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Selected
Cross-Cultural
Factors in
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Abstract

The workforce of the 21st century is increasingly diverse and multicultural. To effectively manage and lead in this environment, HR must be knowledgeable about cross-cultural factors—on both the domestic and global fronts—in human resource management. By promoting education in cross-cultural competencies throughout the organization, HR can better serve the company to successfully achieve its mission and goals.

Introduction

As a concept and as a reality, culture is broad and multifaceted. On a daily basis, culture influences who we are—as individuals, families, communities, professions, industries, organizations and nations—and how we interact with each other within and across regional and national borders. Defined as a set of values and beliefs with learned behaviors shared within a particular society, culture provides a sense of identity and belonging.¹ From language, communication styles, history and religion to norms, values, symbolism and ways of being, “culture” is everywhere.

Human resource management is the formal structure within an organization responsible for all decisions, strategies, factors, principles, operations, practices, functions, activities and methods related to the management of people.²

In domestic and global workplace settings, people in organizations reflect their respective cultures. As shifting demographics bring together people of many cultural backgrounds, human resource management (HRM) must be thoughtfully examined—and sometimes altered—to support organizational goals. SHRM Special Expertise Panel members point out that for sustainability, organizational leaders must expand their perspectives from a

local to a worldly view.³ SHRM’s 2008 *Workplace Forecast* highlights several trends in culture that will likely have a major impact on the workplace: 1) heightened awareness of cultural differences in domestic and global workplaces; 2) greater need for cross-cultural understanding/savvy in business settings; 3) managing talent globally; 4) greater emphasis on global leadership competencies; and 5) increased use of virtual global teams.⁴

Thus, HR professionals experienced in workplace diversity and cross-cultural communication are well-positioned to develop and implement culturally appropriate HRM strategies, policies and practices. While not exhaustive, this *Research Quarterly* focuses on selected cross-cultural factors in HRM in today’s workplace and provides insights for HR to better serve the needs of the organization.

Business Case for Cross-Cultural HRM

With the advent of globalization, research on cross-cultural organizational behavior has become a pathway to understand the dynamics of multicultural domestic and international workplaces.⁵ In fact, successful organizations of the 21st century require leaders who understand culturally diverse work environments and can work effectively with different cultures that have varying work ethics, norms and business protocols. Yet, diverse cultures create HRM challenges. As Lisbeth Claus, Ph.D., SPHR, GPHR, associate professor of global HR at Willamette University, points out, “the HRM challenges lie between the various types of cultures—the cultures of emerging and developed countries and the growing heterogeneity of the workforce in terms of multiculturalism.”

Figure 1 | Cultural Value Dimensions

Edward Hall (1966) ⁷	Geert Hofstede (1980) ⁸	Fons Trompenaars (1993) ⁹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High- and low-context cultures ▪ Concept of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Power distance ▪ Individualism ▪ Masculinity ▪ Uncertainty avoidance ▪ Long-term orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Universalism vs. particularism ▪ Individualism vs. collectivism ▪ Neutral or emotional ▪ Specific vs. diffuse ▪ Achievement vs. ascription ▪ Passage of time ▪ Relationship to the environment

Gaining cross-cultural competence takes time, education, experience, openness and sensitivity. When people lack intercultural skills, miscommunications can damage business relationships, deadlines can be missed, projects may fail and talented people will go to the competition. Key HR responsibilities are to understand how cross-cultural factors interact with HRM, be the conduit for organizational learning for cross-cultural intelligence and foster cross-cultural communication throughout the organization.

Cultural Value Dimensions

Cross-cultural intelligence is the ability to switch ethnic and/or national contexts and quickly learn new patterns of social interaction with appropriate behavioral responses. This competence is essential to work effectively in multicultural environments. Thus, linking future career paths and global business success with cultural competence is important for HR to emphasize, with the goal that managers are motivated to acquire new behaviors and skills and understand the benefits of learning from different cultures.⁶

To become culturally competent, the first step is to have a solid understanding

of one's own values and how they shape cultural identity. Within this process, it is also important to realize that different cultures often exhibit different values. Cross-cultural management researchers and theorists (i.e., Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars) have developed cultural value dimensions, often within the realm of comparing national cultures (see Figure 1). Today, many of these terms are used to explain cross-cultural differences in the workplace.

