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LECTURER'S NAME:

DR EMMA ROBERTS

No	Name	Id Number	Section Created
1.	Nemiitra D/O Shanmugam	2436792 / 25010031	1 - 6
2.	Calvin Stephen S/O Anthony Patrick	2436802 / 25010125	7 - 11

The Significance of the Global Team in Effective Problem Solving

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, problem solving increasingly transcends geographical boundaries, cultural differences, and time zones. Organizations, governments, and civil society actors are now more interconnected than at any point in human history, meaning that the challenges they face are rarely contained within a single nation or discipline. Global teams comprising members from diverse cultural, professional, and disciplinary backgrounds are increasingly responsible for addressing some of the world's most complex and pressing issues. These may include climate change, pandemic responses, cross-border trade disruptions, global poverty reduction, and technological ethics.

While diversity in global teams brings a wealth of perspectives, expertise, and creativity, it also presents unique challenges in communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Different languages, cultural norms, and working styles can generate misunderstandings or tension if not handled effectively. Time zone differences further complicate collaboration, as synchronous communication is difficult to sustain. Yet, if these barriers are managed well, global teams have the potential to outperform more homogeneous groups because their diverse perspectives allow them to consider problems from multiple angles and generate novel solutions.

This paper explores the significance of global teams in effective problem solving, with a particular focus on their role in tackling *wicked problems*. Wicked problems are complex, multifaceted issues with no clear definition or single solution, making them especially suited for examination through a global lens. By analyzing the advantages and challenges of global teamwork, the importance of recognizing individual differences, and the role of emotional intelligence in conflict management, the paper highlights the ways in which global teams transform complexity into opportunities for innovation and impact.

2. The Role of Global Teams in Problem Solving

Global teams unite individuals with different cultural backgrounds, education systems, and professional experiences. This combination can create an unparalleled breadth of knowledge and skills. In practice, this diversity means that one member may approach a problem through a technical engineering lens, another through a sociological or ethical lens, while yet another might emphasize financial or strategic considerations. Such complementarity enhances the team's problem-solving capacity and reduces the risk of blind spots that often affect more homogeneous groups.

Research consistently shows that diverse teams outperform homogeneous teams in solving complex, non-routine problems. For example, a study by Harvard Business Review found that companies with diverse management teams report higher levels of innovation revenue compared to less diverse peers. In global contexts, this advantage becomes even more critical, as problems like climate change or global supply chain disruptions inherently require cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural understanding.

Cultural diversity also sparks creativity by challenging individuals to reconsider existing assumptions. For instance, Western team members might prioritize efficiency and speed, while Asian counterparts may emphasize relationship-building and long-term stability. When managed effectively, these differing emphases encourage more balanced solutions. Similarly, geographical dispersion, though often viewed as a challenge, can also be a strength. With members located across different time zones, work can progress around the clock, ensuring continuous momentum.

Yet, these advantages are coupled with obstacles. Communication difficulties can arise due to language barriers or differing norms of politeness, directness, and hierarchy. Work ethics and conflict resolution styles also vary: some cultures prefer consensus-driven approaches, while others value individual assertiveness. These differences can cause friction or slow decision-making if not anticipated.

Nevertheless, the role of global teams remains vital. By leveraging digital collaboration tools, cultivating mutual respect, and establishing clear protocols, global teams can overcome logistical barriers and harness their diversity as a driver of innovation. In doing so, they position themselves as crucial actors in addressing the complex challenges of the twenty-first century.

3. Wicked Problems in a Global Context

The concept of *wicked problems*, introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973), refers to issues so complex that they defy straightforward definition and lack definitive solutions. Unlike technical problems, which can often be solved with standardized methods, wicked problems are deeply entangled with social, political, and economic dimensions. They exhibit several defining characteristics:

1. **No definitive formulation** : Wicked problems cannot be fully or clearly defined, as new information continuously emerges.
2. **No stopping rule** : Solutions are never final, only better or worse.
3. **Irreversible decisions** : Every attempted solution has consequences that cannot be undone.
4. **Uniqueness** : Each wicked problem is essentially unique, making replication of solutions difficult.
5. **Interconnectedness** : Wicked problems are linked to other issues, meaning progress in one area often creates new challenges elsewhere.

