

SOME CONCERNS IN CROSS CULTURAL MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and the borderless world, promise a better world for all, but is not the answer for all socio-economic dilemmas. While it can bring benefits to many, if not properly managed it can destroy the economies of countries and regions. Responding to the challenges of globalisation and the knowledge economy requires new strategies. The new economy is one where risk, uncertainty and constant changes are the rule, rather than the exception.

Malaysia needs to respond to demands of the new economy by developing global managers, who can demonstrate a new mindset of management. In this context, even public service officers are increasingly faced with managing in a global environment – whether they are serving in the foreign ministry, in international trade, or negotiating in matters related to information technology, environment or financial areas. This paper seeks to develop awareness of the complexities of cross-cultural management facing public sector managers in the globalised environment. It argues that despite cultural relativism, awareness and understanding of cultural diversity enables a manager to be more effective in undertaking his responsibilities. While many of the scenarios are drawn from the private sector and international business, the principles that are drawn are applicable to any cross-cultural management situation.

RELATIVISM

Plato quoted Protagoras as saying, “The way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me; and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you”.¹ Therefore, the way I see things, that is true and real for me, and the way you see things, that is real and true for you. There is no objective reality apart from how each person sees things.

Despite this position, Protagoras still argued that things some people believe may be better than what others believe, therefore there is a need to persuade others of their own belief. Plato in disagreeing with this inconsistency (that though each holds his own beliefs, yet one could be better than the other), stated that, “If the way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you, then it appears to me that your whole doctrine is false”.² Relativism thus seems to contradict itself. If each person’s belief is his concern and no one else’s, then he does not need to persuade anyone of his beliefs. The issue of better does not arise. Neither is there such a thing as falsehood.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

“Cultural relativism is based on the undoubted truth that human cultures are very different from each other and often embody very different values”.³ It is the position “that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual and his or her environment.”⁴ The values and norms of the country you are in, tremendously influence your choice of behaviour. Margaret Mead’s studies on attitudes of sex in Samoa demonstrated her personal expectations and bias rather than the reality of the Samoan society.⁵ Mead’s “discoveries” of a freer attitude to sex was supposedly based on anthropological empirical evidence intended to demonstrate cultural relativism, but it also showed moral relativism. “All ethical, religious, political and aesthetic beliefs are truths that are relative to the cultural identity of the individual. Relativism can include moral relativism (ethics are relative to

the social construct), situational relativism (right and wrong depend on the particular situation) and cognitive relativism (truth is relativism and has no objective standard)".⁶

However, even if it is accepted that cultures have different values, it does not prove cultural relativism, "for while cultural relativism must say that all values are relative to a particular culture, a cultural absolutism merely needs to deny that, saying that not all values are relative to a particular culture, i.e. that some values are cultural universals".⁷ Even if a hundred values are found to be different, but if one value is common to all those cultures, cultural relativism is refuted. Nevertheless, anthropological findings have contributed to a systematic study that has evolved a moral principle, "that since all values are specific to a given culture, then nobody has the right to impose the values from their culture on to any other culture or to tell any culture that their traditional values should be different".⁸

Cultural relativism says that good and bad are relative to culture. Cultural relativism holds that "good" means what is "socially approved" by the majority in a given culture. Morality thus is seen as a product of culture. The emphasis is on tolerance and understanding, to view other cultures, not as "wrong" but as "different". It could be argued that relativism is a misguided movement towards pluralism and tolerance, "if the standard of right and wrong is based on relativism, then society has no standards at all."⁹

CULTURE

Culture has been described by Edgar Schein as "a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems".¹⁰ This definition describes the evolutionary nature of culture and how it seeks to be relevant both to the external environment and the internal needs. It facilitates a certain amount of predictability of people's behaviour.

Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values, and values are among the building blocks of culture".¹¹

It is clear from Schein's and Hofstede's definitions that the term culture is not limited to the national level but also refers to that of a company or organisation. Organisational cultures have often been presented as a matter of values (e.g. Peters and Waterman) with symbols, heroes and rituals (Scholes). Members have to adjust personal values to that of the organisations. But a critical analysis shows that organisational cultures are composed of practices rather than values. National cultures however, differ mostly at the level of values.

Culture is defined by each person based on his experience. Farid Elashmawi provides a practical perspective by defining culture as "the behavioural norms that a group of people, at a certain time and place, have agreed upon to survive and exist".¹² It brings to mind:

Language,
Nonverbal communication,
Space and time orientations,
Religion and belief systems,
Patterns of thinking,
Self-images,
Set of values,
Material culture, and
Aesthetics.¹³

This paper will discuss cultural relativism and its implications in:

- a) Managerial values and national cultural differences;
- b) Values across cultures;
- c) Cross cultural management: centrality of values;
- d) Culture and international mergers and acquisitions;
- e) Acculturation in mergers and acquisitions;
- f) Managing cultural differences;
- g) Cross cultural communication;
- h) International negotiation and culture; and
- i) The multicultural manager.

