Culture and Cross-Cultural Management

Laurence Romani

Contents

1. Introduction 12
2. Studies on culture in management 13
3. Positivist views: ‘Culture and values’ 13
4. Interpretive views: ‘Culture and meanings’ 21
5. Critical views: ‘Culture and power’ 24
6. Summary and conclusions 26
   i. Discussion questions 27
   ii. Case study: ‘Not the way we do business around here’ 28
   iii. Further reading 36
   iv. Internet resources 39
   v. Self-assessment questions 40
   vi. References 40

1This chapter is part of the research project ‘The hidden side of cross-cultural management’, financed by the Swedish Research Council, Vetenskapsrådet (412-2009-2020).
Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives

Learning objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Understand the validity of three different views on culture: positivist, interpretive and critical
- Explain the major points of difference between these views. Present the different management knowledge developed by each view
- Analyse a situation using each of the three views
- Combine each mode of analysis to reach an enriched understanding of culture and cross-cultural management in IHRM

Chapter outline

The chapter provides an analytical method useful for dealing with situations involving culture in IHRM. This analytical method derives from the combination of three views on culture, and the resulting knowledge they create. Together, these views provide a rich understanding and, consequently, can be advantageous when dealing with cross-cultural environments.

1 Introduction

What is culture? A set of norms, beliefs and values shared by a group? Rather, is it how people make sense of the world around them? Or even a rhetorical device used by those in power to reproduce inequalities in organizations? In management research,

Table 1.1  The three views on culture and their related knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivist views: Culture and values</th>
<th>Interpretive views: Culture and meanings</th>
<th>Critical views: Culture and power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researchers search for laws and regularities</td>
<td>Researchers search for meanings: how people make sense of their situation</td>
<td>Researchers’ investigation reveals silenced voices and hidden structures of inequality and domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental knowledge, predictions, development and test of models</td>
<td>Knowledge on sense-making and cognitive processes, on social constructions</td>
<td>Knowledge that questions and challenges, exposing power relationships and inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Cultural dimension constructs such as ‘Power Distance’ or ‘Assertiveness’, value-dimensions valid across many countries</td>
<td>Example: Meaning systems associated to notions such as ‘leadership’, ‘job description’ or ‘competence’, local and specific knowledge</td>
<td>Example: Talks about ‘culture differences’ can be used to masquerade another issue (of power), unveils structures of domination with local and specific examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

02_Harzing and Pinnington 4e_RAB140680111_Ch 01_Part I.indd   12
9/23/2014   5:07:50 PM
views on what culture is, and its implications for management, differ strongly. The aim of this chapter is to present an analytical method for understanding IHRM situations involving culture. This method is based on the combination of three major views on culture used in cross-cultural management research. Combining these three views, and their respective forms of knowledge, develops a rich analysis which can be advantageous in IHRM when dealing with culture.

2 Studies on culture in management

Studies on culture and management are prolific and diverse. It is a challenging task to gain a clear overview since one needs to take multiple research streams into consideration. Cross-cultural management encompasses studies from a variety of research literatures including comparative management (Redding, 1994; Child, 2000), cross-cultural management (e.g. Soderberg and Holden, 2002; Leung et al., 2005; Kirkman et al., 2006; Lowe et al., 2007; Tsui et al., 2007), international management (e.g. Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Sackmann and Phillips, 2004) and cross-cultural psychology of organizational behaviour (e.g. Gelfand et al., 2007). While many reviews of culture tend to consider only one of these streams of research, Primecz et al. (2009) and Romani et al. (forthcoming) offer a broad presentation considering major research paradigms. By following a broad-based approach, this chapter addresses the diversity of studies in cross-cultural management and identifies three main viewpoints rooted in different research paradigms (see Romani, 2010a). The next three sections of this chapter briefly explain and discuss the positivist and then the interpretive and critical viewpoints on culture, cross-cultural management and IHRM.

3 Positivist views: ‘Culture and values’

Within the positivist paradigm, the functionalist group of studies are the most prolific in cross-cultural management. In the functionalist approach, culture is seen as providing answers to the basic needs that human beings have to fulfil and this is the foundation for what are known as cultural dimensions (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). The idea is that there are distinct ways in which culture can fulfil these human needs, thus creating variations in the cultural dimensions. These variations are linked to different values. For instance, human societies are compelled to deal with their environment (see Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961) and the different ways in which they can do this are claimed to be variations (e.g. harmony, mastery or subjugation) within the cultural dimension ‘Relation to broad environment’ (see, for example, Trompenaars, 1993; Maznevski et al., 2002). Each variation is embedded in a set of values, that ‘people carry around in their heads’, thus giving to positivist researchers the possibility of investigating culture through values.
Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives

The functionalist approach substantially influenced seminal contributions by Hofstede (see Hofstede, 2001) and by Schwartz (1994), the works by Maznevski et al. (2002), as well as by the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) research project (House et al., 2004). Likewise, the legitimacy of searching for social axioms (beliefs endorsed and used by people to guide their behaviour in different work situations) is also based on the functionalist argument: they are important for human survival and functioning (see Leung et al., 2002: 288). It is a similar foundation that supports the investigation of ‘sources of guidance’ (see Smith et al., 2002). In sum, culture is said to fulfil the function of meeting human needs. Since they are universal human needs, they are universal (etic) aspects to culture (the cultural dimensions) and to human behaviour. The etic approach is viewed as general, and it often focuses on previously developed constructs or concepts that are then investigated, for example, in a number of different countries. Cultural dimension constructs such as ‘individualism-collectivism’ are argued to be etic: the concept is understood to be valid and coherent across countries. This means that the influence of this dimension on IHRM practices can be compared across countries.

An impressive amount of studies have used the cultural dimensions to test the relationship between culture and various aspects of management, such as motivation, reward allocation, hierarchy, preferred forms of training and leadership (see review by Kirkman et al., 2006). For example, in a cultural environment scoring high on Power Distance, organizations are likely to have centralized decision-making structures, tall hierarchies, a large proportion of supervisory personnel, privileges and status symbols for managers that are both expected and accepted, and a wide salary range between employees at the top and the bottom of the organization pyramid (Hofstede, 2001: 107–108). Hofstede describes representative behaviour for low scores on Power Distance as ‘decentralized decision structures; less concentration of authority. The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat and subordinates expect to be consulted’ (Hofstede, 2001: 107–108).