For the purpose of discussion in this article, several major cultural value dimensions are defined below:¹⁰

- 1) *High power distance* indicates that hierarchy is important.
- 2) *Uncertainty avoidance* is achieved by behavior that results in fewer unforeseen consequences.
- 3) *High-context cultures* rely upon an internalized social context and/or physical environment (such as body language) and face-to-face communication for all or a large part of the message (e.g., indirect, subtle, ambiguous), whereas *low-context cultures* rely on direct messages (e.g., clear, stated in words, with emphasis on time management, punctuality and deadlines).

- 4) *Collectivism* refers to societies in which the group is valued over the individual and the individual's responsibility to the group overrides the individual's rights; *individualism* refers to societies that emphasize individual achievements and rights.
- 5) *Long-term orientation* indicates that cultural values are future-looking, including thrift, perseverance, humility/shame, and observe hierarchical relationships, whereas *short-term orientation* values look to the past, such as respecting tradition.

The concept of "face" is yet another term essential for understanding cross-cultural communication. Face is a sense of self-respect in an interaction and may be related to social status, a projected identity and/or a communication phenomenon. Facework strategies include verbal and nonverbal cues, acts of self-preservation and management impression interaction.¹¹ In Chinese society, for example, the concept of *guanxi* is that of personal relationships, trust and returning favors to support a network of influence.

Through cultural value dimensions, HR will gain a greater awareness of miscommunication or cultural conflict that may occur in the multicultural workplace. Should these concepts be new to the reader, the cultural factors outlined in Figure 2 offer another way to consider key cultural differences.

Corporate and Organizational Cultures

The culture of an organization's headquarters may highly influence the overall organizational culture. Specific factors determine the shape of corporate culture: 1) the relationship between employees and the company; 2) the hierarchical system of authority; and 3) the overall view of employees about the

Communication	Verbal and nonverbal
Concepts of time	Adherence to schedule
Group dependence	Importance of group over the individual
Hierarchy/authority	Perception of rank in relationship to others
Openness to diversity	Country of origin, religion, race, gender, language
Physical space	Space and privacy needed for personal comfort
Relationships	Importance for business interactions
Status attainment	Perceived level of "success"
Tolerance of change	Perception of control over one's destiny

Source: Adapted from Henson, R. (2002). Culture and the workforce. In K. Beaman, (Ed.), *Boundaryless HR: Human capital management in the global economy* (pp. 121-141). Austin, TX: Rector Duncan & Associates, Inc.

company's future, including its mission and goals, and their respective roles in the organization.¹² According to cross-cultural researchers and management consultants Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, there is

(“do whatever it takes”), and the value of employees is in how they perform and to what extent they contribute to the overall outcome. For example, teams serve as vehicles to accomplish goals and are disbanded once the goal

of their own cultural values, behaviors and assumptions, and those of other cultures. Cross-cultural communication also includes global business etiquette—from greeting behaviors, exchanging business cards and toasting at business dinners to work attitudes, appropriate work attire and nonverbal communication. To not cause offense, it is helpful to be aware of differences in greetings, such as the handshake.¹⁸ Another differing communication style is the use of silence, a form of nonverbal communication. In high-context cultures, such as in Asian countries, silence indicates thoughtfulness in decision-making. In contrast, people in low-context cultures, such as the dominant culture in the United States, are uncomfortable with silence and tend to fill the void with ‘small talk,’ such as comments about the weather.¹⁹

People establish rapport in accordance with their cultural values. Based on social capital theory and the importance of social networks, a recent study explored intercultural communication strategies for business relationship building through interviews with business executives in China, India, New Zealand and South Africa. The findings indicate that building a business relationship is defined within the socio-cultural and economic contexts of the respective cultures and that depending on the culture, different strategies are used to build and maintain business relationships. The following mini-case study demonstrates a success story from the viewpoint of the Indian culture.²⁰

Mini-Case Study #1: “The Indian Story”²¹

A senior manager works at an Indian company that sells a broad array of products (groceries, liquor, durable goods) and describes his philosophy

Building optimal business relationships requires global fluency.

a link between corporate and national cultures. Organizations can be classified into four different ideal-types of corporate culture, based on their focus on tasks/relationship and the extent of hierarchy: 1) the family; 2) the Eiffel Tower; 3) the guided missile; and 4) the incubator.¹³ These models of corporate culture provide insights as to why HRM policies and programs differ.

