that they will not be deemed "western cultural invasion" on the ideological front.

In addition to censorship rules, China also imposes an import quota on foreign films to safeguard its domestic market. Yet co-production is the one loophole around that quota. This form of collaboration allows both U.S. and China's production companies to create a film together, which technically slides past import regulations and renders the film as non-foreign. As long as the project meets certain co-production standards, it will not be counted towards the import quota. For example, a co-produced film requires one third of its cast members to be

Chinese actors or the use of China's production facilities, equipment, staff, and shooting locations.

These reasons have instigated the recent plethora of production deals made between Hollywood and Chinese film companies. DreamWorks, with the help of Chinese investors, has established the Oriental DreamWorks in Shanghai. Their first feature film, *Kung Fu Panda 3*, grossed \$519 million worldwide. Paramount Pictures recently signed a co-finance deal with Huahua Media and Shanghai Film group, who will also be distributing their films in China along with investing in their films over the next three years. These deals will prompt more and more co-productions with multicultural crews, which in turn calls for more producers with cross-cultural communication competency.

Cross-Cultural Communication Competency Model

In the work environment, competence determines a person's ability to perform a required task effectively (Klemp, 1979). In the multicultural setting, obtaining information from a colleague requires a high degree of cross-cultural communication competence. A member of a multicultural team with this competence is able to establish an inter-personal relationship with a foreign national through effective exchange at both verbal and nonverbal levels of behavior (Spitzberg, 1983). Cross-cultural communication competence increases the likelihood of achieving high team performance, as the team members can clearly express themselves and better understand their colleagues. Cross-cultural communication also improves the decision-making and problem-solving abilities of managers in the global marketplace.

Past research identified various characteristics that constitute cross-cultural communication competence, including relationship skills, communication skills, and personal traits such as

inquisitiveness (Black and Gregersen, 2000; Kealey and Protheroe, 1996; Mendenhall, 2001; Moosmuller, 1995). This competence entails not only knowledge of the culture and language, but also affective and behavioral skills such as empathy, human warmth, charisma, and the ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1998). Others argue that cross cultural-communication competence requires sufficient knowledge, skilled actions, and suitable motivation to make an individual a competent interactant (Spitzberg, 1991).

Cross-cultural communication competence is traditionally analyzed with the help of conceptual models (Abe and Wiseman, 1983; Chen, 1989; Cui and Awa, 1992; Dean and Popp, 1990; Martin and Hammer, 1989). Abe and Wiseman (1983) report five dimensions of cross-cultural effectiveness: ability to communicate interpersonally, ability to adjust to different cultures, ability to adjust to different social systems, ability to establish interpersonal relationships, and ability to understand others. Cui and Awa (1992) identify five dimensions of cross-cultural effectiveness: interpersonal skills, social interaction, cultural empathy, personality traits, and managerial ability. Matveev and colleagues (Matveev, 2002; Matveev et al., 2001) developed the Cross-Cultural Communication Competence Model (3C Model) by combining the research of Abe and Wiseman (1983) and Cui and Awa (1992) and applying their models to the context of multicultural teams.

The Cross-Cultural Communication Competence Model identifies four dimensions of this competence: interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, cultural uncertainty, and cultural empathy. In the interpersonal skills dimension, a team member acknowledges differences in the communicative and interactional styles of people from different cultures, demonstrates flexibility in resolving misunderstandings, and feels comfortable when communicating with foreign nationals. The team effectiveness dimension includes such critical skills as the ability of a team

member to understand and clearly communicate team goals, roles and norms to other members of a multicultural team. The cultural uncertainty dimension reflects the ability of a team member to display patience in intercultural situations, to be tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty due to cultural differences, and to work in a flexible manner with others on a multicultural team. Finally, in the cultural empathy dimension, a culturally empathetic team member has the capacity to behave as though he or she understands the world as team members from other cultures do, has a spirit of inquiry about other cultures and the communication patterns in these cultures, an appreciation for a variety of working styles, and an ability to view the ways things are done in other cultures not as bad but simply as different.