MANAGERIAL VALUES AND NATIONAL CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is often said that management is getting things done through people. Therefore it is important that the manager knows:

- The things to be done, and
- The people who have to do them.

Understanding people and their culture enables a manager to work with them better.

Geert Hofstede has identified five dimensions of national cultural differences namely:

- Power Distance: small versus large;
- Individualism vs. Collectivism;
- Masculinity vs. femininity;
- Uncertainty Avoidance: strong versus weak; and
- Long term versus short-term orientation.

The implications of these dimensions on the structure and processes of an organisation, as well as the behavioural style of the members are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Cultural values	Structure	Processes	Behavioural style
Power High/low power	Hierarchy: Differentiation High/low Centralization: High/low	Decision making: participative/ Non-participative Communication: vertical/horizontal Control: tight/loose Coordination: vertical/horizontal	Leadership: Authoritarian/ democratic Subordinates' compliance strategies: High/low authoritarian, or coercive/permissive
Social relations Individualistic/ collectivistic orientation	Horizontal differentiation: Specialization High/low Rewards: Differential High/low	Rewards and incentives: individual/group emphasis Communication: specific/diffuse Decision making: contentious/consensus	Commitment: self/group goals Compliance strategies: calculative/moralistic Climate: competitive/cooperative

Cultural values	Structure	Processes	Behavioural style
Work orientation Work/nonwork centrality	Span of control: Wide/short	Rewards and incentives: intrinsic/extrinsic	Climate: expressive/instrumental Commitment: internal/external
Uncertainty High/low avoidance	Formalization: High/low Centralization High/low	Locus of decisions: hierarchical/diffuse	Climate: reserved/open

Figure 1: The Effects of Cultural Values on Organisational Choices: An Illustration ¹⁴

Power values describe forms of power relationships and authority in social organisations. They describe hierarchical arrangements and power-compliance strategies of an organisation. High power distance will relate to high hierarchical differentiation or high centralisation. It relates to non-participative decision making, hierarchical rather than collegial control. The preference is for an authoritarian style of leadership and high distance in interpersonal relationships. For example, studies have shown that Chinese (Hong Kong) are more satisfied working in centralised rather than decentralised structures. ¹⁵

Social interaction values relate to forms of human relationships or bonds that also determine interaction patterns and role relationships. These can vary from being individualistic to being collectivistic in orientation. The US culture, for example, emphasises individualism, pursuit of self-interest and individual accountability. ¹⁶ The Japanese on the other hand, place high value on consensus rather than contentious decision process.

Figure 1 also illustrates the other values. For example, the value on work as distinct from social activity and as being central to life. Cultural differences vary from emphasising work as a measure for achieving non-work goals and social status to an emphasis on work for the activity itself.

The cross-cultural manager would be at an advantage if he is aware of the cultural differences among nations and its impact on organisational dynamics. Hofstede further argued that management practices are culturally dependent and stated that what works in one country does not necessarily work in another. ¹⁷ He illustrated this by discussing four examples, as presented in **Figure 2**.

Performance Appraisal systems	Western management Direct feedback preferred (individualist culture)	Asian Management Loss of face; destroys harmony Indirect feedback preferred
Management by Objectives	Subordinate negotiate with superior their objectives. Negotiation rather than rule.	German environment: more structured culture -- uncertainty avoidance
Strategic Management	Assumes weak uncertainty avoidance Deviant ideas encouraged	Germany/France (Stronger Uncertainty avoidance) Recommendations rarely followed Top management expected to be involved in daily operations.

Humanisation of Work	USA (masculine, individualist) Make work interesting and rewarding – job enrichment	Sweden (feminine and less individualist) Development of semi- autonomous work teams, Members exchange tasks, Help each other Germany – flexible working hours popular
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Figure 2: Management Practices and Culture ¹⁸

The cultures of a country have a direct bearing on the way work is organized and the way management operates. There is little disagreement on the fact that culture is relative among countries that the discussion is on the issue of ratio or relativity rather than clear-cut distinctions.

Another factor is the influence of organisational culture within the national culture. Practices of an organisation can vary one from another within a country. Management styles of Hong Leong Bank and that of Bank Bumiputra are quite distinct – so are the organisation cultures. Similarly Citibank or Chartered Bank can have their distinct cultures adapted within the local environment – partially or fully. This issue will be deliberated on later.

VALUES ACROSS CULTURES

Much has been written about differences in management thinking and practice across cultures. Apart from the popular theory X and Y there has been the much touted theory Z (or Japanese management culture). It has been expressed earlier that values underpin culture. **Figure 3** illustrates the differing values in different cultures.

While the Americans highly value freedom, the Japanese culture places a higher value on belonging. Belonging to and supporting a group to survive is more important than individualism. The Arab culture on the other hand, concentrates on their family security, harmony and depend on God for their destiny, as shown in **Figure 3**.

