Global Leadership Practices: A Cross-Cultural Management Perspective

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Chapter 1 There is nothing so practical as four good theories[i]

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Markus in Shanghai

Markus can't believe it. "Leave the room! You suggest leaving the room! No, no way. It doesn't make sense: it won't be a workshop!" The other employees look at him and wonder what is the reason for this sudden outburst, why Markus, division Manager in Shanghai for about a year, is reacting so strongly to the comments made by Anna. Markus (originally from Germany) and Anna (originally from Brazil) are both in charge of the development of environmentally friendly technologies in the Asian operations of the international corporation Sveab (pseudonym), an MNE globally cultivating its Scandinavian organizational culture. Anna is posted in Singapore and has been facing the same challenge Markus is talking about: the involvement of local employees in creative discussion during workshops.

Workshops, rather than meetings, are a strong element in the organizational processes of Sveab. They are seen as less formal, more creative and more likely to engage employees. Internal training on the art of running workshops has institutionalized them as an organizational culture trait. It is expected that division managers organize their interaction and work processes with colleagues and even corporate partners in the form of creative workshops, where much use is made of flip charts, post-its, coloured pens and the like.

"What typically happens, with my co-workers from Shanghai", says Markus, is that they take a passive attitude and sit in silence whatever I do, whatever technique I use. What's worse, I have the feeling that they are trying to guess what kind of content I expect from them. It's their culture, you know; in China, society is strong on hierarchy: that's just the

[1] http://www.amazon.de/Global-Leadership-Practices-Cross-Cultural-Perspective/dp/1137350008

way it is. I cannot over-ride their culture; I cannot ask them to change."

"You see, this is where I think you are wrong, replies Anna, it's not about changing them; it's about finding a way for them to speak their mind. You think the Chinese never speak their mind to their boss? I don't believe that: it is just that you have not found the way, not yet. And you know what: if you keep on thinking 'it's their culture', you won't get far!"

This introductory case presents an interaction between Markus and Anna who can both be called global managers. Increasingly, individuals grow up, study and work in different cultural environments. The term 'global cosmopolitan' is sometimes used to qualify individuals that travel frequently and live in several cultural environments. Although global cosmopolitans tend to be seen as culturally agile, knowing about different cultural codes and behaviours and capable of rapid adaptation, there is also evidence that being 'culturally independent' can be associated with lack of effectiveness, as the research by Gillespie et al (2010) indicates. Individuals who associate with one or several cultural identities simultaneously (as global cosmopolitans can) tend to demonstrate only a medium level of intercultural effectiveness (Lee, 2010; for more details see chapter 4). In the case, it appears that Markus is facing an efficiency challenge, linked, in his opinion, to cultural differences. How can such a situation be solved? In fact, the view one has about culture and cultural differences is a key element in the resolution of this case. Broadly speaking, there are four major views on culture and cultural differences in management studies, and each view will bring a different kind of solution to Markus. Our aim in this chapter is to present these four major views on culture and argue that, used complementarily, they provide a rich and insightful theoretical framework for the analysis and most efficient resolution of culture-related management situations. Put differently, not one but four views on culture are the most efficient tool that one can use to solve practical problems related to culture in management. We will demonstrate this with the application of these views to the introductory case of 'Markus in Shanghai'.

Culture(s)

Culture permeates all areas of society and organizations and is an essential element in understanding diverse project work in organizations. We consider culture to be the results of socialization (primary and secondary); primary socialization is the acquisition of social awareness and orientation through education, family and the world in which we are immersed as children. Secondary socialization essentially reflects the choices made from adolescence such as professional, organizational and other affiliations. Coupling culture with both primary and secondary socialization means that individuals have several cultures, such as 'generation culture', 'professional culture', 'social class culture' or 'gender culture'. We distinguish cultural influences from individual personality.