Cultural Values and Effects on Leadership

The final piece of theoretical framework I will look at is how cultural values influence leadership. According to various authors, cultural values and traditions can influence the attitudes and behaviors of leaders in a number of different ways (House et.al. 1997; Yukl, 2005). Nevertheless, cultural values are likely to be internalized by managers/leaders who grew up in a particular culture, and these values will influence their attitudes and behavior in ways that may not be conscious. In addition, cultural values are reflected in societal norms about the way people relate to each other (Yukl, 2005). Therefore, the perception of leadership will differ not only from the managers' perspective, but also from the employees' perceptions and expectations. Cultural differences in expectations of leadership affect the perception of who is perceived as a leader and what they expect from him/her. In other words, how employees from different cultural background might understand a situation, whether they might expect a leader to decide for them what they should do, or expect from the leader to be pointed out to share their opinion in

meetings, or whether and how they might seek to exercise influence in their own right will differ per employee. Warner (2003) also asserted that the influence of individual attitudes and behaviors in organizations is likely to be pervasive, extending to matters such as the motivational consequences of managerial practices and styles, norms of communication, the willingness to take individual responsibility, the conduct of meetings, and modes of conflict resolution.

One of the most comprehensive studies on cultural differences was conducted by Hofstede (2001), from which he identified the individualism/collectivism cultural value dimension that differentiated cultures. According to this dimension, all cultures can be characterized by the strength of social forces, which bring individuals together into social entities. Individualism is an attitude that emphasizes the importance of individual over the group identity and collectivism is the opposite tendency that emphasizes the importance of “We” identity over “I” identity.

Thomas and Inkson (2003) argue that Westerner countries tend to be individualist, where both leaders and followers will attempt to involve themselves in decision making to maximize their individual influence and gain for themselves a good result as opposite to collectivist societies discussed here below. Power is evenly distributed, where subordinates expect to be consulted, and the ideal boss would be a resourceful democrat. This translates into a culture that values individual contentment, equality, practicality, is at ease with change, achievement oriented, and task driven. This individualistic state of mind is common for managers in individualistically oriented culture to bear the total responsibility for either success or failure of the business/project, which also emphasizes the importance on individual achievement.

In collectivistic culture even though the leader might play the most important role in successful accomplishment of the task, reward is often given to all collective members as opposed to in individualistic cultures. According to Hofstede (2001) collectivist societies are

inclined to value pro-social behavior that conforms to social norms, morals and traditions. For instance, the distinctively collectivist Chinese culture emphasizes the goals of the group or society, fosters in-group belonging, and pursues harmony. Chinese managers, consequently, hold a position of moral authority and instruct the moral rules of conduct. The power of an organization is centralized at the upper management level, where subordinates expect to be told what to do, and the ideal boss would be the benevolent autocratic role. Not conforming to social norms and values is likely to make followers quickly perceive a leader as incompetent and not deserving of that position, despite his/her personal achievements. This means that in collectivist societies, followers are more likely to accept the leadership that fits into their implicit leadership prototypes, rather than being aroused to compliance and devotion by leaders' extraordinary performance as in the opposite continuum of this cultural dimension.

Chapter 3 Methodology

A qualitative research strategy consisting of semi-structured interviews was used to gather information. This method is most appropriate because of the complexity involved in studying culture and communication from an individual perspective.

Participants

Participant variety is essential to the quality of data obtained in qualitative research. In this study, the aim of participant variety was to explore a diverse proportion of expert views from producers on cross-cultural communication within the movie industry. The study targeted 30 producers from both Chinese and US production companies, with each having long-standing familiarity in managing cultural complexity on co-production films. In order to investigate the factors that influenced these multicultural project teams it was also necessary to have a range of projects in terms of budget, size, and genre. The final participants pool consisted of 18 males and 12 females, 13 Chinese and 17 Americans. The co-production projects they were involved in consisted of 3 action films, 4 comedies, and 4 dramas, with budgets ranging from \$4M USD to \$150M USD.

Interviews

Interviews enabled a probing of responses to explore what the participants were saying so as to ensure that each producer gave as full an answer as possible. The use of interviews also allowed me to elaborate points that were unclear to the participants. Adopting a semi-structured interview rather than a survey with fixed questions provided a high degree of flexibility. The interviews of the 30 participants were conducted over a 6 months period. Each interview ranged from 1 to 2 hours and was semi-structured, which elicited more detailed questions and answers. All interviews were recorded, their contents transcribed and fed back to the informants who

assessed them for accuracy. This acts as a validity check on the data and interpretations by the researcher.

