Intercultural Management and the Importance of the Culture

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Abstract

Due to the existence of a strong corporate globalization, intercultural management has gained increasing interest in recent decades. Communication between people of different cultures requires not only words, but also the transmission of norms and values, which are not always understood by the dialogue partner. Managers should be alert not only to the language, but also to the different attitudes, behavior related to different cultures and traditions.

Effective handling of the cross-cultural interface is a critical source of a firm's competitive advantage. Managers need to develop not only empathy and tolerance toward cultural differences, but also acquire a sufficient degree of factual knowledge about the beliefs and values of foreign counterparts.

In this paper we will highlight the main components of the culture (especially religion), that influence the intercultural management.

1. Introduction

Intercultural management can be described as a combination of knowledge, insights and skills that are necessary for the right approach of national or regional cultures and of differences between cultures, at different levels of management. It is an integral part of international management.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the role of intercultural management: to facilitate a successful solution of problems by providing the most appropriate managerial approaches necessary for effective international action, taking into account the cultural specificities.

Cross-cultural management encompasses studies from a variety of research literatures, including comparative management, cross-cultural management, international management and cross-cultural psychology of organizational behaviour. The functionalist group of studies are the most prolific in cross-cultural management. In the functionalist approach, culture is seen as offering answers to the basic needs that human beings have to fulfil and this is the foundation for what are known as cultural dimensions. The functionalist approach influenced seminal contributions by Hofstede (1996) 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).

The importance of this topic is underlined by the interest shown by the European Union, by declaring 2008 as the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" (ECOTEC, 2009). The aim of this initiative was to promote dialogue between cultures, supporting European citizens in addressing a cultural environment more complex. This initiative aimed to promote, especially among young people, the importance of developing active European citizenship, which respects cultural diversity and common values.

2. Definition of Culture

The term "culture" comes from the Latin „culture", a derivative of colere: to grow. Above its literal agricultural meaning, ancient authors (like Cicero) also used the word metaphorically -

"Cultivation of mind". In the Middle Ages, in the context of the emphasis on religious experience rather than on human development, this meaning of the word has disappeared, more or less, only to return during the Renaissance. Then, metaphorical meaning was gradually replaced by agriculture meaning, as the dominant understanding of culture. Now, there are more than 200 different definitions for the term "culture". Iceberg model may help to better understand this term.

Image 1: Iceberg model of the culture
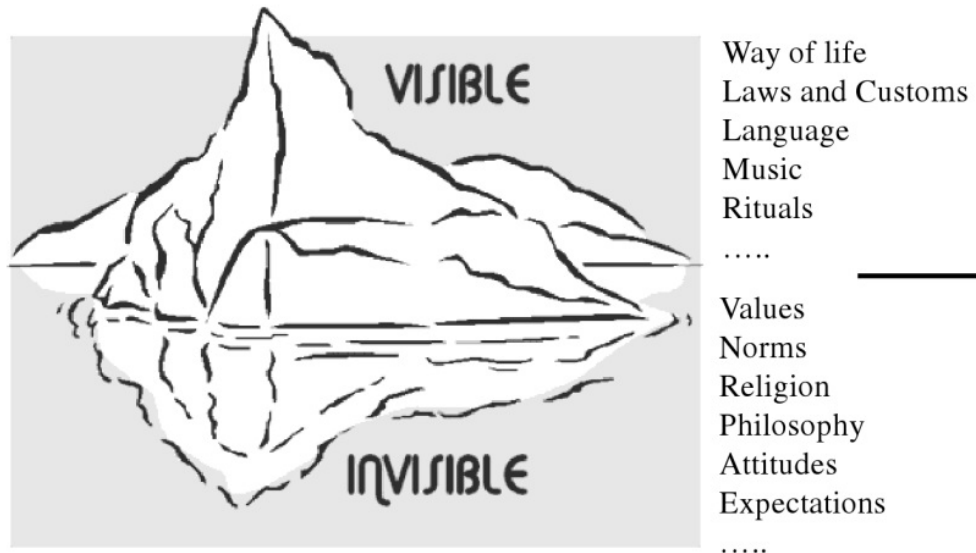
Source: Hall E.T., 1976

As can be seen in the image above, it has a visible part of an iceberg - culture has areas that we can see (music, clothing, dance, language, architecture, food, gestures, behavior, art, etc.); and an invisible part - including: religion, attitudes to life, in family behavior, motivations, tolerance to change, attitude to rules imposed, styles of communication, thinking, risk-taking.

For Lisa Hoecklin, culture is a system of great significance. Culture informs us on what constitutes the primary focus of individuals and shows us how the world is perceived. The author adds that, within a culture, there are common ways of understanding the events and behaviors, and ways that allow predicting how people will behave belonging to their group. For the author, it is a learning culture deriving from the social system and no from configuration or from genetic code. Therefore, culture is a collective phenomenon, sharing values and meanings (Hoecklin, L., 1995).