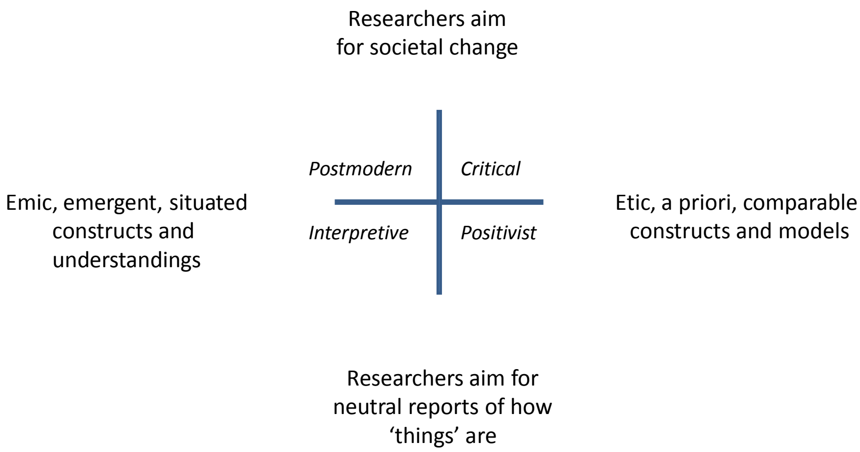
We are concerned here with the way in which culture affects our perceptions, feelings and practices when dealing with others in intercultural interactions. Although this is the focus of this volume, it is important to remember that culture is a major influence on business encounters but not the only one.

Cultures can be thought of as having multiple levels of manifestations and content. Several metaphors are commonly used to talk about these levels and how they relate to each other; examples of these are Hofstede's onion, Schein's levels of organizational culture or Schneider, Barsoux and Stahl's ocean. As also in the popular image of the iceberg, these metaphors refer to a deep invisible or hidden level of assumptions, expectations or core values, and surface manifestations such as dress code, architecture or organizational processes. Management researchers argue that there is a link between the levels, and that surface manifestations (or artefacts) are the crystallizations of deep level components. These metaphors are useful to remind us that observed behaviour or organizational processes are likely to have their origin in underlying beliefs and values that need to be addressed if one wishes to introduce changes.

Four major views on science and the study of culture

In organization studies, four major ways of conducting science and producing scientific discourses are usually acknowledged and we present them below using a model based on the work by Deetz[iii].

Figure 1.1: Four major positions for scientific views on culture



The most familiar way for many is the positivist approach aiming at identifying patterned behaviour across cultures and establishing laws and predictive models. The focus is on regularities i.e. cultural universals or dimensions which record differences across cultures. Knowledge is considered primarily as informative of the way things are. The major concern is to develop constructs and theories that are applicable across many cultures (etic) so that comparisons and clusters can be made. In most positivist research, values are key elements in the study of culture: they are viewed as core to culture and as measureable with research instruments such as surveys.

The second major view is the interpretive one. Rather than aiming for predictive models, this view endeavours to understand how people perceive their (cultural) reality and act accordingly. It considers that individuals act consistently with what makes sense to them, and therefore the focus of the research is this sense-making. Knowledge is considered primarily as informative of how things are in a certain context (local, emic), that of the environment being studied. In management, interpretive researchers are generally not interested in comparing different cultures, but rather, understanding how people's collective sense making in a certain culture explains their actions.

Both the positivist and interpretive views tend to see researchers' role as that of reporters, trying their best to provide an unbiased account of reality.

Emic and etic

As Morris et al (1999, 781) express it "there are two long-standing approaches to understanding the role of culture: the inside perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, and the outside perspective of comparativist researchers, who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of general, external standards."

Generally speaking, etic cultural research investigates culture from the 'outside' and is based on a number of predefined concepts or dimensions, while emic culture research is a view from 'inside' and seeks to understand member's meanings and thus emergent rather than pre-selected concepts[iv]. Etic approaches assume that there are universal cultural categories which exist and can be compared in every culture, and their investigation is based on these universal categories. Emic approaches search for the uniqueness of each cultural environment and look for specificities not found in other cultures; they are based on the meanings and interpretations of members of the given culture.

