

**Effective multinational groupwork: The role of culture, identity
and HRM competence**

by

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Abstract: Incorporating cultural context into HRM research and practice concerning group effectiveness in multinational organisations is an ongoing challenge. The article argues that the literature on multinational group effectiveness has been trapped in positivist conceptualisations of culture. An alternative approach is to perceive culture as a group rather than a national or organisational consideration. Based on such a conceptualisation, this article develops a theoretical framework that argues for managing the multinational scenario as a distinctly ‘group’ and ‘inter-group’ phenomenon, highlighting the pivotal role of categorisation and identity processes, both of which can have a profound effect on perception, attitudes, emotions and behaviours. It is via these processes that the role of culture can be understood to impact on attitude and behaviour, and by actively managing these processes intergroup blocks to effective multinational alliance can be eliminated or contained.

Keywords: multinational teams, cultural diversity, cultural intelligence, HRM practices, social identity theory

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Introduction

Diversity is increasing within organisations at an astronomical rate. Organisations are increasingly operating in multicultural, multinational contexts, building strategic alliances, exporting work and facilitating mergers and acquisitions inside and outside their primary domain of work (Kirkman and Law, 2005). It is not surprising that the metaphors of ‘flat world’ (Friedman, 2005) or a ‘global village’ (Ger, 1999) are fitting descriptions of the contemporary business world (Tsui, Nifadkar and Ou, 2007). Concurrently, organisations are implementing work groups with greater frequency to integrate the knowledge of workers across broad geographic locations and cultural contexts (Gibson, Zellmer-Bruhn and Schwab, 2003). However, although there is a scarcity of literature on multinational groupwork, disagreement exists regarding whether a diverse cultural composition of groups leads to positive or negative group outcomes. On the one side there are some researchers that argue that cultural diversity brings to the group a variety of values, perspectives and behaviours that enhances the group’s creativity and its problem solving capacity (Cox et al., 1991). The explicit heterogeneous composition of groups, it has been suggested, is one of the remedies for the phenomenon of ‘group-think’ (Janis, 1982). On the other side of the debate, there are some researchers that argue that cultural diversity incites intergroup bias leading to negative group outcomes (Pelled, 1996). Moreover, others argue that the cultural differences inherent in a multinational workgroup may be so distracting as to inhibit its potential benefits (Thomas, 1999).

Our review of the multinational group effectiveness literature suggests that the main explanation for the mixed, inconclusive results may be that such studies draw on a positivist conceptualisation of national culture. To trully push the field forward, we argue that a more explicit consideration of group context is critical, with a particular emphasis on the cultural context. To facilitate this, we move away from the traditional way of

modelling culture as a homogeneous entity and we conceptualise culture as a group rather than a national or organisational consideration. In this sense, cultures are perceived as systems of meaning created within and between groups of people in their interface with each other. Based on such a conceptualisation, we develop a theoretical framework that argues for managing the multinational scenario as a distinctly 'group' and 'inter-group' phenomenon. This requires detailed consideration of how individuals interface with groups, what happens to individuals when they become group members, how groups tend to interface with each other, what can go wrong and why, and how in particular the Human Resource (HR) professional can actively reflect on and manage these interface processes. Such a framework is essential both to empirical research on theoretical models designed to understand determinants of multinational group effectiveness and to the implementation of groups in multinationals. This is particularly true given that one of the most underestimated elements of inter-cultural working is the pivotal role of categorisation and identity processes, both of which can have a profound effect on perception, attitudes, emotions and behaviours (Haslam, Eggins and Reynolds, 2003). It is via these processes that the role of culture can be understood to impact on attitude and behaviour, and by actively managing these processes intergroup blocks to effective multinational alliance can be eliminated or contained.

Culture as an explanatory concept

Traditional Conceptualisations.

The traditional way of modelling culture is as a homogeneous thing-like 'stable' entity in which people become subjectively immersed, rooted in history and integral to identity (Hofstede, 1980, 1995). This monolithic view of culture promulgated within anthropological circles, has until recently dominated attempts to model and investigate culture in the organisational sciences (including sociology and psychology) (e.g. Deal and

Kennedy, 1982; Hofstede, 1980; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1983, 1985). Thus, broadly speaking culture is said to comprise a set of unanimously shared and well-defined assumptions, values, and norms dictating attitudes and behaviours. For example, Hofstede (1980) talked of culture as ‘mental programs’ reflected as a cultural blueprint within the ‘software of the mind’ (i.e. individuals are passive recipients of culture, manifesting without their reflection or control, in the way they think, feel and behave). Schein’s classic ‘onion’ (multilayered) model of culture pictures it as comprised of assumptions (unconscious, unquestioned guides to action at the core) through values (about what is important), norms (specific guides to behaviour in particular settings), and behavioural artefacts (externally visible symbols, practices, rules and procedures) (Schein, 1990). Thus, assumptions determine values which determine norms which determine behavioural practices.

