

Co-Culturing Frameworks: Approach Towards Transforming Organizational Culture for Excellence

Kiran Kumar CNK

*Independent -Life Coach (Positive Psychology & Solution focused) & Co-Culturing Ambassador/
Coach (India-Netherlands), Software Test Engineer
Email ID: kkumaarcnk@gmail.com*

Abstract

This research has considered the evaluation of a co-culturing framework as a strategic approach towards transforming organizational culture for excellence. The study aims to address the pressing need for effective cross-cultural integration and collaboration within multinational IT organizations, particularly those operating in the Netherlands. By examining existing co-culturing models and assessing their effectiveness, the research endeavours to provide valuable insights into the development and implementation of tailored frameworks for Indian employees working in the Dutch IT sector.

Drawing upon a structured research methodology, the study assesses the effectiveness of proposed models such as the Sandwich Model, DARTING Model, Handshake Model, Boolean Model, and L Shaping Model. Through quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including structured questionnaires and content analysis, the research evaluates participants' perceptions, knowledge gain, and behavioural changes following the cultural awareness sessions on the implementation of these models.

The findings of this research shed light on the importance of fostering cultural awareness and bridging the gap between Dutch and Indian colleagues within the IT sector. By providing evidence-based recommendations for developing and implementing cultural frameworks tailored to the needs of Indian employees, this study contributes to enhancing collaboration, productivity, and organizational excellence in multinational IT organizations operating in the Netherlands.

Keywords: *Co-Culturing, Frameworks, IT sector, Netherland, India*

Introduction

In a multicultural workplace, collaboration across diverse teams is essential for innovation and problem-solving. A harmonious blend of cultural norms and communication strategies is crucial for organizational success and leads to effective co-culturing. Employees feel more engaged and valued when their cultural aspects of communication are acknowledged and respected in the workplace. Promotion of cultural inclusivity and opportunities for employees to share their perspectives, organizations can enhance employee morale and job satisfaction (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Cultural barriers are natural and often lead to bottlenecks, decreased employee engagement, and subsequent impacts on productivity and project timelines. A survey conducted within the IT sector in the USA by McKinsey in 2023, involving 500 participants, underscores the severity of this issue, revealing significant challenges stemming from cultural disparities (Cherian et al., 2021). These challenges manifest in various forms, including communication breakdowns, lowered employee morale, and delays in project execution. Consequently, organizations grapple with suboptimal performance and diminished competitive edge Inegbedion et al. (2020). The above survey, along with many similar studies, has highlighted the prevalent issue that most IT companies lack any concrete co-cultural framework. Despite operating in an environment of global interconnectedness for project execution, the absence of robust co-cultural strategies significantly impacts efficiency in cost management and human resource utilization.

At present, the Netherlands IT Services Market is experiencing significant growth, with an estimated Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.93% projected during the forecast period from 2022 to 2027. This growth trajectory is expected to propel the market value to approximately \$13.463 billion by 2027, up from around \$11.87 billion in 2021 (Industry ARC Report, Netherlands, 2023). Concurrently, the Netherlands stands out as the world's most globally connected country, as per the DHL Global Connectedness Index 2022. With the Netherlands serving as a hub of global connectivity, it attracts a diverse pool of talent from around the world, particularly in the IT sector. Among the notable contributors to this influx are professionals from India, a key player in the global IT industry. Indian IT professionals often collaborate on projects within the

Netherlands, leveraging their expertise to drive innovation and contribute to the country's thriving IT ecosystem (Hsiao et al., 2019).