Geert Hofstede defines culture as a collective programming of the "mind", that allows distinguishing between a group or a class of people. Category of persons is implicit here as a nation. It is not directly accessible by observation, but is perceived through verbal and non-verbal expressions (Hofstede, G., 1996).
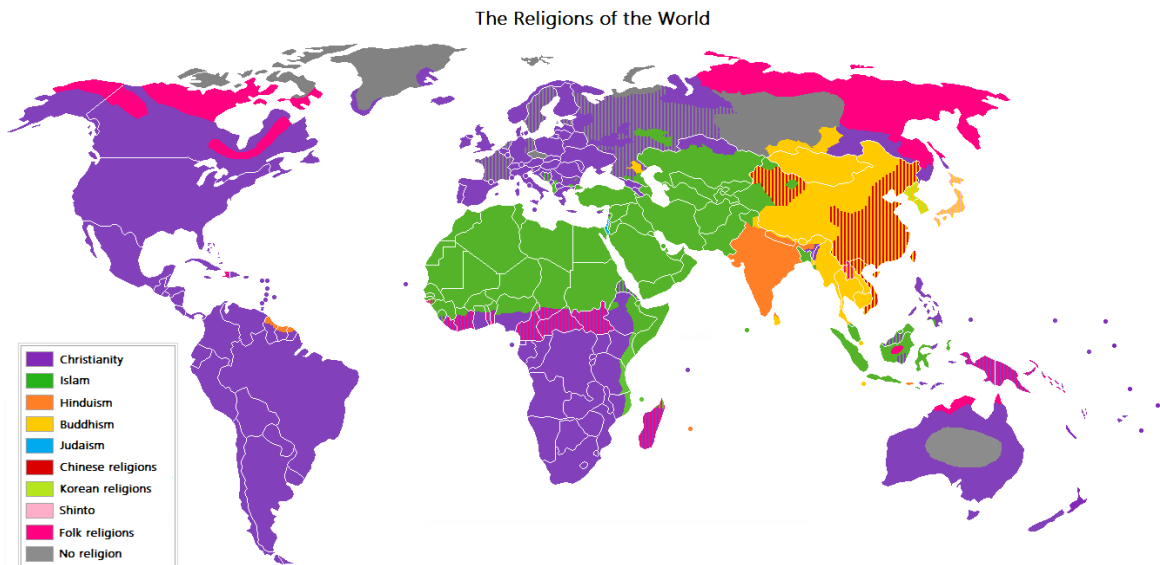
Culture relates to the fundamental belief of what a person should be and how it should interact with those who belong to his group or with the strangers. Education and professional experience allow transition to another phase of programming. Cultural programming of the individual will vary depending on the different phases, which are simultaneously influenced by the values and practices.

3. The components of culture

Religion
Religion is often at the root of a strong sense of belonging cultural, historical and ethnic (see "The great Arab nation", China Confucius, Japan with its mixture of Shintoism and Buddhism specific). The persistence of religious issues and conflicts, that it generates, are rooted in the past and they nourish strong prejudices, even in companies considered to be advanced.

Image 2: Religions of the World

The Religions of the World

Legend:
- Christianity
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Judaism
- Chinese religions
- Korean religions
- Shinto
- Folk religions
- No religion

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups

Culture is derived from the social environment. People are not born with a shared set of values and attitudes. Children gradually acquire specific ways of thinking and behaving, as they are raised in a society. For example, in the United States, children usually acquire values of individualism and Christianity. But in China, children learn to depend on family members and acquire values based on Confucianism. Culture is passed from generation to generation—from parents, teachers, mentors, peers, and leaders (Cavusgil , S.T., 2007).

It is important to note that the perception of human differs from one culture to another. Thus, for christians, from Genesis Bible to naturalism of Rousseau, the man is a person in itself, irrespective of social context in which he lives: worldview is founded on the existence of man, that pre-exist to the quality of his social being, and the agreement between these individuals creates social ties.

Contrariwise, many cultures called oriental (Asian, Arabic) consider that the individual is defined based on what context is specific: it is part of a whole, and without the existence of the whole, the individual does not exist. Social bond is the foundation of the agreement between the individual and the cosmos and, without this link, there would be nothing.

For the Intercultural Management, differences between religions are not interested in dogmatic sense, theological. But there are important differences induced by religious groups adhering to different religions, which bring the differences in attitudes, behaviors, or as a stand against the action. This is the reason why they have already identified cultural criteria of differentiation, relative to religion as a factor of cultural specificity. These criteria aim to mark the differences, considering the impact on economic activity, because, for the enterprise operating in different cultural areas, is important to know and to exploit them.

Family

Family plays an important role in what makes up a complete picture of the concept of culture, causing differences in approach of various aspects of economic and social life of a society or community.