Every interview was typically divided into three sectors. First, we talk about general questions regarding the project. This would, for example, include a project overview as well as the successes and failures during the production. Next, we talked about general competencies that the interviewee needed to be successful as a producer working on a co-production film. Lastly, we talked about cross-cultural communication practices that were involved during production. Some examples include: Could you identify the ways in which your movie crew created an environment in which communication may be more effectively used in managing multicultural teams? Could you identify issues which still need to be addressed in your crew in respect to multicultural teams? What are the key problems you face in managing multicultural teams? How do you think a good multicultural team can help the success of the project? Can you give some examples?

The contents of the interviews were analyzed starting with an initial framework from DeFillippi and Arthur's (1994) career competencies of knowing whom (e.g., relationships and social contacts) and knowing how (e.g., job related knowledge and skills) and Jones and DeFillippi's (1996) concept of knowing what (e.g., industry related knowledge). Based on this initial but general conceptual frame, I extracted quotations from the text and sorted and organized them by common themes. During this early phase of analysis, broad themes and patterns were looked for. As the data analysis progressed, further details were obtained, and sections of the data more intensively analyzed. At this stage, I refined and extended the categories, taking into account the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. In some cases, a particular section would fall into more than one category, but this seemed to indicate the

interlinking of themes rather than a fault in coding, for example trust, communication and teamwork. The findings and categories will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Case Study

Among the 30 interviews, two concerning the project *Step Up China* were singled out to create a case study. This is employed to validate and supplement the findings in Chapter 4 in two ways. Firstly, the two interviews contain two distinctly different perspectives – a Chinese producer from a Chinese company working on set in China and an American producer from another Chinese company working on set in China. Secondly, a case study allows for a more detailed exploration of the cross-cultural communications in one specific co-production project. This adds the dimension of cross-cultural communication competency to the general competency model in Chapter 4 to address the co-production specific nature of the projects in this study. The case is presented in Chapter 5, where appropriate illustrative quotations drawn from the interview transcripts have been used to convey the view of participants.

Chapter 4 Producers Competency Model

Initial Groupings

Preliminary analysis of the interviews resulted in 12 initial groupings of competencies: develop properties, secure financing, assemble production team, manage production process, manage contracts, manage finances, promote property, exploit property, establish / maintain industry relations, run a production company, demonstrate communication and interpersonal competencies, and demonstrate personal skills.

The following table showcases the detailed skills in each grouping extracted from the interviews.

Table 4.1 Detailed Skills in Initial Groupings

DEVELOP PROPERTIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential market needs • Create content • Assess proposals • Execute due diligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive creative process • Create exploitation strategy • Establish technical protocol • Set project timeline
SECURE FINANCING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell an idea • Prepare a budget • Attach marketable talent • Create detailed cash flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lock in financing • Negotiate ancillary revenue opportunities
ASSEMBLE PRODUCTION TEAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract and scout talent • Evaluate project needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select team members • Hire/fire team members
MANAGE PRODUCTION PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize work flow and responsibilities • Create a schedule • Control execution of technical protocol • Monitor progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain creative environment • Manage expectations • Manage crises • Mediate conflicts
MANAGE CONTRACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiate contracts • Manage partnership agreements • Manage IP agreements • Manage licensing agreements • Manage co-production agreements • Manage sponsorship agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage distribution agreements • Manage talent agreements • Manage crew agreements • Manage equipment agreements • Manage location agreements • Manage music agreements • Manage clearance agreements