Emic and etic approaches to the study of culture are complementary. Etic studies enable us to compare a large number of countries' scores on the same construct. However, sometimes research results vary significantly between etic studies, depending on the items measured or the definitions of the concepts that are used. This is the case for Hungary on the construct of Power Distance[v] between Hofstede's and the GLOBE studies (see below). Practitioners and researchers can clearly observe both orientations: high and low Power Distance. In such a case, combining etic and emic research becomes very important. It shows that **the socialist past of the nation** influences both high and low views on Power Distance. Hungarians' past experience of a dictatorship leads many to value low Power Distance, that is, a **democratic workplace environment**. At the same time, their familiarity with Marxist theories induces many to see in the Western capitalist practices the cruel exploitation of workers. This creates **distrust and distance between managers and subordinates,** which can be associated with high Power Distance. Identified by emic studies, this element of trust[vi] becomes then key for smooth organizational practices and explains why it was possible to measure both high and low Power Distance in Hungary, depending on the measurement's emphasis.

The third major view is commonly referred to as post-modern, in the sense that it departs from the "modern, positivist" view on science as an accumulation of knowledge progressing towards improved understanding. This view reveals how our reality is socially constructed with language, how reality is also about fluidity and discontinuity (rather than regularities), how it is constantly in the making and how knowledge is not simply informative but also linked to power. Studies tend to favour local and specific understandings. How language is used and what it 'does' is a central concern of this investigation, unveiling for example that the way we talk about cultural differences, the meanings we associate with culture(s) is not a neutral depiction but reproduces power inequalities.

The fourth major view is called "critical", in the sense that it uncovers hidden power structures and shows power struggles in the construction of reality. The aim is to make explicit that the reality we know is the outcome of relationships between different social or cultural groups, outcomes that tend to favour certain interests. As in the postmodern view, knowledge is perceived as linked to those in a situation of power in society, rather than being the outcome of a neutral and objective research process. Researchers tend to see their role not as 'reporters' but rather as 'activists', as agents for change. Among the research concerns of critical investigations are the identification of groups in relation to each other, of those who are heard in society and those who are not (or 'silenced'), and how to provide a forum for discussion and help in the building of a more open consensus. The critical view differs from postmodern in that it is concerned with power dynamics and structures. Postmodern research is less concerned with structures but rather with the creation of meanings in encounters.

These different views on culture have a tangible impact on how a situation involving cultural differences is addressed. Depending on your approach, you will interpret and deal with the problem differently. In the following sections we present each of the four views in more detail and apply them to the case. This results in a new analysis and alternative solutions for each view adopted; and consequently, in enriched analyses of the situation and suggestions for action.

The positivist views

This perspective uses measures of etic aspects of social value systems and ranks countries in comparative terms using frameworks composed of value dimensions such as Individualism/Collectivism or Power Distance (see table 11). Apart from the seminal work of Hofstede, Schwartz's Value Survey, the GLOBE project - which investigates how cultural dimensions are related to leadership preferences across countries - and the vast body of research in the World Values Survey are among the best known. Extensive presentation of these and other frameworks (Trompenaars, Hall or Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck) can be found elsewhere in the literature, for example in Steers et al (2010), Nardon and Steers (2009), Lane et al (2009), Adler and Gundersen (2008), Schneider et al. (forthcoming). If you are not familiar with cultural dimension frameworks, you should consult the literature since they are the basis of cross-cultural management which we build on in this volume.

In this positivist view, values are the core elements of investigation and the understanding of cultures because they are perceived as significant influences on behaviour. In addition, it is believed that all societies have to deal with fundamentally the same big issues: relationship between human beings, communication, relationship to the environment, etc. The various answers given to each of these universal issues constitute variations on the cultural dimension. For example, one can either live in harmony with the environment or try to master it. These are two positions on the cultural dimension "relationship to the environment". **By promoting one kind of answer or another to these fundamental questions, each society emphasizes a different range of values on the dimension** (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961).