The above model of culture however, rests on the following deterministic assumptions:

- Culture is equivalent to reality itself (Bochner and Hesketh, 1994). In an organisational context, culture and organisation are often treated as constituting one and the same thing. Likewise, in a national context, national boundaries are also often inappropriately used as a surrogate definition of culture. This could be attributable in part to a lack of theory about the relationship between culture and psychological reality within and across nations nor within and across organisations (within and across nations).
- Culture determines attitudes and behaviours; culture pre-exists individuals and is imposed on them (Trompenaars, 1993).
- Culture is homogeneous and relatively unchanging. As such it can be described in the form of a typology (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Mazneski, 2000; Triandis, 1995;

Trompenaars, 1993). The latter is typical of much past as well as contemporary management science in the attempt to 'pin down' culture enabling it to be more effectively controlled and managed. This view also underpins the strategic management assumptions that culture is the means by which an organisation can secure a competitive edge, promoting an uncritical search for a definitive 'success culture' as if everything about organisations can be reduced to and explained by culture (e.g. Peters & Waterman, 1982). The latter is a view that has since been consistently disputed: at the very least what constitutes success will vary substantially by circumstance (Martin, 2002).

- Culture is promulgated and manipulated by leaders - e.g. 'culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin' (Schein, 1985, p.2). This view of how culture originates and impacts on people is now understood to be a gross oversimplification (Martin, 2002), but it is still upheld by those with a vested interest in obtaining so-called 'culture business' (ironically, because of its simplicity and ease of translation into recipes of culture change) (Martin & Frost, 1996).
- Culture is acquired through a process of 'acculturation'. For example, Hebden (1986) talks of socialisation as the infusion or transmission of culture within a person. The socialisation process (which can be formal or informal), results in specifications for behaviour (appropriate rules and norms to follow) and a change in attitude (to align them with those of the group). Thus, the individual is assumed to be a passive recipient of socialisation practices regulated and controlled by a socialising agent.

This determinist view of culture and socialisation has, and continues to underpin most multinational groupwork initiatives in the business world (Essec and Brannen, 2000).

Whilst most programmes of multinational group development may not be quite so 'totalistic' in their acculturation strategies and tactics, they are nonetheless evolved from within the same tradition of attempts to exert 'social control' by instilling particular attitudes and behaviours appropriate to be aspired to multinational organisational philosophy or paradigm (Ailon-Souday and Kunda, 2003). The idea however, of changing culture in a national context is less feasibly contemplated from the monolithic 'culture-is-reality' perspective though in principle, the same sources of top-down leverage for change are likely to apply.

By changing culture, it is assumed that one will automatically change the assumptions, values, norms and practices of which it is comprised. Moreover, to the extent that culture is promulgated and shaped by leaders, culture change is understood to be simply a matter of leaders dictating and enacting a new cultural reality with 'followers' initiated (pedagogically) into this new paradigm (through educational and training practices, reward systems and other mechanisms of top down control). Finally, new cultures can be learned through a process of re-indoctrination (e.g. extensive and intensive training and re-socialisation practices) (Daft, 1995). Individuals are stripped of their prior self and are effectively reinvented by the organisation through the use of coercive tactics and various 'intense and prolonged persuasion' efforts (Schein, 1985). Totalistic forms of social control of this kind involve emotional and behavioural manipulation through:

- The reliance on intense interpersonal and psychological attack to destabilise one's sense of self to promote compliance.
- The use of an organised peer group whose influence is used as a substitute for analytic thought (i.e. groupthink).
- The application of interpersonal pressures to demand absolute conformity.

- The manipulation of the social environment to stabilise behaviour, once modified.
- The classification of those not sharing the ideology as inferior and not worthy of respect.

Such a 'top-down' regulatory view of culture assumes that attitude and skill change in order to facilitate effective multinational working can be unambiguously harnessed and secured (Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000; Tayeb, 1996). However, research has shown that 'totalistic' regimes of social control rarely lead to enduring change in attitudes and behaviours (Ofshe, 2003). The most common response is a transient alteration in attitudes and behaviours (termed 'adaptive conformity') and in many cases intellectual resistance and hostility. In cases of adaptive conformity, attitudes and behaviours are likely to revert back to their prior position once removed from the totalistic environment. The maintenance of a new social identity depends fundamentally on social support and communication control. Some have noted how surprising this is given the evidence from the attitude change literature showing that eliciting a desired behaviour sets up conditions likely to simulate the development of attitudes consistent with this behaviour (Festinger, 1957). On the other hand, it is easy to see how behaviour can be justified with reference to external sources of pressure ('I had no choice') rather than through self-justification processes requiring ownership and responsibility for expressed behaviours.