Climate change offers perhaps the clearest example. Efforts to reduce carbon emissions involve technical, political, ethical, and economic trade-offs. A solution that prioritizes rapid decarbonization may harm developing economies dependent on fossil fuels, while delaying action risks catastrophic environmental consequences. Similarly, global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic reveal wickedness: public health goals must be balanced with economic survival, personal freedoms, and international cooperation.

Global teams are uniquely positioned to tackle such problems because they bring together varied perspectives that reflect the diversity of global stakeholders. For example, in addressing supply chain disruptions, a European member might stress compliance with EU regulations, an Asian member might emphasize logistical realities in emerging economies, and a North American member might highlight corporate governance or consumer demands. When these insights are synthesized, the resulting strategies are more holistic and globally relevant.

Still, global teams face distinctive challenges in handling wicked problems. The diversity that equips them with broader perspectives also necessitates stronger trust-building and conflict resolution. Without shared goals and clear processes, the team may struggle to progress beyond disagreements.

4. Recognising Individual Differences

A hallmark of global teams is their diversity, not only in culture but also in personality, working style, and professional background. These individual differences significantly shape problem-solving processes. Recognizing and respecting such differences is critical to ensuring inclusion, avoiding miscommunication, and maximizing collective intelligence.

Key differences include:

- **Cultural norms and values:** Some cultures value direct, explicit communication, while others rely on indirect cues and implicit meaning. For example, a U.S. team member may interpret silence as agreement, whereas a Japanese member may see it as respectful disagreement.
- **Problem-solving approaches:** Analytical thinkers may rely heavily on data, while intuitive thinkers prioritize patterns or gut feelings. A balanced approach often combines both.
- **Risk tolerance:** Some members may prefer cautious, incremental strategies, while others advocate bold, innovative solutions.
- **Professional backgrounds:** An engineer, economist, and sociologist will frame the same problem differently, emphasizing technical, financial, or social dimensions.
- **Personality traits:** Introverts may prefer structured discussions or written input, while extroverts thrive in dynamic brainstorming sessions.

Neglecting these differences can lead to miscommunication, exclusion, and reduced effectiveness. For instance, dominant voices may overshadow quieter participants, causing valuable perspectives to be lost. Likewise, assuming “equality” without accounting for differences risks reinforcing power imbalances those with stronger language skills or cultural familiarity with dominant norms may unconsciously dominate discussions.

Leaders of global teams must therefore cultivate inclusivity by actively inviting contributions, clarifying expectations, and adapting communication styles. For example, rotating meeting facilitators ensures no single cultural style dominates. Providing multiple avenues for input such as verbal discussions, anonymous polls, and collaborative documents helps balance the participation of both extroverts and introverts.

Ultimately, recognizing individual differences is not about minimizing them but leveraging them as strengths. A team that values and integrates diverse perspectives is more resilient, innovative, and better equipped to tackle complex global problems.

5. Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Management

Emotional Intelligence (EI), popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995), refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions while also recognizing, understanding, and influencing the emotions of others. In the context of global teams, EI is not just a desirable trait but an essential skill for effective collaboration and conflict management.

Virtual and multicultural environments amplify emotional complexity. Cultural distance complicates the interpretation of emotions, while online platforms strip away many non-verbal cues such as tone, body language, or facial expressions. This increases the risk of miscommunication and escalation, particularly when discussions involve high-stakes or contentious issues.

The core components of EI and their relevance to conflict management include:

- **Self-awareness:** Recognizing personal biases and emotional triggers helps team members understand how their reactions influence discussions.
- **Self-regulation:** Controlling impulses enables individuals to respond calmly rather than react defensively in heated debates.
- **Motivation:** A focus on collective goals sustains cooperation even when disagreements arise.
- **Empathy:** Understanding others' perspectives and cultural contexts fosters respect and reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation.
- **Social skills:** Building rapport and resolving misunderstandings are essential for maintaining trust and cohesion.

