
Business Dynamics: Contemporary Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

According to various Cross-Cultural management studies, management perceptions and approaches differ across cultures, in particular, the management of Human Resource. This article presents a number of implications for the appraisal process and its different functions and characteristics when applied within a cross-cultural context. Culture is identified as an important factor influencing the understanding and interpretation of the appraisal process, its development, implementation, and other appraisal related elements and functions. Challenges of practitioners in business world include the adaptation of Human Resource procedures and practices to local cultures; managers need to be aware of sensitive employees holding different cultural value and belief systems. It is inevitable to have conflict when people from different cultural backgrounds work together. Cultural differences influence individual's perceived status within a work group or team. Cultural differences in the perceived status lead to differences in beliefs about legitimacy of group participation and the nature of the status hierarchy of the group, which in-turn affect the amount of conflict in the group (Ravlin et al., 2000). A lot of times managers try to put together a multicultural workplace without trying to integrate people better. Learning to collaborate creatively with people from other cultures is a vital skill in today's business environment.

Another issue in context of cross cultural management is changing nature of nonstandard overseas assignments (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2000). Nonstandard assignment includes commuting overseas (typically weekly or bi-weekly basis), rotational (Home-Overseas-Home) assignments and contractual (Short-term 6-to-12-months) posting (Welch & Worm, 2006). This issue associated with this includes family separation, stress, health issue, safety concern and inconsistent work demands.

The dual-career phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent worldwide. This lifestyle often generates stresses and strains, at home and at work, for couples juggling multiple demands, which can have negative consequences for organization. While most empirical research into this life style has been conducted in the United States and Britain, very little has been carried out in Australia. The particular study, based on data from an Australian sample of 121 lawyers and accountants, was therefore aimed at analysing the levels of stress, work-family conflict and overload among dual-career and single-career couples. The results confirm that dual-career couples experience higher level of stress, work-family conflict and over-load than single-career couples. To enhance labour productivity and organisational effectiveness, human resource managers therefore need to take account of the potential for dual-career stress, overload and conflict, and respond flexibly to dual-career employee status.

This study based on Culture, Classical Management Principles, and International Planning evaluates that classical theoretical framework of planning and its relevancy is an international context. Additionally, it integrates Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions into the discussion to provide an exploratory analysis of how national culture characteristics may impact cross-cultural acceptance and application of classical planning principles.

INTRODUCTION

Today's world of work and organizations have become demanding and increasingly turbulent. Business organizations are more focusing on creating organizations that add value to customers, investors as well as employees. The eight major challenges faced by the business organizations are globalization, responsiveness to customer, increasing revenue and decreasing cost, building organizational capacity, change and transformation, implementing technology, attracting and developing human capital and ensuring fundamental and long lasting change (Ulrich 1997). Organizations can copy technology, manufacturing process, products and strategy, however human resources practices are difficult to copy and hence it's the only competitive advantage in today's competitive world. Companies need to be culturally diverse in order to succeed (Roy Y. J Chua). Increasing integration of organizations across business and national borders demand that modern

manager should be able to operate multi-nationally. The main problem with the people in the organizations is that they tend to compare their culture with others and find faults with the latter. They pride in their own culture and look down upon others.

This document highlights some of the key issues relating to business world and organization working in highly complex environment and provides a helpful insight into the challenges and issues of cultural variations in an organization. It will be useful to anyone who works with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, either in a face-to-face context or through remote team working. The main aim of this document is to develop a better understanding of challenges and issues faced by individual while working in cross cultural team. More and more companies are dealing with cross-cultural issues either as a result of having divisions located in other countries or because the people being hired speak English as a second language. The cultural mix within departments, on project teams and even in management ranks, creates an entirely new set of challenges for organizations. The impact of culture differences on teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, support for authority and problem solving is profound and often confusing.

