

## SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Ruxandra GEORGESCU

University Valahia Targoviste, Romania, [gruxandra11@yahoo.ro](mailto:gruxandra11@yahoo.ro)

***Abstract:** The article aims to highlight the structures that influence intercultural management, the link between them and the approach of each one separately in order to understand the mechanisms of cooperation in a group of people of different cultures.*

***Key words:** intercultural management, cultures of management, religion, region*

**JEL Classification:** A140

### INTRODUCTION

What we now call “intercultural management” is an area of knowledge and action whose separation has occurred over time, but which is referred to with the current meaning for a short period.

#### 1. THE EMERGENCE OF INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT - IMMEDIATE DETERMINANTS

Intercultural management (IM) undertakes the special analysis of culture and civilization. It stands as an initial mandatory approach because the identification of cultural specificity does not represent an end in itself for this discipline, nor can it be achieved beyond the essential dilemmas of this reality, if we talk only about culture, these two complementary or adjacent dimensions, whether between culture and civilization such positioning may be invoked.

If we talk about culture and especially about cultural specificity, which is important for intercultural management, we have to stop more on the meaning that can be attributed to these concepts. Difficult and even delicate undertaking because, we might say, there are as many houses as cultures and as many cultures as houses, as many definitions of culture as specialists and scholars dealing with this topic. Cultural specificity seems to be more approachable and understandable to the extent that the meaning of the word culture is already mentioned, being in direct subordination to it. An inventory of meanings attributed to the word culture is impossible. In 1952 (according to A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn) 164 definitions of the word culture had already been proposed, without exhausting the inventory. Later, however, other definitions were constructed and proposed as well, but their number is impossible to determine precisely.

Dictionaries and encyclopaedias generalize laconically and superficially and each time specialists take subjective positions dominated by their job and the particular aspect that they are considering or intending to research. Differences, not major but sometimes sensitive, can be found within the same science or the same domain. We might talk about some consensus on the general characteristics of culture for anthropologists, historians, sociologists or linguists, considering only these few areas of theory concerned by or and culture.

A dictionary definition may be the one supplied in “Le Nouveau Petit Robert”: “Development of certain faculties of the mind through acquired knowledge allowing the

development of critical sense, taste and judgment”. According to this sense, culture encompasses knowledge, education, formation and training.

Here we also find a less explicit sense: “Set of intellectual aspects belonging to a civilization, a nation” or a more restrictive one: “Set of shapes acquired by behaviour from human societies”.

In the famous Webster’s we find another formulation, somewhat more explicit: “Formation and development of the mind, refinement of taste and manners acquired through this training; social and religious structures, as well as intellectual and artistic manifestations etc. which characterize a society”.

Obviously, we are dealing with attempts to capture the maximum possible meanings for all or nearly all areas where culture appears as an object of research as a factor of influence or tangible element in relation to variables under study. Looking for origins theorists have placed the beginning of intercultural management in the early '50s-'60s of the past century. The emergence of intercultural management as a scientific theory and as a tool for practical action for the benefit of business is attributed to exchanges which occurred mostly in the last half of the last century in the economy and business management, in more or less explicit connection to the development which marked technique and technology, social and politics.

The determinants of the emergence of intercultural management are:

- internationalization and globalization;
- competition between major international corporations;
- free movement of specialists and liberal professions;
- communication and information technologies.

To these we may add:

- “outs” of small and medium enterprises from their national theories;
- planetary migration of people;
- “flattening” of culture and linguistics.

Internationalization and globalization are considered determinants of the emergence and evolution of IM. Internationalization, understood as a process of crossing national borders of business (dominant in the field of financial markets, as well as by international extension of production and trade) and globalization, seen as integration on a global scale of production and consumption, induced the need to identify local cultural specificities in order to expand consumption and therefore markets.

Competition, especially in big corporations, but also between countries and nations or even in small and medium enterprises, forced the search for more suitable solutions to preserve positions or win new markets, new partners, associates, followers, customers, solutions to obtain benefits or even privileges. The methods used to gain customers, partners or associates, had to be refined, had to undergo the application of appropriate methods in order to involve them “sentimentally”, to attract them, to convince them to act favourably for the corporation.