Contemporary conceptualisations of culture.

It is increasingly evident that the above model of culture is a gross oversimplification of what culture is (Kitayama, 2002), as well as the implications involved in the formation and development of efficient multinational groups.

Anthropologists have since demonstrated that culture is much more fluid and internally diversified than previously recognised, and that assumptions of cultural homogeneity are

the product of perception (e.g. cultural stereotyping) and motivation (e.g. intergroup boundary carving) rather than reality (e.g. Hannerz, 1992). An organisation (just like a nation) could thus be described as a potential carrier of a multiplicity of separate, overlapping, superimposed or nested cultures, with participants maintaining simultaneous memberships in a number of cultural groups (Sackmann, Phillips, Kleinberg and Boyacigiller, 1997). In this sense, nations are not synonymous with culture. A particular nation may be associated with particular cultural stereotypes but these are not necessarily reflections of reality therein. A nation is bigger than the culture ascribed to it: it is a geographical as well as a political and economic entity, for example. Many nations also house a multiplicity of different ethnic or racial groups, each with their own distinctive cultural claims.

Moreover, culture is a means of communication rather than a thing like 'superorganic' entity, that offers both a template or guide to existing meanings that facilitate social interaction (e.g. to render it intelligible and predictable) whilst at the same time constituting a medium for reinvention and change of meanings through social interaction (Erez and Gati, 2004). Culture, like language, is not reducible to individual minds but at the same time it is produced by, and can be deemed an emergent property of, interaction between individuals (Giddens, 1984). It allows people to understand each others' actions and to act in ways that convey the meanings they want but at the same time, new meanings can also be created (Geertz, 1983). People recreate culture all the time (and never replicate it entirely) sometimes consciously. Culture is a dialectical process of sense-making (Weick, 1995). Whilst the actions of leaders – especially local leaders/managers or supervisors - are clearly crucial to how people perceive organisational life (e.g. Buono and Bowditch, 1989), it is equally clear that cultures are not created by

dictum from the top; on the contrary, culture is co-created by leaders and their followers as they mutually engage in the process of sense making (Weick, 1985).

Whilst we would expect shared meanings among those who belong to a particular culture, no one is a blueprint or complete representative of this culture (Barinaga, 2007). Culture is a milieu in which people construct themselves (i.e. culture does not construct people; they construct themselves in this context). To this extent, culture is a resource that enables people to model reality and their place in it but is not reality itself. The way culture is used depends on their goals and aspirations (Collier, 1994). People behave in particular ways not because of their culture but because they use culture as their means of interaction (Kitayama, 2002). The assumptions/beliefs, values, behavioural norms and practices ordinarily associated with a particular cultural outlook, are fundamentally self-defining. This is critical to understanding how particular attitudes (beliefs, values, behavioural inclinations) are acquired, maintained or changed. Recent work converges on the view that attitude change is a self-verifying self-referential process (Haslam et al., 1995) that motivated behaviour is self-expressive (Doyle, 2002) and that both felt and expressed emotion is inextricably interlinked with considerations of self (Heise, 2002; Hochschild, 1983).

Finally, it is now commonly acknowledged that the individual is not a passive recipient of socialisation ('acculturation') practices; on the contrary, the individual takes a proactive self-socialising role (Frese, Garst and Fay, 2007). Little is known about individually-initiated (rather than organisation-initiated) socialisation strategies, but it is clear that a model of the individual as a blank state in which to infuse culture is highly inappropriate (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo and Tucker, 2007). Niendenthal, Cantor and Kihlstrom (1985) have demonstrated that individuals actively seek out situations and memberships they believe to be self-defining and in which they receive self-verifying feedback (see also

Setterland and Niendenthal, 1993). Thus socialisation is a highly self-referential and selective process.

Several key considerations arise from the above discussion, central to our subsequent analysis of how to harness effective multinational groupwork:

- Culture (and the values, sentiments, attitudes, beliefs and practices with which it is associated) is fundamentally self-referential (i.e. self-defining, self-protective, self-expressive). Understanding self and identity processes is thus critical to understanding how culture operates at the interface between the individual and the wider social system in which they are located.
- Culture is a group rather than a national or organisational consideration: cultures are systems of meaning created within and between groups of people in their interface with each other (intra- and inter-group relations). Understanding group and inter-group processes is critical to understanding the interface between self and identity and cultural phenomena.