In the family model, a high-context culture, the leaders set the tone. This model gives high priority to doing the right things rather than doing things right. Pleasing one's superior, for example, is considered a reward in itself. Within this corporate model, some HRM policies, such as pay for performance, are viewed as threatening to family bonds. Countries that often use the family model include Japan, Italy, France and Spain. The Eiffel Tower model—contrary to the family model, where relationships are most important—is based on prescribed roles and functions within a rigid system (e.g., Germany). In this model, people are viewed as capital and cash resources. Typical HRM strategies in the Eiffel Tower culture include workforce planning and performance appraisal systems.¹⁴

The guided missile model is egalitarian, impersonal and task-oriented (e.g., United States, United Kingdom). The focus is on achieving the end goal

is reached. HRM strategies focus on management by objective and pay for performance.¹⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, the incubator model has a different philosophy, wherein the fulfillment of individuals is more important than the organization. The structure is egalitarian, personal and individualistic, such as entrepreneurial firms in Silicon Valley in California and many Scandinavian companies, where the goal is innovative products or services. HRM strategies focus on rewards for innovation.¹⁶

As illustrated through these four corporate culture models, approaches to work, authority, problem solving and relationship building differ. This information provides HR with additional insight when working with companies of different corporate cultures.

Building Business Relationships

Building optimal business relationships requires global fluency. Global fluency—defined as “facility with cultural behaviors that help an organization thrive in an ever-changing global business environment”—is a competitive advantage to establish and maintain good business relationships.¹⁷ To promote people working effectively with those of other cultures, cross-cultural training assists employees in becoming knowledgeable about cross-cultural communication in terms

about relationship building with an example from his company:

"To successfully achieve our business goals, establishing and maintaining relationships with distributors is an essential strategy. Some of our customers are large firms, managed by graduates from the elite university I attended. This link creates strong networking opportunities. Once this *jan pehchan* (connection) is made, it is critical to invest time in this relationship, and I always counsel my subordinates on the importance of relationship building. One employee in particular is very good at maintaining relationships. He works hard to do so, even going to the airport or train station without prior arrangement to meet clients upon their arrival, once at 5 a.m.! This effort shows that he is sincere and demonstrates how far he will go to maintain this valuable relationship. This personalized service adds to our commitment to nurture a long-term business relationship."

Effective cross-cultural communication is necessary to build and maintain business relationships. To support their organizations, HR professionals can develop HRM practices and policies that promote cross-cultural training and reward managers for their part in educating employees on effective cross-cultural communication.

The Role of Language

Today, communicating in the global marketplace requires new perspectives and new communication skills. In fact, the appropriate use of language in cross-cultural settings often depends on the situation. Thus, when developing HRM policies, practices and initiatives, it is important to consider the role of language in cross-cultural environments. For example, to roll out

new initiatives worldwide, it may be necessary (and often required by law) to translate HRM policies and programs into other languages. Colgate-Palmolive Company is an example of an organization that has effectively communicated key HRM programs to its global workforce. Keeping in mind the different languages spoken in

The appropriate use of language in cross-cultural settings often depends on the situation.

the firm, two critical HRM core value initiatives, *Valuing Colgate People* and *Managing with Respect*, were translated into 10 languages. *Valuing Colgate People* includes a section on the company's business ethics, code of conduct and business practice guidelines. These initiatives set the stage for the organization's strategy to become a best place to work.²²

When working with people from different cultures and/or countries, organizational leaders must know how to "read" body language, a key communication factor in high-context cultures. Misunderstanding body language can lead to inaccurate expectations. With many Western companies now doing business with India, a good example of a common cross-cultural difference is one of the head gestures by Indians. As cross-cultural trainer and management consultant Craig Storti explains, the Indian head gesture for "yes" appears similar to how Westerners shake their head to indicate "no." When seeing this gesture, Westerners may think that the Indian has disagreed, when that is not necessarily so.²³ Taking time to understand communication through body language can make the difference in a positive or negative outcome. These various points are representative of the many

scenarios that require flexibility and knowledge about language and cross-cultural communication.