Political or military support not being accepted morally, free pronounced competition as fundamental ethical principle leaves no room to influences or direct interventions of governments.

Free movement of specialists and liberal professions favoured IM imposing on direct action and theoretical and practical initiation. On the one hand, business expansion has forced companies to use specialists from other countries better prepared; or on the other hand, specialists coming from different cultural areas, raised problems adjusting to other conditions in order to produce the effects expected by the corporation.

The most significant mutations occurred due to displacements imposed or assumed by professional training, especially for university and post-university, by developing research in multicultural teams, by professional migration to search jobs, as well as by systematic tourism. Thus, there appeared intercultural areas where hybrid languages are spoken, where behaviour cannot be easily identified in relation to the country of origin. Many university campuses have become areas of cultural integration; entire regions are marked by external cultural influences. Cultural flattening could also be considered a consequence of globalization, but not only. The desired direction of flattening is to capture a certain organization that is produced in the world in terms of culture. Cultural flattening represents one of several factors with the most significant influence on emergence and development.

The characteristics and functioning mechanisms of cultural communities among which connection elements have already been established support positively the emergence of IM and its involvement in the initiation and development of global business.

## **2. MANAGEMENT STANDARDIZATION**

Management appeared and developed as general theory and practical action tool to support business creation and development. Although it was initially defined and exploited unitary and coherent, subsequently numerous nuances appeared.

Management standardization does not mean bringing it to a unique style and generalization of a unified regulatory framework for enterprises obliged by global extension of business to come into contact, to communicate or to obey the same rules of the game. A natural flexibility in terms of management action and style will continue as long as people are created not as cloned models but as refined variations of the first copy left on earth to populate it and make it evolve. Intercultural management will always be applied in this area.

Because there are not different forms of management for each region, country or culture, but just a cultural application of management which describes a certain style, adapted to the place, people, behaviour; management cannot be imported, exported or borrowed. It adapts continuously, becoming more particular to bring supplementary profit.

International Management is also very connected to the predecessors of Intercultural Management, not only by its components related to International Management of careers or organizational structures, but also by international marketing or communication and international negotiation, which can be assimilated to it. International enterprises are required to study local specificities and if necessary, to adapt their commercial and social policy to these conditions; it represents the constant need to adapt in order to cope with competition, to expand its activities and market, to increase their turnover and profit.

An important moment in the emergence and development of intercultural management should be considered the year of publishing the translation in French of the first part of the work of Max Weber entitled “L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme” through which the first challenge on the influence of culture on the entrepreneurial spirit is launched. The one who produced the binding of business to culture in a coherent and structured manner seems to be Edward Hall, an American anthropologist, best known for several trailblazing works in intercultural approaches: “The Hidden dimension” (1956), “The Silent Language”, “Beyond Culture”(1976), “La danse de la vie”(1976). Edward Hall, by steps taken thereafter with Mildred Hall, built the method of “cultural decoding” based on the analysis of the relationship between the individual and himself, through institutions, ideas and entourage. They are the ones who laid the foundation for the development of IM, actually outlining its methodological developments

(along with other big names such as: B.E. Moore, I.L. Child, L.B. Doob, W. Buchanan, H. Cantril, A. Berjstadt, I.C. Brown and many others).

After 1980, the number of papers devoted to Intercultural Management increases significantly. Steven Globerman (1986) analyses different possibilities to develop techniques that can be considered political and cultural dimensions of each country in taking decisions. He stops systematically on the socio-cultural criteria, behavioural studies and differentiated application of techniques in making important decisions in enterprises (“Delphi” method) to involve local specificity in defining the development strategy of a multinational corporation or group.

Intercultural Management is decisively marked by the appearance of works based on large-scale research, by involving economic, anthropological, sociological, psychological and linguistic approaches; Geert Hofstede probably remains the best-known specialist, several of his works exposing the results of some research undertaken on longer periods being already well known.

Businesses with international activities have been sensitive to intercultural approaches, even before those problems had been proposed to be solved by theory. In the USA, jobs or functions, departments or specialized services have already been created in addition to many large corporations. Sometimes big companies or corporations develop training programs to cover areas of Intercultural Management that may have an effect on its operations, or to fit in directions launched by national policies on racial integration, assimilation and adaptation of immigrants, by creating mixed teams etc.