However, amidst this influx of diverse talent and collaborative project engagements, the need for effective co-culturing frameworks becomes increasingly apparent. As Indian employees integrate into Dutch IT organizations, cultural differences and communication barriers can emerge, potentially hindering collaboration and productivity. Identifying the productivity hindering barriers Kiran Kumar CNK (2023) developed a modular approach to inculcate cultural awareness and efficacy. The five models suggested in the work titled "Exploring the Synergy Between Cultural Awareness and Co-culturing: Understanding Subjectivity, Relativity & Objectivity", the author runs a co-culturing programme on the Indian freshers of the IT company and Dutch employees. The efficacy of the model has been tested through a survey questionnaire and percentage frequency test based on the common themes and responses of the participants. The models are the Sandwich, Darting, Handshake, Boolean and L shaping Models. These Models provide diverse perspectives on cultural integration and organizational transformation, providing valuable insights that align with the aim of the research to explore co-culturing frameworks for enhancing organizational culture and excellence.

This research aims to explore and evaluate co-culturing frameworks as an approach towards transforming organizational culture for excellence, with a specific focus on the IT sector. The objectives in this regard are as follows:

1. To conduct a comprehensive review of existing co-culturing frameworks and identify key components employed to facilitate cross-cultural integration and collaboration.
2. To set out co-culturing models: Sandwich, Darting, L-Shaping, Boolean, and Handshake for fostering co-culturing models for IT employees, Dutch and Indian.
3. To examine the efficacy of the suggested co-culturing approach through model-based training.

Literature Review

For the review of literature, existing co-culturing models have been critically reviewed to understand the dimensions of co-culturing and the measurement of its effectiveness by various scholars. This review aims to generate a scale to measure the effectiveness of the proposed models while understanding the research gap in these models.

The Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Model

According to Inegbedion et al. (2020), The Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model, developed by Earley and Ang, assesses individuals' ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. It comprises four components: Cognitive CQ, which involves understanding cultural similarities and differences; Metacognitive CQ, which involves strategic planning and monitoring in cross-cultural interactions; Motivational CQ, which involves the willingness to engage with different cultures; and Behavioral CQ, which involves adapting verbal and nonverbal behaviours to suit cultural contexts (Naaz et al., 2024). This model provides a framework for evaluating individuals' readiness to navigate cultural diversity and promoting cultural competence within organizations.

The Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES)

Inegbedion et al. (2020) stated that The Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) measures individuals' effectiveness in intercultural interactions across three dimensions: Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Adaptability, and Intercultural Sensitivity. This scale assesses individuals' ability to communicate, adapt, and empathize with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Qadir et al., 2020). By evaluating these dimensions, organizations can identify strengths and areas for improvement in intercultural competence and tailor training programs to enhance employees' cross-cultural effectiveness.

The Cultural Orientations Framework (COF)

The Cultural Orientations Framework (COF), developed by Richard D. Lewis, offers a comprehensive approach to understanding cultural differences within organizations. This framework categorizes cultures into

three main groups: Linear-Active, Multi-Active, and Reactive. Linear-active cultures, such as those found in Northern Europe and North America, prioritize task-oriented communication and value punctuality and efficiency (Sifatu et al., 2020). Multi-active cultures, prevalent in Southern Europe, Latin America, and parts of Asia, emphasize relationship-building and flexibility in communication. Reactive cultures, common in East Asia and parts of Africa, prioritize harmony and consensus in interpersonal interactions.

Research Gap

1. **Country-specific Focus:** While existing models offer valuable insights into cultural competence, there is a research gap in the context of specific countries, particularly focusing on the cultural dynamics between the Netherlands and India. A more in-depth exploration of the cultural nuances between these two countries within organizational settings is needed to tailor co-culturing frameworks effectively.
2. **Practical Application in Projects and Organizations:** Existing models primarily provide theoretical frameworks for understanding cultural differences and fostering intercultural competence. However, there is a research gap in terms of practical application within real-world projects and organizational contexts specifically for the IT sector.

The research gap indicates a deficiency in IT-specific or organization-specific co-culturing models for Dutch -Indian employees, hindering the development of tailored frameworks to address the unique challenges and opportunities in these contexts.

Proposed Models on co-culturing:

In response to the need for specific models for the Dutch -Indian co-culturing, the proposed models aim to fill this gap by offering practical and customizable approaches for co-culturing within IT environments and organizational settings.