CULTURE AS ESSENCE

General texts on international management and international organizational behavior which explicitly address cross cultural issues devote a good deal of space to a definition of the term ‘culture.’ But, as literature reviews by Adler and Bartholomew (1992) and Darlington (1996) make clear, this literature is very wide-ranging in its approaches and in the dimensions used by researchers. It is, however, our overwhelming impression that the international, cross cultural management literature, in contrast to the literature on organizational cultures, is not so much devoted to a discussion of and reflection on the theoretical assumptions embedded in a certain concept of ‘culture’. In international, cross cultural management literature, culture is more seen as an area of interest, referring to something ‘soft’, human, unquantifiable, difficult to account for in rational terms and provided with a label of convenience, namely ‘culture’.

The majority of the researchers, among them Hofstede and Trompenaars, seem to build on the classic concept of culture, developed by Western anthropologists in the 1950s and 1960s. According to this essentialist understanding, culture is seen as a relatively stable, homogeneous, internally consistent system of assumptions, values, and norms transmitted by socialization to the next generation. Or as Hofstede puts it, culture is the ‘software of the mind’ that individuals acquire in their childhood and in educational institutions through ‘mental programming’ (Hofstede, 1980). Moreover culture is seen as something that members of a community (e.g. an organization or a nation) ‘have’ or ‘belong to’.

Culture can be defined as a learned set of values, beliefs, norms and assumptions transmitted from one generation to the next, becoming an accepted way of being, doing and thinking within a collective group. Culture refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape way we understand the world. It includes group that we are born into such as gender, race or national origin. It also includes group we join or become part of.

Our behavior is shaped by many factors and culture is one of the powerful factors that act on us. Culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see and how we express ourselves. As people from different cultural background take exciting challenge of working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. These conflicts can lead to stress and misunderstanding at work places which in turn effects productivity of employees.

Research into culture and its impact in business and management studies is highly contentious. Cross-cultural management issues arise in a range of business contexts. Within individual firms, for example, managers from a foreign parent company need to understand that local employees from the host country may require different organization structures and HRM procedures.

Cross-border joint ventures, alliances, or buyer–supplier relationships between two or more firms also require a cultural compromise. Finally, for firms to sell successfully to foreign customers requires culturally sensitive adaptations to products, services, marketing, and advertising.

Firms also tend to have different organizational and decision-making practices depending on where they have evolved and which cultures and subcultures they encompass. For firms to build successful alliances and partnerships, or for M&A activities to succeed at the company-to-company level, there needs to be an understanding of the organizational differences between them. Figure 1.1 outlines, at the most general level, links between business contexts and particular characteristics of individuals or groups that are influenced by social and cultural norms of a particular region. At the face-to-face level in meetings the language and behavior of different peoples vary and their mutual understanding of each other’s culture will influence the effectiveness and efficiency of communication between them.