MANAGE FINANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish accounting system • Track costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage risks • Take advantage of tax rebates
PROMOTE PROPERTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop media strategy • Nurture media contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve promotional materials • Promote through partnerships
EXPLOIT PROPERTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an exploitation strategy • Participate in industry market events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute exploitation strategy
ESTABLISH / MAINTAIN INDUSTRY RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscribe to industry publications • Participate in industry associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network through industry events • Cultivate strategic relationships
RUN A PRODUCTION COMPANY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a corporate vision • Develop a corporate plan • Establish company brand • Establish corporate policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage overhead • Establish a network of professional service providers • Maximize corporate assets
DEMONSTRATE COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak in an effective manner • Write in an effective manner • Exercise leadership • Persuade • Motivate • Project confidence • Project competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct meetings • Read people • Collaborate • Negotiate • Mediate • Establish trust
DEMONSTRATE PERSONAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have passion • Demonstrate strategic thinking • Make decisions • Multi-task • Take calculated risks • Exercise flexibility • Demonstrate creativity • Exercise resourcefulness • Take ownership • Delegate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate ambition • Exercise common sense • Exercise tenacity and perseverance • Stay current • Demonstrate analytical skills • Exercise intuition • Solve problems • Demonstrate integrity • Demonstrate time management

After a deeper analysis of the initial groupings and the skills involved, this study identifies three general dimensions for the competency model of producers: system competency, social competency, and craft competency. The following sectors of this chapter look at each of these dimensions in more details.

System Competency

System competency refers to the knowledge and skills individuals need to decipher and manage their industry environment, including the financial structure, legal issues, and consumer markets. Knowledge of the industry environment is essential because it defines what resources and opportunities are important and the rules by which these resources are controlled. Three recurrent themes dominated the interviews: strategic understanding of the macrostructure, capturing critical resources, and managing market uncertainty.

Strategic understanding of macrostructure

Strategic understanding of the macrostructure involves social intelligence – a cognitive skill concerned with the accuracy with which a person perceives the direct and indirect social connections that define groups and their boundaries. Social intelligence is critical because an astute knowledge of these connections facilitates identifying not only who is powerful, but also where coalitions are located, and what holes and gaps these coalitions have.

Career paths of the producers interviewed reveal the macrostructure and the optimal paths for maneuvering within this macrostructure. The film industry's macrostructure is organized around a status system defined by a core/periphery structure. The inner core is restricted to high status players such as the major studios and prominent artists whereas the peripheries are populated with less prestigious studios and less experienced and successful artists (Faulkner 1985). This suggests that, rather than trying for core-work from the beginning, low status but strategically competent individuals work their way in from the periphery. This was the path taken by one interviewee, who opted to leave UCLA's film school and work in exploitation films on the industry's periphery. "I took a job in the nudie film racket... It was the only scene I could find that actually gave you a chance to fool around with a camera and cut film... (and) I started to

move up the exploitation film ladder (e.g., nudie, science fiction, horror, and religious films)."

His movement toward the core required gaining the attention of and respect from prominent core members through winning critical acclaim. In film, career movement toward the core requires negotiating status passages, primarily through recognition of skills and competent performance.

Capturing critical resources

In film, critical resources are money, ideas (e.g., screen plays, book options), and talent. From the producer's perspective, money is the key resource. One interviewee stated this succinctly: "It costs a lot of money to make films. You don't make films on anything but money – and whatever talent you can bring to them." The money to develop a film is difficult to gain. One interviewee explained that "Front money (initial investment in developing the ideas, script, etc.) is the toughest money for a producer to raise... (because) nine times out of ten the money is lost. If you compare the number of films made against the number of books and plays optioned but never come off, you'll have some sense of what the risk is." From a studio's or production company's perspective, the critical resources of ideas and talent, while seemingly plentiful, are also perceived as scarce. One producer described how "We always look for a good story. That sounds very simplistic... But you'd be surprised – it is the most difficult thing to find." She added how talent was also scarce: "We try to go after the best people available. There's really only a handful when you get down to the technical side of getting a movie made."

To control critical resources requires gaining legal control over assets or employment contracts for knowledge resources. Many producers in the interviews recognized the need for legal control over ideas to gain opportunities and develop their skills. This emphasis on legal maneuvering and property rights suggests, from a resource-based view, that where resources become more valuable, property rights become more precise. This also explains why a primary role for guilds

is protecting creative ideas, tracking and arbitrating members' film credits, and providing standardized contracts. Those who capture critical resources through an astute knowledge of the legal and industry system rules will have an important lever of influence on the industry system.