- 1 **The Sandwich Model:** It serves as a communication framework to facilitate effective interaction between Dutch and Indian colleagues. The model aims to bridge the disparity in communication patterns between these two counterparts. Dutch communication tends to be straightforward and objective, often providing affirmations or rejections directly. Conversely, Indian communication tends to be more personalized and subjective. To address this cultural difference in responses and their acceptance, the Sandwich Model offers a valuable communication tool.

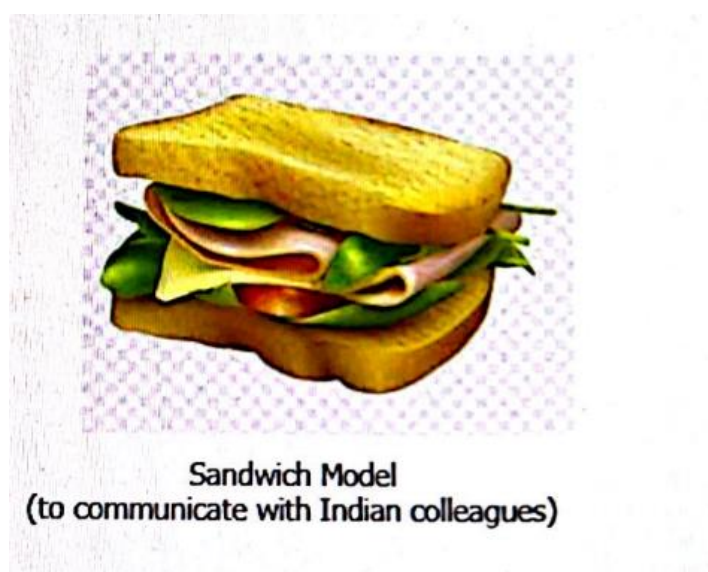


Figure 1: Sandwich Model

In the context of this model, rather than delivering a direct and objective response to work execution, the Dutch colleague adopts a cascading approach. This involves framing feedback in a manner that acknowledges positive aspects first, then addressing areas for improvement, and concluding with additional positive reinforcement. For instance, instead of bluntly stating dissatisfaction, the Dutch colleague may offer feedback such as, "In this task, your performance was commendable from point A to B. However, there is an opportunity for enhancement from point B to C." This approach effectively sandwiches the negative feedback between positive aspects, delivering criticism constructively and politely. Thus, the Sandwich Model provides a structured approach for conveying feedback, enabling effective communication while respecting cultural differences in response styles.

2 **Darting Model:** The Darting Model serves as a communication framework designed specifically for Indian colleagues to effectively engage with their Dutch counterparts. It addresses the observed differences in communication styles between these two groups. Dutch individuals typically prioritize efficiency and straightforwardness in their communication, focusing on the practical aspects of a conversation. Conversely, Indian communication tends to involve more subjective discussions and indirect approaches, particularly when addressing issues or concerns.



Figure 2 : Darting Model

In the context of projects or tasks, Dutch colleagues prefer direct and concise communication regarding their effectiveness and implementation. They appreciate clarity and efficiency in discussions, including the ability to question and challenge ideas, regardless of the hierarchical structure. Conversely, Indian colleagues often adopt a more indirect approach, discussing issues in a roundabout manner and hesitating to question higher authorities. They may provide less direct responses, incorporating subjective opinions or referencing past experiences.

The Darting Model aims to facilitate effective communication by encouraging Indian colleagues to adapt their approach to align with Dutch preferences. It emphasizes the importance of providing direct responses and embracing questioning as a means of clarity and progress. Through this model, Indian colleagues can convey their thoughts and concerns more effectively, contributing to smoother collaboration and understanding with their Dutch counterparts. In essence, the Model provides a structured framework for Indian colleagues to adjust their communication style, enabling clearer and more efficient interactions with Dutch colleagues while respecting cultural differences.

3 **Handshake Model:** The Handshake Model, as outlined in the paper titled "Exploring the Synergy Between Cultural Awareness and Co-culturing: Understanding Subjectivity, Relativity & Objectivity in

Culture," addresses cultural differences and potential barriers encountered by Indian and Dutch colleagues within an organization. The model acknowledges the contrasting cultural norms between India and the Netherlands, emphasizing the need for effective communication strategies to bridge these gaps.



