Culturally Tuned Emotional Intelligence: A Tripartite Cultural Analysis

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This article is concerned with culturally tuned emotional intelligence (CTEI) as an effective cross-cultural management tool. Cultural values create a commonality among its members in how they interpret and subsequently respond to emotional issues. Improving management understanding of employee emotions may enhance both productivity and quality of life in the workplace. Management of culturally diverse environments requires both the ability to meet intellectual challenges and emotional strategies to empathize with and motivate employees. CTEI may promote positive emotions and behaviors that lead to success, and minimize negative ones that waste company resources.

This paper uses the tripartite conceptualization of culture including the national culture level, professional culture level and organizational culture level. The Emotional Process Model (Druskat & Wolfe, 2001) is used to illustrate the influence of culture on the emotional responses of employees. Case studies are presented for each of the three cultural areas, depicting varying emotional responses to management initiatives. These examples provide a cultural lens that may be used by managers to better understand the emotions of culturally diverse employees. This exploratory paper attempts to extend the basic understanding of emotional intelligence by using a cultural perspective.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence, Culture, Cultural values, Emotional process model

Introduction

This cross-cultural research attempts to expand understanding of the cultural influence in employee behavior in the field of contemporary management. The Emotional Process Model (Druskat & Wolfe, 2001) posits a connection between emotions and behaviors. It also provides an understanding of how both interpretation and expression of emotions are influenced by culture. Managers may be better equipped to understand the diverse emotional fabric of their workforce through understanding of the role of culture in this model.

Within the past ten years an increase in the number of mergers and acquisitions (Johansson & Nilson, 2000), has resulted in a greater mix of employee cultures; in some cases, almost overnight. Improved collaboration and understanding across the resulting cultural boundaries may be achieved by management awareness of the importance of culturally tuning their own emotional responses, as well as culturally tuning their interpretations of the emotional responses of others.

Effective leadership requires not only cognitive ability i.e. intellectual clarity, but also requires emotional sensitivity. Successful leaders need to be both emotionally intelligent and intelligently emotional.

Current management thought supports the underlying premise that cultural awareness is an important organizational skill as well as an important management skill (Herkenhoff, 2000). Within the context of strategic management, Marquardt and Engel (1993) point out that culturally compatible management techniques are more likely to endure and be effective than those that are culturally incongruent.

Tripartite Cultural Model

This tripartite conceptualization of culture (nation, organization, profession), has been thoroughly explored in the literature (Burns& Stalker, 1961; O'Toole 1979; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Hofstede, 1980; Laurent, 1986;Trompenaars, 1994;Rogovsky, 1996). The case study analysis will explore all three of these cultural constructs.

National culture analysis attempts to expand the understanding of how those who manage global workforces may have increased success in promoting constructive emotions such as satisfaction, feeling valued, happiness, motivation, enthusiasm, and loyalty. They may also be better able to mitigate negative emotions such as anger, stress, disdain, frustration, and betrayal, which may waste company resources and decrease the quality of life in the workplace (Goleman, 2004). National culture is operationalised using the five indices from the Hofstede/Bond framework: power distance (PDI), long-term orientation (LTO), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), masculinity (MAS) and individualism (IDV) (Hofstede, 1980; Bond, 1988). Within this context, culture is defined as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1984). An overview of these dimensions is included in Table 1.

Professional culture also plays a role in tuning emotional intelligence. As early as 1973, studies indicated that employee attitudes and behaviors vary within occupations (Bell, 1973). Managers operating in only one country may consider culture as constant, and thereby negate its importance. But supervising employees in various professions also requires cultural tuning that takes into account the different values and beliefs associated with different professions. Cultural values within a given profession create a commonality among members in how they process emotion eliciting events (Tellman, 2004). Management practices that reinforce professional culture are more likely to yield predictable employee behavior and high performance (Helmreich & Merritt, 1998).

Organizational culture has been a popular subject in the literature since the 1980s but first appeared as early as 1969 as a synonym for *climate* (Burns & Stalker, 1961). The Hofstede definition of organizational culture will be used:"…the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one organization from members of another" (Hofstede, 1980). For example, values and attitudes of American engineers may vary depending on whether they work for a large multinational engineering company such as Bechtel Corporation versus a local environmental company. In this case, national culture and professional culture are constant but the organizational cultures vary. Culturally tuned learnings about emotional responses within given organizational cultures may be used by managers to better understand the emotions of employees in situations where different organizations are brought together i.e. mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures.