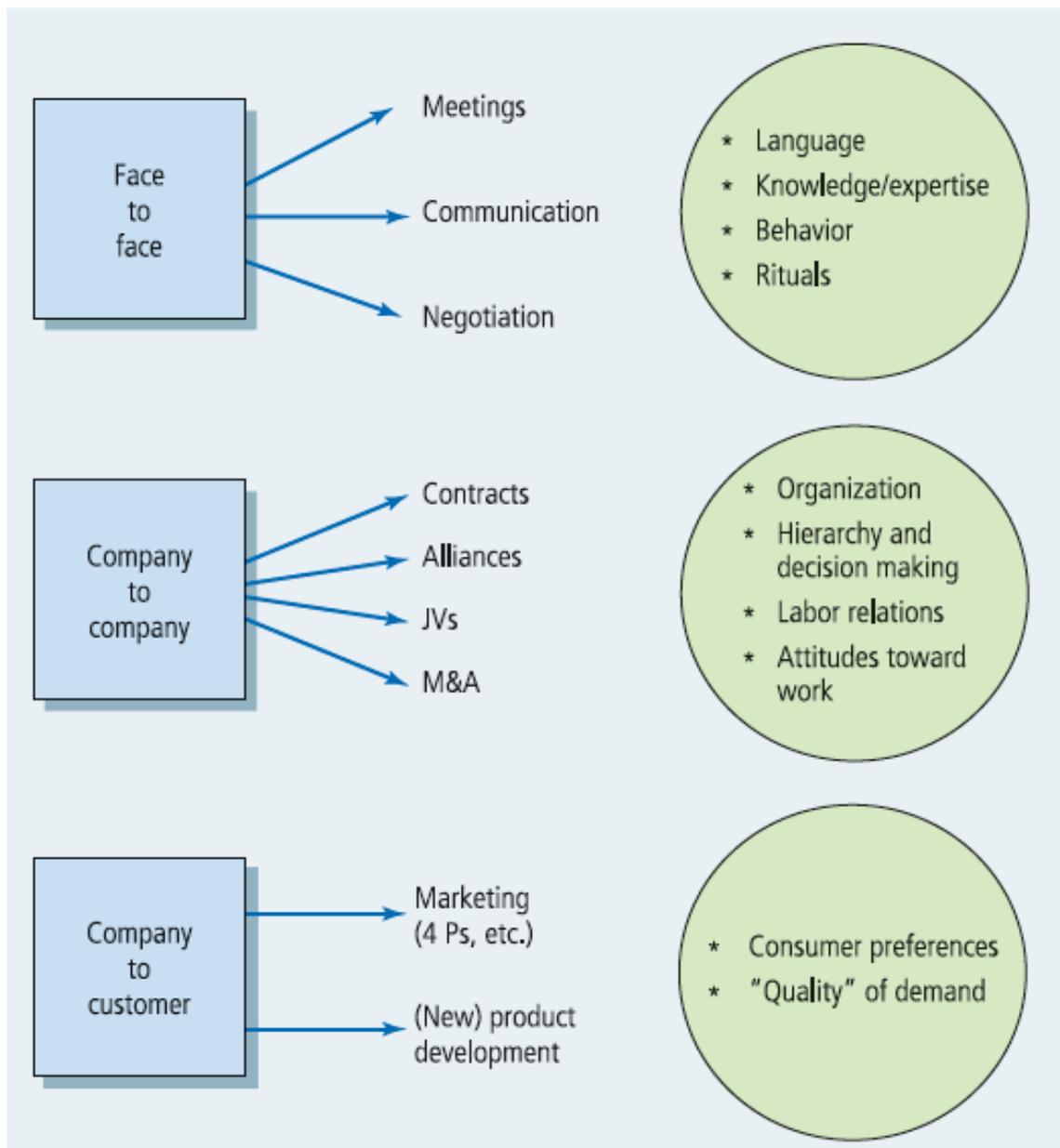


Figure 1.1 Cross-cultural business contexts

Organizations from different countries will have developed different beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior based on their underlying national culture. A wide range of differences could be important, including attitudes

toward work and workplace practices, management–labor relations, the decision-making hierarchy, and division of responsibilities. Cross-border M&A often also requires changes to the marketing and branding of products and services as sales are expanded into new markets. Differences in the language, values, and preferences of customers in different countries also need to be taken into account.

Culture influences the behavior and preferences of clients and customers. To sell successfully in a foreign market, a manager needs to adapt his or her product or service to meet the different needs of that particular group of customers. Any alteration in advertising, marketing, product or service features, after-sales support, technical back-up, documentation, etc., will be partly guided by cultural differences. Key elements of culture include language, religion, values, attitudes, customs, and norms of a group or society. Language is perhaps the most important key to understanding culture in general and the specific values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of a particular individual or group. English is widely accepted as the language of business; many global institutions and companies have adopted English as their official language. For many firms, such as Toyota, Hitachi, and IBM Japan, English-speaking ability is a prerequisite for promotion. However, any assumption that speaking the same language removes cultural differences is dangerous—it normally just hides them.