Table 1.2 Sample of argued representative behaviour linked to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and examples of country positioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>High score</th>
<th>Low score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>• Centralized decision structures; more concentration of authority</td>
<td>• Decentralized decision structures; less concentration of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which the less powerful members of a society expect and accept unequal distribution of power</td>
<td>• The ideal boss is a well-meaning autocrat or good father; sees self as benevolent decision maker</td>
<td>• The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat; sees self as practical, orderly and relying on support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subordinates expect to be told</td>
<td>• Subordinates expect to be consulted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, France</td>
<td>• Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Dimension High score Low score

#### Masculinity
When emotional gender roles are clearly distinct, this is a masculine society; it is feminine when they overlap
- Live in order to work
- Stress on equity, mutual competition, and performance
- Career ambitions are compulsory for men, optional for women
- Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Mexico, Germany
- Work in order to live
- Stress on equality, solidarity and quality of work life
- Career ambitions are optional for both men and women
- Sweden, Denmark, Costa Rica, Finland, Thailand

#### Uncertainty Avoidance
Extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations
- Strong loyalty to employer
- Appeal of hierarchical control role
- Top managers involved in operations
- Power of superiors depends on control of uncertainties
- Greece, Belgium, Japan, Peru, Argentina
- Weak loyalty to employer
- Appeal of transformational leader role
- Top managers involved in strategy
- Power of supervisors depends on position and relationships
- Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, Malaysia, USA

#### Individualism
Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between the individuals are loose, Collectivism pertains to societies in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups
- Employees supposed to act as ‘economic men’
- Hiring and promotion decisions should be based on skills and rules only
- Employer–employee relationship is a business deal in a ‘labour market’
- USA, Australia, Netherlands, South Africa
- Employees act in the interest of their in-group, not necessarily of themselves
- Hiring and promotion decisions take employees’ in-group into account
- Employer–employee relationship is basically moral, like a family link
- Ecuador, Panama, Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru

#### Long-term Orientation
Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards
- Persistence, perseverance
- Relationships ordered by status, and this order is observed
- Leisure time not so important
- China, Hong Kong, Japan, Brazil, India
- Status not major issue in relationships
- Leisure time important
- Quick results expected
- Pakistan, Nigeria, Canada, USA

#### Indulgence versus Restraint
Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of needs related to enjoying life and having fun
- Personal life control
- Importance of leisure, enjoying life, having fun
- Freedom of speech viewed as relatively important
- Mexico, Colombia, Sweden, Australia, UK
- Moral discipline
- Gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms
- Thrift is important
- Freedom of speech not primary concern
- Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, Russia, China, India

Source: based on Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede et al. (2010)
In an environment scoring high on Uncertainty Avoidance, there is a tendency for more formal conceptions of management, hierarchical controls and roles. There is also a tendency for a stronger belief in specialists and in expertise (see Hofstede, 2001: 169–170).

In the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004), additional cultural dimensions are developed and existing dimensions are further refined (see Table 1.3). For example, GLOBE considers the dimension 'Humane Orientation' that encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2004). In an environment scoring low on Humane Orientation, there will tend to be greater use of IHRM for control and coordination of organizations, than in an environment scoring high on Humane Orientation, where 'organizations are relatively autonomous in their employee relations’ (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2004: 584).

Assertiveness is found to have a positive relationship with an ‘autonomous’ leader (independent and individualistic), and a negative relationship with a leader who is team-oriented and participative (Den Hartog, 2004).

Cross-cultural management research largely adopts a mainstream psychological approach (see Smith and Bond, 1998), that tends to define culture as an independent variable influencing human cognition or behaviour. Values, and consequently the study of values across countries, are a fundamental part of cross-cultural comparison studies. The Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) is the point of departure for the seven value-types (similar to cultural dimensions) devised by Schwartz and colleagues (see Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987). He distinguishes the same seven types of values in each country (Smith and Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz, 2004) and assesses their implications for management (see Table 1.4).

For example, in the dimension Egalitarianism, voluntary cooperation is emphasized, 'leaders motivate by enabling', and members 'flexibly enact their roles' (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000: 420). Role overload and role conflicts are more likely to be reported by managers working in a cultural environment where values of 'Mastery' and 'Hierarchy' are praised, and where values linked to 'Harmony' have a low priority (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000: 427). In environments where values of 'Embeddedness' are important for individuals, it is less likely that managers will choose pay levels exclusively based on their employees' work productivity. They tend to also take employees' family situation into account (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000: 432).

Another important contribution made by psychologists to cross-cultural management research is the work of Triandis (1995) on individualism and collectivism. This dimension is the most researched and documented of the cultural dimensions. It has been investigated regarding its direct or moderating impact on, for example, motivation, job attitudes and group processes (see reviews by Earley and Gibson, 1998; Gelfand et al., 2004).

In complement to the etic investigations of culture with the search for universals and cultural dimensions, Gannon (2004, 2009) proposes to use a metaphor to describe and make sense of the cultural profile of a country. He defines a cultural metaphor as a 'unique or very distinct institution, phenomenon, or activity of a nation's culture that most or all of its citizens consider to be very important and with which they identify
Table 1.3  Sample of argued representative behaviour for the societal practices (as is) of the cultural dimensions of the House et al. (2004) study and examples of country positioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>High score</th>
<th>Low score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Power Distance | **is the degree to which people expect and agree that power should be stratified and concentrated at higher levels of an organization or government** | - Different groups have different involvement, and democracy does not ensure equal opportunities  
- Society differentiated into classes on several criteria  
- Information is localized  
- Argentina, Turkey, Germany  
- Show less tolerance for breaking rules  
- Be orderly, keeping meticulous records  
- Rely on formalized policies and procedures, establishing and following rules, verifying communication in writing  
- Switzerland, Finland, Singapore |
| Uncertainty    | **Avoidance** - members strive to reduce uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals, bureaucratic practices |
| Future Orientation | **relates to engagement in future-oriented behaviour such as planning and delaying gratification**                                               | - Individuals are more intrinsically motivated  
- View materialistic success and spiritual fulfilment as an integrated role  
- Organizations with longer strategic orientation  
- Canada, Malaysia, Singapore  
- More women in positions of authority  
- Higher percentage of women in the labour force  
- Afford women a greater role in community decision making  
- Less occupational sex segregation  
- Sweden, Canada, Norway  
- Mentoring and patronage support  
- Practices reflect individualized considerations  
- Need for belonging and affiliation to motivate people  
- Members of society are urged to be sensitive to all forms of racial discrimination  
- Thailand, Zambia, Malaysia |
| Gender Egalitarianism | **minimizes gender-role differences while promoting gender equality**                                                                          | - Value instant gratification and place higher priorities on immediate rewards  
- See materialistic success and spiritual fulfilment as dualities, requiring trade-offs  
- Argentina, Russia, Guatemala  
- Fewer women in positions of authority  
- Lower percentage of women in the labour force  
- Afford women no or a smaller role in community decision making  
- More occupational sex segregation  
- Japan, India, Kuwait  
- Supervisory support  
- Practices reflect standardized considerations  
- Formal welfare institutions replace paternalistic norms and patronage relationships  
- Welfare state guarantees social and economic protection of individuals  
- Germany, South Africa, Italy |
| Humane Orientation | **encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others**                                        | - Supervisory support  
- Practices reflect standardized considerations  
- Formal welfare institutions replace paternalistic norms and patronage relationships  
- Welfare state guarantees social and economic protection of individuals  
- Germany, South Africa, Italy |