Based on the above assumptions, a multinational groupwork scenario can be described as an encounter between individuals with different backgrounds, needs, goals and identities. Culture is only one means by which these differences may be formulated. All individuals have many potential cultural identities. We learn how to become members of different groups and how to properly behave in each of them. Consistent with the assumptions of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1972, 1978) and Self Categorisation Theory (SCT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), identities are co-created in relationships with others. Thus, rather than referring to a cultural or ethnic identity in terms of fixed or absolute dimensions, we should think in terms of 'cultural identity enactment'. This means that who we are and how we differ from others emerges depending on who we are with

(Collier, 1994, p.40). Earlier we argued that the key to understanding the impact of culture on multinational groupwork is to acknowledge that culture is an inextricable part of group dynamics and relations. In this context, SIT and SCT can be used to understand the multinational group scenario as they explore not so much how particular values and norms are internalised, but how the individual identifies with a group category, and starts to think and relate accordingly. Both perspectives claim that by changing the group dynamic, the impact of differences arising from fundamental discrepancies in value, belief, attitude and practices, can be moderated.

The pivotal role of categorisation and identity processes

In modelling culture as having both a content (meanings) and a process dimension (originating in social interaction), we begin with the assumption that effective international groupwork depends upon the way group members relate to, and interact with each other. To facilitate interaction, we need to understand the causes or generative basis of group behaviour and what predisposes groups to interaction with each other in particular ways. It is an inescapable universal fact that interaction will involve categorisations of different kinds with predictable effects (Bruner, 1957). Identification with social categories influences group members' interaction with each other as it predicts identity consistent attitudes and behaviours (Turner, 1982).

The significance of social self-categories for understanding blocks to effective international groupwork lies in the way that identification with a particular social group can be a referent for people to surface certain cognitive assumptions about themselves in relation to others (Tajfel, 1972). These assumptions and the sense that people make of situations, influence the extent to which they are prepared to relate positively to others including whether they are willing to co-operate with them and to share tacit or specialised knowledge or understanding. The enactment of social identity and the potential barriers to

communication that this can introduce, is likely to take place primarily under certain conditions, especially those that are interpreted as posing a threat to the people concerned and/or when dependence on their membership group is perceived to be high (Salk & Brannen, 2002).

Moreover, since people can also belong to more than one group, it is possible for them to have multiple social identities just as the pluralistic nature of organisations means that they will contain multiple category possibilities (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). It is now generally agreed that any one situation can evoke a number of potential categories as sources of identification (Haslam, Eggins and Reynolds, 2003). These identities may sometimes conflict in their core values and beliefs, yet somehow people can separate out their different participations in social groups such that no inconsistency is implied (Cuche, 1996). The apparent contradiction between different ways of 'being' is not of any consequence because at any one time, only one may be salient (i.e. contextually, pragmatically relevant). For example, Renault (1992) observed African immigrants in France coming from very strict Muslim communities and working as respected professionals in pork slaughter houses. The daily contact with pork meat is considered a necessity of work and does not alter in any way their identities as Muslim. Thus people appear to have the ability to 'compartmentalise' their attitudes, values and beliefs into self-contained chunks.

The question of which category or categories will come into play at any one moment in time is nonetheless a more complex issue, although some would argue that some categories like gender and ethnicity are chronically accessible forms of categorisation (Brown, 1995). It is important nonetheless not to assume that any particular self-category is salient (i.e. assume that a particular self-category is driving attitudes and behaviours) because it might not be (Haslam, 2001). Indeed, assumptions about the importance or

salience of particular demographic categories for employees might be one main reason why efforts at diversity management often fail (Leach, Jackson and LaBella, 1995).

Categories that are assumed to be salient might not in fact be either self-defining or self-relevant. Minority group members (e.g. women in a male dominated organisation), may prefer to 'pass' (i.e. individual social mobility strategy) into higher-status groups (e.g. management) if they can then accept being categorised in terms of a disadvantaged social identity (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries and Wilke, 1986).

The salience of a self-category depends on 'accessibility' (within the self-concept of an individual) and 'fit' (with the comparative and normative frame of reference) (Oakes, 1987) which arise from how the situation is defined and interpreted by individuals. The 'definition of the situation' is thus crucial to understanding how a particular self-definition will arise. Definitions of the situation arise from how the situation is structured, its meaning (e.g. associated with particular behavioural scripts, social norms or rules) and purpose (e.g. goals, motives of self and others within the same situation). Definitions of the situation can be manipulated implicitly by creating identity consistent forms of infrastructure (e.g. the design of groups will make salient common group goals and heighten the salience of perceived cooperative interdependence), the design of work, interaction opportunities, incentive mechanisms) or directly through communication (e.g. leadership function) (Brickson, 2000). Thus the conditions under which one or other category becomes salient can to some extent be manipulated with those accredited with the power and authority to do so (e.g. leaders, HR professionals, managers).