Across all of the business contexts in Figure 1.1 ignorance of cultural differences represents a common stumbling block for international managers.

Ethnocentrism

The belief that one's own way of doing things is superior to that of others, can also be a major barrier to good international management. The challenge lies in recognizing differences, combining the advantages that stem from different styles and approaches, adjusting and adapting to succeed with different people, in different partnerships, and in different markets.

Different value systems

Values are the basic foundation of any culture in any country. They are deep-rooted attitudes that have a significant influence on people's behaviour and express people's attitudes toward the most important topics in life, such as their roles in society, attitudes toward relationships, time, and nature.

Peoples' values are expressed through what they say and what they do. Therefore people working together from different cultural backgrounds may find that they approach and execute tasks differently because of differences in their cultural values.

In fact, values can influence individual goals and intentions. They also affect what kind of behaviours individuals will find rewarding and satisfying. While some cultures emphasize competition, risk-taking and freedom, others are more interested in the group harmony and the sense of belonging. Even others put more value in reputation, family security and social recognition. Accordingly, the desirability of different rewards would be quite different across these cultures. In other words, managers supervising employees from different cultures would need to carefully consider the types of rewards to offer for high levels of performance.

A number of models have been proposed to explain how the value systems of countries differ. The most frequently cited model is that proposed by Hofstede. He suggests five fundamental dimensions to national culture. These can be summarised as:

1. Hierarchy: Hofstede calls this dimension 'power distance'; it relates to the extent to which individuals within a culture accept unequal distribution of power. At one end of this continuum are cultures that value hierarchy. In these cultures, the emphasis is placed on leader status; individuals will expect the team leader to provide direction and make decisions. Individuals within these cultures tend to be accepting of rules and questioning authority may be discouraged.

At the other end of the continuum are cultures that place a lot of emphasis on team involvement, with wide consultation and group decision-making being common. Questioning authority is likely to be accepted or even encouraged in these cultures.

2. Ambiguity: This dimension, labeled by Hofstede as 'Uncertainty Avoidance' deals with the degree to which individuals feel comfortable with ambiguity. At one end of the continuum are cultures that encourage risk taking; in these cultures individuals are likely to feel very comfortable trying new and different ways of approaching things. At the other end of the continuum are cultures that place more value on routine, regulation and formality. Individuals in these cultures are likely to prefer tried and tested ways of doing things rather than taking risks with unknown methodologies.

3. Individualism: This dimension relates to the extent to which the individual values self-determination. In an individualistic culture people will place a lot of value on individual success and the need to look after oneself. At the other end of the dimension are collectivist cultures in which individuals will place more value on group loyalty and serving the interests of the group.

4. Achievement-Oriented: Hofstede describes one end of this dimension as masculine and the other end as feminine because it relates to values that have traditionally been associated with gender in western society. A culture at the masculine end of the continuum will be very achievement-oriented, valuing things such as success, achievement and money. At the other end of the continuum are cultures that place more value on aspects such as quality of life, interpersonal harmony and sharing.

5. Long-term orientation: This dimension was a later addition to Hofstede's work. At one end of the continuum are cultures that focus on long-term rewards; at the other end are cultures that are more concerned with immediate gain.

Hofstede suggests that a country's cultural values are reflected along a continuum of these five dimensions. Individuals' expectations and behaviours are likely to be influenced by their country's cultural values. For example, according to his research, team members from a country that is low on power distance, low on uncertainty avoidance and high on individualism are likely to:

- Expect to take a role in deciding the team's direction.
- Be prepared to question a team leader's decisions.
- Feel comfortable trying different approaches.
- Focus on achieving their own personal goals, with the view that successful completion of those will facilitate group success.