### **3. CULTURES OF NATIONAL MANAGEMENT**

Business literature often speaks about the culture of “management”, national “leadership”, but these two options cannot be separated from other aspects of society. The American anthropologist Marvin Harris says that “anthropologists have always emphasized the fact that social aspects of life which seem to have no connection between them, in reality they do”.

Leaders, like the people they work with, belong to national companies. In order to understand their behaviour, we must understand the societies they belong to: the types of personality that are common in their country; the family as a cell of society and how it influences children’s education; the education system and what types of people attend their school programs; the influence of the government and politics on citizens and the historical events a generation witnessed. We need to know some things about their behaviour as consumers, their opinion and beliefs about health and disease, crime, punishment for breaking the law and the religious aspects are also very important. Art, science and literature of a country lead us to knowing the culture of people. All these areas should be used for understanding the management of a country. “In culture there is not a short way to the world of business” (Rules of the social game in “Cultures and organizations” by Geert Hofstide, Gert Jan Hofstide and Michael Minkov).

According to people in the media and the political, foreign cultures are treated as “better” or “worse”, although there is no standard to consider ways of thinking and acting. The opinion of a group differs from that of another.

The study of cultural differences between groups and societies involves adopting a neutral perspective, that of cultural relativism.

The French anthropologist Claude Lévi Strauss (1908-2009) said that: “Cultural relativism claims that culture has no absolute criteria for considering that the activities of another culture have “inferior” or “noble” origins, but each culture should apply such judgment of its own activities, since its members are actors and observers”.

Cultural relativism does not prevent us from judging oneself or the society we belong but judging other groups or societies. Before judging, we must consider cultural differences between societies, their roots and consequences.

At the time of colonialism, foreigners exercised their absolute power in societies that they wanted to dominate and imposed their rules.

In postcolonial times, those who wanted to change certain aspects in another society had to negotiate with it; negotiation is successful if the foundations of perspective differences are taken into account.

#### **4. REBIRTH OF CULTURE**

An approach to the rebirth of culture can be done by comparing the aged cells of the human body, which are constantly replaced with new ones. A 20-year person no longer has in the body any single cell of those they were born with.

Thus, from a physical point of view we may say that we exist as a succession of cell assemblies. However each one of us has an identity because all cells have in common the same genes.

A similar phenomenon occurs at the level of societies. Societies have a remarkable ability to maintain their culture over successive generations, despite various and numerous forces of change. While changes happen on the surface, deeper layers remain unchanged and culture rises from its own ashes like a phoenix.

Although our genes give us the ability to create and maintain the structure, from the evidence that we have so far, it appears that our experiences have a higher influence on culture than our genes. Culture is the unwritten book that contains the rules of the social game, being passed from generation to generation.

#### **5. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BASED ON RELIGION, ETHNICITY, REGION, GENDER, GENERATION AND SOCIAL CLASS**

Religious, ethnic and regional cultures explain the disparities within countries. Ethnic and religious groups often cross the political boundaries of countries. Some groups form minorities at the crossroads of the dominant culture of the nation and the traditional one of the group. Some minorities are treated in the predominant current, even though the phenomenon can last several generations although others keep their traditions. An example is the United States, where immigrants are part of the people. Discrimination based on ethnic origin delays the assimilation and represents a problem in many states. To the extent that regional, ethnic and religious cultures have not been assimilated from birth, they may be presented in equal terms as national cultures.

Gender differences are not usually presented in cultural terms. Nevertheless, if we do this, the result can be surprising. If we recognize that within every society there is a masculine culture different to the feminine culture, we can better explain the difficulty to change traditional gender roles. An example is that women are considered unsuitable for certain professions traditionally designed for men, this is supported by the fact that women do not bear masculine symbols, they do not correspond to the image of a hero, they do not participate in rituals and it is believed that they cannot grow dominant values in the culture of men and not by the fact that from a technical point of view women are unable to practice a particular profession, vice versa, respectively. Feelings and fears related to the opposite sex can be as intense as people's reactions to foreign cultures. The generational differences in terms of symbols, heroes, rituals and values are evident for most people. They are often overestimated. In ancient Egyptian papyri, 4,000 years old, and

in the writings of Hesiod in the late eighth century BC we find dissatisfaction with young people who lost respect for the values of the elderly.