Evidence suggests that people prefer to use more refined groupings. For example, Van Knippenberg and Van Oers (2002) have suggested that there may be instances when work-group identification may be more important to social identity than organisational

identifications. Predicting which of the many possible ways of carving up the world will actually be chosen on any given occasion would require knowing more about:-

- the people perceiving the situation (e.g. their needs and goals)
- the situation they are confronted with (e.g. perceived similarities, differences, requirements of the situation, scripts and norms in association with the situation).
- the frame of reference. In multinational or strategic international alliances, it is highly likely that members of ethnic or national groups will identify more closely with their fellow nationals than with the organisation or the alliance they have formed with others (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Self-categorisation is multidimensional and dynamic, whether cultural, national, ethnic, organisational or social. The identities evoked or constructed vary and thus can to some extent be reformulated and manipulated. Some authors consider that identity may be used as a means to an end, leading to a sort of identity strategy (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). The mechanisms that can be used to change identities are many: symbolic manipulation, change in personnel, physical or temporal separation of distinct subgroups, sequential attention to multiple identities, creation of anti-identities, use of rhetorical tactics, socialisation of members to mediatory or other myths. Identity then, is not absolute and is constructed through social actors, according to social situation and respective power relationships between social groups.

Different identities can be enacted depending on the particular goal of the group and the kind of common cultural referent that is available and can be exploited. Dahler-Larsen (1997) analysed several strikes that occurred in the Scandinavian airline company SAS, renowned for being a company with a strong unifying corporate culture and showed how strikers referred alternatively to four different 'we typifications' at different times: we as

cabin attendants, we as SAS members, and we as employees (as opposed to managers) and we as Danes. In this context, seeing identity as a strategy underpinned by categorisation processes means that effective multinational groupwork is possible in the way group members relate to each other via an understanding of the way meaningful self-categories come about.

Multiple attachments to roles, organisations and situations inside and outside the organisation vary in intensity and in the degree to which they overlap. This affords some space for the accommodation of identity by negotiating their involvement. People may be committed to their work or their colleagues without being committed to the organisation. Faced with a plurality of potential group identities, managers can endeavour to develop identities that offer a basis for enhancing identification with, and loyalty to the organisation and accord with their definition of its goals (Alvesson, 2000). The task of those who manage inter-group relations is therefore to reconcile different identities with a wider organisational identity. This can pose a significant challenge because of differential power, status and reward implications. To capitalise on social identities, group memberships need to be self-relevant and self-defining (i.e. maintaining enhanced positive distinctiveness) (Breakwell, 1986).

Critical to understanding how particular inter-group rivalries come about is to look at the way the inter-group situation is defined or framed (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Even subtle aspects of the way an issue is framed or represented in an appeal, such as the apparent location and time at which a proposal will take place, can affect recipients' attitudes (Salk and Brannen, 2000). The mechanisms underlying framing effects probably depend, as in standard persuasion paradigms, on the extent to which recipients are motivated and able to process message content and other relevant information. For example, the impetus to

adopt a new interpretation or frame for an issue can arise from motivational goals such as the need to maintain positive distinctiveness or group efficacy.

In short, multinational groupwork relies fundamentally on the ability to combine and recombine distinct competences provided by different groups (Teece et al, 1997). The effective realisation of this requires a degree of reconciliation and integration. The fact that people come from different cultural backgrounds can cause difficulty but not because culture causes them to act and think in different ways that will inevitably clash.

To explain why culture may cause difficulties we need to look at the dynamics of group level interaction and identity creation in which culture plays a part. Culture is a source of definitions, interpretations and meanings from which the content of identity can be drawn or in relation to which it can be negotiated. To understand how this is to look at how the situation is framed or defined, and how 'culture' is being used by each group in their identity claims within a inter-group dynamic underpinned by motives of self-preservation or self-affirmation. There are thus limits to the extent to which self-categories are malleable posed by the needs fulfilled by an identity that is resisting change. Identities drawing on cultural resources for self-definition in a multinational context will for instance be sustained by various self-preservatory or self-affirming motives. If these motives are not respected attempts to impose new self-categories or to change the meaning of existing self-categories, may end up exacerbating inter-group rivalries.

Harnessing identity as a resource for effective multinational groupwork

So far, it has been argued that self-categorisation or identity processes can be seen as a key means of leveraging change in attitudes and behaviour (i.e. a key resource) in multinational groupwork contexts (Haslam, Egghins and Reynolds, 2003) creating thus the conditions of intergroup cooperation. One approach to this is typified by the re-

categorisation model of integrated working. In other words, group members within, say, a group might be encouraged to re-categorise themselves in the broader more super-ordinate terms required of effective teamwork (Gaertner et al., 1991). This approach has since been termed The Common In-Group Identity Model (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1999). This model recognizes the central role of social categorisation in reducing as well as in creating inter-group bias (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Specifically, if members of different groups are induced to conceive of themselves more as members of a single, superordinate group rather than as members of two separate groups, attitudes towards former out-group members will become positive through processes involving pro-in-group bias. Thus changing the basis of categorisation from race to an alternative dimension can alter who is “we” and who is “they”, undermining a contributing force to contemporary forms of inter-group conflict (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1999).