On the other hand, team members from a country that is high on power distance and low on individualism are likely to:

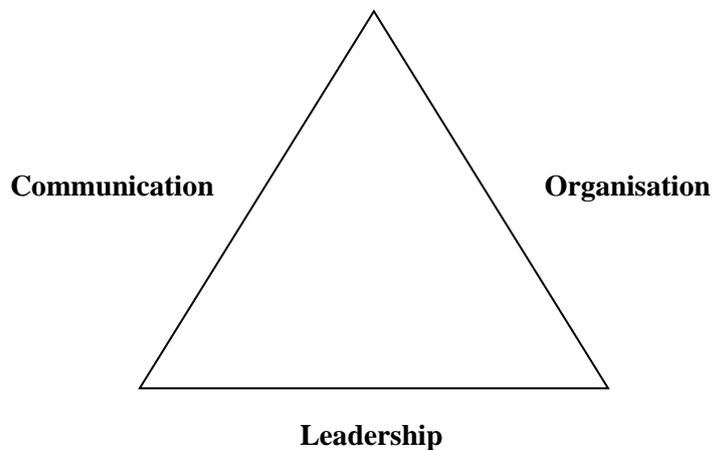
- Expect a clear hierarchical team structure, with a clear team leadership.
- Be highly disciplined.
- Focus on providing support to other team members to ensure that the overall team outcome is achieved.

The dominant value system of a country is not always at the extreme of one end of the continuum. For example, one country in Hofstede's research falls somewhere in the middle of the power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions, suggesting a strong need for hierarchy, but also a tendency to break rules when needed.

Hofstede's framework is useful to help us to think about how misunderstandings may occur within work teams. For example, imagine an international team that is being led by someone from a cultural background that values hierarchy. That leader may expect to make decisions without consulting her/his team members. This may damage the relationship with those team members from cultures at the opposite end of the continuum who expect to be consulted and make joint decisions.

Management dimensions of culture

Cultural differences can make a significant difference at the company-to-company and face-to-face levels. The three management dimensions of cultural are communication, organization, and leadership.



I. Communication

Cultural communication is described as either explicit or implicit. Verbal communication in an explicit culture, like Germany, the US, Canada and Great Britain focuses on being straight-forward, frank, to the point, where a yes means yes, and a no means no. Those cultures that practice more indirect communication, such as France, Italy, Spain, and Arab, Latin-American and Asian countries believe the precise meaning of what is said depends on the context, not just the words. The listener is expected to interpret the meaning, often based heavily on nonverbal cues. A “yes” can mean “Yes, I heard you,” not “Yes, I’m in agreement.” It’s easy to see how explicit communicators would see implicit communicators as vague, overly flowery, and unclear. Implicit communicators would see explicit communicators as giving too much information, aggressive and lacking in style and finesse.

Effective communication is critical within any work team. Within an international team it is often the area that individuals have the most difficulty with. There are a number of aspects of communication that can cause problems when working with people from different backgrounds. Two of the most common ones are discussed below.

1. Language

Language problems may occur if all individuals within a team do not use the same first language. In these situations, for ease of communication, the team often chooses a common language that they can use for group communications. Language differences between individuals can occur at two different levels:

a. Vocabulary - Confusion can arise if individuals simply do not understand one another in terms of the language being used; difference in vocabulary, , pronunciation, use of slang and idioms can all cause problems.

b. Language style - Different styles of language can also lead to difficulties in comprehension. For example, some people may be very direct, whilst others are indirect; some may be expansive whilst others are succinct. Over-evaluation of individuals' style of language can lead to a misunderstanding of their intent.

2. Non-verbal behaviours

Gestures form a significant part of methods of communication. However, there are few if any universal gestures. Non-verbal behaviours or 'body language' vary considerably from one culture to another. For example, a high level of eye contact is considered a sign of attentiveness in some cultures and a sign of rudeness in others. In some cultures individuals are encouraged to express their emotions openly, whilst in others openly demonstrating feelings are discouraged. These differences in body language can lead to misunderstandings between people of different cultural backgrounds.