(Continued)
### Table 1.3 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>High score</th>
<th>Low score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertiveness</strong> is the degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others</td>
<td>• Stress equity, competition and performance&lt;br&gt;• Expect demanding and challenging targets&lt;br&gt;• Value assertive, dominant and tough behaviour. Positive associations with the term ‘aggression’&lt;br&gt;• Believes anyone can succeed if s/he tries hard enough&lt;br&gt;• Hong Kong, US, Australia</td>
<td>• Stress equality, solidarity and quality of life&lt;br&gt;• Have sympathy for the weak&lt;br&gt;• Value who you are more than what you do&lt;br&gt;• Associate competition also with defeat and punishment. More negative associations with the term ‘aggression’&lt;br&gt;• Value cooperation&lt;br&gt;• New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Orientation</strong></td>
<td>• Emphasize results more than people&lt;br&gt;• Attach little importance to age in promotional decisions&lt;br&gt;• Believe that schooling and education are critical for success&lt;br&gt;• Value training and development&lt;br&gt;• Expect demanding target&lt;br&gt;• Singapore, Iran, Taiwan</td>
<td>• Have high respect for quality of life&lt;br&gt;• View merit pay as potentially destructive to harmony&lt;br&gt;• Performance appraisal systems that emphasize integrity, loyalty and cooperative spirit&lt;br&gt;• Regard being motivated by money as inappropriate&lt;br&gt;• Hungary, Argentina, Qatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-Group Collectivism</strong></td>
<td>• Members assume that they are highly interdependent with the organization and believe it is important to make personal sacrifices to fulfil their organizational obligations&lt;br&gt;• Employees tend to develop long-term relationships with employers from recruitment to retirement&lt;br&gt;• Jobs are designed in groups to maximize social and technical aspects of the job&lt;br&gt;• Iran, Philippines, Zimbabwe</td>
<td>• Members assume that they are independent of the organization and believe it is important to bring their unique skills and abilities to the organization&lt;br&gt;• Employees develop short-term relationships, and change companies at their own discretion&lt;br&gt;• Compensation and promotions based on equity model, in direct relationship to the employee’s contribution to success&lt;br&gt;• Sweden, Netherlands, US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Collectivism</strong></td>
<td>• Organizations take responsibility for employees’ welfare&lt;br&gt;• Obliging, compromising and accommodating conflict resolution tactics are preferred&lt;br&gt;• Sweden, South Korea, China</td>
<td>• Direct and solution-oriented conflict resolution tactics are preferred.&lt;br&gt;• Jobs are designed individually to maximize autonomy&lt;br&gt;• Greece, El Salvador, Morocco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: inspired by similar tables made by House et al. (2004) and Romani (2010b)
### Table 1.4 Sample of argued representative behaviour for Schwartz’s value structures and examples of country positioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Examples of implications for organizational behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Egalitarianism</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations acknowledge the legitimacy of cooperative negotiation among members who flexibly enact their roles and try to affect organizational goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship to the societal norm ‘entitlement’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship to the work value ‘social’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finland, Sweden, Spain, Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mastery</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations are likely to be competitive and strongly oriented towards achievement and success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship to the work value ‘power’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USA, South Korea, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harmony</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations are likely to be viewed holistically as systems to be integrated with the larger society, which should minimize competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaders are likely to try to understand the social and environmental implications of organizational actions and to seek non-exploitive ways to work towards organizational goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chile, Estonia, Slovenia, Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective Autonomy</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations are open to change and diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizations treat their members as independent actors with their own interests, preferences, abilities and allegiances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship with the work values ‘intrinsic’, ‘curiosity’, ‘broad-mindedness’, ‘creativity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France, French speaking Canada and Switzerland, Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual Autonomy</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations are open to change and diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizations treat their members as independent actors with their own interests, preferences, abilities and allegiances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship to the societal norm ‘entitlement’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship with the work values ‘intrinsic’, ‘curiosity’, ‘broad-mindedness’, ‘creativity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France, French speaking Canada and Switzerland, Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hierarchy</strong>:</td>
<td>Emphasis on chain of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well-defined roles in a hierarchical structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand of compliance in the service of goals set from the top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship with the societal norm ‘obligation’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship to the work value ‘power’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe, India, Hong Kong, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Embeddedness</strong>:</td>
<td>Organizations tend to take responsibility for their employees in several domains of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employees’ loyalty to the organization is expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationship with the work value ‘extrinsic’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippines, Nigeria, Malaysia, Georgia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on Schwartz (1999) and Sagiv and Schwartz (2000)
closely’ (Gannon and Audia, 2000: 91). There is not a total parallel between the metaphor and culture, but with a metaphor, the different components of national culture are integrated into a coherent image rather than being a set of scores on independent cultural dimensions. For example, Nielsen et al. (2009) use the metaphor of the ‘Fado’ (a popular form of song) to describe the Portuguese culture. Using the rich metaphor of a social institution in a given country, cultural metaphors explain the complexity of a local culture in an intuitive way. Cultural metaphors can contribute to the preparation of employees for expatriation, as well as assist with making sense of the cultural differences between two partners in a merger.

**Box 1.1 Example: The metaphor of the Swedish stuga**

The metaphor used for Sweden is the one of the ‘stuga’ (Gannon, 1994: 106–119). A stuga is a summer cottage with modest facilities where many Swedes spend several weeks during their summer holidays. This is a place close to nature, where the close family enjoys solitude, quality time and personal development. This metaphor illustrates and integrates several dominant traits of the Swedish society: harmonious relationships to nature; individualism and low power distance; the importance of private life and quality of life in comparison to working life; and the idea that individual well-being and development is primordial.

Most recently, the work of Tony Fang (e.g. 2003, 2012) is gaining popularity as a value-based understanding of culture, not using cultural dimensions, but the observation of cultural paradoxes and tensions in all societies. The Yin Yang model illustrates that there are conflicting values in each society (rather than a set of dominating ones as cultural dimension frameworks sustain), and that these values are expressed at different times or in different situations. This model accounts for cultural change in societies.