A related line of inquiry is based on the idea of increasing the salience of superordinate shared goals (Oaker and Brown, 1986; Brown and Wade, 1987). Research shows that it is important that the outcomes of collaborative endeavours are positive. If shared goals are not achieved, ‘blame’ may be cast on the out-group (nurses may blame doctors and doctors may blame nurses). A way to prevent this occurring is to increase the salience of distinctive group contributions to inter-group (e.g. multi-disciplinary) ventures so that identities are not threatened by blurred group boundaries. Brown (1988) writes “groups which have a common interest in uniting or even just working together more closely may be well-advised to think carefully about how to allow each group to retain something of its identity in the joint operation (p.211).”

The super-ordinate goal approach strives to keep the in-group/out-group division intact but to minimise their salience whilst simultaneously optimising the various conditions for successful contact. So contact is inter-group rather than inter-personal and enhances the

likelihood of positive transfer of attitudes. There is strong evidence in support of this approach (see Hogg and Tindale, 2003). However, as evident in our discussion of attempts to change the way 'categories' are used in inter-group contexts, it is crucial to also ensure that there is an identity consistent behavioural infrastructure in place to support the continued enactment of these changes. This could be achieved by successively attempting to encourage the translation of lower level heterogeneity into higher order homogeneity, accommodating rather than stifling differences (Eggins, Haslam and Reynolds, 2002; Eggins, Haslam and Ryan, 2000).

The first step towards strategically harnessing identity resources (based on the model developed by Haslam et al., 2003) in accordance with organisational imperatives for collective working is to ascertain which social identities employees use to define themselves. Every individual has access to multiple social identities, many of which are not relevant to the organisation's core activity. What is or are the self-categorisation(s) most relevant to people's ability to do their work (as distinct from identities not perceived self-relevant)? What defines a group will change as a function of the groups with which it compares itself and the broad social context in which it is located. "The core challenge... is to be sensitive to such variation and to avoid prejudged, uni-lateral imposition of reifications of identities in question" (Haslam, Eggins and Reynolds, 2003). The main outcome of this phase is knowledge of the social identities that people perceive to be relevant to their work related activity (and irrelevant) and of the contours of these identities within the organisation. A key task is then to achieve a collective decision about which groups need to form the basis of the next phase.

In the next phase, each of the sub-groups identified engage in discussion and debate. The purpose of this is threefold: 1) to allow sub-group members to identify and agree upon shared goals which will allow them to perform their work better, 2) to help identify

structural and other barriers to achieving these goals but which might be surmounted and 3) to contribute to shared identity relevant to these goals and which sub-group members will internalise and carry over into subsequent stages. Because the broad context for this activity is inter-group, individual members should be motivated to differentiate the new 're-framed' higher-order group from others, to polarise group goals and to strive to agree on these goals. This process is akin to team building through which a collection of individuals identify distinctive values, interests and goals that they share but also work out ways of developing a shared theory of their in-group that accommodates their idiosyncratic personal identities.

In the next phase, a similar process of discussion and debate is envisaged between different sub-groups. Members of these groups or who are represented in this process should show better awareness of: a) shared organisational goals, b) barriers to organisational goal achievement and c) the organic nature of organisational identity than those who are not. Within this super-ordinate framework, there should be evidence of more trust, superior communication, more enthusiasm and more creativity. An important caveat to this successive process is that a meaningful super-ordinate framework must be available within which to harness otherwise potentially conflicting social identities and goals. That is, conflict is recognised and contained within this process rather than stifled or ignored and allowed to run riot.

The final phase highlights the central role of HR leadership in the process. So long as members of the relevant organisational unit feel represented and involved in the process, HR professionals can facilitate the process and in so doing, embrace a different understanding of the new superordinate whole whose normative content is more complex and more respectful of the contributions of different sub-groups to the attainment of organisational goals (Hodgkinson, 2001). Members of organisations that participate or are

represented in this process are more likely to have a sense of ownership of the super-ordinate decision, goals and plans and to perceive them to be fair, and appropriate. They are also more likely to be committed to these decisions, goals and plans, and to use them as a guide to their own action.

This model aims to counteract the potentially negative consequences of super-ordinate identities by ensuring that they are explicitly premised on lower-level group memberships (allowing the identities of members to be expressed and affirmed). This principle is also consistent with insights from the negotiation literature in which the success of negotiation is said to depend on the ability to take the perspective of, and show concern for, both self and other (Stephenson, 1981). It is also consistent with 'dual identity theory' (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman and Brown, 1993; Hogg and Terry, 2002). This model assumes that the most successful form of conflict management involves the simultaneous recognition of all distinct identities within the super-ordinate framework.