Over a period of time it may be possible to learn some of the key differences between cultures in terms of body language. But the range of non-verbal behaviours we all use and the subtle differences between our behaviours means it would be difficult to produce a comprehensive list of all of the differences between cultures, let alone learn and remember them. Another problem is that much non-verbal behaviour is very subtle; as we tend to only see, hear, feel and smell those things that have some meaning to us, we are likely to miss much of the non-verbal behaviour expressed within other cultures.

II. Organization

Organization styles range from organic, informal, or people oriented to systematic or mechanistic, formal, or task oriented, in keeping with some common organizational dimensions described by sociologists throughout history (such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim). Organizations that operate very much around personal relationships and social networks contrast those that are much more functional and logical. In fact different cultures and different firms display elements of both these characteristics, but the balance varies considerably and can create tensions when groups of people or firms from different ends of the spectrum interact or try to cooperate. As an aid to predicting differences among individuals, groups, or firms, and understanding the significance of these variations, relative differences among countries, organizations, and groups of people are important, rather than any absolute scores. For example, family companies are characteristically directive, individual oriented but organic. Multinational firms are usually more autocratic and mechanistic. Consulting and professional services firms are often mechanistic and emphasize individual performance and rewards but may also be fairly team oriented. Entrepreneurial new ventures will usually be organic, unsystematic, and group oriented.

III. Leadership

Leadership styles range from individual oriented, directive, autocratic, top down, or authoritarian to group oriented, participative, democratic, bottom up, or egalitarian. Again, cultural groups and corporations often encompass both kinds of leadership but tend to reflect one dominant style. Individual managers from cultures that score high on the power distance or assertiveness dimensions are likely to be viewed by those from other cultures as autocratic and directive but will tend to view others as indecisive and too compromising. They will not want to spend too much time discussing issues to achieve a consensus. If they also reflect an organic or informal (low uncertainty avoidance) culture, this will result in an instinctive or unsystematic decision-making and implementation style, and they might be viewed as an unpredictable autocrat. This contrasts the combination of high power distance and high

Uncertainty avoidance, which results in a more directive and mechanistic style. Such leaders prefer established formal routines and a command-and-control bureaucracy, while other managers are likely to see this as over-regulated and inflexible.

Attitudes to time

The issue for international teams is that attitude towards time is thought to vary between cultures. Polychronic and monochronic behaviours are ways of defining different attitudes towards dealing with time. Treating time with a monochronic attitude results in attempting to do only one task at a time, whereas those individuals who treat time with a polychronic attitude typically regard time as a naturally recurring phenomenon that can be used for many purposes at once.

Individuals with a Monochronic attitude to time will tend to compartmentalise their time, allocating specific times to specific tasks, and will focus on one task before moving onto the next. However, someone with a polychronic attitude to time will tend to multi-task, attempting several tasks at the same time. Problems can occur for international teams if different team members have different attitudes towards time; for example, someone with a monochronic attitude to time may feel that a colleague displaying polychronic behaviours seems disorganised, and may feel frustrated when that person seems reluctant to keep to a specific time for meetings; in contrast the person with a polychronic attitude to time may get frustrated with colleagues



displaying monochronic behaviours, particularly when they seem reluctant to take time out on an ad hoc basis to discuss pressing issues.

Multinational organization structures: imperialist or independent.

Key dilemma for international firms is the degree to which they promote or even impose a common, standardized corporate culture across the organization. Although this will create economies of scale and be more efficient in a number of respects, it will also stifle diversity and create clashes with local cultures and ways of doing things around the organization.

Firms respond to this dilemma in different ways, with different outcomes. At the simplest level we can map out a range of responses from what is termed imperialist, where a common culture is imposed wherever a company has a presence, to federalist or independent structures, where each national subsidiary bases its own culture on local norms and values. There are problems associated with either of these extremes and most firms try to steer a middle line, standardizing some elements across the whole organization to centralize and simplify some practices and unify employees, while allowing differentiation where necessary. This transnational culture allows for a compromise in work styles, values, and approaches, harnessing the strengths that lie in diversity.