**Box 1.2 Stop and reflect**

All individuals do not act in accordance with a set of average scores for cultural dimensions of a particular country. In addition, the cultural dimension frameworks were not developed for an individual level of analysis. However, in what ways do you think we can use the cultural dimension frameworks to explicate (and predict) individual employees’ behaviour in organizations?
Interpretive views on culture posit that people use meaning systems to organize their actions. In other words, people act and interact in a way that makes sense to them and it is the actor’s point of view that is seen as most relevant to explain behaviour. It is therefore an emic positioning in strong contrast to the etic constructs such as cultural dimensions. From an emic position, meaning exists within the context of its experience. The emic approach is seen as situated and focused on the particular meanings given by a specific group of individuals, thus implying that there are implicit aspects to knowledge and understanding. For example, the idea of statistical theory that was applied to product quality control in the United States in the 1920s was further made sense of in a comprehensive way by Japan in the post Second World War period. Quality was not interpreted as the feature of a finalized product, but rather as the outcome of a process. The focus expanded from quality of products to quality of numerous other aspects of organizations, leading to what became later internationally known as total quality management (TQM). Similarly, the same IHM tool can lead to distinct practices in the various (cultural) environments where it is implemented, since the local interpretations and the local views will vary. Emic studies are reflected in an interpretive approach to science that emphasizes the interpretations of individuals and the significance of the local context in the development of these meanings. In interpretive views researchers such as Geertz (1973), Schutz (1962), Garfinkel (1967) or Berger and Luckmann (1966) are key inspirational figures in societal and organization culture studies.

Within each society, there are tremendous variations between individuals, social groups or genders in possible ways of making sense of situations. At the same time, some claim that through socialization, in generation cohort groups, in gender groups and in other social groups, individuals tend to develop similar frames of interpretation or similar interpretations of symbols. A unique stream of studies in cross-cultural management, inspired by the works of d’Iribarne (1989, 2009), argues that it is possible to identify similar national patterns of interpretation within countries, called ‘frames of meanings’.

Box 1.3  Stop and reflect
A French multinational had repeatedly tried to implement TQM in its Moroccan subsidiary, without success, and then it suddenly worked. The origin of the success was attributed to a combination of elements that enabled employees to make sense (Continued)
Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives

(Continued)

of TQM, and thus to implement it. The new CEO adopted an ‘exemplary’ leadership attitude, combining it with a new form of TQM training that articulated parallels between the key principles of TQM and verses of the Quran. This ability to relate the values of TQM in a culturally meaningful way meant that employees could make sense of the implementation of TQM with the emic concept of the Zaouia. They drew a semantic parallel between the community of the Zaouia, with its exemplary leader and its religious connotations, and their own organization, now including an exemplary leader, a community of employees, and TQM principles associated with moral guidance (see d’Iribarne, 2002).

The association of meanings that are present in societies around the notions of ‘good work’, a ‘good organization’ or even a ‘good boss’ are very useful to know about, since they influence what is perceived as desirable behaviour. For example, leadership studies inform us that an ideal of idea-oriented leadership tends to be shared between Swedish top and middle managers.

Box 1.4 Example: Meanings associated with good leadership in Sweden

‘Idea-oriented leadership means that leaders bring about involvement, commitment and motivation through skilfully communicating inspiring [ideas] … The relationship to the supervised is built on confidence and trust (rather than coercion) and openness’ (Åkerblom, 1999: 48). Leaders are seen as visionary, team-oriented and favouring collaboration and consultation, and supervision and instructions are considered as the opposite to a desirable leadership style. An informal style and frequent communication between superiors and subordinates is the preferred approach to leadership.

Meanings systems are not rigid; they can be adapted to new situations or altered depending on the circumstances. In the study of a large Tunisian corporation, Yousfi (2011) reveals first how the association of the organization with the theme
of ‘a family’ is frequently used in Tunisian organizations, leading to potential dysfunctions (absence of explicit rules, favouritism, etc.). She shows that this metaphor is also used in the exceptional Tunisian organization she studies, but it is used with a twist: written rules. The introduction of an ‘American management model’ (e.g. performance assessment) did not replace the metaphor of the family, but rather consolidated it because it could control its dysfunctions. Managers and employees built on a meaning system linking an organization with a family (a personal place, where one grows and receives support, etc.) when dealing with the rules of performance assessment. In other words, there is a Tunisian meaning system linking the notions of family and organization, and this meaning system is flexible and dynamic: it can encompass new items, reinforce others and keep its role of sense making for the employees in the organization even when management practices change.

Knowing what local meaning systems are associated to organizational practices is primordial. Resistances, failures or difficulties in the transfer of HRM processes have been linked to disparate understandings and cultural practices occurring between, for example, the headquarters and foreign subsidiaries. Henry (2007) investigates the resistance of a French consulting firm to the implementation of detailed job descriptions in the Société d’Electricité du Cameroun, when these job descriptions were in fact explicitly requested and thus were part of the consultants’ brief. After the analysis of the cultural meanings associated with job descriptions by the French consultants (e.g. lack of freedom, disempowerment) and the Cameroonian employees (e.g. protection against arbitrary and pervasive use of power, clarification and delimitation of tasks) the people working in the consulting firm and in Société d’Electricité du Cameroun were then able to come to an agreement and move forwards with the specification of acceptable job descriptions.

Interpretive views on culture are not solely linked to investigating shared meanings in organizations; they also include the study of meanings developed by institutions and their implications for organizations’ practices. Child (2000) explains that management and business have distinctive institutional foundations in different societies. These institutions (e.g. state, legal system, etc.) and the roles they play shape different ‘national business systems’ (Whitley, 1992a, 1992b; Redding, 2005; Hasegawa and Noronha, 2009). Local systems of ideas (political, religious, etc.) influence the ideology, structure and culture of institutions, which themselves influence organizations, organizational behaviour, HRM and IHMR. Budhwar and Sparrow (2002) report how different contextual variables (such as industrial relations, labour markets, business systems) in India and the United Kingdom shape different logics of actions for managers, even when they are aiming to achieve the same goal of improving integration between HRM and business strategy. Institutional influences are presented in this book (see Chapter 2) to explain differences across countries regarding HRM practices (Ferner et al., 2001).
Box 1.5 Stop and reflect

Interpretive research gives us a local and specific understanding of a situation or a construct (e.g. how is ‘good leadership’ perceived) in a given environment. Therefore, in terms of generalization, this perspective is weak, but if you think instead in terms of transferability, this perspective is very helpful. Investigate and reflect on the distinction between (a) generalization and (b) transferability of knowledge about culture.

5 Critical views: ‘Culture and power’

Postmodern, critical and postcolonial perspectives have much internal diversity, just like the other two views presented above. Works adopting these perspectives can be said to share in common their conceptualization of societal structures as processes and outcomes of power struggles. They also focus on the influence of societal and structural elements in the explanation of (work) interactions. Such elements are social, political and historical contexts that affect how, for example, employees consider and evaluate their colleagues coming from a different culture (Muhr and Salem, 2013).