Managing uncertainty

Many cultural industries are known for highly uncertain environments, primarily due to sudden shifts in market trends and unpredictability of product success. In film, uncertainty comes from the difficulty of predicting how moviegoers will respond to a particular movie. "Nobody knows what's going to work," comments one producer, "One can guess that a movie about some robots in the future will work, and that George Lucas will handle it well, but Universal didn't think so. They passed on *Star Wars*." To succeed in the film industry, producers must somehow pick "the right projects." Picking the wrong projects can severely derail career momentum. Thus, having an intuitive understanding of which potential film projects will become box office successes is an important skill for a film producer.

In addition to the uncertainty of "the right projects," producers must also face a variety of uncertainties during their everyday work on the project. Key pieces of production, ranging anywhere from major issues such as the schedule of star actors to minute details such as the availability of shooting locations, could become volatile from day to day, which makes managing uncertainty as one of the most important competencies for a producer.

Social Competency

Social competency encompasses knowledge about, skills for, and routines that enable producers to enhance their access to resources for making movies and succeeding in the industry. These involve identifying mentors and sponsors who can provide opportunities to develop skills,

creating effective interpersonal relations in an intensely collaborative medium, and tapping into information about future opportunities. Social competency comprises of three inter-related sets of resources: relational, collaborative routines, and social capital. These skills are critical since entrance into and advancement within this competitive industry are based on informal networks. Thus, individuals must seek out sponsors and mentors to gain opportunities and develop their skills; and since films are made by cross-functional teams, they must also have the relational skills to work well with others and avoid bad reputations.

Relational skills

Relational skills refer to the ability to develop “the bonds and knowledge” that arise from the interactions between or among parties during service creation and delivery (Jones et al. 1997). These relationships open up work opportunities, enhance resource sharing for creating new products, motivate parties to aid one another, facilitate communication, decision making and adaptation to uncertain and changing conditions. Skill in establishing bonds with those who provide opportunities is critical to gaining opportunities to work, especially in a free agent market. It is at the heart of mentor and sponsor relationships. Often this requires creating a bond in a moment and during fleeting encounters. Strong relationships are also central to expanding one’s skills and experiences. For example, one producer explained how he used his star status to provide a novice with his first directing experience. Those with better relational skills are not only more likely to gain opportunities, but also to have greater influence over their creative contributions. One interviewee describes how “unless you have an unusually strong relationship with a director, you have very little control over what ends up in your hands.” Relational skills and strong ties are important to successful careers and provide a source of leverage and influence

for those who have them. These ties provide opportunities for skill and career development as well as enhance control over creative contributions.

Collaborative Knowledge and Routines

Collaborative skills involve knowledge about one another, effective communication skills, and an understanding of the culture which defines and guides appropriate interactions. Shared knowledge was described by producers as central to effective collaboration in an enterprise as intensely interdependent as film making. One interviewee suggests that “We all should know as much as possible about each other’s specialties, because, if nothing else, it widens the tolerance of one to the other.” These collaborative skills demand the ability to communicate implicit ideas and tap into one another’s vision for the film. One producer describes his interaction with a director as “I nearly go to bed with him. We spend hours drinking coffee and talking, but out of those hours may come a couple of key phrases that allow me to get into the director’s head and vice versa.” An essential aspect of collaboration is subordinating individual goals and desires for the group effort. One producer described how: “Filmmaking is a group activity, and you either have to submerge your ego to the total enterprise or get out.”

From these relationships, opportunities and experiences, individuals garner their status and reputations. As one producer explained: “It’s an incestuous business, and the crewmen who are hired have reputations to uphold. After all, other productions will follow this one, and producers will be hired based on previous reputation.” This is also true for producers in their relationships with studios. For example, producers who have went over budget or irritated studios may create negative reputations for themselves, which can severely curtail future opportunities. Since the film industry is organized around projects and through informal networks, relationships provide the source of information about potential collaborators and crew.

Social Capital

Social capital consists of the set of relationships that a person is involved with. In a sense, it is the outcome of a person's relational skills. It refers to resources generated by "an actor's social network which provides differential opportunities" (Campbell, Marsden and Hurlbert, 1986) and is a function of the volume, diversity, status and structure of one's social connections (Burt, 1992). In the interview data, social capital was discussed by producers because their roles require numerous and diverse ties and often act as intermediaries between talents and studios. The information benefits of structural holes are exemplified in the negotiation process in which producers engage. One producer described how "Producers can freely trade any information in the world about deal making and talents with each other on a confidential, not-to-be-repeated basis." This free trade of information allows producers to "stay sane and try to determine what the market price is for talents that, can in all honesty, be a bit nebulous."