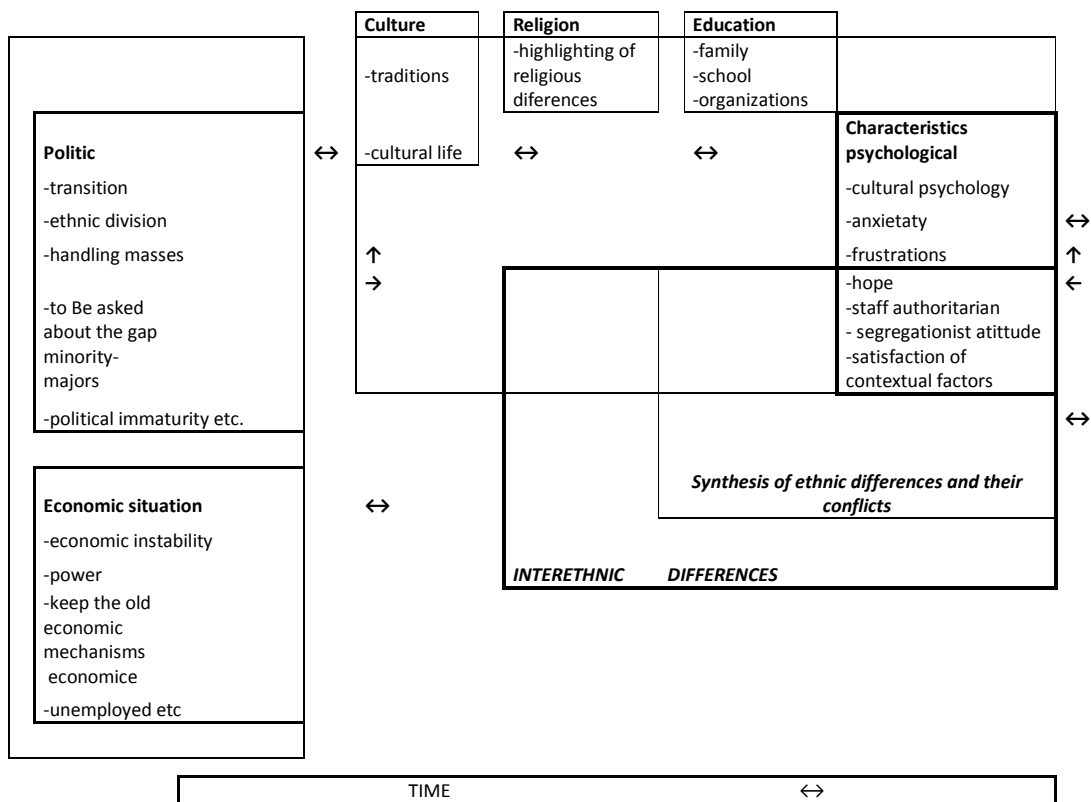
Most differences between generations in terms of practices and values are attributed to age, repeated from generation to generation. However, historical events affect generations who participated in a different way; when the “cultural revolution” (1966-1976) occurred in China it was the period of universities and Chinese people can testify in this regard. Those who normally could continue studies were sent to work in the countryside and missed the opportunity to study. They talk about the “wasted generation”. Technological development can also differentiate generations. The spread of television has made people see how life looks in other parts of the world.

Social classes wear different class cultures. Social class is associated with the opportunity to study with each job and profession. Education and profession are powerful sources of culture detachment. There is no universally applicable definition of social class and people from different countries have a different number and different types of classes. Manners, the accent used to speak their native language, using or avoiding certain words, are some of the criteria that place a person in a social class.

Less approached as specific element of cultural differentiation, religion plays a particularly crucial role in the evolution of cultures and civilizations. The issue is very sensitive and obliges to rigor and subtlety. However, religion is not the same as faith and cannot be accused of neither good nor bad, neither failure nor success. Belonging to a religion or another may nevertheless have consequences on different attitudes, behaviours, individual and collective manifestations, sometimes through what the servants of the church in question preach and especially how they preach, sometimes by the way they act religious receptors perceive messages sent to them by church ministers.