It is important to be aware that predicting individual behaviour from cultural dimensions is a difficult enterprise. Scores and rankings are based on aggregation of data at the national level and individuals do not mechanistically enact their country's culture scores on researched cultural dimensions. In practice, we can find everyday situations that appear to contradict the national score of a country, such as low-context face-destroying directness in Chinese bosses dealing with subordinates. However, the directness can be explained by high Power Distance, not harmony seeking between equals and thus it may not be contradictory. These are what are referred to as "cultural paradoxes" (see Osland and Bird, 2000; Gannon, 2007; Bell, 2006) in the sense of counter-intuitive observations. Etic constructs are useful because they enable us to make sense of major differences that one is likely to encounter between cultures and to show general cultural tendencies; however, they require the correct attribution to the most relevant dimension.

The positivist views on culture and especially the cultural dimension frameworks have contributed to a decisive turn in the study of culture (Sakmann and Philips 2004) over the last three decades by introducing tangible dimensions, statistics and predictive models in a domain that was perceived, at best, as 'fuzzy'. Quantitative studies tend to have a dominant position in positivist studies but a number of studies use qualitative methods, for example the *Kulturstandard* method (which also can be used with interpretive studies[vii]), the Yin Yang view on culture and Cultural Metaphors. In contrast to the large scale comparative studies, they tend to be more concerned with an 'emic' view as they try to present national cultures in what can be unique to them. In the boxes in this section, we briefly present these alternative views and the knowledge they bring of cultures and cultural differences talked about in the introductory case.

The value dimensions approach to understanding cultures has been much attacked in recent years (see e.g., Mc Sweeney, 2009 and recent comments by Minkov, 2011) but continues to be popular because it provides an easy and very accessible explanation of why managerial behaviour varies. Knowing how to use cultural dimensions astutely **at the individual level** of analysis, although they were **developed for country level analysis**, is one of the main challenges of this approach and we suggest ways to do this in the next section. Scores on cultural dimensions are available for a large number of countries[viii] and widely diffused outside the academic world. Since they enable comparisons across nations they are seen as helpful for pointing to potential differences between countries for practical purposes such as preparing a marketing or expatriation plan. In addition, these nation-based cultural framework studies point to organizational culture variations across countries and are thus also useful for predicting potential organizational culture differences in M&A situations. Many commercial web pages and consultants use the findings of these studies.

Application to the case

From the metaphor of the Swedish stuga, we learn that Markus' company is likely to represent values of individualism, low power distance and individual well-being. The scores of Scandinavian countries and China on the major cultural dimensions (see table 1) indicate differences, especially in term of Power Distance, Individualism (or low score on In-group Collectivism), Future Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Assertiveness and Humane Orientation. In view of the situation described by Markus, the discrepancies on the dimensions of Power Distance and Individualism seem to be the most relevant for explaining employees' lack of participation in workshops. China's high score on Power Distance and low score on Individualism (compared to Scandinavian countries) may indicate that employees are not used to an environment fostering equal communication between supervisors and their subordinates, nor individual positioning, which are both important for workshops to be successful.

It is helpful to think of the scores on dimensions as indicative of a preference for a certain kind of logic. It is not that all Chinese are high on Power Distance in some absolute sense whatever their religion, ethnic background, socialization, organizational or other affiliation and in all situations; rather, it is that in comparison to practices and ways of thinking encountered in Scandinavia, employees in China are more familiar with high power distance in their organizational environment. In consequence, they have developed strategies to deal with directive leadership and strategies to be successful in such an environment. In this way, the analysis using positivist views on culture informs us of cultural reasons that can be explanatory of individuals' behaviour. In search for solutions to the problem, one might wonder: what are the limitations of workshops for people used to high Power Distance logic? How can workshops fit in with such logic? How can they fit in with a high score on In-group Collectivism?