Figure 3: Hand Shake Model

Indian culture is characterized by a more conservative approach, while Dutch culture tends to be more open and direct. Dutch individuals prioritize open discussions on various topics of interest, whereas Indians may tend to nod in agreement during conversations, regardless of their actual perspective. One notable cultural difference highlighted in the model is the preference for direct responses among Dutch colleagues, who appreciate clear yes or no answers accompanied by questioning. Conversely, the tendency of Indian colleagues to nod without explicitly expressing their opinions may lead to misinterpretation, as Dutch counterparts may perceive nodding as affirmative when it is not necessarily the case.

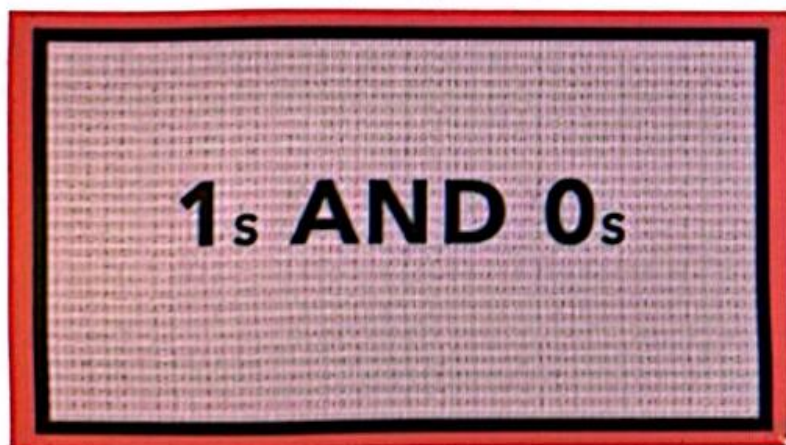
To mitigate misunderstandings, the model suggests that Indian colleagues adapt their communication style to employ more verbal expression rather than relying solely on gestures such as nodding. However, recognizing the challenge of immediate adjustment for newly arrived Indian colleagues, the model also emphasizes the importance of Dutch colleagues understanding and accommodating different forms of communication, including gestures. Effective communication under the Handshake Model involves awareness of cultural differences, mutual understanding and adaptation from both Indian and Dutch colleagues. It recommends fostering trust through feedback sessions, enabling Indian colleagues to express their perspectives objectively. By promoting open dialogue and cultural awareness, the model aims to bring both counterparts closer together on the same page, facilitating smoother collaboration and understanding within the organization.

In summary, the Handshake Model provides a structured approach for navigating cultural differences and enhancing communication effectiveness between Indian and Dutch colleagues, ultimately fostering greater synergy and collaboration within the organization.

4 **Boolean Model**

The Boolean Model, as proposed, underscores the significance of initiating small talk to establish a conducive work environment between Indian and Dutch colleagues. It emphasizes practical functionality over cultural

expertise, advocating for the understanding and application of effective communication strategies. Central to the model is the recognition that people tend to engage in discussions about variables rather than constants, necessitating dynamic topics for small talk.



Boolean Modal
(to initiate small crispy talks)

Figure 4: Boolean Model

In the context of Indian and Dutch cultures, the model identifies specific variables that serve as suitable conversation starters. For Indians, topics such as food, cinema, and cricket are deemed appropriate, reflecting dynamic interests within the culture. Conversely, Dutch colleagues, with less diversity in food and cinema, often opt for weather and vacation-related discussions, given the region's unstable climate and varied vacation destinations.

To facilitate effective small talk, the model recommends that both Indian and Dutch colleagues be aware of their respective cultural variables. For instance, a Dutch colleague may initiate a conversation with an Indian counterpart by inquiring about their breakfast choices, while an Indian colleague might engage in weather-related discussions with Dutch counterparts.