Finally, although the international language of business is English, not everyone speaks English fluently. When non-native English speakers come in contact with native English

speakers, the result is often miscommunication. *International English*, a relatively new term, describes a mode of communication increasingly used in international business where non-native English speakers speak English with native English speakers. International English requires the avoidance of culturally laden language, such as cultural shortcuts, metaphors, jargon, slang and idiomatic phrases. U.S. Americans, for example, often use metaphors with sports terms, such as "all the bases are covered" or "we want a level playing field," most of which are not understood by non-native English speakers. Interestingly, it takes time and practice for native English speakers to become proficient with the use of International English and to consciously avoid using phrases or terms that are culturally based.²⁴

Cultural Perceptions of Organizational Justice

Regarding fairness in the workplace, organizational justice is a central theme within the employee relations domain. A fair workplace helps maintain employee commitment, contributes to job satisfaction and minimizes absenteeism and turnover. There are three broad categories of organizational justice: 1) procedural justice (fairness of methods used); 2) interactional

justice (the quality of treatment); and 3) distributive justice (perception of process and fairness of the outcome).

In a culturally diverse workforce, perceptions of justice may vary due to cultural values. A recent study examined cultural factors that influence how employees form overall justice perceptions in the United States, China, Korea and Japan. The study examined employee reactions in industry sectors such as finance, education, service, information technology and manufacturing. According to the study, the effect of perception of fairness on turnover is greater for Americans than for Chinese or Koreans. Americans are more likely to leave their organization as a result of perceived organizational injustice than are Japanese, Chinese or Korean employees.²⁵ Yet, not all studies point to differences regarding justice based on country culture. The results of one study suggest that cultural dimensions should not be used as a generalization. This study considered whether individualist (low power distance) or collectivist dimensions (high power distance) had the most impact on organizational justice perceptions regarding employee work outcome relationships at a multinational bank with Hong Kong Chinese and American employees. While employees from low power distance cultures were more influenced toward perceived justice, a key finding was that the perceptions of fairness were important to both groups. This study suggests that for managing in different cultures, workplace justice and its corresponding positive effects are important, no matter a country's cultural values.²⁶

Turnover is another key aspect related to organizational justice. In an increasingly diverse workforce, turnover due to unfairness in the workplace is very

costly. While research on domestic and cross-cultural issues in relation to fairness in the workplace is relatively new,

problems in similar ways; 2) do they seek out similar kinds of information to investigate problems; 3) do they

In a culturally diverse workforce, perceptions of justice may vary due to cultural values.

studies demonstrate how insensitivity can damage work relations and result in increased turnover. A recent study of U.S. employees found that more than 2 million managers and professionals leave their jobs as a result of inappropriate and insensitive comments in their organizations, costing U.S. employers \$64 billion annually. The study highlights that illegal discrimination is no longer the greatest threat when it comes to attracting, recruiting and retaining talent. Rather, every-day inappropriate behaviors are the root cause of losing talented employees.²⁷ By ensuring that HRM policies and practices—including consequences for inappropriate behaviors in the workplace—are fair, consistently applied and culturally appropriate, HR can create a work environment that fosters respect, employee commitment and contribution. However, it should be noted that not all localized policies and practices may be consistent with corporate policies.