To sum up this analysis of the case, it appears clear that national cultural differences are an explanatory variable of the situation encountered by Markus in Shanghai. Dimensions such as Power Distance, Individualism and Low versus High-context communication are part of the challenge of encouraging employees' participation. However, as Fang's model and others indicate (e.g. Osland and Bird, 2000), these cultural dimensions are context dependent and a recommendation to Markus could be, in addition to understanding these differences, to search for the expression of opposite values, the ones he wants to promote in workshops.

Pause for reflection
Use your knowledge of cultural dimension frameworks and do your own analysis of the case. What insights can you offer Markus? What would be your recommendations?

The interpretive views

Interpretive views on culture posit that people use meaning systems to organise their actions. In other words, people act and interact in a way that makes sense to them and it is the actor's point of view that interests the researchers. By understanding how people make sense of their world, researchers gain an understanding of why they act as they do. It is therefore an emic positioning, rather than the development of a-priori frameworks that are then tested in situations. Interpretive views are diverse and rich – just like the three others. Researchers such as Geertz (1973), Schutz (1962), Garfinkel (1967) or Berger and Luckmann (1966) are key inspirational figures in societal and organisation culture studies developing this approach. Within each society, there are tremendous variations between individuals, social groups or genders in possible ways of making sense of situations. At the same time, intercultural interpretive research claims that through socialization, in generation cohorts, in gender, in social groups and so on, individuals tend to develop similar frames of interpretation or similar interpretations of symbols. Some researchers dealing more specifically with culture and intercultural interaction at work argue that it is possible to **identify similar national patterns of interpretation within countries;** this is quite unique in interpretive research. Work inspired by d'Iribarne refers to these patterns as 'frames of meanings' or meaning systems (see e.g., d'Iribarne, 1989; 2012 or

Chevrier, 2009). This is not to be confused with etic value statements at national level.

A focus on meanings, rather than values, brings our attention to how the meanings are created, that is, the process of sense-making. In contrast to positivist studies, these views focus on interactions and thus on management of actual interpersonal encounters at an individual level of analysis and are closer to our experienced reality than the use of means for a nation. Knowledge of meaning systems is seen by some commentators as a rich and vital way to understand interaction than the static comparative view (Holden, 2002). Limitations of the use of meaning systems and emic knowledge in general touch principally on their scope. The meaning systems inform us about one theme, one structure of meaning association, in one local situation, and are therefore ill-suited for comparative purposes.

Studies of intercultural interactions constitute the bulk of interpretive works on (usually national) cultures. They show how employees from different national backgrounds use different meaning systems to make sense of their work, how this can lead to misunderstandings and how these can be resolved. A study by Chevrier (2011) shows, for example, that while working with French collaborators, Vietnamese aid workers were frustrated at the lack of direct supervision that could have been provided by technical collaborators and their weak presence in the field. The analysis of the meaning systems used by both partners regarding what they see as competence led to revising the working interactions. When French counterparts thought they were respecting local competences by granting autonomy and reducing their participation in the field but found that in fact they were not, they learned to engage more actively, to understand the importance of local social networks and support their partners more effectively.

Meanings systems present a form of stability, in the sense that they may serve as a reference over time, but at the same time, their content and interpretation is dynamic. For example, in the study of a large Tunisian corporation, Yousfi (2011) shows how the frames of meanings associated to organisations are dynamic. First, she reveals that the metaphor of a family is frequently used in Tunisian organizations. This can lead to potential "dysfunctions" (absence of explicit rules, favouritism, etc.) as well as strong supportive structures. Then, she considers the case of the exceptional Tunisian organization Poulina (a multinational group), and underscores that in this organisation too, the metaphor of the family is used. But it is used with a twist: the presence and observance of written rules. In other words, the meaning system of the family is used as a metaphorical reference in this organisation that has an "American management model" (e.g., performance assessment). Managers and employees built on a meaning system linking an organization with a family (a personal place, where one grows and receives support, etc.) when dealing with the rules of performance assessment. In short, the meaning system linking the register of the family with that of organisational life is stable, but its content is re-interpreted and adapted to the new situation.