Critical perspectives can contribute to diversity management for international human resource (IHR) managers by encouraging more questioning on their views on diversity. Respecting cultural diversity for IHR managers goes beyond the consideration of ‘traditional’ forms of diversity (such as gender, age, people with a disability) to include, for example, religious belonging, professional training and sexual preferences. IBM and Volvo group, for example, are actively managing this multi-faced diversity of their international workforce through programmes such as ‘Diversity and inclusive leadership’. In their investigation, critical scholars pay attention to power imbalance between organizational members and sometimes highlight surprising results. For example, Zanoni and Janssens (2003) assert that IHR managers’ discourse on diversity may reflect dominant views and reaffirm management practices and underlying inequalities. Likewise, Omanović (2013) reveals how an organization ‘closed the door’ to diversity with a programme designed precisely to establish a diversity initiative. Critical perspectives can thus help IHR managers to realize that they may involuntarily be reproducing the inequalities they intend to address.

Cultural differences are also shown by critical researchers to be used as ‘excuses’. Organizational or national culture differences are shown, for example by Riad (2005) or Vaara (2002), as a narrative construction (in other words a story) to explain the success or the failure of mergers and acquisitions. Discourses on cultural differences
between organizations present suitable narratives for explaining incompatibility between organizations and legitimizing partial actions, or making sense of failures. In the study of mergers between several banks in the Nordic European region, researchers show how the discussions about cultural differences (between, for example, Danish, Finnish and Swedish) were not as neutral as it first seemed. The way the national identities were constructed in these conversations, the examples that were chosen, contributed to exclude females from top management positions (Vaara et al., 2003; Tienari et al., 2005).

In consequence, the critical approach urges us to pay attention to how discourses are constructed, and how ‘cultural differences’ can be used in these discourses to hide another aspect or to masquerade an issue. For example, Mahadevan (2011) studied an organization where HRM attempted to train engineers based in Germany in cross-cultural management, in view of their future collaboration with Indian engineers. The analysis of the case progressively reveals that the will to impose a training intervention (using the excuse that engineers are low on social and cultural skills and therefore need such education) is coupled with the will to gain more power over the conflictual areas of relationships between different professional groups in the organization.

Ybema and Byun (2009) provide the example of a study that shows how discourses on culture are constructed and mobilized in individual power struggles in the case of Japanese–Dutch interactions. The researchers realized that each national group was not consistent in its description of cultural differences. For example, Japanese managers assert that Dutch culture is egalitarian, compared to the Japanese one, but Japanese subordinates see their Dutch superiors as hierarchical with top-down decision-making styles. This highlights that talking about cultural differences is not an objective depiction of reality, otherwise the argued cultural differences would be the same. Consistency is found when one looks at the hierarchical levels. In both countries, people who have a superior of a different nationality argue that their boss’s national culture is hierarchical. This means that the power inequalities are important in determining what cultural differences people see as relevant. In other words, the cultural differences are talked about in a way that creates two different groups: ‘the Japanese’ and ‘the Dutch’ who are essentialized as different, especially when they are connected to different hierarchical levels. These boundaries serve the reproduction of power and status inequalities in their organizations.

Critical views address the discourse about the other and about concepts of difference. They contribute to shedding a new light on cross-cultural management knowledge that is used, for example, for expatriation training (e.g. Jack and Lorbiecki, 2003; Szkudlarek, 2009). Pre-expatriation training may implicitly reproduce stereotypes about non-Western cultures, thereby justifying the transfer of HRM practices from the headquarters to subsidiaries in developing countries. For example, the use of discourse essentializing others and presenting them as culturally determined and ‘backward’ (Kwek, 2003; Fougère and Moulettes, 2011) may lead to IHRM policies and practices in favour of bureaucratic control mechanisms rather than cultural ones based
Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives

on training – since the assumption is that ‘they’ are not going to change or that any change will be difficult. Peltonen (2006) argues that the relationship between headquarters and subsidiaries is embedded in political, economic and symbolic power inequalities that tend to favour the views of the headquarters. Likewise, expatriates sent to subsidiaries can be on a mission that tends to prioritize the interests of the group or the global operations of the group, rather than the local subsidiary (Gersten and Söderberg, 2011).

**Box 1.6 Stop and reflect**

The critical perspectives tell us, among other things, that the cross-cultural knowledge that we develop about the (cultural) others is biased by the power relationship we have with them. Does it mean that there are no absolute cultural differences?

6 Summary and conclusions

IHRM is intrinsically international and multi-cultural, contributing to making culture a frequent component of issues IHR managers deal with in their work. The three views presented in this chapter are an analytical tool to better investigate, and then to understand more comprehensively, situations that are influenced by culture, or that employ culture as an argument in the pursuit of certain goals.

The positivist analysis is frequently employed in the management literature and provides an answer to a central question: What are the value discrepancies that can be identified in this situation? And consequently: What are the external influences of culture on what is happening? This investigation is especially useful for identifying culture as a central consideration in any analysis of IHRM.

The interpretive view regards management as cultural. In other words, culture is the way that people make sense of their situation, thus the meanings attached to it by actors are at the core of the investigation. A main question of this analysis is: What does the situation mean to each of the people involved? This investigation is especially useful for explicating how people experience the situation, why they react the way they do, and how new processes are adopted or rejected.

The critical view considers, for example, that culture can be a rhetorical device serving the stake of parties involved in power struggles. A central question is: What is at stake? What are the (hidden) structures that impact the reality we need to deal
with? It is especially useful to unmask the tensions and struggles at play in a situation and to expose it in a new light, leading to more possibility for change.

Together, these three views compose a flexible method for performing a complex analysis of a situation, and consequently, can lead to more effective IHRM. Table 1.5 proposes questions to guide your analysis in each of the three views.

**Table 1.5 Sample questions to use in the analysis of a situation dealing with culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivist views</th>
<th>Interpretive views</th>
<th>Critical views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture and values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Culture and meanings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Culture and power</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does culture influence this situation?</td>
<td>What does this situation mean to those involved?</td>
<td>Is there a struggle between two camps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are the cultural dimensions that can explain people’s behaviour?</td>
<td>What do they associate with the situation/elements of the situation?</td>
<td>Who is in a position of power?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are the cultural dimensions' score differences between the two countries/organizations?</td>
<td>What does the situation remind them of?</td>
<td>Who is silenced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the characteristics of an environment scoring high/low on these dimensions?</td>
<td>Which terms, which metaphors do people use when talking about it?</td>
<td>What is at stake?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does it apply here?</td>
<td>What are the arguments advanced, how do the arguments make sense for the participants involved?</td>
<td>Are people collaborating?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ‘With globalization, people’s behaviour and values are increasingly becoming similar, and especially so in organizations. Therefore, in about ten years’ time, the IHRM of multinational organizations will be conducted globally.’ Comment on this statement.