It is in this recognition of 'organic pluralism' that inherent diversity (rather than a monocultural model of the organisation) can be creatively and constructively harnessed in a multinational setting. As such effective HR leadership in this setting needs to focus on the affirmation rather than negation of social identities. This is consistent with Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (House, 1971) which argues that the key to effective leadership is to identify employee goals and to help them find paths to achieve these goals consistent with, and that contribute to, super-ordinate goals. This requires that HR leadership is committed to a process that acknowledges and respects sub-group goals (together with the distinct identities that underpin them) and reconciles those with super-ordinate goals (Haslam and Platow, 2001). The above discussion suggests that on the contrary, and consistent with the principle of 'Diversity Training', differences should be respected and constructively managed. However, conventional diversity training packages are atheoretical and

prescriptive. Here we offer a coherent theoretical framework for Diversity Training rooted in the rigorously developed, tested and refined principles of SIT/SCT and based on extensive evidence from field as well as laboratory studies. What is missing however, is an elaboration of the competence required by the HR professionals managing the international groupwork scenario. What follows then, is a discussion about the concept of cultural intelligence as a framework in which to understand how HR professionals can be trained to achieve consensual identities while simultaneously respecting difference. This will address more directly, the issue of how to ‘manage culture’ within the inter-group dynamic. We argue that this requires ability on the part of the HR professionals to reflect on the processes in which they are a part, and to actively manage them.

Cultural intelligence of HR professionals

Cultural intelligence may be a term better understood at instinctual level but as a working definition it is understood as the ability to function effectively in a diverse context where the assumptions, values and traditions of one’s upbringing are not uniformly shared with those with whom one needs to work (Offermann and Phan, 2002). If culture, as defined previously, is an organized system of meanings which members of a society attribute to people and objects of the culture, then cultural intelligence is the ability to successfully function in a diverse context (Triandis, 2006). Cultural intelligence is then intelligence in context, where the right answers depend on the situation and people involved. In some situations there may be no single appropriate answer, and successful answers made by one person may not be successful when tried by another. Therefore, effective responses require understanding of the self and others.

The term cultural intelligence is then introduced here not to compare leaderships or leadership styles but with the aim to deal with the capability of altering one’s behaviour to fit the situation or determining when it is in one’s own interest to do so. Or in other words,

an attempt must be made to find the portion of one's own style that maintains effectiveness across a variety of situations. To do this it is necessary for the HR professional not only to understand others but also to understand one self (Davis, 2006).

Understanding one self is, in this context, of primal importance as it underlies the importance of understanding one's own culture before the understanding of other cultures is attempted. Though the impact of a manager's own culture may not be apparent to him/her, others can see it. For example, Offermann and Phan cite evidence that cultural values (Offermann and Hellman, 1997) held by managers can relate to what subordinates see as their manager's way of work.

Furthermore, many leaders, like people in general, are not aware of the cultural lenses they use to view the world, or how their own acculturation affects the way in which they view others (Janssens and Brett, 2006). The ethnocentric tendency to use one's own group as the standard of correctness against which all others are judged sets the stage for in-group bias. Therefore, understanding others builds on self knowledge of one's own attribution biases, so that HR professionals can more appropriately diagnose difficulties and select more appropriate responses.

Culturally intelligent HR leadership also means a commitment to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the various perspectives represented by multicultural staff, and combining them creatively for maximum organisational performance (Davis, 2006).

At the individual level, culture may be one of a number of factors affecting capabilities on the job, and allowing each person to contribute their best, combined with others with different strengths, offers the best prospects for maximum achievement. This view is in direct opposition to the assimilation and homogenisation so inherent in some organisations, i.e. the melting pot is viewed now as a mosaic, maintaining the identity and contribution of different pieces in the context of a larger organisational creation. However,

the potential of this organisational creation, according to Offermann and Phan (2002), will not be realized if effective communication and co-operation cannot be simultaneously preserved.

In summary, understanding oneself and others in terms of cultural conditioning is the foundation of successful HR leadership adaptation. And it is leader adaptation that it is at the heart of culturally intelligent HR leadership. Many theoretical models of leadership have been put forward emphasising the importance of leadership consideration (Bass, 1997; House and Aditya, 1997), a tailoring of leader consideration behaviour to the developmental needs of different staff, while others have suggested the importance of modifying leadership to situational needs. However, these theories and models progress to categorize followers into groups based on commonalities and then the temptation to categorize staff by culture is strong as well. Offermann and Phan (2002) warn that to place people in categorical boxes may be ineffective or offensive. In a world where every person belongs to multiple groups, cultural intelligence means to forgo the boxes, and to treat people as unique combination of values, preferences and needs. The cultural intelligent HR professional will then be motivated or will make an effort to shortcut category based stereotyping in favour of individuating thought or re-categorisation.