Cross-Cultural Decision-Making

Decisions in the workplace are influenced by cultural viewpoints, beliefs, assumptions and values. Cultural values have an impact on why and how decisions are made and implemented. Although cross-cultural decision-making is rarely a topic of discussion, this information provides valuable insight for HR to improve communication in the workplace. Figure 3 illustrates cultural variations involved in decision-making, based on questions such as 1) do managers of different cultures view

come up with similar solutions; 4) are different strategies used to determine alternatives; and 5) do they implement their decisions in similar ways.²⁸

Culturally influenced decision-making can be seen in various aspects of HRM. Change management is one example where culture influences decision-making. In a culture that is future-oriented, such as the United States, with strongly held beliefs about people's ability to learn and change, HR creates change management programs with the goal to be more productive and efficient in serving internal and external customers (e.g., employee training programs on new technology). In contrast, in a company with a hierarchical management style—common in Japan, for example—where major decisions are made by a senior-level manager, HR would be unlikely to promote a program that emphasizes team decision-making.

Whether in a domestic or global workplace, HR needs to be cognizant of cross-cultural decision-making and the corresponding influence on HRM. By being aware of cultural differences in the decision-making process (e.g., the reasons for making decisions, the various ways that decisions are made in different cultures, the party responsible for making those decisions—individuals, groups, various levels within the organization—and the ways decisions are implemented), HR can better gauge culturally appropriate decisions and work with managers of other cultures in the decision-making process.

Cross-Cultural Performance Feedback

Lack of cross-cultural sensitivity in the performance appraisal process can result in negative impact on communication, employee morale, teamwork and turnover. It is critical that managers be culturally appropriate when assessing performance and delivering feedback. Additionally, to get better performance results in culturally diverse employee populations, companies may need to re-examine and redefine their performance standards to ensure cultural bias does not influence the performance appraisal process.²⁹ However, as the literature shows, performance management is originally a Western practice. When coming from an international perspective, there are complexities primarily due to cultural and structural constructs that may not directly match the Western use of performance management.³⁰

Researchers Philip Harris and Robert Moran point out that at the cross-cultural level, how performance is defined and judged is “culture-bound.” In an individualistic society, such as the United States, performance is judged on productivity, timeliness, quality of

output, job-specific knowledge and proficiency, with emphasis placed on individual and work outcomes, not on the group and work process.³¹ At the same time, culture influences the communication of performance feedback. In a collectivist or high-context culture, such as India and Japan, where in-group harmony and interpersonal relationships are highly valued, it is recommended to give feedback in a manner that is subtle, indirect and non-confrontational. Researchers suggest that for certain feedback processes, such as 360-degree feedback, which involves explicit feedback, employees be trained to understand and utilize such feedback, particularly if it does not match their cultural orientation of communication.³² Presented by authors Milliman, Taylor and Czaplewski, the following mini-case study illustrates a critical incident in which cultural differences in the performance feedback process contributed to an unexpected response. This situation is an example of one that may commonly occur without cross-cultural training about how feedback is perceived and received in different cultural contexts.³³

Mini-Case Study #2: Cross-Cultural Performance Feedback³⁴

Fred, a team leader in software engineering at a U.S.-based multinational enterprise, leads a virtual work group. His team is working on a new product and is under pressure to meet quality standards and get the product to the marketplace. Some of his team members are located in Malaysia. Since the team was provided with technology for global communications, such as electronic group software and teleconferencing, the company did not provide cross-cultural training. Fred writes an e-mail to his counterpart team leader, Hisham, in Malaysia to inform him that the testing process must end and the next phase of the project must now go forward. Hisham does not respond to Fred’s e-mail for many days, and the Malaysian team continues to do testing on the product. For the final stage of the project, Fred flies to Malaysia. Two weeks after the U.S. deadline has passed, the project is successfully completed.

Within the company’s goal to operate as a global company, one of the new practices is 360-degree feedback. In

Figure 3 | Cultural Contingencies in Decision-Making

Five Steps in Decision-Making	Cultural Variations	
1. Problem Recognition	<i>Problem Solving</i> We should change the situation.	<i>Situation Acceptance</i> Some situations should be accepted as they are.
2. Information Search	<i>Gathering “facts”</i>	<i>Gathering ideas and possibilities</i>
3. Construction of Alternatives	<i>New, future-oriented alternatives</i> Adults can learn and change.	<i>Past-, present- and future-oriented alternatives</i> Adults cannot change.
4. Choice	<i>Individual decision-making</i> Decision-making responsibility is delegated. Decisions are made quickly. Decision rule: Is it true or false?	<i>Team decision-making</i> Senior managers often make decisions. Decisions are made slowly. Decision rule: Is it good or bad?
5. Implementation	<i>Slow</i> Managed from the top. Responsibility of one person.	<i>Fast</i> Involves participation of all levels. Responsibility of team.