	American		Japanese		Arabs
1.	Freedom	1.	Belonging	1.	Family security
2.	Independence	2.	Group harmony	2.	Family harmony
3.	Self-reliance	3.	Collectiveness	3.	Parental guidance
4.	Equality	4.	Age/seniority	4.	Age
5.	Individualism	5.	Group consensus	5.	Authority
6.	Competition	6.	Co-operation	6.	Compromise
7.	Efficiency	7.	Quality	7.	Devotion
8.	Time	8.	Patience	8.	Very patient
9.	Directness	9.	Indirectness	9.	Indirectness
10.	Openness	10.	Go-between	10.	Hospitality
11.	Aggressiveness	11.	Interpersonal	11.	Friendship

	American		Japanese		Arabs
12.	Informality	12.	Hierarchy	12.	Formal/admiration
13.	Future-orientation	13.	Continuation	13.	Past and present
14.	Risk-taking	14.	Conservative	14.	Religious belief
15.	Creativity	15.	Information	15.	Tradition
16.	Self-accomplishment	16.	Group achievement	16.	Social recognition
17.	Winning	17.	Success	17.	Reputation
18.	Money	18.	Relationship	18.	Friendship
19.	Material possessions	19.	Harmony with nature	19.	Belonging
20.	Privacy	20.	Networking	20.	Family network

Figure 3: Cultural Contrasts in Value¹⁹

The American culture that values independence and freedom of choice sees everyone as equal regardless of age, social status or position. Japanese and Arab culture value seniority and age. The Americans generally bring their competitive attitude in the business setting while the Japanese values group co-operation. The Arabs seeks goal achievement through compromise. The Americans highlight individual achievement and are results-oriented. Therefore they value directness and openness in interpersonal relationships. The Japanese are generally indirect and prefer a harmonious style and value interpersonal harmony and avoid direct confrontation.

Understanding cultural differences enables a manager to work better and adjust quicker in a different culture or setting. We each see the same thing differently, just as our perception of ourselves is not the same as others' perception of us. But if "your cultural values overlap with mine, your image of my culture will be positive. To the extend that our values differ or conflict your image of my culture will be negative".²⁰ An American executive cannot expect a Malaysian worker to fully agree or comply with his set of values in their interactions. Likewise a Malaysian manager serving overseas or working with employees of diverse cultures has to be aware of the value differences of the cultures in which he manages.

A cross cultural manager must be aware of his own country's or society's priorities, and reorganise them to mobilise people for group success. Similarly he must, especially in his initial dealings, attempt to understand the other country's or society's culture and attempt to work within it. Once accepted by the group, then he can slowly introduce his own set of values to the group. When both sides recognize the new values necessary for effective performance, then synergy will occur.

It has been said that all our behaviours in the business and social life are influenced by our belief systems and our rewarded values, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.

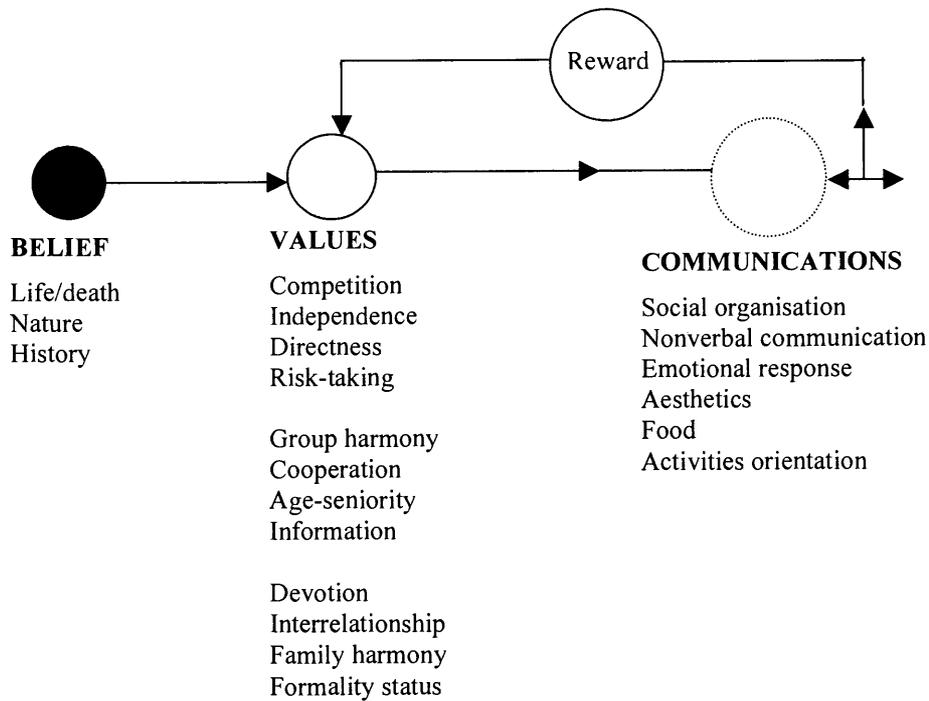


Figure 4: The Belief, Values, and Communications Model²¹

Although an individual may consider his beliefs as norms, his set of values is subject to changes according to the group or societal system.