Moreover, the model acknowledges the absence of common conversation topics between Indian and Dutch colleagues, noting the cultural divergence in interests such as cricket and Indian cinema versus football and Dutch entertainment. To address this disparity and foster rapport, the model suggests that Dutch colleagues initiate discussions about India's culture and food, creating a shared conversational theme that accommodates both parties' interests.

In summary, the Boolean Model advocates for the initiation of small, engaging conversations centred around dynamic topics relevant to each culture. By acknowledging cultural variables and fostering common conversational themes, the model aims to cultivate a healthy and comfortable work environment conducive to effective collaboration between Indian and Dutch colleagues.

5 L shaping Model

The L Shaping Model revolves around fostering mutual trust between Dutch and Indian colleagues within an organizational context. This model acknowledges the cultural differences between the two groups, particularly in their approaches to human relationships. Dutch individuals tend to exhibit a compartmentalized behaviours approach (ie., they almost have a clear distinction between family, friends and colleagues, given the individual societal system) in their interactions, while Indian colleagues typically seek a more friendly and rapport-based

connection. (ie., almost colleagues are perceived as friends and friends are perceived as family members or kinships, given the collective societal system)

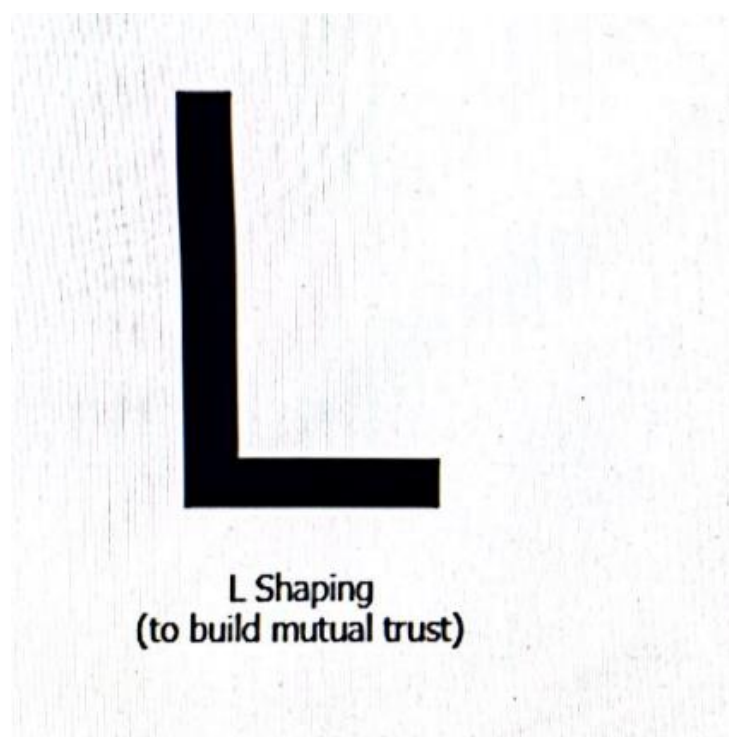


Figure 5: L Shaped Model

Visualized as the letter "L," this model delineates the vertical line as representative of the Dutch perspective, emphasizing the need for Dutch colleagues to adopt a softer approach. They are encouraged to be polite and warm, minimizing the compartmentalization of human bonds, particularly when engaging with Indian colleagues. By being more open and functional in their interactions, Dutch colleagues can pave the way for Indian counterparts to open up further. Conversely, the horizontal line in the "L" shape signifies the Indian perspective, highlighting the importance of Indian colleagues feeling comfortable enough to communicate openly, once they sense the mellow-downing from Dutch colleagues. In Indian culture, hierarchical gaps often exist, particularly in relationships with managers. However, within peer relationships, these gaps are less pronounced. By adopting a more approachable demeanour, Dutch colleagues can bridge this gap, encouraging Indian colleagues to communicate more freely.