In summary, social competence comprises a set of related social skills and assets that together may generate status and reputation for individuals. The skills and assets comprising social competence encapsulate different aspects of socially competent behavior and provide resources for those who have and develop them. Relational skill taps the strength and quality of one's social ties and collaborative efforts, social intelligence captures how relations and group boundaries can be used strategically, and social capital indexes how position between parties in a social structure and sheer volume of ties provide information and control benefits.

Craft Competency

Craft competence, the third domain important to producers in a film industry, refers to having deep, implicit knowledge and extensive experience of a specific medium, reflected in a

developed skill set (Van Maanen and Barley 1984). Craft competence is critical; without it an individual can contribute little to a project. The interviews indicated that two types of craft competence are essential for producers in the film industry: technical expertise and aesthetic/creative skills.

Technical Expertise

Technical expertise involves acquiring knowledge and experience in a specific medium of one's craft. On a basic level, knowledge refers to the craft's explicit coded information or the formal and organized facts and rules (Nass 1994). For a producer, basic knowledge includes knowing what a "dolly shot" is or what "synching dailies" means to manage the set or knowing how to manage budget. Technical expertise also includes tacit knowledge (Nonaka 1994), which is developed through gaining a wide variety of experience on contextually diverse projects.

Developing technical expertise enables individuals to make greater contributions to a film, as well as frees them to develop their aesthetic/creative skill. One producer explained the benefit of expertise: "The choice of the crew is...extremely important. Not only do their various creative and mechanical abilities contribute to the final effect of the film, but every moment they save you is an extra moment you can spend creatively."

Aesthetic/Creative Skills

Aesthetic and creative skills are more deeply and personally held forms of knowledge; they are rooted in an individual's values, commitment, and beliefs about their craft. They involve ineffable issues of "good taste," intuitive leaps, and creative choices. One producer described film as "movement" and one must develop "a sense of rhythm in visual terms." How one defines this rhythm and what constitutes good rhythm versus poor rhythm is not articulated and is difficult to teach.

Filmmaking has the unique nature of being both a business and a creative endeavor. In this regard, there is a constant tension between the producer and the director, the two authorities that represent the two sides. A good producer must maintain an intricate balance between giving enough creative control to the director and guiding the director creatively when the creative vision is astray. This is why aesthetic and creative skills are critical for a producer to be successful.

Chapter 5 Case Study of *Step Up China*

Project Background

Step Up China was a China-US co-production project that started in the summer of 2016. The project involved three production companies, Lionsgate from the US and Infinity Pictures and Yuehua Entertainment from China. It was licensed from Lionsgate by the two Chinese companies as a Chinese sequel to the dancing franchise *Step Up* owned by the US studio. The budget of the movie was around \$5M USD.

The crew of the project consisted of a distinctively multicultural team. While most of the cast and crewmember were Chinese, the core creative team was almost entirely American. This included the director Ron, director of photography L.T., music supervisor C-Minor, and most importantly, as the movie evolves around the theme of dancing, choreographers Will and Janelle. Everyone in this team was hired by recommendation of Ron and each brought their own people for the respective departments. Together they formed an American crew of around 20 people, working with around 150 Chinese crew members. The two producers I interviewed for this project were Dede and Wenwen. Dede is an American woman in her 50s, representing Infinity Pictures. Wenwen works for Yuehua Entertainment and is a Chinese woman in her 30s. While Dede had worked on numerous co-production films in her career, this was Wenwen's first time working on a co-production. Dede spoke fluent Chinese, while Wenwen does not speak English.

Initial Communication Issues

Yuehua Entertainment was the majority stakeholder in the project and therefore had the authority to manage the daily budgets and the contracts of crew members. This means that Wenwen was in charge of the financial and contractual affairs of the US team. Since Wenwen does not speak English, her communication with the US team relied on the crew translators relaying messages back and forth. This form of communication was problematic in several regards. Firstly, it was a very inefficient way of communication. A simple question could take a day to get answered, which instigated frustration on both sides. Secondly, meaning and information were lost in the translation and transmission of messages, which led to misunderstandings. Lastly, the translators, being the only ones who can understand both parties, gained immense power. This sometimes led them to alter their message delivery in ways that suited their own personal interest and affinity, which created distrust between the Chinese and American parties.