In an American system, the values of independence, competition and risk taking are rewarded, enhanced and encouraged. The Japanese reward system on the other hand bases reward on group harmony, group consensus and group achievement. If the Japanese executive tries to act with independence, taking risks, he would more likely be pressured to conform to his culture.

The cross-cultural manager has to develop his skills and be able to listen, watch and feel the people of a different culture. Only when he has patiently understood his new group, by managing his own bias, is he able to react, participate and grow with the new group. This will then allow him to adapt, share and experience with the group, allowing them to enjoy the new set of values, as illustrated in **Figure 5**.

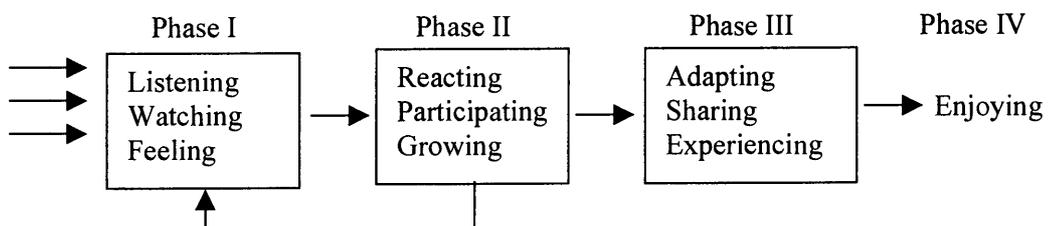


Figure 5: Building Cultural Sensitivity²²

CROSS CULTURAL MANAGEMENT: CENTRALITY OF VALUES

Research on cross-cultural management has brought into light the complexity of the impact that indigenous cultural settings may have on organisational structures and processes. It has also been shown that cultural values impact organisations (Hofstede).

In this context, values held by a society significantly influence organisations – structure, processes and management styles, as illustrated in **Figure 6**. “Values are the basis for the choice, by a social group, of particular ends and of particular means by which those ends are to be accomplished”.²³ They provide the legitimacy for preferences of conduct over available alternatives. Values thus serve as mechanisms for controlling or regulating social behaviour. Cultural values have an important role of controlling and directing social behaviour, and that of the organisation.

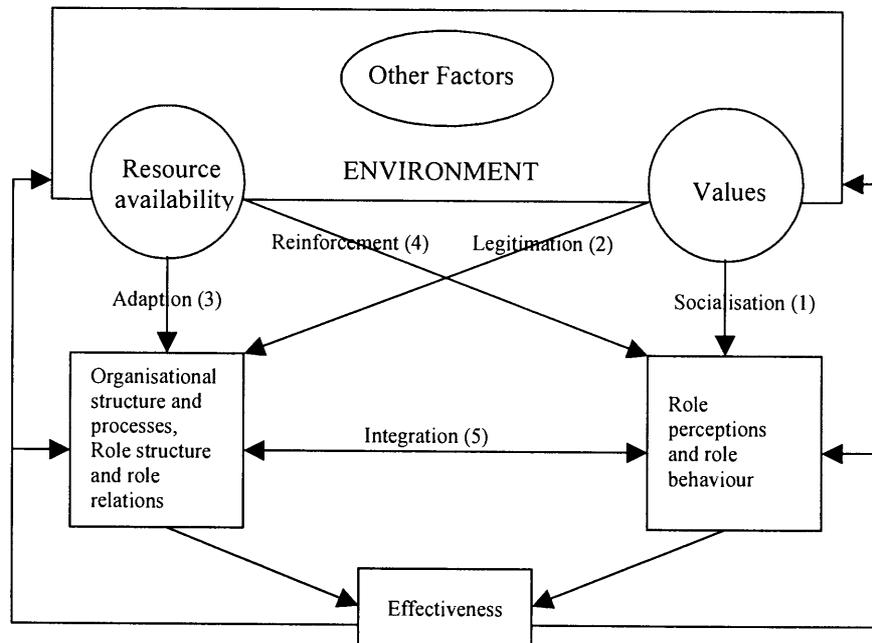


Figure 6: A Theoretical Framework for Cross-cultural Analysis²⁴

Congruence between societal values and that of the organisation will facilitate effectiveness of organisations. “Congruence between core values governing modes of organizing in a cultural setting, and the value assumptions underlying the structure and processes of cross-national organisations operating within that setting, is of critical importance for organisation effectiveness”.²⁵

Cultural values have the role of legitimising the organisation’s existence and its ways of functioning, as well as the pattern of behaviour of its members.

The cross-cultural manager has to understand the impact of national culture on the organisation’s way of functioning and its member’s behaviour. What is visible externally does not necessarily portray the actual dynamics of the organisation, as illustrated in **Figure 7**.

