
Book Review

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**Intercultural Management: A Case-based Approach to
Achieving Complementarity and Synergy**

by: C. Barmeyer and P. Franklin

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The book aims to foster positive attitudes to cultural diversity rather than dwelling on differences as typified by traditional dimensional models, in the words of the editors to “promote constructive solution-oriented attitudes and to develop the intercultural competencies required for this purpose” and deals with “how organisations manage these intercultural challenges and benefit from diversity.” There is a foreword by Günter Stahl.

The book consists of 20 case studies organised into three parts: ‘Understanding otherness and discord’ (eight cases), ‘Applying competencies and resources’ (four cases) and ‘Achieving complementarity and synergy’ (eight cases), and the third part aiming to “respect and integrate cultural characteristics in a resourceful and constructive way in order to generate added value.” The book offers a European focus counterbalancing the ‘Anglo-centric emphasis’ in management literature; numerous cases also involve non-Western business cultures.

It claims to be of interest to “students and scholars ... in business schools and universities” who “may be in their final stages of undergraduate study or (in) postgraduate education, especially at MBA level” but also “useful to consultants, trainers and management practitioners”, a wide range claiming to please everybody. In fact, I would say it is best suited for classroom case study, and has been used for that purpose.

Chapter 1 gives us a potted historical summary of studies of culture in business from etic dimension models through emic interpretative approaches with much attention to d’Iribarne and a clear rationale for moving beyond national monoliths. There is a sketchy review of the cases and a remarkably long list of references for the eight pages in the chapter.

The editors’ chapter titles in each section are long and somewhat laboured whilst the texts are dense and rather heavy going. They are intended to explain the progression in the book from identifying differences to generating synergistic outcomes.

The format of the cases is standard with a one-page introductory note generalising (repetitively) about intercultural management, a case description of 5–8 pages, background information about the authors, supporting theoretical material and questions to consider for each case. The applicability and usefulness of the materials suggested

for dealing with cases vary and inevitably respond to the preferences of the authors. One minor irritant is that the chapter numbers do not correspond to cases, so Case 1 is in Chapter 2 and Case 20 in Chapter 23, for example.

The first case is rather sketchy, written by D.A. Victor and recommending his 1990s 'Lescant' headings, hardly a model. It is about a US firm in China not allowed to pay bonuses for Chinese New Year and the Western failure to "read between the lines", a common enough tale of how not to do things. No indication of how to approach the case is really given: Lescant does not look very enlightening for solving the case.

The second case, by Helen Spencer-Oatey, offers much more detail and helpful input and background frameworks such as the 3Ps: products, practices and perspectives. The quality of supporting research is clearly of a high standard. Also Sino-Western, the case deals with the organisation of a meeting and associated communication, an area in which the writer is a recognised authority. 'Questions on the case' offer more ideas too.

The third case is German/Rumanian/Bulgarian and presented at some length through the points of view of the various parties involved. A lot of guidance for dealing with the case is given, notably the GLOBE dimensions and leadership styles (though the page detailing the culture clusters seems unnecessary). Students can also use an organisational modification of Berry's acculturation strategies. General stages in M&As are pointed out but the focus is mainly on national issues.

In the case of Lafarge in Britain, the takeover is seen through French eyes. The question of the level is important: are these national issues, a specific history of labour relations in the company, a confrontational organisational culture? The issue is left open, one presumes deliberately.

Case 5 takes us into the extraordinary world of online gaming, focusing on strategic management in open systems and cultural issues in a frontier-less virtual gaming world, launched and still dominated by a German company. The underlying theoretical framework is 'intercultural synergy' in teams, though the organisers also seek to emphasise national differences so that fans identify with their teams. The case involves international virtual team research and the virt.cube framework. The authors argue that "the more information and emotions are shared via technologies without the limitations of physical attributes, the more communication will become real-time and socio-emotionally 'rich' replacing face-to-face communication", a somewhat alarming prospect... The questions on the case are helpful and unexpectedly simple given the barrage of theoretical material.