Table 1

Hofstede Dimensions

- **PDI**, Power Distance Index refers to society's acceptance and sanctioning of power differences. A high PDI describes a society that believes there should be a well-defined order in which everyone has a rightful place. A low PDI is associated with the prevalent belief that all people should have equal rights and the opportunity to change their position in society. This reflects how societies deal with the fact that people are unequal.
- **UAI**, Uncertainty Avoidance Index refers society's willingness to accept and deal with uncertainty. A high UAI score suggests a culture seeks predictability and security and wishes to avoid uncertainty. A low UAI score reflects that the society is comfortable with a high degree of uncertainty and is open to the unknown. A high UAI culture tries to minimize unexpected events by adopting strict codes of behavior. Change is often construed as threatening because the outcome is unknown. High UAI countries show a need for comprehensive rules and regulations, a belief in the power of experts and a search for absolute truths and values.
- **MAS**, Masculinity Index refers to the importance assigned to traditional male values by society. Male values include assertiveness, performance, ambition, achievement and material possessions. Female values encompass quality of life, environment, nurturing, and a concern for the less fortunate. A high MAS culture has clearly differentiated sex roles with men being dominant. In low MAS cultures, the sex roles are more fluid and there is a predominance of feminine values. A quality of life focus replaces the money focus found in high MAS cultures.
- **IDV**, Individualism Index IDV refers to society's acceptance and encouragement of individual decision–making and action. It describes the relationship between individuals and groups and the individual's integration into the group. A high IDV score depicts a society that emphasizes the role of the individual. In high IDV countries, the links between individuals are loose. People are expected to look after their own interests and, at the most, the interests of their immediate family. Conversely, a low IDV indicates a society that emphasizes the importance of the group.
- **LTO**, Long Term Orientation refers to a society fostering virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular, perseverance and thrift. Long-term orientation pertains to the past and demonstrates a respect for tradition, preservation of face and fulfilling social obligations. Short term orientation focuses on the now and seeks quick results. Investment in long-term relationships is deemed unnecessary.

Emotional Intelligence

Throughout this paper, the definition of emotional quotient (EQ) is provided by Bar-On (1988) as the innate set of emotional and social abilities you are born with. Bar-On's subsequent work (1997, 2000) defines and measures emotional intelligence by way of the Emotional Intelligence Inventory (EQ-I). Salovey and Mayer coined the term *emotional intelligence(EI)* in 1990. They described EI as " a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor ones own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide ones thinking and action" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Salovey and Mayer also initiated a research program intended to develop valid measures of EI and to explore its significance. EI is conceptualized in terms of perception, appraisal and expression of emotion; emotional facilitation of thinking; understanding, analyzing and employing emotional knowledge, and reflective regulation of emotions (Schutte et al., 1998). EI is also defined by Goleman (1995) as the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in others and ourselves. Goleman offered the first proof that emotional and social factors are important. Ciarrochi , Forgas and Mayer (2001) broadened the existing understanding of the role of EI in everyday life. According to Bennis (2001), EI accounts for 85-90% of the success of organizational leaders.

Specifically, employee EI has been linked with health, teamwork, productivity and profit (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001; Goleman, 1995, 1998, 2004). EI has been reported to moderate the relationship between stress and mental health in university students (Ciarrochi et al., 2002). Emotional health is a common factor across all cultural contexts. Consider the emotions of stress and anger, which, when left unchecked, may lead in the extreme example to suicide. Toxic emotions such as these can create obstacles in managing across cultures effectively. Leaders need to recognize the influence of employee emotions in determining team design (teamwork), or work outcomes (productivity and profit). Achievement drive (McClelland, 1961) means optimistically striving to continually improve performance. Consider how the negative emotions of fear and anger affect productivity. Managers may be better able to recognize and regulate these emotions in their employees by recognizing how these emotions are influenced by culture. Being emotionally intelligent allows a focus on profit; that is, focusing on problems that are the greatest cost to the organization.