Conclusion

The discussion about culture is critical to the issue of what can be changed – and rapidly so - in order to facilitate effective multinational working. Clearly, culture itself cannot be rapidly changed. It is evolved over time. Organisations may consciously and strategically attempt to change their cultures but rarely do they succeed at least in the short-term. And we would not expect them to because culture must evolve in response to an environmental imperative. The ‘drip-drip’ method of attempting to change the ‘deep’ underpinnings of culture (assumptions, values and attitudes) is to completely miss the point. And even if

attitudes do change, whether they reflect in changed practices and behaviours is a different issue altogether. Research consistently shows that attitudes do not predict behaviours, necessarily. There are many other 'immediate' situational predictors of behaviour. In this drip-drip approach, where are the real material cultural imperatives for change?.

Here we have argued that the key to changing the impact of culture and cultural differences on attitudes and behaviours is via the concept of social self-categorisation or social identity. Identity is the means by which culture is both enacted and changed through people in their interactions with each other. Categorisation processes are an escapable fact of human reality. What differs among people is the meaning ascribed to particular categories. Culture works through the way in which a situation is defined, and the meanings evolved or ascribe to self and others in this context.

Culture may also impact on which social category is likely to be activated (or which aspects of a social category become salient), the extent to which these categories have norms and stereotypes associated with them (i.e. some categories are 'owned' by society and thus society evolves meanings in association with these categories as a means of social regulation and control) and the way we interact with representatives of these categories. Whilst we do not subscribe to a position of complete linguistic relativity, it is now well established that language does influence, at least to some degree, what we perceive or do not perceive, and how we interpret these experiences. Hence we have argued that reflecting on the language used to define a situation is a critical part of becoming 'culturally intelligent'.

Evidence shows that categorisation at a group level of analysis has some predictable consequences: it creates uniformity of perception, values, goals, attitude and behaviour consistent with the meaning of the categorisation or group membership, it is associated

with in-group favouritism and bias, stereotypical perception of other group members and also a stronger likelihood of inter-group conflict and rivalry.

Evidence also shows that the level (individual, group) and meaning of self-categories is highly context dependent and to this extent, can be changed. By changing the likelihood or reducing the likelihood that particular categories are deployed in any particular context, attitudes and behaviours can also be changed (and thus also the interaction and communication patterns). How a category is deployed and its meaning can also be changed. Change in category likelihood or deployment however must be sensitive to the needs fulfilled by particular group memberships and dynamics (positive distinctiveness, continuity, efficacy, esteem) by ensuring that changes are self-enhancing (or self-preserving). Changes that fundamentally threaten existing identities without substituting them with more self-enhancing identity possibilities will merely reinforce 'old' identities.

The likelihood of particular categories entering into salience (and thus driving attitudes and behaviours) depends on how the situation is defined or framed. Many different factors can affect this including the design of work, design of teams, group composition within an inter-group alliance, previous history of inter-group dynamics, the current interactions of group members, leadership behaviour and so on. Changing a category as a particular frame of reference or its meaning will need to be credible – i.e. managed by a respected leader. Such changes will also need to be underpinned or supported by changes in the behavioural infrastructure. People will naturally strive to make sense of a situation. The HR professional's role in managing this sensemaking making process and by helping people 'make sense' in a particular way, is critical to managing the interplay of identities. Evidence shows that identity can be actively manipulated and managed.

The central role of HR professionals in shaping inter-group dynamics is taken up by considering in detail how they can take control of the language they use (to define or

evaluate a situation, for example), and their communication practices generally requiring cultural intelligence on their part.

Thus, we argue that what effective multinational groupwork depends on the ability to:

- Change self-categorisation and identity processes that will in turn change perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. This may require a change in the way a situation is defined and understood.
- Change HR leadership practices.
- Change communication practises.

To achieve this we advocate that the HR professionals should develop:-

- New understandings and use of the concept of culture.
- More elaborate understandings of the way culture impacts on behaviour via processes of self-categorisation and identification.
- An understanding of how the impact of culture can be changed through exploring its inextricable link with identity within an inter-group dynamic.
- Perceptions of the multinational scenario and in particular, the way in which categories are used to define or frame the situation.
- Programmes to change identity (the use of self-categorisation processes) as a resource to enhance inter-cultural working.
- An understanding of the power of language not only in creating barriers of perception and understanding but as holding the key to more effective and sensitive use of language in communication practises. For example, the use of strategies like 'translating back' could be applied effectively in the use of technical language.

Identity processes are easier to change than culture because process is about how things are done in practice. If behavioural imperatives are created by making particular categories salient and/or creating working conditions that require cooperative inter-dependence, this may be sufficient for attitudes and values to become realigned, particularly if the new behaviours are appropriately supported and rewarded.

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