In the next case, dealing with matrix management in an M&A in Asia-Pacific, a consultant applies an intercultural approach that views people as culturally situated (the 'cultural self') and contextualised through economic, social structure, diversity or other lenses, hence the name 'Kaleidoscope'. The idea is useful though represented in an apparently arbitrary wheel with "cultural self, building awareness and personality" in the centre for no obvious reason. Also, the description is badly written with gems admonishing us not to see "individualism and collectivism (...as) opposites and vice versa." Furthermore, this is on the grounds that there are group and individual situations in which people react differently, which is unsound as a criticism of a dimension. The case relates the familiar story of a well-intentioned Westerner who realises how little she understands in a complex multicultural world made more difficult by matrix management structures. The executive is luckily rescued by a new leader, which does not make the case more plausible for general application.

In Chapter 8, we find proxemics, chronemics and German norms, a classic set of cross-cultural variables to support our teaching on how social conventions reflect cultural differences.

Chapter 9 deals with the infamous misadventures of IKEA in Saudi Arabia. We have Donaldson and Dunfee's ISCT and hypernorms, as well as 'transnational CSR', which adds little to the argument; the doing good/avoiding harm distinction also fails to offer satisfactory solutions. Not much guidance for students and unhelpful questions (consider this, record your thought...). Such ethical problems are notoriously difficult to deal with and this case does not break new ground.

Part 2, 'Applying competences and resources', starts, like each part, with a short earnest text from the editors with a very long heading, generously (and one presumes accurately) referenced, very dense and rather hard work like much of the recitative in the book, but rich in content: the editors are experts and authorities in their own right.

The chapter concludes with the role of co-construction in communication far removed from traditional Shannon and Weaver sender-receiver message transfer. The emphasis in this part is on intercultural interaction, a subject dealt with extensively in Franklin's (2009) book co-authored with Helen Spencer-Oatey.

The Adidas Reebok case on how to avoid behaving like a conqueror in an M&A is presented as a success story in which the HR guys build a functioning team in the organisation whilst retaining differentiation of focus in the merged companies. Cultural contrasts such as national approaches to problem-solving are dealt with as well as preparation for overseas assignments and involvement of one's family and the case includes Stahl's framework of characteristics of successful expats. There is a complete presentation of Worldwork's international competency framework whilst the case questions include a lengthy list of indicators to look for; these sections together occupy ten pages, which seems let us say over-generous. A lot of this material also appeared in Franklin and Spencer-Oatey's earlier book (some greatly mixed metaphors too such as "Reebok focuses on its fitness roots because 'if it's already in your DNA why reinvent the wheel?'"...).

The Worldwide Rx case in Chapter 12 co-authored by Soon Ang and focusing as one might expect on culture intelligence is disappointing. We are offered a very limited case material and a bare outline of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence popularised by Ang in the early years of the century, nor is there any suggestion of how this typology can be used to help approach the case. There are also linguistic infelicities such as "(he) really enjoys the organisation's global footprint." Can you enjoy a footprint?

In contrast, the following case, set in Thailand, offers more complete details and gives richer food for thought, based on the same model of cultural intelligence but with a more detailed analysis to help the student work out the best application to the case; there are also helpful questions for guidance.

The next case, by Craig Storti and Peter Franklin on off-shoring to India, deals with the frequently encountered communication problems between a relationship oriented, indirect face saving culture and a task oriented, direct and low context culture. It is very well supported by models, including dimensions from House, the Gudykunst and Hammer experiential/didactic and culture general/specific box, reinforced by Flower and Blohm's exhaustive taxonomy of training and skill development methods. It is very complete and usable.

The third part, 'Achieving complementarity and synergy ... the enriching nature of interculturality' develops Stahl and Tung's idea that interculturality is too often seen in

negative terms. On the contrary interculturality, we are told, is a “dynamic process for joint construction and negotiation of meaning and action”, a major thrust of the book.

Complementarity is easy to understand in economic processes and manufacture; in management, it is concerned with knowledge, skills and attitudes. The text examines the history of the concept of synergy, or ‘transforming risk into opportunity’, a nice phrase, and how it has been ignored in cross-cultural management literature. One section deals with the contribution of bi-cultural individuals and ‘marginals’ and their potential role as boundary spanners. There is here, as elsewhere in the editorial texts in the book, a tendency to thick verbiage...