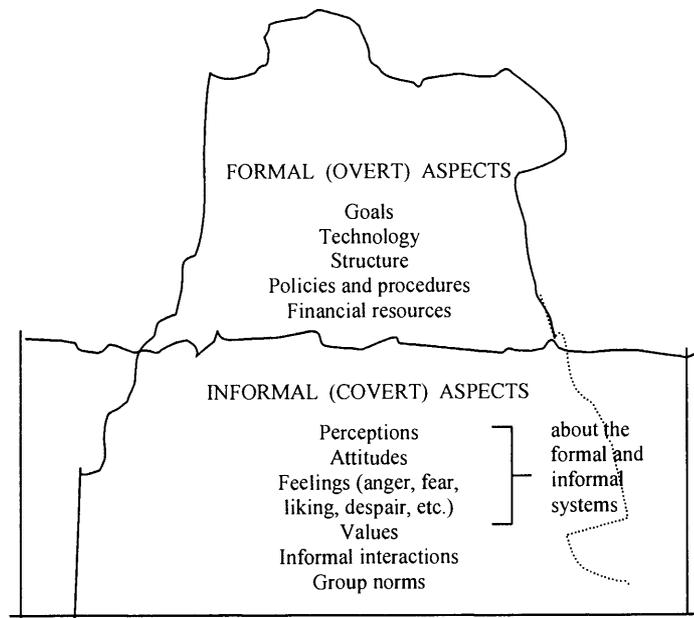


Figure 7: The Iceberg of Organisational Culture²⁶

CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Mergers and acquisitions are increasingly becoming the norm for organisational growth. Cross-border alliances such as joint ventures, co-operative agreements and mergers and acquisitions are steps taken to increase market share, enjoy economies of scale and facilitate research and development. Mergers and acquisition have also been seen as a strategic alternative to internal growth of firms.

While the success of mergers and acquisitions are influenced by market conditions, technological developments, government policy and other environment conditions, success is also dependent on its ability to integrate. “It has been estimated that one third of all merger failures are caused by faulty integration”.²⁷ Culture-related problems are part of this integration process.

Post merger syndrome can demonstrate resistance to change, resentment of company managers, focus on personal security rather than organisational goals. “People go through a culture shock, and culture differences are often cited as a source of hostility. At the organisational level, the syndrome is visible through a tendency to not pass information or problems up or down, a tendency among top management on both sides to not communicate with their respective organisations, and conflicts between the acquired organisation often quite intense”.²⁸

In international mergers both the companies organisational culture and the elements of the host national culture are involved. Potential cultural conflicts are reduced if the bargaining powers of one party are of equal size or importance, and no dominant “home” culture is available.

Japanese-American mergers can predictably have difficulties. Likewise Malaysian-Japanese mergers would involve adjustments and understanding. Perhaps even the development of a third culture. Culture is relative. It is often compared to a lens through which we see the world. Can that lens shift according to the need?

Culture is an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate the worlds in which they live. “It is a sense-making process, a frame of reference that guides our actions and thoughts”.²⁹

Cross-cultural managers involved in mergers and acquisitions have to make effort to understand and facilitate change. Each partner will insist on his own way of doing things. There will be concerns

about freedom and losing positions. The manager has to be aware of those concerns and also manage the confrontation of cultures. An effective manager will facilitate acceptance of change and develop understanding of cultures. Cultures are not permanent but relative. Therefore, evolutionary synergy can be obtained by integrating the best values to create a win-win situation.

ACCULTURATION IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Although the discussion thus far used the term culture, as if organisations have a monolithic culture, in reality most of the firms have more than one set of beliefs influencing the behaviour of employees – there are various subcultures, although there may be a dominant culture.

Acculturation is changes induced in (two cultural) systems as a result of the diffusion of cultural elements in both directions.³⁰ Although acculturation is often considered to be a balanced two-way flow, in reality members of one culture often attempt to dominate members of the other.

In the case of mergers, the characteristics of the acquired and the acquiring companies determine the type of acculturation.

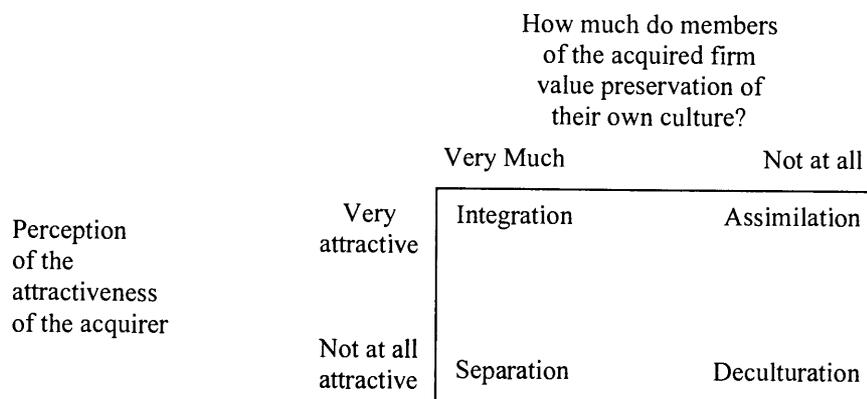


Figure 8: Acquired Firm's Modes of Acculturation⁽³¹⁾

When the companies merge, total absorption is not the only option. Both companies need to decide an approach to implementation of the merger.