Being emotionally intelligent can be beneficial in conflict management, such as in union negotiations. When represented workers request changes in the terms of their contract, management may be faced with a highly emotionally charged *they versus us* environment. Taking the expressed emotions into account along with the terms of the contractual requests may more quickly facilitate a successful outcome.

Emotional Process Model

Recently, Druskat & Wolfe, (2001) developed an emotional process model, which suggests that both an individual's response to an event and the subsequent response selection are impacted by prevailing cultural influences. This model, as shown in Figure 1, borrows from the theoretical representation of emotion in an anthropological framework. Anthropologists have long proposed that cultures have conventions and norms that influence the management of emotions (Ekman, 1980; Lutz, 1988). These cultural norms create commonality and predictability among individuals in their interpretation and response to emotional stimuli.

Figure 1

Cultural Influences in the Emotional Process Model
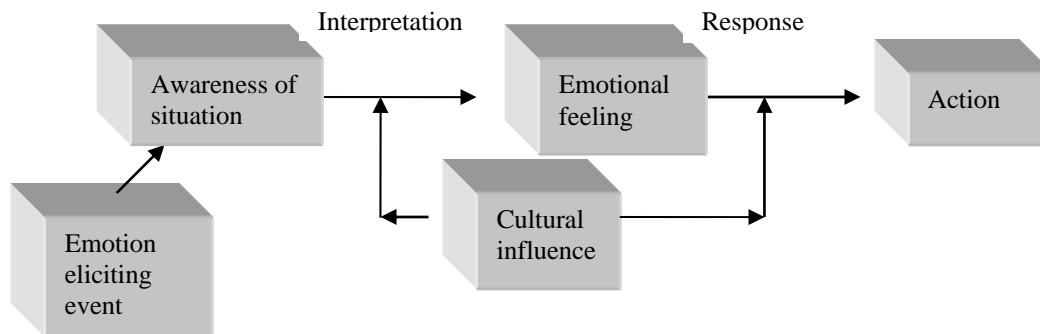
As shown in Figure 1, the first step in the emotional process model is the awareness of an emotion eliciting event. Culture may then filter the interpretation such that an arousal or emotional feeling enters into the conscious awareness. Culture also influences the selection of an action or behavior as a response to the event. This model posits a connection between emotions and behaviors. It also provides an understanding of how both interpretation and expression of emotions are influenced by culture. This relationship is explored within the contemporary workplace where managers are faced with trying to understand, and often to anticipate, the emotional responses of their employees. Current literature lacks research data to quantify exactly how much of emotional intelligence is affected by culture. This paper suggests it is one , but not the only factor that influences the emotional process.

Several exploratory case studies were completed that recognize and/or make use of CTEI. Throughout these case studies, two levels of culture will be held constant while variations in the third will be analyzed. The data were collected through direct observation and personal interviews.

Culturally Tuned EI Case Studies.

Organizational Cultural Tuning in Electronic Data Systems: National Culture constant, Professional Culture constant, Organizational culture varies

Variations in organizational culture will be discussed within the common national/professional cultures of American CFOs.

Electronic Data Systems (EDS) formed an e-procurement startup in 2000, located in the San Francisco area of California. The startup, eBreviate, offered online auctions in real time for assisting companies in procuring goods. During the 2-year life of eBreviate, there were constant clashes between the organizational cultures of the parent company and the California startup. eBreviate was projected to go public within three years. eBreviate was part of the fast paced Silicon Valley culture, which included a lean, dedicated workforce, energized by the seductive possibility of completing an IPO. Corporate headquarter employees, associated with the mothership in Plano, Texas, slowly navigated their way through corporate policies and procedures before any options could be discussed, let alone decisions made. These two cultures were almost virtual opposites of one another.

Consider the area of risk aversion, or as articulated in Hofstede terms, the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). The existence of eBreviate had been built on a high-risk model with many unknowns. eBreviate employees were recruited, in part, by the appeal of stock options that were likewise risky. This environment elicited emotions of motivation, excitement, and positive affectivity. While EDS professionals avoided risk at all costs, eBreviate was constantly requesting exceptions to the formal corporate policies. One EDS finance manager admitted he would get nervous and worried whenever she saw en eBreviate phone number appear on her telephone caller id and often would just not answer the phone. Risk created an environment of negative

affectivity within the organizational culture of the parent company.