Source: From ADLER, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior*, 5E, © 2008 South-Western, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission, www.cengage.com/permissions

his supervisory role, Fred gathers the required feedback and then meets with Hisham. Fred informs Hisham that while he performed well on the project, there were issues upon which he could improve. Fred documents the feedback in an e-mail to Hisham, with a copy to Hisham's supervisor in Malaysia. From Fred's viewpoint, he has completed the performance appraisal in accordance with the company standards, feeling that he has been both fair and transparent. Back in the United States the following week, Fred is quite surprised to learn that Hisham, immediately following the performance appraisal meeting, applied for a transfer to another team. Fred recalls that Hisham was quiet during the performance appraisal. He thinks that the transfer is for the best, particularly if Hisham cannot deal with constructive criticism. After all, Fred knows that the success of the project is what is most important.

In this mini-case study, different cultural dimensions are involved: 1) Malaysia is a high-context culture where communication requires awareness of facial expressions, tone of voice and eye contact, and 2) the United States is a low-context culture where people depend more on words than on external expressions for meaning. Differences in collectivism-individualism also explain the miscommunication between Fred and Hisham. Collectivism emphasizes creating harmony and loyalty between people. Yet, due to Fred's direct and assertive approach in the performance appraisal, Hisham experienced individual criticism and consequently suffered a loss of "face" for his team. On his end, Fred acted within the values of his individualistic culture and emphasized individual responsibility, not group responsibility, in Hisham's performance appraisal. Clearly, Fred is unaware

of the cultural context in which he spoke to Hisham.³⁵ Had Fred received cross-cultural training regarding the Malaysian workplace and appropriately

communicated his feedback, Hisham may not have requested the transfer.

To break the cross-cultural conflict cycle, organizational learning is essential. Examples of learning mechanisms are many: 1) HR puts systems in place to catch cultural issues and then addresses them; 2) supervisors bring cultural dilemmas to the attention of HR; 3) HR learns about cultural conflicts through exit interviews; 4) progress reports sent to managers may flag cross-cultural issues; 5) HR trains managers and team members on communication-style differences between cultures; and 6) prior to sending managers to work abroad, HR provides them with cultural informants, such as mentors and/or managers with multicultural expertise, to offer support and advice.³⁶ As highlighted in a study on society culture and HRM practices, the methods of communication—downward and upward—are strongly linked to cultural value dimensions. This research points out that in a culture of high power distance, it is unlikely that the manager would use electronic methods in communication. Again, the lesson here is that managers be trained to be culturally appropriate when communicating performance feedback.³⁷

Developing Global Mindset

The SHRM's 2008 *Workplace Forecast* cites training and developing global leaders as a global trend to which organizations are now responding.³⁸ In particular, intercultural competence is

emerging as a key focus in global leadership development, with the critical themes of cross-cultural communication skills, developing global mindset

Intercultural competence is emerging as a key focus in global leadership development.

and respecting cultural diversity.³⁹ In fact, global mindset has become an essential competency in global business strategy. As researchers Gupta et al. emphasize, "a deeply embedded global mindset is a prerequisite for global industry dominance."⁴⁰

From a cross-cultural viewpoint, Paul Evans, Vladimir Pucik and Jean-Louis Barsoux, experts in global HR management, point out that it is "global mindset"—a state of mind—that differentiates global managers. Global mindset is the ability to work effectively across organizational, functional and cross-cultural boundaries. The strongest mechanism to develop global mindset is the international assignment. HR can foster development of global mindset by ensuring that talented employees worldwide—no matter their passport country—have equal access to opportunities. Focused learning programs can also promote global mindset. Multinational corporations such as Unilever, Johnson & Johnson and General Electric have effectively used in-house experiential action-learning programs for a broad cross-section of high-potential employees to speed up the development of global mindset.⁴¹