The cross-cultural manager has to be aware of the degree of multiculturalism of an organisation and the extent of pressure for conformity or change, as illustrated in **Figure 8**. The measure of relatedness of the two companies can further assist in deciding on the best approach. "Congruence can take place even if the cultures and practices of the two organisations are considerably different".³²

Often the power of the acquirer, the size of the absorbing party, tends to pressure conformity from the acquired or smaller company – often with insufficient consideration to the sensitivities, cultures and practices of the organisation and its workforce.

Culture is relative. It is evolutionary. It is the means by which groups agree on a mode of action that can help them achieve goals. It is therefore malleable. The manager can play a significant part in assisting this acculturation of beliefs and practices that can be acceptable to both parties.

However it must be acknowledged that the cultures of some countries appear to be more difficult to adapt to than do cultures of other countries. The culture barriers of Southeast Asia, Japan and Middle East are said to be greater than that of other world regions.

CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is crucial in management. In a cross-cultural context the communication model must take into consideration cultural and personal differences in communicative behaviour.

“As a process, communication has no determinate beginning or end; rather, it is an ongoing exchange of messages between two or more people. People exchange both intended (purposive) and unintended (expressive) messages”.³³ If expressive messages are taken as purposive, misunderstanding may occur.

Face to face communications involve verbal and non-verbal aspects. It also involves use and understanding of language. Meanings, perceptions – intended or unintended are involved. There are also interferences or barriers. Communication is complex. Further complicating the process is cultural values and beliefs that lead to varied interpretations. A person’s phenomenal field is culturally conditioned. Thus the sender’s message and intended message may be processed differently, as illustrated in **Figure 9**.

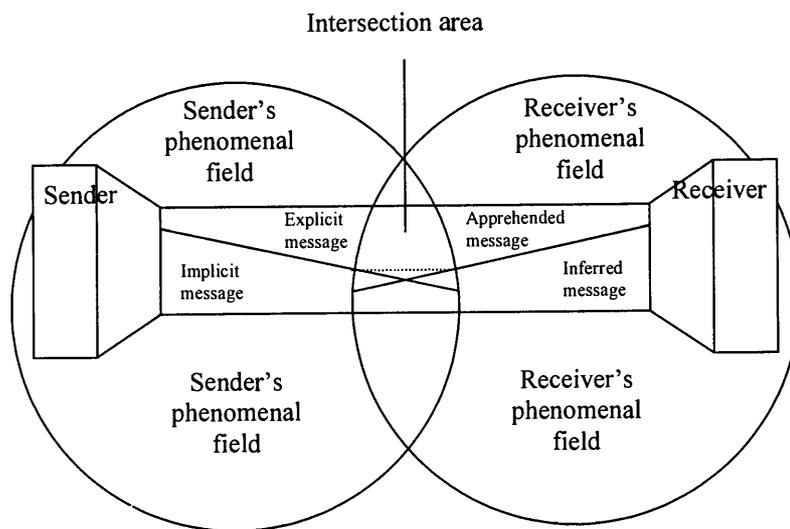


Figure 9: Channel-ratio Model of Intercultural Communication³⁴

The channel-ratio model helps provide cues to the user of the possible challenge to effective communication. The interpreted size of the intersection area is critical in any communication. Some cultures use subtle implication and inference (based on shared experience) to exchange messages. These are high content on cultures. The low content cultures are more explicit in their messages. The cross-cultural manager thus would find it useful to understand cultural and contextual determinants of communicative behaviour. It can help him avoid underestimating the influence of culture and context in communication.

However, Hall’s model does not adequately capture the aspect of feedback in communication. How does one interpret feedback, agreement, disagreement or support? But the model does highlight the major issues in cross-cultural communication especially the implicit and explicit information.

Understanding and applying the model would further facilitate communication between people of different countries and cultures. The sender’s message in the channel contains both an explicit component and an implicit component. The explicit contains both purposive and expressive behaviour while the implicit conveys meaning within the conversational and cultural context. On the receiver’s side, the total message involves both what is inferred and the portion that is apprehended (received, interpreted, assimilated). The message, as interpreted and understood will influence the receiver’s behaviour choice.

“In intercultural communication, even exchanges between communicators with relatively large intersections may go awry if one communicator uses greater explicitness than the other requires.”³⁵⁾ The complexity of intercultural communication is further compounded by choice of language, gestures or other behaviour that can be misinterpreted by the receiver.

INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION AND CULTURE

Related to issue of communication is the role of managers who engage in international negotiations. Cross-national interactions are largely influenced by national character, organisation culture and individual personality as illustrated in **Figure 10**.