Religion, on the one hand, by its fundamental elements, beliefs (in single deities or a set of deities, in supernatural or in transcendental power) and acts (ritual practices), and, on the other hand, by the institutions of ministry, has imposed over time as one of the most sovereign ways of organization, communication and dissemination of human groups. It has become universal and marked fundamentally the social and economics at all times. In an effective manner and not necessarily credible, religion has assumed educational and formative missions, it has opened or closed horizons, stimulated or slowed creation and creativity, made mankind to progress or return to the past according to the era and its people, the characteristics and motivations of believers and servants of its institutions and, not least, according to what the system faiths - acts - religious institutions had become through the accumulations and transformations achieved up to that point. Religion is, as stated often, the need for order and meaning through which intellectual appropriation of nature can be achieved. It is what is achieved through the religious speech, speech that is inextricably linked to contexts and situations, language and language characteristics, the system of encoding and decoding each culture at a certain moment and in progress. Religion appears thus to the level of discourse and of the religious domain (content of the space between people and objects of their representations) as a fundamental element of culture and cultural act. It leaves its mark on cultural specificity and relationships between cultures (different cultural backgrounds) in a profound and very well marked way; and, equally, on business environment, organization and management quality etc. Here we have a table who explains the differences between the cultures (Table 1).

**Table 1. The differences between the cultures**



## 6. STEREOTYPE IN ANALYSING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Consideration of cultural specificity is often made by stereotype. Moreover, there appears the temptation to grant an exaggerated credit to this element in adapting behaviours to the cultural environment visited with which they enter in relation for one reason or another. Stereotype is taken by classic clichés in some papers or studies in order to be provided in guiding attitudes towards individuals or groups from other cultures. The results are rarely positive; these clichés have in addition to accurate elements of characterization of behaviours from different cultural areas, some distortions, exaggerations or metaphorical subtleties.

The stereotype does not have a single definition, it is seen differently depending on the position, education, training and cultural background of those who try to capture its essential characteristics. Thus, in general, the stereotype appears as a formed (ready-made) opinion, a cliché reducing singularities as a stable association of elements (images, ideas, symbols, words) which outlines an ethnic, cultural or even organizational unity. It is considered an “element of a universal tendency to group events and objects based on similarities” (Lippman, 1922), as “projection of a judgment on a category” (Allport, 1954) or as a “means of expressing devaluation (transfiguration) of ethnic and cultural change by assigning general unfavourable traits” (Katz and Braly, 1933). It is often reduced to national or ethnic characteristics printed by folk beliefs or folklore. A stereotype may have its origin in a metaphorical statement of a personality or an anonymous that captures a positive feature (usually auto-stereotype) or a negative one (usually hetero-stereotype) to a population or ethnic group.

The stereotype is often seen through the positive role that it can fulfil in the evolution of a country, a population or ethnic group. Thus, it becomes the guarantee of egocentrism and shield of the sense of self-worth, its positions and rights against the world. It forces the tradition in which we feel safe for the position we occupy (Lippman, 1922).

Regardless of the sense, it is assumed that stereotype undergoes significant changes over time, depending on ideology, position, relationships etc.

The study of stereotype enters the zone of interest of cognitive social psychology but anthropology also aims to know its cultural and social characteristics and dimensions. Intercultural Management tries to benefit from the results of studies undertaken by them and bring them to the need for knowledge of the cultural specificity in relation to the requirements of business development between enterprises and corporations from different cultural areas. IM helps to achieve systematization, structuring and interpretations of stereotypes regarding management implicitly or explicitly, grounding strategies, market research and competitive adjustment to the cultural characteristics of other markets and business environments. At IM level, it becomes important to know the stereotypes, especially through what they capture deformed in relation to attitudes, behaviours, manners of communication etc. The thing correctly captured by a stereotype becomes a common place and can be noticed easily. It is more difficult to find outside of specialized studies what changes faster leaving the stereotype behind.