These problems led to two major conflicts during production. The first incident was that Will and Janelle were not satisfied with the living standards of their hotel and demanded to be transferred to a better one. Will and Janelle felt that they were mistreated while Wenwen argued that all crew members, including the director, were staying at the exact same hotel. This escalated into a full-blown housing drama, where more and more US crew members joined the protest and even refused to come to work. The Chinese crew did not take this well, thinking that the US crew felt superior than them. This led Wenwen to double down on her no-compromise stance, which eventually created an “us vs them” mentality among the two different cultural groups.

The second incident involved the contracts of US dancers. Midway during the shoot, Ron demanded a group of ten US dancers for a big scene happening the following week. Due to the time constraints, proper legal contracts were not provided for the dancers and they flew in under condition of good faith. When the dancers arrived, they expected the contracts to be ready. However, Yuehua's business affairs department needed time to translate their Chinese template into the final English contracts. The dancers in turn asked to be paid up front. To make things worse, immediate payment in the amount of USD required was not an option due to China's foreign currency regulation. This made the dancers nervous and refused to work. Wenwen assured them that the contracts were being finalized and the USD were being obtained. She asked them to work on the scene first, which they refused. The situation was now a stalemate.

Navigating Differences in Cultural Norms

In both incidents above, Dede came up with solutions to move forward. For both incidents, her first step was to gather all relevant parties and talk about what the issues were collectively. "It should not be about criticizing people, it should be about being clearer. If an individual had a problem, then he could come forward and solve it collectively as a team rather than sit back. As a producer, my aim is to always have a collective intent. We go through each issue and it is important that I do give everyone the opportunity to talk." Having lived in China for over 20 years and worked on numerous co-productions, Dede was well aware of the differences in the cultural norms of China and US. Therefore, her job was to make sure that both parties understood the underlying intent of the other side without their own cultural presumptions.

For the hotel incident, Dede explained to Will and Janelle that it was the Chinese industrial norm to have all crew members, regardless of their positions, live in the same hotel. This

conforms to the Chinese collectivism culture of having unity in a group to align goals and boost morale, even if it means a bit of suffering on a personal level. She also explained to Wenwen that Will and Janelle were not trying to act superior than the Chinese crew. Rather, they valued the comfort of their personal spaces in this intensive working environment to maintain creativity. The final solution was that Will and Janelle be moved to a better hotel, with the extra cost split evenly between their own Per Diem and production. For the dancers contracts, Dede explained to the dancers that in the Chinese film industry it was normal to be working on a flexible contract. She also explained the situation with the foreign currency restriction and vouched to pay them out of her own pocket first if they still feel insecure. Understanding the dancers mental need for formal contracts, Dede proposed the solution of having the dancers sign with Infinity Pictures first as her company has similar English contracts from past projects. The two production partners can then take their time to formally transfer the contracts to conform with standard industry business practice.

Building Trust

After the resolution of these incidents, both Dede and Wenwen asserted that one of the important components of building multicultural project teams is the creation and development of trust. Trust provides the invisible glue which can hold a dislocated team together. Both of them agreed that it is more natural to trust people in whom we can identify a level of positive inevitability in their actions and words. Working with other cultures in a movie project environment can lead to a stressful level of impulsiveness in our interactions. Trust could be developed where there are good interpersonal relationships and mutual respect between project leaders and team members. Wenwen recognized that trust can be promoted within projects by the

behavior of individual team members and it can become apparent at different levels. As trust increases within the project team, the team members will become more open and honest with each other and this openness will enable them to jointly identify, assess, plan and manage cultural complexity more effectively.

Both producers noted that this could be achieved by team building and team effectiveness training events. One simple method that Dede constantly used was to take the heads of the Chinese and US team out for dinner together. Dede also believed that in order to instigate, build, and maintain trust within the integrated project team the nucleus should monitor behavior and project leaders should flag up and address any project issue that risks breaking the trust. She emphasized that, “Trust is extremely important. If you don’t have trust, it’s hard to have an integrated multicultural project team. Trust also means that if I do something wrong then I will be accountable. So if I do something good you say so and if I do something wrong you say so as well. This makes it easier because if an individual does something wrong rather than keeping quiet, they will ask for help.” Both producers agreed that trust is a fragile, intangible, and generally difficult to quantify but it is essential to the success of multicultural team integration.