For example, when European members' direct critiques were perceived as harsh by Asian teammates, empathy and self-awareness helped the team reframe comments constructively. Active listening, paraphrasing, and acknowledgment of concerns helped diffuse tension and sustain collaboration.

High EI fosters psychological safety a climate where members feel comfortable expressing opinions without fear of ridicule. This is especially important in global teams, where power dynamics and cultural hierarchies may otherwise inhibit open dialogue. Moreover, EI helps transform conflict into an opportunity for creativity. Rather than avoiding disagreements, emotionally intelligent teams use them as springboards for innovation, practicing what management scholars call "constructive conflict."

In global problem-solving contexts, where wicked problems demand creative abrasion, EI ensures that diversity becomes a strength rather than a liability. By cultivating EI at

both the individual and group level, global teams can transform tension into trust and harness their diversity to achieve more effective solutions.

6. Reflection Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

6.1 Description

Our team comprised six members drawn from Asia, Europe, and North America, and we collaborated remotely over a six-week period. The project's goal was to design a strategy to reduce our organisation's carbon footprint, a challenge that demanded us to balance environmental, economic, and social factors. The problem was not only technically complex but also politically and ethically sensitive, with many influencing variables such as government policies, corporate social responsibility expectations, and the rapid evolution of green technologies being uncertain. The task had the features of a "wicked problem" because no solution could satisfy all stakeholders simultaneously. The company expected a pragmatic recommendation, but the path toward consensus required navigating diverse perspectives shaped by cultural, disciplinary, and regional contexts.

6.2 Feelings

At the outset, I felt excited about working in such a diverse team. I assumed the variety of perspectives would automatically guarantee creativity and innovation. However, as discussions unfolded, my initial enthusiasm was tempered by frustration.

Communication delays caused by time zones slowed decision-making, while conflicting opinions made it difficult to prioritise between cost, feasibility, and environmental ambition. At times I felt anxious when debates became heated, worrying that pushing my perspective might damage relationships. I noticed myself becoming defensive when my contributions were questioned. These feelings highlighted the emotional complexity of global teamwork. They also revealed my lack of confidence in managing intercultural conflict. While diversity enriched our debates, it also created tension, and I often felt caught between the desire to be inclusive and the need to advocate strongly for my position.

6.3 Evaluation

Positive aspects:

- Diversity expanded the range of factors considered. For instance, members from Europe emphasised regulatory compliance with the EU Green Deal, while those from Asia highlighted cost-efficiency and supply chain realities.
- Expertise in renewable energy and logistics within the team brought depth to our analysis and improved the credibility of our recommendations.

- We developed creative solutions that balanced technological feasibility with financial sustainability, such as combining solar energy adoption with behavioural change campaigns.
- The project improved my ability to adapt communication styles for different audiences, a skill critical for professional growth in international contexts.

Negative aspects:

- Time zone differences made synchronous meetings difficult, sometimes leaving members excluded from urgent conversations.
- Differing cultural communication styles created misunderstandings; for example, direct critiques from European teammates were perceived as harsh by some Asian members.
- Disagreements sometimes felt personal because tone was misinterpreted in virtual settings where non-verbal cues were absent.
- The absence of clearly defined decision-making structures occasionally left discussions unresolved, contributing to frustration.

6.4 Analysis

This experience reflected the essence of global teamwork: diversity is both an advantage and a challenge. The clash of perspectives mirrored real-world international negotiations on climate policy, where developed countries push for strict emission reductions while developing nations emphasise economic growth. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory helps explain why conflict emerged: teammates from low power-distance, individualist cultures tended to speak assertively, while those from high-context, collectivist cultures preferred indirect communication. Without explicit acknowledgment of these differences, misunderstandings easily escalated.

The turning point came when one member suggested explicitly acknowledging our different priorities and aligning on shared objectives. This triggered a shift in approach: we began using empathy actively, paraphrasing each other's ideas and validating concerns before offering counterarguments. These practices drew directly on Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, particularly self-awareness, empathy, and social skills. We also adopted collaborative tools such as digital whiteboards to visualise our ideas, reducing ambiguity and improving inclusivity.

