

THERESA SIGILLITO HOLLEMA

Foreword by Fons Trompenaars,
author of *Riding the Waves of Culture*



**VIRTUAL
TEAMS
ACROSS
CULTURES**

**Create Successful Teams
Around the World**

“Theresa has done an excellent job of reviewing the working of remote teams from the lens of *culture*...a much needed perspective. The book has a nice combination of academic research and the stories of remote teams...making it an easy read.”

Amit Mittal, Vice President, Talent and
Organizational Development, Tetra Pak
International SA

“Building global virtual teams across cultures that truly maximize the value of their diversity has never been more important for organizations. Theresa reveals the ‘soft factors’ that drive hard outcomes. Her blend of rigorous research and hands-on experience delivers invaluable insights, case-based examples and engaging tools - Team Taco Test anyone? - for leaders, HR experts and anyone committed to improving outcomes for business and their people.”

Diane Moody, Vice President, Organizational Development
& Culture, Royal DSM

“Engaging and insightful. The conceptual argument is powerful and most of the authors’ suggestions are practical and common sense. A recommendation for global leaders to facilitate cultural bridges to enable a diverse team to thrive.”

Marlene de Koning, Director, Solutions Design EMEA-
Workplace Intelligence, Microsoft and President,
Professional Women’s Network-Amsterdam

“This book is perfect for any virtual leader, and I know many leaders and teams in India who would benefit. Globalization is here to stay, and we all must develop to leverage the capabilities we have in different locations. Theresa has put a microscope to the virtual experience and this well-researched book is full of compelling ideas and practical solutions. The three ways culture impacts virtual teams is insightful and the four Leadership Levers are relevant for all leaders, but she has given the twist for virtual context. A must-read for anyone working virtually!”

Hari T.N., Co-author, *Saying No to Jugaad – The Making of Bigbasket*

“We’ve morphed into a virtual world now, in our work and our lives, with a myriad of new opportunities and challenges. Here Theresa has unpacked both, in a depth and detail extremely useful to any of us in cross-cultural and virtual arenas. This is a pioneering piece of work in how to navigate and use best practices to optimize our engagements in an expansive and novel horizon.”

David Allen, Author, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*

“I have been interested in the study of multicultural teams since my career began in HR almost 30 years ago. With the recent global pandemic, the need to do this successfully and virtually is even more critical than before. Theresa’s consulting experience and research help uncover diagnosis, cultural understanding and competence, and what levers to pull to help ensure you not only maintain, but enhance your company’s culture, collaboration and productivity.”

Dan Domenech, Chief Human Resources Officer,
Hewlett Packard Enterprise Financial Services

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Influencing Virtually

Influence. We do it all the time, even if we are not aware of it. We influence our children to clean their rooms, our partners to visit our parents on the weekend and our friends to meet at our favorite restaurant. At work we continue our influencing behaviors when we request a colleague to attend an important meeting or ask the headquarters to increase the department

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budget by 25%. I am trying to influence you through this book using rational arguments and inspirational appeals.

Professionals who contemplate and research the topic of influence can list various types, such as direct pressure (words that clearly demand and threaten), legitimizing (using one's authority for the request) and coalition building (working with others to influence the target). In this chapter, we will look at how to influence others who are geographically far away.

In co-located environments, the three most common influencing techniques are rational arguments, ingratiation and coalitions.⁹ Rational arguments use data and other facts to show how the proposal can make a difference to reach certain outcomes. Influencers use ingratiation when they use their relationship to appeal to the influencer by making them feel good about the request. For instance, taking a colleague to lunch to convince them to join a project is an example of ingratiation.

Influencers use coalitions when they recognize that doing it alone is not enough. Not only can colleagues in a coalition add more thinking power to the proposal but they can also use their connections to broaden the network.

These influencing techniques work effectively when people are co-located and share the same cultural cues and understanding of the local context. Team members can also meet in person where they can use a warm handshake and smile to win someone over or a harsh stare to put pressure.

Influencing virtually is different than influencing co-located both in type and degree. Virtual influencers lose many of the communication and cultural cues of their co-located counterparts and therefore need to think differently about how to influence colleagues and other stakeholders.