Depending on its origins stereotype can be the product of its culture (auto-stereotype) or the product of another culture on a given culture (hetero-stereotype). In the first case it is a misconception of its culture (French about themselves: nothing is impossible for a French); in the second case we deal with a preconceived idea of another culture (a Brazilian about a Portuguese: lack of imagination and wickedness).

In general, auto-stereotype is more favourable than hetero-stereotype (Marin Salazar, 1985). However, there are important differences between cultures regarding the meaning assigned by stereotype. In primitive cultures, appreciative stereotype is dominant; very often, it exaggerates the positive aspects of attitudes, qualities, ethnic or national behaviours compared to those coming from other cultures. Cultures of evolved populations with a high level of economic and social development provide auto-stereotypes covering the desire to satisfy national egos and vanity and hetero-stereotypes slightly derogatory towards neighbours or peers. In the cultures of populations in a state of poverty or incipient development auto-stereotype is easy or strongly unfavourable and hetero-stereotype can be derogatory (compared to neighbours of the same rank) or laudatory (compared to developed populations or situated in other geographical areas). In the cultures of very proud and haughty populations, auto-stereotype can highlight only positive, often amplified, aspects.

Stereotype is also influenced by the political relations which nations (peoples) maintain, the level of development of the country or region, education level and religious dominants of the population, the type of dominant political ideology etc. Thus, in situations of conflict between two countries auto-stereotype tends to draw out positive aspects while hetero-stereotype mostly brings negative reviews. Hetero-stereotype becomes more favourable when the culture of the country assessed by stereotypes has a level of socio-economic development higher than the country of the evaluator and approaches certain neutrality when the evaluator comes from a more developed country. The role of the evaluator (researcher, specialist in human resources, mission manager etc.) is very important, their subjectivity may affect the character and meaning of the stereotype.

Stereotype may not only be national or ethnic but also racial or religious. Often it is the result of mixing different cultural, racial and religious features of a particular community,



usually a nation or ethnicity. Some of the stereotypes can have particularly severe negative consequences. National ones, for example, can be sources of chauvinism and xenophobia, being the source of many jokes and anecdotes on everything that is foreign.

## CONCLUSIONS

Organizational cultures have become a main topic in management literature since the '80s. The idea that the level of "excellence" of an organization is given by the way in which its members have learned in common to think, feel and act started to be supported.

The notion of "corporate culture" is a diffuse and holistic one but seems to have important consequences.

Sociologists dealing with organizations have emphasized for more than half a century the role of the diffuse factor in organizations.

Assigning the term "culture" for mental software shared by people within an organization is a favourable way to analyse these sociological perspectives.

Organizational cultures are different to national cultures in many aspects. A corporation is a social system different to a nation, perhaps only because the members of a corporation have not grown in it. They have agreed to be part of it, but one day they can go. But without a common goal of the organization's members, cultural differences, religious and political will born conflicts because they still remain as the beliefs and opinions of the members even if they do not share with others or if they do, it will be just for exposing their beliefs, not by reason of injury to others.

The results of the research on national cultures and their dimensions are useful to a certain extent to understand organizational cultures.

The study of all factors and their correlation can form a clear picture of the differences and way of understanding between cultures.

Between an organization and national cultures, there may be benefits if exchanging information can help development of the organization or organization making improvements to persons who are part of a culture, although there is a sensitivity in sharing information that can lead to conflict, instead of benefits.

## REFERENCES

1. Minkov M., Hofstede G.I., Hofstede G. (2012) *Cultures and organizations. Mental software. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival*, Humanitas Publishing House
2. Bosch, Marc (coordonator), *Le management interculturel*, Nathan Publishing House, 1993
3. Demorgon, Jacques, *Complexité des cultures et de l'interculturel*, Anthropos Publishing House, Paris, 1996
4. Chombart de Lauwe, *La culture et le pouvoir*, Stock Publishing House, 1975 Paul-Henry
5. Hofstede, Geert, *Managementul culturilor multiculturale*, Economics Publishing House, 1996
6. Ionescu, Gh. Gh. *Cultural dimensions of management*, Economics Publishing House, 1996
7. Varine, Hugues de, *La culture des autres*, Seuil Publishing House, 1976