In retrospect, the difficulties were not signs of failure but rather inherent to the wicked problem and the nature of diverse global teams. The challenge was not to eliminate difference but to transform it into a productive source of creativity. This insight reflects the concept of "creative abrasion" described in innovation literature, where friction when managed constructively leads to stronger ideas.

6.5 Action Plan

For future global projects, I plan to:

- Establish clear communication protocols from the outset, including expectations for response times, language use, and decision-making procedures.
- Encourage team members to share individual priorities early on so that differences are surfaced constructively rather than surfacing as conflict later.
- Continue developing my emotional intelligence skills through practice and training, focusing on empathy, active listening, and self-regulation.
- Use visual collaboration tools such as Miro or MURAL to bridge language and cultural gaps.
- Introduce structured reflection points during projects to ensure ongoing alignment and prevent conflict escalation.
- Proactively engage quieter members to ensure inclusivity and reduce the risk of groupthink.

7. PEST Analysis: New Technologies in a Global Context

Political & Geopolitical Factors

Technology has become an arena of geopolitical competition. AI nationalism and “tech sovereignty” are increasingly shaping how states approach global cooperation. The U.S. and China rivalry dominates this space, with disputes over semiconductors, intellectual property, and data security creating barriers to cross-border collaboration. Export restrictions on advanced chips have limited access to crucial technologies, fragmenting research ecosystems. For global teams, this geopolitical fragmentation complicates data-sharing and technology transfer, raising concerns about trust and compliance.

At the same time, new governance frameworks are emerging. The UN’s High-Level Advisory Body on AI and the Global Digital Compact aim to create inclusive international norms. The UK and U.S. have set up AI safety institutes, while countries like Singapore and Canada have introduced national strategies focused on ethics and resilience. Yet global consensus remains elusive. For example, at the Paris AI Summit, 58 countries signed a declaration on inclusive AI governance, but both the U.S. and UK withheld endorsement. This patchwork governance highlights both progress and fragmentation.

Economic Factors

AI investment is heavily concentrated in a few nations. The U.S., China, and the UK dominate global funding, creating innovation hubs that deepen disparities. In contrast, regions like Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America struggle with infrastructure gaps. Singapore has positioned itself as an AI hub in Southeast Asia, but many of its neighbours lack the resources to compete, raising the risk of digital dependency.

AI also reshapes value chains by automating knowledge work and optimising logistics. Multinational companies gain efficiency and competitiveness, but the distribution of benefits is uneven. Without capacity-building policies, developing nations risk being relegated to peripheral roles in global supply chains. At the organisational level, many firms struggle to capture returns on AI investment due to unclear integration strategies, reflecting the gap between technological hype and practical adoption.

Social Factors

The social implications of AI are profound. Bias in algorithms stemming from skewed training data can entrench discrimination, undermining public trust. For instance, recruitment algorithms have been found to disadvantage women or ethnic minorities. This problem highlights the importance of ensuring datasets reflect social diversity.

Cultural differences also shape acceptance of AI. Western contexts often emphasise transparency and individual rights, while Asian contexts may prioritise collective welfare and harmony. For global teams, this creates tensions in defining ethical standards. Moreover, digital inclusion remains uneven. While AI-powered tools can transform healthcare in low-income settings, challenges of explainability, trust, and access must be addressed through inclusive policy frameworks.

Technological Factors

The integration of AI and AR into teamwork is advancing rapidly. Augmented reality platforms, such as Microsoft Mesh, allow geographically dispersed teams to collaborate in virtual environments. Generative AI agents are increasingly embedded into digital workspaces, providing shared memory, summarisation, and translation functions. These innovations enhance productivity but also intensify debates over data privacy, intellectual property, and energy sustainability.

Technology has thus become both an enabler and a source of new risks. Export controls, resilience planning, and data protection laws will play a central role in shaping how global teams operate in the coming decade.