From a communication standpoint, when Dutch colleagues "mellow down," it facilitates the opening up of Indian colleagues, fostering a more cohesive environment built on mutual trust. For instance, when a Dutch manager extends a sincere offer of assistance 'associated with friendly rapport' to an Indian colleague, it creates a positive atmosphere conducive to organic communication. This gesture reassures Indian colleagues that their perspectives and issues are valued, encouraging them to express themselves more openly.

In essence, the L Shaping Model underscores the importance of mutual understanding and accommodation between Dutch and Indian colleagues. By blending Dutch compartmentalization with Indian rapport-building, this model promotes a harmonious work environment grounded in trust and effective communication.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the cultural awareness session involves a structured approach to gathering quantitative and qualitative data from participants who attended the session conducted by the cultural coach. The session has focused on discussing Proposed models namely the Sandwich, Darting, Handshake, Boolean and L shaping, aimed at improving cultural awareness and bridging the gap between Dutch and Indian colleagues for increased employee output and efficiency.

The research developed a structured questionnaire to gather Qualitative data on participants' perceptions, knowledge gain, and behavioural changes following a cultural awareness session. The population comprised Dutch and Indian IT sector employees working in the Netherlands, with a sample of 106 respondents who attended the session over six months. The responses were both close-ended, featuring Likert scale questions to measure agreement or disagreement with statements related to the effectiveness of the models on a scale of 1-10, and open-ended allowing for both qualitative and quantitative interpretation. Quantitative interpretation of the collected data involves descriptive analysis by converting it into percentages. Most of the respondents said “yes” to the need and effectiveness of the modular co-culturing sessions. Additionally, content analysis was conducted on the open-ended questions to identify themes or patterns in participants' feedback regarding the effectiveness of the models and later. converted into frequency percentage.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

To calculate the effectiveness of each model based on the content provided by 106 respondents, the key insights mentioned by each respondent have been analyzed, and the percentage of respondents mentioning each insight for each model has been quantified. This involved identifying recurring themes or topics mentioned by the respondents and determining the frequency with which they have been mentioned. For instance, “Importance of building relationships and empathy”, “Interest in understanding deeper cultural nuances”, “open conversation”, and so on.

The result of the data has been tabulated as follows:

Repetitive Content	Content Description	Count	Percentage
Differences in communication styles	Many respondents highlighted the differences in communication styles, such as the tendency for Indian colleagues to speak rapidly and the nuanced interpretation of affirmative responses like "yes."	48	45.28%
Hierarchical nature of Indian corporate culture	The hierarchical nature of Indian corporate culture, particularly about age and seniority, stood out as a significant cultural difference.	23	21.70%
Importance of building relationships and empathy	The importance of building relationships and empathy before engaging in direct communication or feedback was emphasized, especially in the context of Indian culture.	18	16.98%
Contrasts in attitudes towards work-life balance	The contrast in attitudes towards work-life balance between Dutch and Indian colleagues was noted, with a focus on the need to accommodate different perspectives and preferences.	9	8.49%
Differences in small talk topics and social norms	Differences in small talk topics, social norms, and the perception of politeness were highlighted as important considerations for effective cross-cultural communication.	8	7.55%
Interest in understanding deeper cultural nuances	There was a general interest in understanding the deeper cultural nuances and motivations behind certain behaviours, such as the reluctance to say "no" and the significance of family and personal relationships.	8	7.55%

Desire to improve integration and collaboration between Dutch and Indian colleagues, suggesting initiatives	Several respondents expressed a desire to improve integration and collaboration between Dutch and Indian colleagues, suggesting initiatives such as cultural awareness training and ongoing communication strategies.	7	6.60%
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Based on the above rating the effectiveness of the model has been calculated based on average means and Median score, the formatted rustles are as follows :