Table 1.2 illustrates a range of organization types. In particular, it links elements of organization structure and design with cultural orientation, for example, in the relationship between headquarters and regional subsidiaries. It specifically extends the ethnocentric, polycentric, and geocentric typologies introduced by Perlmutter in the 1960s.²¹

- **Ethnocentric** firms are where top management is dominated by home-country nationals, and procedures and management styles are transferred from the head office and imposed on regional subsidiaries in place of local ways of doing things.
- **Polycentric** firms tend to act like a federation of semi-autonomous organizations with financial controls or strict reporting structures holding them together. Subsidiaries are able to reflect the local cultural norms, and headquarters appreciates the need for different organization designs, procedural norms, rewards systems, etc., as long as profits flow to the center.
- **Geocentric** firms are seen as the ideal, collaborative, and meritocratic form of global organization.
- (Unilever is seen as an example based on the above statement.) An equal sharing of power and responsibility between headquarters and subsidiary; senior management promoted according to ability rather than nationality; subsidiaries that share worldwide objectives with managers focusing beyond national market interests. In the geocentric organization the benefits of cultural diversity, such as knowledge of local customers and business practices, are harnessed for the good of the firm as a whole. The costs of diversity, such as language and communication problems, different values, and attitudes toward work, are minimized. Firms moving toward this more balanced, geocentric approach have to recognize diversity and its effects and identify which elements of consistency in regulations and values should be promoted, where and when. Local divisions must identify aspects of diversity that are most important to them and their operations and take the lead in expressing and managing these differences. Discussion, interaction, cross-divisional teamwork and job rotation, support, awareness, and understanding go alongside training programs, language courses, and cultural assimilation.

	Imperialist	Interventionist	Interactive	Independent
Organization	Ethnocentric	Ethnocentric	Geocentric	Polycentric
Structure	Steep hierarchy	Flat hierarchy	Network	Federation
Strategy	Dictated	Centrally decided	Jointly specified	Locally specified
Decision-making	Centralized	Distributed	Shared	Devolved

Table 1.2 Organization types reflecting cultural predispositions

Using technology

The geographical distances that often exist between international team members means that technology plays an important role in enabling individuals to communicate on a regular basis. Telephones and video-conferencing allow geographically disparate individuals to communicate verbally, whilst e-mail and faxes enable fast, efficient communication 'out of hours'. However, using technology for communication does have difficulties. Problems with incompatible technology or lack of access to appropriate technology can mean that some individuals do not receive all of the information they need to be able to perform effectively. Furthermore our increasing dependence on fast communication methods that do not involve face-to-face contact, such as e-mail, can lead to misunderstandings. This is because removing face-to-face contact limits opportunity for recipients to observe the expression and tone of the message, and for communicators to check understanding and ask questions.

Risk factors

Governments may change legislation regarding work permits, visas, duration of assignments, or extensions of assignments. Quotas have to be approved by authorities.

Tax laws may change and not all countries have double taxation agreements with the home countries of all expats. Currency restrictions for moving both individual and corporate funds out of the country differ in various regions. Employers must at all times take appropriate measures to ensure compliance.

Remuneration concerns

Globally, expatriate remuneration is one of the biggest challenges for organisations. The shift to global business is still in process, creating new concerns and issues to be dealt with. Factors such as location or hardship allowances and cost-of-living (COL) allowances are vital for providing legally and intellectually justifiable methods in arriving at the final package offered to expats.

Location (hardship) allowances are identified by ranking all countries against a specific home country to host country on a variety of factors such as climate, health, culture, goods and services, language, religion, isolation, housing and education, security risks, and social and political tensions. All of those have a major affect on the total cost to the company for all assignees. Companies should use data from specialist organisations that conduct regular research around the world in calculating location allowances. Cost of living is the difference between the costs of a basket of goods in the home country as compared to the cost of the same basket of goods in the host country. Most salaries are offered net in a common hard currency.