8. Advantages & Disadvantages of AI/AR in Global Team Problem Solving

Advantages

1. **Enhanced collaboration:** AI and AR tools facilitate real-time, immersive teamwork. Platforms like Microsoft Mesh and Meta Horizon Workrooms allow dispersed teams to collaborate spatially, fostering deeper engagement.
2. **Speed and scale:** AI accelerates data analysis, enabling global teams to test multiple scenarios rapidly. For example, in logistics and supply chain management, AI-driven forecasting has improved resilience during disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Trade and efficiency:** AI boosts productivity and supports cross-border trade. Southeast Asia's adoption of AI in fintech and logistics illustrates how technology can integrate regional economies.
4. **Knowledge accessibility:** AI-powered translation tools, such as Google Translate and DeepL, reduce language barriers, allowing smoother collaboration among multilingual teams.

Disadvantages

1. **Ethical bias and exclusion:** AI systems can reproduce or amplify social biases. A well-documented case was Amazon's recruitment algorithm that disadvantaged female applicants due to biased training data. Such flaws risk undermining inclusivity in global collaboration.
2. **Infrastructure divide:** The uneven availability of digital infrastructure means that not all countries can fully participate in AI-driven teamwork. This exacerbates global inequalities, leaving developing nations at risk of marginalisation.
3. **Environmental cost:** Large-scale AI training consumes vast amounts of energy, straining sustainability efforts. The EU has begun regulating AI's environmental footprint under its Green Deal policies.
4. **Geopolitical fragmentation:** National restrictions on AI and data governance reduce openness, making it harder for global teams to collaborate across borders. This risks creating "technological silos" rather than fostering shared innovation.

9. Ethical Issues for Global Leaders to Consider

Global leaders must confront several ethical questions before integrating AI/AR into teamwork.

- **Equity and inclusion:** Leaders must ensure that technologies do not perpetuate inequality. Transparency, representative datasets, and independent audits should be required. Rawls’ theory of justice focusing on fairness for the least advantaged offers a guiding principle here.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Frameworks must respect cultural value systems while protecting universal human rights. Avoiding “ethical imperialism” is crucial, since what is acceptable in one culture may not align with another.
- **Sustainability:** AI adoption should be aligned with international commitments such as the EU Green Deal or the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Monitoring the carbon footprint of high-energy computing is essential.
- **Governance and oversight:** Strong governance is needed. UNESCO’s AI ethics recommendations and the OECD AI Principles provide useful frameworks, but they require consistent enforcement across jurisdictions.
- **Geopolitical responsibility:** Technology should not reinforce dominance by powerful nations. Inclusive global governance mechanisms, such as UN-led advisory bodies or multilateral agreements, are essential to balance power asymmetries.

10. Practical Recommendations and Future Outlook

10.1 Practical Recommendations for Global Teams

The analysis in previous sections has shown that global teams can drive innovation, but their success depends on deliberate structures and behaviours. Based on this, the following recommendations can help organisations and team leaders turn theory into practice:

1. Establish clear governance frameworks

Global teams need decision-making structures that are transparent and inclusive. Too often, virtual teams rely on ad hoc discussions, which results in confusion. A formal governance model designating rotating chairs, assigning clear deliverables, and documenting decisions ensures accountability. Such frameworks can be adapted from agile project management methods, which emphasise short sprints, regular stand-ups, and visible progress tracking.

2. Prioritise cultural intelligence training

Technical competence alone is not enough. Training in cultural intelligence (CQ) the ability to interpret unfamiliar behaviours and adapt communication should be mandatory for leaders of global teams. Research has shown that high CQ correlates with greater trust-building and resilience in diverse groups. Simulations, role plays, and scenario planning are practical tools organisations can deploy to build this capability.

3. Harness technology as an equaliser

Digital tools like Miro, MURAL, and Microsoft Teams are not just platforms for meetings; they can be structured to reduce bias. For example, anonymous idea boards allow introverted or minority voices to be heard without cultural hierarchy interfering. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can assist by automatically transcribing meetings, flagging unresolved action points, and even detecting sentiment patterns to highlight when conflict is escalating.

4. Build psychological safety as a norm

Amy Edmondson's concept of psychological safety where members feel secure in expressing dissent without fear of ridicule is crucial. Leaders must explicitly invite disagreement and model vulnerability by admitting their own mistakes. Such practices not only reduce conflict but also turn diversity into innovation. Organisations like Google's Project Aristotle demonstrated that psychological safety was the number one predictor of high-performing teams, even more than technical skill.