2. ‘Using multiple views on culture (positivist, interpretive and critical) for the analysis of a situation is only making things more complicated. Models should simplify reality, so that we can act upon it.’ Explain why this comment is limited in potential and discuss the differences between a rich analysis and an over-complicated one.

3. Every researcher tends to do research mainly within one paradigm. Similarly, you, as a manager, will also tend to spontaneously make one type of analysis of the situations

*(Continued)*
(Continued)

you encounter. Which one is it? The positivist, the interpretive or the critical one? Reflect on your view, and its inherent limitations. Then, discuss how you can develop a way of thinking which will bring to your analysis the other two views.

4. An etic view on culture reflects a positivist position, whereas an emic view reflects an interpretive position. What view of culture is reflected by the critical position?

CASE STUDY

‘Not the way we do business around here’

Please note: this case is based on original email material in Swedish, from Nickell Sweden (Nickell is a pseudonym). The English translation reflects the original proficiency of Swedish and writing style of the authors of the emails.

Introduction

Robin hangs up the phone, it’s almost 11 p.m. and tomorrow will be a long day. Today was spent visiting an important client and Robin was out of reach most of the time, while installing a new system. The phone call that just ended with Tapio Mäkelä, the managing director of the Nordic area, is worrying. If Tapio does what he threatens to do, Robin will lose one of the most important members of the Swedish team: the technical specialist, Per Jonson. How can things go so wrong in just one afternoon? Robin decides that a good night of sleep is needed before writing – or not – a report to the European HR manager.

Background

Robin works as the sales director of Sweden, for a European company called Nickell, specialized in the development, production and sales of cleaning chemicals and dosing systems for the food-processing industry (cleaning of pipes, tanks, etc.). The Swedish operations of Nickell are a subsidiary of Nickell Nordic Area, located in Finland. The problem started last year, when Bekvema (a pseudonym), one of the most important international customers of Nickell, established a subsidiary in Sweden. Bekvema is a centrally run corporation, with headquarters in Finland where its activities make about 70 per cent of the turnover of Nickell Finland. Tapio Mäkelä is personally in charge of the relationships with Bekvema and will not tolerate Per Jonson continuing with his attacks on his work.
Robin is sceptical. Is Per right in saying that the system used by Bekvema in all its subsidiaries is not appropriate, thereby criticizing the solution developed together with Nickell Finland? On the other hand, Tapio often said that Bekvema does not always follow his recommendations and that they tend to do what they think is right, or enough. Bekvema now wants to have a new system installed for its Swedish subsidiary during the holiday weekend of Midsummer. This is the most important holiday here in Sweden! Robin understands the importance given to the midsummer celebrations. They mark the beginning of the summer break for very many people in the country. But what is the most upsetting for Per? Is it really that Tapio said ‘yes’ to Bekvema, which means that they are going to have to work during Midsummer? But Per will not even be there! Robin scrolls down the email inbox searching for the first email sent by Per.

EMAIL #1
From: Per Jonson
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2007 12:17 PM
To: Tapio Mäkelä
Cc: Robin; Bengt Karlson; Göran Söderberg
Subject: Bekvema Sundbyberg

Dear Tapio,

To my consternation I hear that we are going to install the system Propre at Bekvema in Sundbyberg.

I must decisively protest against this coward attitude towards Bekvema and its demand to start up Propre in Sweden.

To accept this was not good to any party involved, in view of the circumstances. The success we have reached through the years in Sweden depends to a large extent to the fact that we have demands on our customers, as much as they have demands on us.

Many times, a No from us was positively perceived by the Swedish customers. By acting like puppet dolls we have never reached any success in Sweden, but it is maybe different in Finland?

As you certainly remember, I was from the start of Bekvema Sweden in Sundbyberg strongly critical to the inferior (the least we can say) cleaning system they use.

To dose 1,2 g PXX at 60° is like doing nothing, because this brings no significant disinfection.

(Continued)
Besides this remarkable recommendation, the cleaning process is performed without FGcs? What is it for process? 
Your answer was that it is Bekvema’s decision and that we don’t have anything to say as far as processes are concerned.
In my eyes this sounds like a coward attitude to the client!!!!
If the processes were right from the start we probably would not have ended in that situation.
The fact that Bekvema Finland experiences an awesome good result with Propre does prove that the earlier processes were not good?
You also said that we, in Sweden, don’t know anything since we don’t have experience with PXX.
Nothing can be more wrong!!

Long before you started using PXX in Finland, we had an extensive international project where we investigated the PXX processes and disinfection in ClientX in Karlstad. The fact that it has never been a success in Sweden is linked to the too high costs it implies.
Unfortunately, all the documentation was lost in the three moves.1
Without doubts, the best in this case would have been to install instead of Propre a real PXX process during the month of July ...

If the client were Client Y, they had applauded such a clear decision, especially when one knows that the service resources are limited during the summer vacations. We did so with Client Z and they were thankful for it.

Someone must learn to say no now and then to Bekvema too, and maybe learn to motivate why one says no.

Next time we have a common meeting, I think that we must discuss in detail how we are going to do in the future, because we cannot successfully continue in this way.

Note that my criticisms are about actions, not persons.
Best regards and best wishes for a nice Midsummer.
Per Jonson
Technical Specialist

---

1Per refers to the recent changes that occurred in the company. Both Finnish and Swedish activities of Nickell were part of a larger multinational corporation, itself the result of a merger between business units of other companies. Previously, another ownership change had taken place.
Robin remembers the criticisms that Per Jonson made loudly to the other members of the sales team during their last meeting. His convincing arguments had gained the agreement of the other sales technicians. It is true that Per is the only technical specialist in the Nordic area. His influence on the Swedish sales team is clear and Robin already wondered whether this could be a problem. Robin searches for Tapio’s answer.

EMAIL #2

From: Tapio Mäkelä
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2007 12:36 PM
To: Per Jonson
Cc: Robin; Bengt Karlson; Göran Söderberg
Subject: RE: Bekvema Sundbyberg

My dearest Per,
You think you can just like that criticize the case of Bekvema although you don’t even taken part in the work for the last months. How can you think that you would know better?

Unfortunately, you don’t have now enough information to judge the situation. For this reason I cannot either answer to your assertive email. In case you want to learn more about the situation, you are welcome to call me today or next week (although I don’t understand why you are so interested in a client you did not even work with for the last months). If you call you’ll get answers.