For example, Scandinavian and Germanic systems presents family structure comparable to those found in Asia, especially in Japan and Korea. Unlike countries with a structure called the nuclear family, in which one can distinguish between individualistic and egalitarian behaviors members (as found in France, England, USA), their family system is sometimes authoritarian and inegalitarian. The reason of this situation is rooted in the structure of land ownership and agricultural productivity.

This authoritarian character stresses, from family - to the nation, the dependence on authority and compliance behaviors, passing through all forms of social organization. Inegalitarian character, due to the primacy given to the elderly, determines the group to accept inequality and hierarchy.

Extended family, which can be confused in some situations with a clan set up based on ethnicity, is the dominant value in many regions. It requires a strong solidarity, which could be detrimental in certain situations for entrepreneurship. But it can also to turn into a factor of stability, if taken into account the ability.
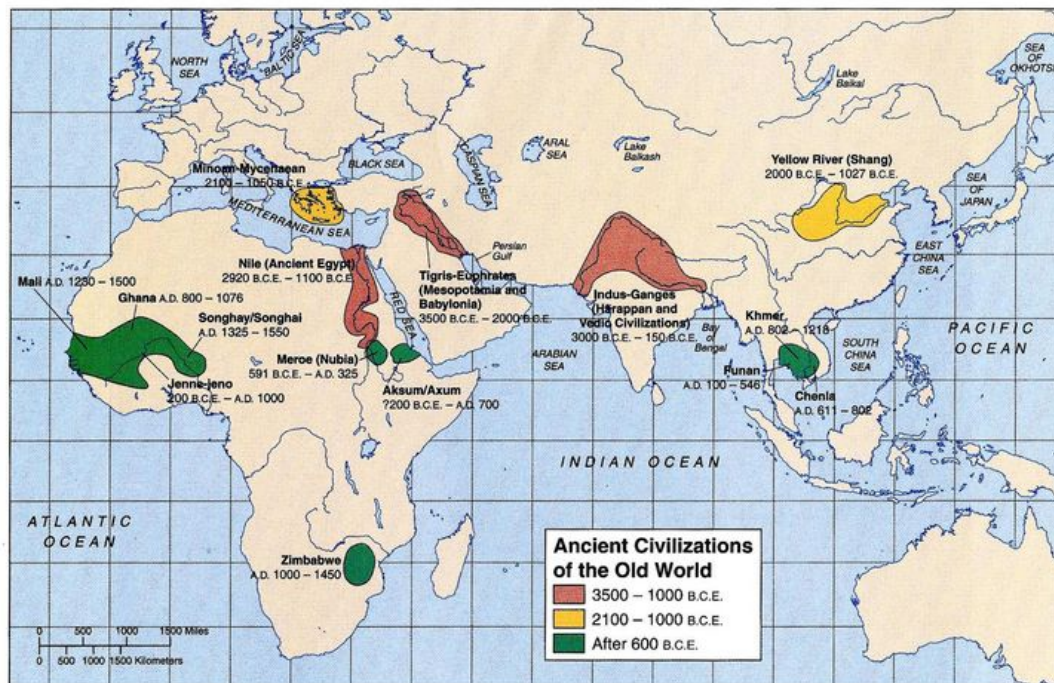
The history of a nation

Many civilizations are much older than the European civilizations; the feeling of superiority of Westerners (europeans and north americans) does not date back only two or three centuries. This superiority may not be well regarded by the inhabitants of civilizations much older. For many oh them, the Westerners are promoters of dangerous imperialist war and are the descendants of the Crusaders.

Thus, one of the oldest empire was China, with a continuous history of nearly 4,000 years. Another ancient empires were : Sumerian; Babylonian; Assyrian; Egyptian; Persian; Greek; Romanian; Turkish; Aztec; Maya; Maurya, etc.

Image 3:

Ancient Civilizations of the Old World

Source:https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/6a/4f/20/6a4f20c7fce29edd801638b76aeb4e33.jpg

Power relations within a community

The feeling that the established order in a society is determined by the will of God is widespread in many countries: inequalities are therefore natural and they can be organized (see example castes in India) and, accordingly, discipline can and is accepted as the rule of the game. In the West, the chief imposes his authority and and give strength and value to his views. In Japan and in most cases all over Asia, head rarely expressed verbally: he imposes his authority through its ability to express the views of the global group, whose leader is.

4. Conclusion

In the future, the number of business meetings with participants from different cultures will increase. Therefore, managers will need to be flexible and open, so that they can transit from one

cultural context to another one. The old ways of communication, negotiation, leadership and doing business are increasingly less effective.

Multi-cultural workforce is becoming the norm. To achieve organizational goals and avoid potential risks, the managers should be culturally sensitive and promote creativity and motivation through flexible leadership.

5. References

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