The authors point out that “intercultural synergy in organisations – apparently – rarely emerges spontaneously” so requires active support and facilitation, again citing WorldWork Ltd.’s International Competency Framework. Likewise, Hampden-Turner’s dilemma and synergy methodology are cited as a way forward. The chapter ends with the quote from Ghosn: “synergy ... is about creating together something that neither one could have done alone.”

The Future + case is about how differences in a Franco-German takeover situation are addressed by a virtual team thanks to the cross-cultural qualities of the team leaders. The importance of distinguishing culture, context and persons are stressed in a three-factor approach; all can be influenced to some extent – except situational givens. The case focuses on putting intercultural complementarity into practice through globally dispersed teams, with a lot of support for the student working towards this objective.

Sylvie Chévrier’s case about a French expat in Vietnam uses an interpretative approach inspired in the work of d’Iribarne, who sees culture as “a shared framework of meaning associated with a particular vision of the proper way of living together.” Transfer of management values is not determined by a monolithic overall set of values as described by positivist writers, but has to be reconciled with shared meanings, the “invisible underlying cultural assumptions” and core concerns at group, family, organisational or societal levels; consequently, adaptation may be more or less difficult depending on the case. This is an emic view concerned with specifics in each culture, not an etic comparative approach. Intercultural synergy is built by understanding others’ sense-making systems and thus valuing specifics as well as finding common ground.

The Japan Tobacco International case is a success story of diversity on a large-scale permeating the organisation after its takeover of Gallaher; ‘cultural homelessness’ is seen as an advantage and high performance does not prevent a top manager being forced to leave through inappropriate attitude. Reference is made to Berry’s acculturation model.

The following case, dealing with a German software company, emphasises multiple levels of culture and the role of multicultural individuals. An RBV view of the firm is argued to harness individual motivation. The right combination of technological and human resources is a key in seeking synergistic outcomes.

The Trompenaars and van den Bergh case is essentially a caricature of the US individualistic performance-oriented management style and US HR management in the 1980s, along the lines of very early casework on the dimensional etic national categorisation of cultures. The supporting notes are a reproduction of material from *Riding the Waves of Culture* and whilst describing differences offer no clue to ways to achieve synergies. The Jackson framework offers a similar black and white summary of instrumental vs. human approaches to HRM. The questions on the case do not mention synergy or reconciliation and the worksheet at the end is obscure and unhelpful for

students. A very disappointing case and surprising that it was included, especially in the third section of the book supposedly showing strategies to achieve ‘complementarity and synergy’!

In the excellent introduction to ‘A parcel to Spain’, the authors distinguish between implicit and explicit organisational cultures, reminiscent of Schein’s espoused values/basic assumptions distinction; they focus on explicit management messages in the form of ‘corporate values’ and codes of conduct as “instruments to implement a normative global culture” through ‘international transfer’ exemplified in the USA takeover of a German company. True to US business practice and with a view to protecting itself, the US company has a code of conduct that runs to 32 pages; the case revolves around a minor abuse of trust by an employee. To help the student we are offered the Parsons and Shils and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck variables (acknowledged as the source of Trompenaars dimensions) and a description of Hampden-Turner’s dilemma and reconciliation approach, still not as convincing as it should be and thin on examples and explanation.

Laurence Romani’s case is about reconciling cultures on multiple levels in a merged but highly international company operating in Sweden and is longer and more detailed than most of the cases in the book. The central issue is whether to reward the team as a whole or only high performing individual. To analyse this dilemma, Martha Maznevski’s time-honoured mapping, bridging and integrating (MBI) model from 2000 is used, aiming to reconcile apparent dichotomies, with a number of practical suggestions for students.

Finally, perhaps the most famous successful cross-cultural strategic alliance of all, Renault Nissan, is presented as an intercultural OD case. Once again, multicultural individuals are considered important in enabling synergies, as exemplified by Carlos Ghosn of course. A well documented and readable case.

Overall, the book is a valuable resource for teachers in the field, though as noted one has to be careful in selecting the cases. The attempt to show the three parts as a progression is not very consistent and perhaps it would have been wiser to present the potential for complementarity in all the cases included. A reference to integrative negotiating theory and techniques might also have fitted well in the book.