Generally, the preferred styles of influencing virtually are rational arguments, coalition and intermediary, particularly when trying to influence upward in the hierarchy.¹⁰ Notice that ingratiation, preferred when co-located, drops off the list. It is very difficult to use personal charm to convince

from a distance. Instead, people increase their use of rational argument with links, data and charts.

As mentioned, influencers use intermediaries more when working virtually than when co-located. An intermediary is a person who is somehow connected with the person to be influenced, and therefore can help the influencer to solidify his position. Specifically, intermediaries can help the influencer understand the situation, the communication preferences and other characteristics of the person to be influenced. They may even directly help with the influencing process.

Virtual Intermediaries in Action

Tony, Head of e-Commerce at a major Nordic bank, provides an example of using intermediaries: "Last year I had to run a project and cooperate with someone from a different organization. He was in Sweden, I in Denmark, and we had to work together on this big project. We had very different working styles and we disagreed on many things. We were both mature enough to recognize it, but it added to the difficulties. I was trying to get my points through in all the different ways that I could. I tried speaking directly with him with reason, but that did not work. Their department is also distributed, so they have people in all locations. At the time, I committed myself to sit physically together with their people in Denmark at least once a week. I discussed my issue with the Danish crew and tried to find some allies. When I sat with them, I had the opportunity to explain the situation and asked them if they could speak to their Swedish colleagues and explain my position, which they did. I was able to get the changes that I needed."

Eliminating Ambiguity

People trying to influence across cultures and virtually may have an extra

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complication because the stakeholder that they want to influence does not know the culture or context and therefore does not really understand the request. To address this issue, Professors Wadsworth and Blanchard, of the University of North Carolina, found an interesting tactic used by virtual influencers that is less common in co-located teams, which they called eliminating ambiguity.¹¹ Eliminating ambiguity is an empathetic approach by the influencer to decrease the confusion of the person to be influenced and to help them become more at ease with the request. This differs from the purely rational argument, which is basically the same whether virtual or co-located. For example, they share additional information, show examples and send pictures and videos to describe the request and help the distant person to be influenced to understand the entire situation.

Email to Open a Door

Email can play a role in the influencing process. Even though it is a words-based communication tool, users can add exclamation points to get someone's attention or emoticons to soften a request. Email senders can include supervisors on copy to increase the pressure on the email reader. More importantly, though, it provides an open door for someone's request or point of view. Often people will write their opening request in an email, which allows them to find the right words and ensure clarity of their rationale. Once that email is sent, often they will follow up with a phone call or video call. This two-step process was found to be common, particularly in requests to managers or other senior stakeholders.

Virtual Influencing Breakthrough

Often, virtual managers use more than one influencing technique, as Li-yang did when he had to influence the CEO of a newly acquired company located in Norway. Li-yang, based in Amsterdam, was an

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HR manager for a global organization with headquarters in Taipei. He was responsible for implementing management policies and an HR system as part of the post-acquisition integration plan. He knew that the CEO of the acquired company was frustrated by what he perceived as a tsunami of changes without his oversight. Li-yang needed to tread carefully.

“I was responsible for the project and needed to influence the manager of the local team, who was the CEO, which was not easy. I understood the policies and system, but I have a junior position, and it may not have been enough. I discussed this with my manager in Taipei and we arranged for a more senior HR Director to travel to Norway and give a presentation to the CEO. She explained the purpose and the logic behind the policies and system and how they fit in the big picture of the whole group. I was able to follow-up with the details and explained what this meant to them as a new company in our organization. After that, things went quite smoothly for this project. We implemented the system from Norway, Taipei and Amsterdam, managing the team virtually.”

Li-yang used both rational arguments and intermediary influencing techniques, especially leveraging the hierarchical relationships to give credibility and show respect.

9. Wadsworth M.B. and Blanchard A.L. (2015) "Influence Tactics in Virtual Teams." *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol.44, pp.386-393.
10. Steizel S. and Rimbau-Gilabert E. (2013) "Upward Influence Tactics Through Technology Mediated Communication Tools." *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 29, pp.462-472.
11. Wadsworth M.B. and Blanchard A.L. (2015) "Influence Tactics in Virtual Teams." *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol.44, pp.386-393.