The dual career issue

Expatriate partners involved in dual career couples (couples in which both partners are psychologically committed to their respective careers) are faced with the additional challenge of finding a job and ultimately abandon and sacrifice their own careers. Adjustment can be thus more problematic for dual career couples which need, not only to adapt to the host country but also try to different kinds of strategies in order to coordinate both careers (Mäkelä et al. 2011a). The most important and frequent problem faced by dual career couples in international assignments is the difficulty, or the impossibility in some cases, for the partner to find a job in the host country. To follow the expatriate, the spouse often has to resign from his/her job and abandon a potential career, which can impact on the expatriation success (Mohr and Klein 2004; Kupka and Cathro 2007).

A recent survey on expatriate spouse employment (Permits Foundation 2009) show that almost all of them were engaged in a professional activity before accompanying the expatriate on international assignment and only one third were able to pursue their own career. Seventy-five percent of those who were not working during the time abroad mentioned wanting to do it, and a great majority thought the employment issue had direct effects on adjustment, family relationships, health and well-being (Permits Foundation 2009). Other large scale surveys (ORC Worldwide 2005; GMAC 2008) reported similar results. Generally, the dual career

issue is the origin of several problems affecting the expatriation management such as higher refusal rates to relocate internationally, more difficult (or at least different) adjustment to the host country or reduction of family income.

Expatriate partners may be not allowed to work because of work permits and visa limitations and when this kind of restrictions do not exist in the host country, they have to face severe job-finding related obstacles such as cultural and language barriers, unrecognized foreign educational or professional qualifications, lack of available and suitable jobs and general preference for local hires (Pellico and Stroh 1997) The partners forced to abandon their career are in a more fragile psychological state, which is not only due to the career interruption, but also to the exclusive focus on the partner's career at the expense of their own professional interests.

Conclusion

Working in an international team can be challenging. However, as this document shows, there are a number of simple steps that you can take to minimise the challenges and maximise the benefits of international team working. Think about the people you are working with, take time to get to know their working style and consider things from their point of view. Do not make assumptions and do not dismiss ideas; just because something did not work last time does not mean it will not work this time. To manage effectively in a global or a domestic multicultural environment, we need to recognize the differences and learn to use them to our advantage, rather than either attempting to ignore differences or simply allowing differences to cause problems (Adler, 1997). Rather managers should be taught how to respect the differences at work and how to work with them to maximize the contribution of each employee (Cascio, 1998). Managers must understand their firm's culture first and then implement diversity strategies according to that culture.

Being aware of cross-cultural differences and in particular our own attitudes, behaviours and biases is essential for effective international team working. But being aware is only part of the process, we also need to have the skills and consistently use those skills to ensure that we communicate and work effectively with people from different backgrounds. An important point to remember is that cross-cultural team working is not about minimising the differences between people, rather it is about making the most of the added value that a diverse team can offer.

We can also learn to collaborate across cultural lines as individuals and as a society. Awareness of cultural differences doesn't have to divide us from each other. It doesn't have to paralyze us either, for fear of not saying the "right thing." In fact, becoming more aware of our cultural differences, as well as exploring our similarities, can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other. International projects that use effective cross-cultural teams can provide a source of experience and innovative thinking to enhance the competitive position of their companies, and to resolve potential communication barriers. Multi-cultural projects are becoming the norm. More and more projects are being executed successfully using multicultural teams. To achieve project goals and avoid potential risks, project managers should be culturally sensitive and promote creativity and motivation through flexible leadership.

Lastly, if we are open to learning about people from other cultures, we become less lonely. Prejudice and stereotypes separate us from whole groups of people who could be friends and partners in working for change. Many of us long for real contact. Talking with people different from ourselves gives us hope and energizes us to take on the challenge of improving our communities and worlds.

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