The eBreviate CFO was continually frustrated by the amount of time it took to for the EDS CFO and his finance team to approve decisions. Likewise EDS senior finance management was becoming upset with the "pushy" management style of the eBreviate CFO.

Using their current level of emotional intelligence, both management teams were at least able to recognize that frustration and anger were deteriorating their working relationship. Their level of EI was increased, making them aware of their differing values and beliefs. The cultural values associated with time are included in the long term orientation dimension (LTO) in the Hofstede model.

Within eBreviate, HR fine-tuned the CFO's emotional intelligence to take into account the differences in the cultural values associated with risk aversion (UAI) and time orientation (LTO). Within the two different organizational cultures, what seemed like a tolerable level of risk in eBreviate was an unacceptable level of risk in EDS. What seemed like an adequate amount of time to make a decision by eBreviate's values and standards felt too aggressive and rushed to EDS management. Neither group was wrong; they were just operating with different cultural values and beliefs.
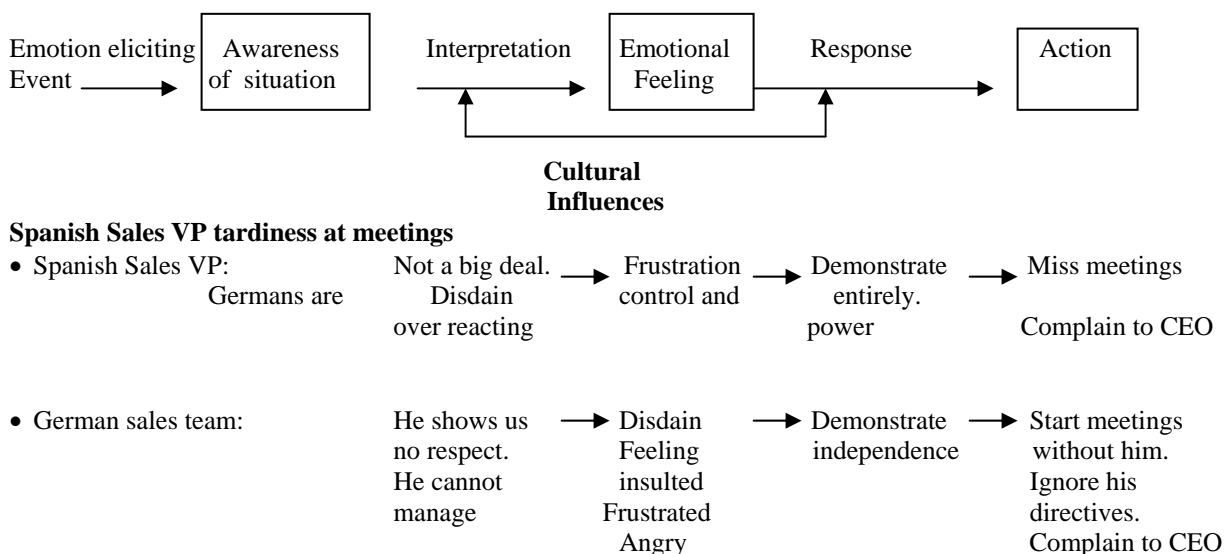
The eBreviate CFO built in more lead-time in decision making with EDS and provided more thorough risk analysis on all proposals. Although decisions initially still took longer to make than was desired, improving the working relationship between the two finance teams eventually led to faster turn around to achieve concurrence.

National Cultural Tuning in eBreviate
National Culture varies, Professional Culture constant, Organizational culture constant

Variations in national culture will be discussed within the common organizational/professional cultures of EDS sales professionals.