I wish you a nice holiday and hope at the same time that you can get some rest. In the future, please learn more about the background before you start sending emails that can be seen as written with a negative attitude. I rather have this kind of discussion on the phone since emails are a much too powerful media for sensitive matters and often opinions are polarized unnecessary. Same wishes to the others as well. I hope this will become a habit in the future.

Best wishes
Tapio

PS. I would love to know why you have so many feelings in regard to everything that has to do with Bekvema. I could almost believe that this has something to do with Sweden versus Finland ... could that be the case?

Robin wonders whether Tapio has a point. It seems that the feelings of competition between Sweden versus Finland are there. In Nordic sports, very often the finalists (Continued)
are Sweden and Finland, and both countries tend to see the other as the eternal adversary. It appears to Robin that whatever comes from Nickell Finland is received negatively. On the other hand, it seems that Tapio does not know much about the situation here, since he believes that Per does not work much with Bekvema. This is not the case. Per’s response came two hours later.

EMAIL #3

From: Per Jonson  
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2007 14:33 PM  
To: Tapio Mäkelä  
Cc: Robin; Bengt Karlson; Göran Söderberg  
Subject: RE: Bekvema Sundbyberg

Tapio,

- If I was involved or not has nothing to do with the matter, and nothing to do with knowing better. You don’t know much of my commitment to Bekvema. However, I know that it was a bad decision, at this point of time, to start the installation of a project like Propre.
- I have enough information to see that this is a stupid decision, and furthermore, I know very well how the processes they use today (don’t) work.
- No one in Sweden is interested in working in a company where they cannot (or should not) write their true opinion in emails. The coming situation with Bekvema touches us all to a great deal. In this country, it is a habit to circulate one’s opinion, via mail or phone. I assume this will continue in the future. To insinuate that we should not do so in the future is weak and pure dangerous leadership.
- I don’t understand what you mean with ‘first learn about the background’. The background facts I have are more than enough to judge that starting up a Propre project at this point of time is risky.
- It is not about feelings, don’t you understand the problem? If not, I’d be happy to explain again.
- The cleaning processes used so far are hardly professional and I suppose, this is why it is so urgent to start Propre.

I repeat point 3 in other words, just to be sure because this is important:
To suggest that we should go quiet and carefully with our opinions is not only stupid, it is also wrong. I cannot even see that this would polarize into something negative.
In Sweden, it was a long time ago that man stood with the hat in the hand, and we are never going to go back to that time.

Your wish that we should not write down our opinion in mail does not scare only me ...

I can also mention that most of the decisions that we make in Sweden are based on consensus.

This is not about Sweden versus Finland, it is just that business and management are fundamentally different in our countries, well, one could say incompatible:

It would never occur to a Swede to implement a system that was wrongly developed by the client. In this case, you have to have good arguments to explain where the mistake lies. We are good at that. To say No, too.

Of course I will rest during the holiday, but this does not imply that I will tie me a muzzle. On the contrary. Tremble should the ones I'll meet.

Honestly, I was expecting a better, actually a much better answer from you Tapio. Your answer felt empty. A bit unpleasant.

Best regards, with the hope that you too will get the possibility to rest during the holiday, and maybe reflect about life.

Per Jonson
Technical specialist

Per called around the other sales technicians and even Robin during the afternoon. Robin remembers how upset Per was, saying that Tapio is some kind of Stalinist dictator, and that keeping one’s head down in front of the hierarchy, or clients, is unacceptable. It may be the usual way in Finland, but ‘this is not the way we do business around here!’ Robin tried to calm him down. The afternoon was tense and Robin spent also some time with Tapio on the phone, trying to calm him down too. That afternoon, another sales technician reacted.

EMAIL #4

From: Bengt Karlson
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2007 17:55 PM
To: Tapio Mäkelä; Per Jonson
Cc: Robin; Göran Söderberg
Subject: RE: Bekvema Sundbyberg

Tapio and Per!
Without going into detail in your exchange on whether things are done this way or that way, whether one does this or that in Sweden or Finland, I consider too that
this is crazy to start a new project just before the holidays. This shows imprudence and a big faith that everything is going to happen the way we want. In my world there is a guy call Murphy (the devil’s assistant) and we meet him quite often. Free translation: If something can go wrong, then it goes wrong. And especially because we purposefully did not take any safety measure. And then the fact that if something goes wrong, someone has to go to the client and fix the problem when we are on holiday. Is this going to give trust to the client?

If you see that as a criticism from Per, you need to know that it was I who first was upset about all this. I am not as much in touch with all the technical details as Per, but it does not mean that I don’t have an opinion.

Finally, I want to say that I agree with Per, we have it good in Sweden. We basically discuss everything. Even your behaviour in the Bekvema related matters. You have to understand that what you decide on the other side of the Baltic Sea, we have to implement it on this side. So I think this is more than right that we should be in the decision process too.

And yes, Bekvema touches us all in Sweden. Not just Göran who is responsible for the client. Every one of us feels responsible, and will get mobilized if for some reason Göran is not available.

All in all, I want to calm down this storm a bit with wishing you a happy Midsummer. We’ll sort things out in the future.

Best regards,

Bengt

The conversation Robin just ended with Tapio was mostly about Per’s latest email (see below). Tapio found Per’s attitude unacceptable and disrespectful. He said he could no longer tolerate such an attitude from one of his subordinates. And since whatever he says to Per is misinterpreted, he’d rather meet Per next time with a lawyer, to serve as a witness. Tapio wants Robin to translate the emails and to send them to Jaap van der Dorp, the European Human Resource Manager. He asked Robin to send along a note to Jaap van der Dorp, in order to give a third party’s opinion on the matter. Tapio wants to use this note, together with the emails, as material in his case against Per. If Per continues like that, he wants him to go.

EMAIL #5

From: Per Jonson  
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2007 20:06 PM
To: Bengt Karlson; Tapio Mäkelä  
Cc: Robin; Göran Söderberg  
Subject: RE: Bekvema Sundbyberg

Unlike Bengt, I don’t see all this as a storm, in fact just an illustration of how things go wrong when one tries processes with a quasi science and let the client take over knowledge,* and at the same time, a lack of ability to say No.

Tapio’s nonanswer (!) to me gave no explanation as why it could not have worked with a normal PXX-process during the month of July (which would have been easier and more cost effective in time).

This would have been much safer, but instead Tapio came with an answer asking us to shut up with our cap in the hand and bow, which is never going to happen, this we have, in this country, left behind us for a long time (circa 1950s). I indicated this in my previous answer.

Now I don’t only think that Tapio’s answer was unpleasant, it was even alarming (I get vibes from the old East block).

In general, I agree with Bengt. Business and application decisions must, in the future, be made in consensus, this way is accepted with thankfulness.