Global mindset is ongoing, driven by four factors: 1) curiosity about the world and the desire to know more; 2) awareness of one's current mindset; 3) exposure to novelty and diversity; and 4) a specific intention to develop an integrated perspective that weaves

together many aspects of knowledge about different markets and cultures. Global mindset is of value for local/ domestic organizations as well as companies in the global marketplace. At the local level, for instance, a company might use global mindset to benchmark product and process innovations of competitors outside its domestic borders. For organizations operating in other countries, having global mindset helps people relate to others in different cultural contexts and then develop the foundation essential for “interpersonal glue,” such as in cross-border mergers (e.g., Alcatel and Lucent).⁴² Ultimately, global mindset greatly fosters global learning, allowing for faster access to other markets or providing quality customer service to diverse groups. As HR supports its organization in training for global competencies, global mindset should head the list of essential cross-cultural factors in HRM.

Career Perspectives Across Cultures

Research about cross-cultural perspectives on careers offers insights on similarities and differences from cultural and national contexts. Career development, a part of human resource planning, is an HRM strategy within talent management. However, Western career attributes and definitions, which dominate the career development literature, are not always representative of how people in other cultures view

and formulate careers. Proactive career behavior by individuals to promote their career plans, for example, is uncommon in high power distance cul-

success.⁴⁶ A study in Russia notes that new career beliefs and behaviors are emerging, in great part due to multinational corporations entering Russia

Cultural viewpoints about career development are gradually changing.

tures, where HR decisions are usually centralized. Where hierarchical status takes priority, decisions for promotions may be made by high-level executives. In contrast, HR planning in low-power distance cultures (e.g., United States, United Kingdom) often includes input from managers at many levels.⁴³ In high power distance and paternalistic cultures (e.g., France), employees often look to their superiors for guidance, whom they assume know what is best for their career development.⁴⁴

Recent studies look at career beliefs, social networking and the influence of political, social and economic changes on career concepts in nations around the world.⁴⁵ One study explores career-life success and family social support among successful women in Argentina, Canada and Mexico. In all three countries, women now consider broader measures of career success than have been traditionally viewed, such as learning and contributing to society. In Canada and Mexico, many women now see receiving recognition in the workplace as evidence of career

and introducing Western ideas about career development (e.g., mentoring and coaching, management education and training, professional development).⁴⁷ Yet, another study found that social or informal networks are greatly used in the job search process in both the United States and China, with a different focus by workers in each country. Social networks in the United States (an individualistic culture) are used to open doors for opportunities and gain information. In comparison, social networks in China (a collectivist culture) emphasize *guanxi* (the importance of interdependence of relationships, based on trust and expectations of returning favors).⁴⁸ Thus, research illustrates that while cultural viewpoints about career development are gradually changing, differences based on cultural values and past history continue to influence careers in today’s global marketplace. This information provides HR with a broader understanding of what is valued in a career through the eyes of other cultures as well as a movement toward global career values.

Figure 4 | Examples of Questions to Assess Global Mindset

Individual	Organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In interacting with others, does national origin have an impact on whether you give equal status to them? ■ Does being in a new cultural setting result in fear, anxiety or excitement? ■ When living in or visiting another culture, are you sensitive to cultural differences, without becoming a prisoner of these differences? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do you recruit your employees from the global talent pool? ■ Do employees of every nationality have equal opportunity to climb to the top of the career ladder? ■ Do you perceive your company as having a universal identity or a strong national identity?

Source: Adapted from Gupta, A. K., Govindarajan, V., & Wang, H. (2008). *The quest for global dominance: Transforming global presence into global competitive advantage*, 2nd edition. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

In Closing

As globalization continues to expand, it is increasingly important for HR to understand the implications of HRM in a changing world. Not all HRM strategies will fit every situation. Communication styles and cultural value dimensions need to be taken into consideration when establishing or changing HRM strategies, policies and practices. Whether in domestic or global business environments, HRM must adapt to cross-cultural factors for the success of the organization and its people.

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