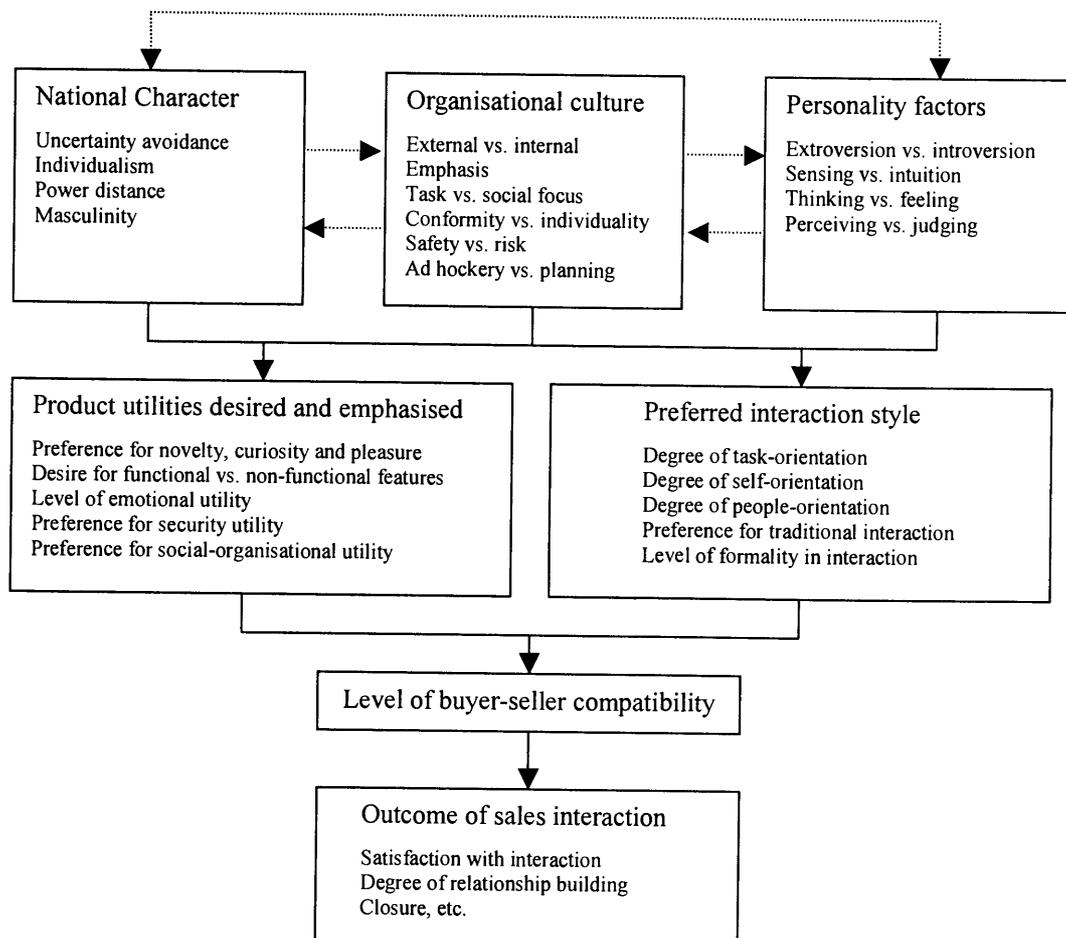


Figure 10: Cultural and Personality Dimensions Affecting Cross-national Buyer-seller Interactions³⁶

A personal selling transaction involves content and style. Content refers to the substantive aspect of the transaction that involves suggesting, offering, or negotiating a product. Style refers to mannerisms, rituals, ground-rules that buyer and seller follows in their negotiation.

The model in **Figure 10** clearly indicates the role of culture, not only at the national but also at the organisational level. The cross-cultural manager has to be aware of the variations in national cultures – to be effective. “The problem of communicating with people in diverse cultures is one of the great creative challenges in international marketing. This is because cultural factors typically operate below the level of conscious awareness, they operate on an individual at several levels and are therefore difficult to comprehend”.³⁷

It is culture that largely determines the way various phenomena are perceived – what a person talks about and how he approaches others. Two managers engaged in negotiations will be influenced by the degree of compatibility between their national character, organisational culture and individual personality, which will influence their communication. This will influence the degrees of success of the seller.

Yet, as observed earlier, we are not dealing with static, inflexible patterns of beliefs and outlooks –but changeable. It is up to the manager to use his acumen to understand his counterpart and engage in meaningful communication that will be beneficial to both. Lisa Hokelin observed that “all social behaviour is embedded in a particular context and is connected to other deeply held values and beliefs.”³⁸ Understanding the values and worldviews of others then facilitates negotiation and communication.

“The essence of culture is not what is visible on the surface. It is the shared ways groups of people understand and interpret the world.”³⁹ These interpretations influence interactions and managing cross cultures. People do not merely react to their environment but actively select, interpret and create their environments. Understanding the subtle dynamic forces of culture at work will enable the manager to more effectively manage in cross-cultural situations.