The current decision measure with Bekvema is what we call in Sweden, in a modern language, something low, and even very low.

Regards
Per Jonson, who will be available most of the holidays
Technical specialist
‘Like the 1,2g PXX/m which is according to the book not authorized by our company, Bekvema made it up!

Robin was out of email reach for the entire day and thought to react to this email exchange in writing now. What am I going to answer? wonders Robin. What is the situation really about? Why are they so upset? How could the situation go so wrong within a few hours? Of course tensions have occurred before ... The communication between the Swedish sales team and Tapio usually goes all right; he makes the effort to speak Swedish although his mother tongue is Finnish. 'What am I going to write to Jaap van der Dorp?' wonders Robin. Robin has met Jaap only once, and got the impression of an old and conservative manager, clearly from another generation, and certainly not used to trying to understand that there are different ways of managing people in Sweden than in Belgium.

(Continued)
Case study questions

Use the analytical framework of this chapter with positivist, interpretive and critical research in cross-cultural management. Conduct each analysis with the help of Table 1.5 and you will progressively uncover the depth of the problem.

1. Which cultural dimensions (Tables 1.2–1.4) can help explicate the interaction between Tapio and Per? What is Tapio’s leadership style? Does it fit to the cultural profile of Finland? What leadership style is expected from Per and the other Swedish employees? Draft a few recommendations to Robin on the basis of this analysis.

2. Note in the text of the emails the words and meaning associations used by Tapio, Per and Bengt in their description of good (versus bad) leadership. How are these views reconcilable? What are the distinct areas of expertise claimed by Tapio and Per? What would you recommend Robin to do, in light of this further analysis?

3. Why are Tapio and Per not collaborating? Is Per using the argument of cultural differences to impose a certain view? Which one? Why? What are the consequences of the PXX system not functioning properly? What do you recommend Robin to do now?

Further reading

  This is the second edition of the seminal work of Geert Hofstede first published in 1980. It presents five cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term or short-term orientation). Each dimension is comprehensively introduced and discussed in its implications for, among others, work situations and IHRM.

  This edited volume is becoming the major source of reference regarding cultural dimensions and thus positivist and etic studies on culture. It investigates how 62
societies compare on nine cultural dimensions, in practice and in value preferences. Each dimension is richly introduced and discussed in its implications for, among others, work situations, but especially leadership. The GLOBE database is more recent than the one used by Hofstede.


- d'Iribarne, P. (2002) 'Motivating workers in emerging countries: universal tools and local adaptations', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(3): 243–256. This publication illustrates an interpretive analysis of important changes in the human resource management of the subsidiaries of two multinationals, Sgs-Thomson and Danone, in Morocco and in Mexico. The interpretive analysis shows how the same situation, which was workers' lack of motivation, had dissimilar origins, and thus had to be addressed differently. It explains how motivation is introduced by changing the system of meanings that employees used to associate with their work, in other words, how they were accustomed to making sense of their work.


- Gersten, M.C. and Söderberg, A.-M. (2011) 'Intercultural collaboration stories: on narrative inquiry and analysis as tools for research in international business', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42: 787–804. Using an interpretive analysis of interviews about a collaboration between a Danish expatriate manager and his Chinese CEO in the Shanghai subsidiary of a multinational enterprise (MNE), the authors of this article demonstrate the benefit of narrative analysis for the understanding of cross-cultural competence development. They make it clear how the partners overcame most of their differences and established common ground through mutual learning.

of verbatim interviews with HR managers of Flanders (Belgium), the authors show how discourses essentialize the others (those who are seen as ‘different’: persons with a disability, migrant workers, etc.), how their discourses devalue or value diversity, and also reaffirm management practices.

- Jack, G. and Westwood, R. (2009) *International and Cross-cultural Management Studies: A Postcolonial Reading*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. This volume systematically examines research in cross-cultural management and points to the limitations of these studies in light of a postcolonial analysis. The authors demonstrate that this discipline is a Western and Eurocentric discourse that echoes the colonial project. They urge us to reconsider our theoretical frameworks and common understandings of culture to include more local, emic and alternative understandings and research. The author’s positioning is in strong contrast to the positivist views using cultural dimensions and etic constructs and models.


This article is in the (interpretive) tradition of the works by d'Iribarne in cross-cultural management that study frames of meanings. It illustrates the method and strength of the approach and implications for managers.

  This article views culture from an interpretive, sense-making perspective. It analyses religion-based cross-cultural conflict through the example of two ethnographic studies of multicultural high-tech organizations undergoing change.

  This article illustrates how power (hierarchical) discrepancies between Dutch and Japanese employees influence their respective perceptions of cultural differences. It adopts a critical viewpoint on cross-cultural management.

  This article suggests that the integration of postcolonial perspectives into cross-cultural management and its theorizing enhances and enriches its discursive import. Postcolonial studies illustrate a stream of research with a critical viewpoint.

### Internet resources

- www.geert-hofstede.com. This website provides visitors with comparative tools, country profiles and other valuable information to those who want to access Hofstede’s research and outcomes. This is currently the official page for the diffusion of Geert Hofstede’s research and tools.

- www.Harzing.com. This website contains multiple references and resources linked to IHRM. In the section ‘resource’ a spreadsheet with the scores of 98 countries on Hofstede’s and/or GLOBE’s dimensions is free to download.

- www.sietareu.org or www.sietarusa.org. The Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR) is the world’s largest interdisciplinary network for professionals working in the field of intercultural relations. You find on SIETAR Europa’s and SIETAR USA’s pages information about trainings, publications and cross-cultural management and cross-cultural communication tools. SIETAR organizations have close links with the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI). It is a private, non-profit foundation designed to foster an awareness and appreciation of cultural differences in both the international and domestic arenas (www.intercultural.org). It provides, for example, education and professional development in intercultural communication.
Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives

- www.dialogin.com. The mission of the Delta Intercultural Academy is to act as a global knowledge and learning community on culture, communication and management in international business. The website provides information or reviews of a large range of books, articles and commentaries on cross-cultural activities. It advertises conferences, training and job offers and regularly organizes e-conferences between Dialogin members (open membership) and influential researchers in the field of culture and management.

Self-assessment questions

Indicative answers to these questions can be found on the companion website at study.sagepub.com/harzing4e.

1. When facing a situation involving culture, you will need to ask yourself different kinds of questions to use the different views presented in this chapter. Can you state sample questions that are helpful to adopt positivist, interpretive and critical views?
2. Each view is best suited to develop a certain kind of knowledge. Can you provide an example of knowledge achieved by the positivist view?
3. Can you provide an example of knowledge achieved by the interpretive view?
4. Can you provide an example of knowledge achieved by the critical view?

References


Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives


Cultural, Comparative and Organizational Perspectives