5. Integrate sustainability and ethics as core metrics

As global teams increasingly tackle wicked problems such as climate change, supply chain ethics, or AI deployment, they must move beyond financial KPIs. Success should also be measured in terms of environmental and social impact. Embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into project scorecards gives teams a shared moral compass, aligning diverse cultural values with global standards.

10.2 Future Outlook: The Evolution of Global Teamwork

Looking forward, global teamwork will be shaped by converging technological, social, and geopolitical trends:

- **Artificial Intelligence as a co-facilitator:** AI will not replace human judgment but will increasingly act as a mediator. Real-time translation will reduce language barriers, sentiment analysis will detect brewing conflict, and predictive analytics will help teams anticipate risks before they escalate. Teams that embrace AI as a collaborator rather than a threat will achieve higher productivity.
- **Hybrid work as the new normal:** The post-pandemic shift has demonstrated that fully remote models can fragment teams, while full in-person work excludes international collaboration. Hybrid systems that combine short in-person intensives with sustained virtual engagement will dominate. Companies that master this rhythm will attract global talent more effectively than those clinging to old models.
- **Geopolitical uncertainty:** Rising nationalism, trade disputes, and shifting alliances (e.g., US-China tensions, EU regulatory assertiveness) will directly impact how global teams operate. Teams must build "geopolitical literacy" into

their practices, ensuring members understand the broader forces shaping markets and partnerships.

- **Ethical frontiers of technology:** As teams adopt augmented reality, AI, and blockchain, ethical dilemmas around privacy, bias, and accessibility will intensify. Organisations that establish proactive ethical guidelines will not only protect themselves legally but also build reputational capital. This is particularly critical as consumers and employees increasingly favour companies aligned with strong social values.
- **The rise of South-to-South collaboration:** Historically, global teams were dominated by Western headquarters managing satellite offices in the Global South. However, we are witnessing the rise of South-to-South innovation networks, where countries like India, Brazil, and Nigeria drive global projects in technology and sustainability. Teams that recognise this shift and distribute leadership accordingly will be more resilient and forward-looking.

10.3 Concluding Reflection

The inclusion of practical recommendations and a forward-looking outlook highlights the transformative role of global teams in addressing the wicked problems of our time. Success depends not simply on diversity of membership but on conscious structures that transform difference into advantage. As technology accelerates and geopolitical complexity deepens, global teamwork will remain both a challenge and an opportunity. The organisations that thrive will be those that embed cultural intelligence, ethical leadership, and adaptive structures into their DNA.

Ultimately, the global team is not just a managerial arrangement it is a microcosm of our interconnected world. If managed effectively, it offers a blueprint for how humanity might collectively confront the crises and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

11. Conclusion

Global teams have immense potential to generate innovative solutions to wicked problems issues with no simple resolution and multiple competing interests. Their significance lies in combining cultural, disciplinary, and professional diversity to create fresh perspectives. Yet, diversity is a double-edged sword. If managed poorly, it leads to miscommunication and conflict; if managed well, it becomes a catalyst for creativity and resilience.

Through my personal experience, I learned that global teamwork is both emotionally and intellectually demanding. Conflict and misunderstanding are inevitable, but they can be transformed into growth opportunities when managed with empathy, active listening, and emotional intelligence. Effective teamwork depends less on eliminating differences and more on harnessing them productively.

Looking ahead, technologies such as AI and AR will reshape how global teams operate. They offer powerful tools for collaboration, speed, and accessibility, but they also raise significant ethical and political challenges. Leaders must ensure equitable access, cultural sensitivity, environmental responsibility, and robust governance. Only then can these technologies enhance rather than undermine global cooperation.

Ultimately, the success of global teams depends not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to navigate cultural complexity and act ethically in a fractured world. By treating diversity as a resource rather than a barrier, global teams can play a transformative role in addressing urgent global challenges, from climate change to sustainable development.

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Video Presentation Link

<https://youtu.be/zBQZyWn2ZRE>