THE MULTICULTURAL MANAGER

The next century with increasing globalisation will see managers in transition, experimenting on more effective ways to manage people and resources in times of rapid changes. With increasing interaction between nations, managers’ cross-cultural sensitivity and skills will be in demand. The world has become an international marketplace – with easier transportation and communication. International business and relations demand the ability to move from one cultural **conditioning/orientation** to a multicultural arena.

Multicultural managers characteristically:

- Think beyond local perceptions, and transform stereotypes into positive views of people;
- Prepare for new mind shifts, while eliminating old mindsets;
- Re-create cultural assumptions, norms, and practices based on new insights and experiences;
- Reprogram their mental maps and constructs;
- Adapt readily to new and unusual circumstances and lifestyles;
- Welcome and facilitate transitional experiences;
- Acquire multicultural competencies and skills, including foreign languages;
- Create cultural synergy whenever and wherever feasible;
- Operate effectively in multinational/multicultural environments;
- Envision transnational opportunities and enterprises; and
- Create optimistic and doable scenarios for future.⁴⁰

Multicultural training and development is increasingly important in organisations. In the public sector, occupations such as the immigration service, customs department and even the police force have to be exposed to cross-cultural education.

Organisations are usually influenced by their leaders or management. Leadership can be despotic, individual or collective. Whether the leader functions through networking or task orientation, is a choice that reflects their culture. Diverse values and core beliefs of different societies significantly influence leadership and management of an organisation. Cross-cultural education serves an important role in developing managers with cross-cultural sensitivity and skills.

CONCLUSION

“Culture is *required knowledge* that people use to interpret experience and to generate social behaviour. Culture also has the characteristics of being *learned*, shared, transgenerational, symbolic, patterned, and *adaptive*”.⁴¹

Culture is acquired, learned and adaptive. The paper has highlighted areas where culture plays a significant role, namely in,

- Managerial Values and National Cultural Differences,
- Values Across Cultures,
- Cross-cultural Management:
- Centrality of Values,
- Culture and International
- Mergers and Acquisitions,
- Acculturation in Mergers and Acquisitions,
- Managing Cultural Differences,
- Cross-cultural Communication,
- International Negotiation and Culture, and
- The Multicultural Manager.

The paper has discussed how cultural considerations have significant bearing on each of the above areas. Despite its relativism, understanding cultural differences can assist a cross-cultural manager identify cues that facilitate effective decisions and responses.

The cross-cultural manager has to recognise that:

- Individuals make up a culture,
- Culture is a set of affirmations,
- Culture makes sense and have coherent points of view,
- Cultures provide their members with continuity and identity,
- Culture is in a state of balance between reciprocal values,
- Cultures are patterns,
- Cultures are about communications, and
- Cultures can be learned.⁴²

But not all writers propose understanding and accommodation. While emphasising that the Asian business sector has deep cultural dynamics at work within it, it is proposed that “in the transition from tradition to modernity, the Asian manager must be true to himself, i.e. true to his culture . . . the manager cannot afford to uproot himself too abruptly from his cultural origins and his social conditioning in his haste to enter the modern world”.⁴³ Societies still hesitate, are fearful of losing their values and are basically, distrustful.

Yet others argue for the growing demand for global managers, conversant with multiculturalism and able to work with and within different cultures. “The multicultural manager of the future, will be trained and sensitised to meet and work in other countries with an open mind. He will not bring his cultural baggage with him but the proper attitude of mind which will help him to respect and to learn more quickly the dynamics of cultures other than his own”.⁴⁴

The cross-cultural manager must be identified for:

- Natural empathy, sensitivity and open mindedness,
- Have a basic set of attitudes,
- Be technically proficient,
- Through training have special skills in developing relationships across cultures,
- Balance aspirations of host country against objective of headquarters of investing countries, and
- Be committed to societal development.

Some of the above qualities can be developed through training and appropriate exposure.

Understanding cultures, despite its relativity, will assist cross-cultural managers be effective in their undertakings. Successful global managers recognise that there are significant differences between various regions of the world and that they need to be flexible and try to evaluate each situation on its own merit rather than look for rules and principles. He has to avoid the danger of stereotyping different cultures, and manage with sensitivity and understanding.

Cross-cultural Management: Some Pointers

- Culture is based on the experiences of the group and their selection of norms that they believe will best meet their needs at the time.
- Culture is evident in a variety of situations including language, nonverbal communication, values and norms, religion, food, music, art and dressing.
- Culture is itself culturally defined based on one's life experiences and the group with which one is associated.
- Understand your own set of values and priorities and how it reflects norms of the group you represent.
- Be aware of your own behaviour choice and the values that trigger it.
- Observe and try to understand the verbal and nonverbal communication of others.
- Try to understand and appreciate values and priorities underlying their behaviour.
- In interaction, identify areas of common values and where you differ.
- In interactions enhance listening and watching, and especially be aware of your feelings.
- Try to develop a new cultural value with those you are interacting with, towards successful cross-cultural relationships.

Adapted from "Multicultural
Management 2000" p.262

Endnotes:

1. Kelley L. Ross, Relativism, homepage (Internet).
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
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