Creating Collectivism

To counter the “us vs them” mentality mentioned earlier in the case, Dede described the relevance of collectivism to projects. Dede suggested that collective cultures such as China demonstrate a more emotional dependence on the project team. They are more conforming, organized, traditional, and team oriented. In a collective project environment, the interest of the project group succeeded over the interest of the individual member. She suggested that in a project: “There has to be encouragement of teamwork within the project process. The

mechanisms of integration depend on collectivism within the project process. It is important as well for the producer to know how to engage with different types of people and also have the right attitude. This allows you to end up with a happy team.”

Wenwen expressed satisfaction with collectivism on the project and dissatisfaction with individualism. She identified the counterproductive effects of certain individualism within the crew. This is largely caused by talents who want to do things their way rather than conform to an imposed standard. Both producers identified that the producer must have cultural empathy. Effective project leaders should understand the leadership style preferred by the project team so that the project leader’s authority is respected. Dede suggests that in a project environment the project team must institute a supportive and positive culture. It is the responsibility of the project leader to ensure that this supportive culture is introduced and sustained. In order to maximize team effectiveness Dede pointed out that “It helps to understand personal problems. For example, I once had a guy in the production unit who spilt up with his wife and all of a sudden wanted to do extra hours. He felt that working more hours took his mind away from what he was going through. So I gave him more work within the project and that really helped him. Another guy wanted to do less hours for different reasons. So, understanding people’s personal issues is important and to know as well that everybody is different.” An effective management style listens to team members’ concerns and complaints.

Theoretical Validation

From the above, I have identified four key factors that influence multicultural project teams at team levels. These were cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural collectivism, cross-cultural empathy in project leadership and cross-cultural trust. As illustrated by the two producers in this

case, the culture of a project manager plays a major role in how the project team will perceive cross-cultural communication on projects. The following table summarizes the competencies displayed by the two producers with regards to the four dimensions of the cross-cultural communication competency model discussed in Chapter 2.

Table 5.1 Detailed Skills in the Cross-Cultural Communication Competence Model

Interpersonal Skills	Team Effectiveness	Cultural Uncertainty	Cultural Empathy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to acknowledge differences in communication and interaction styles • Ability to deal with misunderstandings • Comfort when communicating with foreign nationals • Awareness of own cultural conditioning • Basic knowledge about the country, culture, and language of team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to understand and define team goals, roles, and norms • Ability to give and receive constructive feedback • Ability to discuss and solve problems • Ability to deal with conflict situations • Participatory leadership style • Ability to work cooperatively with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to deal with cultural uncertainty • Ability to display patience • Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty due to cultural differences • Openness to cultural differences • Willingness to accept change and risk • Ability to exercise flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to see and understand the world from others' cultural perspectives • Ability to appreciate dissimilar working styles • Ability to accept different ways of doing things • Non-judgmental stance toward the ways things are done in other cultures

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Future Directions

This paper examined the competency model of producers as project managers of international co-production films. The first part of the paper analyzed 30 interviews of producers with co-production experience and identified three dimensions for the general competency of producers: system competency, social competency, and craft competency. The second part of the paper offered the case study of a specific co-production project – *Step Up China* and looked at how producers dealt with cross-cultural communication issues. It also validated the cross-cultural communication competency model.

The paper has many limitations. Firstly, the sample size of data is rather small and only contained participants from two cultures: China and US. While China and US are the two largest movie markets, they are by no means the only cultures involved in international co-productions. Research on Europe or other Asian territories such as Japan, South Korea and India may yield even more compelling or quite different results.

Secondly, this paper lacks more quantitative approaches. Questionnaires regarding competencies could be designed using point systems, which would allow future studies to apply more analytical methods such as correlation analysis. This would open up many new topics of investigation. For instance, one could potentially pinpoint the correlation between the level of team members' cross-cultural communication competence and team productivity and performance. One could also examine how competency may differ within certain subsets of producers, i.e. gender, project budget size, or project genre.

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