Model	Average Rating (Out of 10)	Key Insights
Sandwich Model	9.2	- Effective framework for bridging communication patterns between Dutch and Indian colleagues - Structured approach for a Dutch colleague to deliver feedback constructively to an Indian colleague
Darting Model	8.9	- Explanation of communication style differences between Indian and Dutch colleagues - Insights for Indian colleagues into adapting communication approaches for alignment with Dutch preferences
Handshake Model	9	- Addressing cultural differences and providing strategies for effective communication by navigating through cultural differences- Emphasis on -mutual cultural understanding between Indian and Dutch colleagues
Boolean Model	7.6	- Focus on initiating small talk for rapport building -, with many finding it impactful for dynamic conversation topics and as an effective means of ice-breaker
L Shaping Model	8.4	- Importance of mutual trust and understanding between Dutch and Indian colleagues - Insights into bridging cultural gaps and fostering open communication

From the above analysis, one basic aspect that could be established is the fact that communication is a tool for co-culturing. Hence the Dutch colleagues needed to adopt the sandwich model rather than going straightforward with their approach. Secondly, there is a need for feedback sessions to assess what has been interpreted out of the communication. Hence the room for assumption out of gestures and communication blocks and gaps should be mitigated with these feedback sessions, where the interpretation should be directly conveyed. Hence, always end your meeting by summarising your understanding.

In the Netherlands, there is a formal compartmentalisation of relations with the specific demarcation of friends, colleagues, and families. In India, there is an abided culture where office colleagues become friends and family with time. Hence when an Indian colleague comes to the Netherlands, with a binding frame of mind, it has a cultural shock in the Netherlands (Bochner, 2023). Also in India, when a new colleague joins the organisation, it gives a space and period to get comfortable with the work however in the Netherlands the new joiner or team member has to make the effort by himself and has to approach others and introduce himself. Hence here Dutch colleagues are expected to give a period to their new Indian counterparts to get absorbed with the work environment.

Recommendation

Based on the above discussion following recommendations have been formulated :

1. **Introduce Practical Tips for Clear Communication:** There should be a focus on integrating practical communication strategies into the co-culturing framework sessions. By offering specific tips and techniques for effective communication, such as active listening and clear articulation of ideas, participants can enhance their ability to communicate with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds.
2. **Encourage Interaction and Engagement:** It is important to foster active participation and engagement among team members by incorporating interactive elements into the co-culturing framework sessions. This could include group discussions, role-playing exercises, or collaborative problem-solving activities, allowing participants to actively contribute to the learning process and build rapport with their colleagues.
3. **Incorporate Feedback from Indian and Dutch Colleagues:** It is important to seek input and feedback from Indian and Dutch colleagues to ensure that the co-culturing framework is inclusive of their perspectives and experiences. By actively involving Indian and Dutch colleagues in the development and implementation of the framework, organizations can foster a sense of ownership and engagement among all participants, leading to more effective cultural integration and collaboration.
4. **Consider Cultural Awareness in Onboarding Programs:** Integrating co-culturing sessions into organizational onboarding programs can facilitate smoother transitions for new employees and cultivate a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect from the outset. By providing cultural awareness training as part of the onboarding process, organizations can help new hires navigate cultural differences, build relationships with their colleagues, and contribute to a positive and inclusive work environment.

Conclusion

This research establishes the efficacy of the suggested models for fostering cultural awareness and synergy between co-culturing and eliminating cultural subjectivity for specific purposes. The employees being trained under the model give similar responses as reflected in the data analysis and interpretation of this paper. This shows a high relatedness between the training under the models: sandwich, L shaping, Boolean, Darting, and Handshake and increased awareness in the Indian and Dutch employees. Understanding the culture and traditions of others helps in better communication, coordination, and collaboration. The professional setup requires specific cultural awareness, not too deep into one's tradition, but significant enough to fast-pace the work and build a friendly environment. The models can be effective in other organisations for handling similar issues and enhancing cultural awareness among employees. Building a professional cultural divide can be a significant game changer in employee output and performance.

The program aims for a mutually beneficial outcome, striving to forge a collective success narrative. This endeavour not only enhances smooth communication and collaboration among Indian and Dutch colleagues but also elevates key performance indicators (KPIs) such as overall team efficiency and productivity. This, in turn, fosters a secure and comfortable working environment for colleagues, potentially boosting the overall happiness index and retention rates for the organization.

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