Consider the example of a Spanish Sales Vice President who managed a German sales force. Something as simple as showing up for meetings on time became an emotional issue. Feeling anger due to tardiness was not universal among the two cultures involved. The Sales VP thought arriving late, or sometimes completely canceling a meeting at the last minute, was not sufficient reason to be angry. However, the German sales people had a different set of values that made them feel insulted and angry when the VP did not show up on time. The different cultural influences on the interpretation of the emotion eliciting event and the associated response to that event are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Cultural Influences on the Emotional Process: EDS Case Study

Spanish Sales VP tardiness at meetings

- Spanish Sales VP:
  Germans are

- German sales team:

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These influences were discussed with the members in a focus group approach facilitated by the HR professionals in eBreviate. Once the employees could view the issue from outside of their own cultural framework, it was much easier to modify their own behaviors in a way that respected the other culture's values and beliefs. The Spanish VP worked very hard to be at all meetings on time and when he could not, he always apologized. The German employees realized that starting meetings late was not a personal affront and always provided positive reinforcement to the Spanish VP when he was available to start meetings on time.

National Cultural Tuning in Chevron
National Culture varies, Professional Culture constant, Organizational culture constant

Variations in national culture will be discussed within the common organizational/professional cultures of Chevron engineers.

Implementing 360-degree feedback systems was enough of a cultural challenge in the USA when the concept first became popular over a decade ago. More recently, a greater challenge was how to implement this performance management tool globally, within a multinational corporation such as Chevron. During the late 1990s, Chevron struggled with designing an effective implementation plan for this tool. It would have been easy to mandate usage of the tool through all of the international offices, without taking into account any of the national cultural differences, but the success of such an American-based program would probably have been limited.

Two main national culture dimensions that may impact the success of such programs include power distance and individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Countries with a high Power Distance Index (PDI) have a high acceptance of hierarchies. In other words, power distance deals with the emotive distances separating subordinates from their bosses. In cultures like the USA with a low PDI, subordinates generally prefer a horizontal organization structure rather than structures with numerous reporting levels between them and their boss. In these flatter organizational cultures, subordinates are comfortable in providing feedback to their boss, who may be considered more of a colleague. However, in a culture such as

Indonesia that has a higher PDI, employees value and respect hierarchies within their workplace and are threatened by the concept of providing their opinion about someone higher up in the organization. They tend to feel a sense of disrespect to both the individual manager and the organization if they provide any criticism, which leads to bias in any 360-degree feedback that is provided.

In national cultures that have a higher level of individualism (IDV), such as the USA, employees feel it is their right to have their individual thoughts and concerns voiced, including those about their bosses. In collectivist cultures in which IDV is lower, such as Indonesia, subordinates see themselves as part of the same team as their boss. The team speaks with one voice, usually that of the manager at the top of their hierarchy. In low IDV cultures it is considered presumptuous and disrespectful for a team member to provide feedback concerning another team member. So, once again a 360-degree tool would meet with limited success. In this instance, the change initiative to implement 360-degree feedback in all countries was modified. In those cultures where it was anticipated that 360-degree feedback would create more emotional stress than emotional well being, it was made available, with the proviso that it was to be used solely at the discretion of local management.

Several overseas locations took advantage of this option and did not implement the 360-degree facility. Local management in both India and Indonesia expressed appreciation for corporate understanding of their awkwardness in incorporating a tool that transcended hierarchical boundaries.

National Cultural Tuning in the US Air force
National Culture varies, Professional Culture constant, Organizational culture constant

Variations in national culture were incorporated within recruiting practices for several professions within the US Air force.

The US Air force wanted to reduce their high turnover rate and the associated training and hiring costs, as explained by one of their regional recruiting managers. To facilitate this change, they introduced EI into their recruiting process. The US Air force began seeking individuals who could integrate

diverse emotional perspectives within a variety of national cultures, enhancing innovation and allowing for the effective management of the emotions of others. EI-based questions were tuned to reflect the specific situations where each professional culture might have to handle stress in those they lead, as well as situations in which they would have to effectively regulate themselves in times of crisis management.

It is acknowledged by the US Air force that their leaders may be more effective by taking into account how different national cultures respond to and emote stress. Questions posed during the recruitment process address the candidate's awareness of varying national cultural values. The US Air force was able to reduce turnover by more than 90% within a year, in addition to saving close to $3 million in training and hiring costs, by using EI in their selection process (Robbins, 2003).

Professional Cultural Tuning at Stanford University
National Culture constant, Professional Culture varies, Organizational culture constant

Variations in professional culture were examined within the common culture of American Stanford employees.

As Stanford University faced a year of double-digit healthcare inflation in 2004, the mandate was to change the focus from short-term annual design changes to long-term reform solutions. Stanford's change initiative was based on the recognition that keeping employees healthy can reduce healthcare utilization, decrease absenteeism and increase productivity.

To achieve these objectives, a program was developed to identify and reduce employees' physical and emotional lifestyle risk factors. Commencing in January 2004, employees received access to a Health Risk Assessment tool that highlights lifestyle risk factors. For example, when the emotion of stress is flagged as being a potential risk in terms of leading to hypertension, the employee is provided with personal coaching and additional tools to manage that emotion.

Part of the initiative to support healthier lifestyles, particularly reducing stress, required cultural tuning to recognize the differences between the faculty culture and the staff culture. To ensure that both groups were treating each other with mutual respect at all times, a *respectful workplace* program was developed that defined integrity as a core value for all managers in both cultures. Part of the program involves making both groups aware of how something as simple as how they communicate with each other can inadvertently create stress. There is no tolerance for disparaging remarks, which can create a toxic emotional environment. Managers are expected to treat all members of the university community with civility, respect and courtesy regardless of whether they are staff or faculty. Positive feedback was received from both faculty and staff who attended "EI-related" workshops. The number of complaints by staff members concerning faculty-staff interactions decreased.

Professional Cultural Tuning within International Swim Organizations
National Culture varies, Professional Culture constant, Organizational culture varies

Variations in professional culture and national culture are minimized while organizational culture values are discussed.

Elite swimming organizations such as United States Swimming (USS), Western Australian Swimming (WASA) and Federation International Natation Association (FINA) often use EI to purge emotions from stroke and turn officials. These officials closely observe swimmers for stroke and turn infractions that result in disqualification of the swimmer. It is vital to the unbiased nature of the job that officials show no overt emotions that may be interpreted as favoritism or impartiality towards any swimmer, team, or country. Often the officials are multinational. It is recognized that controlling or masking emotional responses is more difficult for officials from more emotionally demonstrative cultures such as the Italian culture, versus those from more reserved cultures such as the Japanese. The English official needs to keep all emotions regulated while officiating with an Irish swimmer in the pool. The American official must regulate his/her emotions when the U.S. swimmer is competing for the gold medal.

Likewise, any differences in these three organizational cultures are replaced with values specific to this profession. For example the social gatherings for officials following a swim meet might vary within these organizations. Following a WASA event, coaches may be allowed to attend the offcials'gathering, whereas a FINA gathering will strictly be only for sanctioned swim officials. These differences may be based on varying levels of power distance; the FINA culture is much more hierarchical based than the other two cultures. However, in the profession of stroke and turn officiating, the hierarchy remains constant for all organizations and must be followed to preserve fairness and equity in competitive swimming.

A change initiative was developed to focus on improving the quality of emotional purging across all officials regardless of their national culture. As part of this initiative, officials were provided with culturally tuned training about roles and responsibilities aimed at the technical and emotional aspects of the job. Having completed this training, officials became more aware of emotional responses while officiating. Subsequently, they may be better able to regulate these emotions and hence demonstrate increased impartiality.

Conclusion

This exploratory paper has attempted to explain the effective use of EI through cultural tuning. Reframing emotional intelligence in terms of culture may better support cross-cultural management effectiveness. Managers may be able to extend their emotional intelligence using cultural perspectives.

The case studies provide practical examples of national, professional and organizational cultural tuning.This type of cross-cultural research contributes to a better understanding of how culture influences behavior.

The analyses in this paper were limited to examining one level of culture while holding the other two constant. A more powerful approach would be to simultaneously examine all three levels. This type of work is currently underway by the author using hierarchical linear modeling in LISREL.

A better understanding of the cultural influence on behavior is still needed.

Dr. Linda Herkenhoff is currently an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Business at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California, where she teaches both Quantitative Analysis and Organizational Behavior. Her research areas include Culturally Tuned Emotional Intelligence (CTEI) as well as effective uses of technology in the classroom.

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