Application to the case

In the light of research done on meaning systems linked to leadership in Sweden, the reasons behind Sveab's willingness to introduce workshops as organizational processes appear differently. It seems that in Sweden (and to some extent in the rest of Scandinavia, see Lindell and Sigfrids, 2007) a workshop is a perfect setting for the expression of good leadership and for people to express themselves (empowerment). In a workshop, the setting is informal and fits with the view of a boss as a coach. In addition, the workshop is a case of collective action: it is a team work perceived as an ideal format to work with, offering more ideas, more creativity, more inclusiveness and so on. To this extent, a workshop is a perfect illustration of leadership that values teamwork and consensus.

In light of the meaning systems associated with participative leadership in Germany, one might expect Markus to be familiar with or adhere to the idea that employees' participation is both expected and required for best organizational performance. According to this meaning system, the non-participation of employees in a workshop can be perceived as problematic and a loss to the organization, since neither their expertise nor knowledge of the complexity of the situation is capitalized upon. In addition, employees' non-participation and silence may be interpreted as a lack of commitment. Moreover, Markus may see his role of team leader as that of facilitator and, consequently, might see his lack of success in moderating the workshop and thus enabling the team to work independently, as a leadership failure.

A 'good leader' in China

Many expatriates look on Chinese employees' unwillingness to challenge authority as a form of submission due to fear, passivity, or lack of initiative. This may, however, be a misinterpretation, as some interpretive studies addressing relationships with authority in China indicate. In the West - that is, environments adhering to Ancient Greece's cultural heritage - a political regime that has no opposition is perceived as being despotic, in contrast to democratic ones, where divergent ideas are discussed in public debates. In China however, 'good' and 'bad' power are construed differently. Good power is inspired by the image of a leader devoted to the good of the people, who is a model of virtue. With upright and exemplary conduct, the leader creates a harmonious ruling environment. Subordinates suggest and express their desires and leaders should take them into consideration. Thus, in opposition to the Western views on what gives authority to a good regime, it is frequent that people in China associate good power with rules, duties and no direct expression of opinion but indirect suggestion (see Fu et al., 2007 and d'Iribarne, 2012).

Like many Western expatriates in China, Markus is facing the challenge of employees' low participation. If local employees perceive that stating one's opinion up-front is a form of undesirable self-assertiveness, their active verbal participation in a workshop is bound to be limited. Yet, employees in China do express their opinion and do communicate with leaders, when they indicate their opinion and when leaders consult them. Thus it is not the culture of the employees itself that may be the challenge, but rather, the format of the workshop that necessitates up-front expression of ideas and opinions. In the format that Markus is trying to develop, it seems that he assumes the role of a moderator who will facilitate participants' contributions. In view of the lack of spontaneous and direct contribution, maybe one possibility would be to modify the format of the workshops towards a form of group-work where Markus, for instance, can develop one-on-one relationships, or takes a backseat position. He could have the workshop organised into smaller teams, in which he might himself be part of one team, and then ask each team to report to the larger group.

To sum up, this interpretive analysis adds a new level of understanding of the cultural differences at play in the situation encountered by Markus. When the positivist analysis informed us that there is a discrepancy in terms of Power Distance, the interpretive analysis explains that the ideas behind the workshop is a form of leadership valuing team-work and the mobilisation of employees, and a consensus decision-making style. These views are most probably considered culturally desirable by the organisation and Markus alike; this is how they see good leadership and good management and why they insist on their use. In other words, the organisation of the workshop is not just a randomly effective technique that management came up with, and that happened to work well in some places. In this organisation, it is most likely that management strongly believes it is the best way to do things. This means that using workshops will not be easy to change.

Pause for reflection

Use this interpretive analysis of the case and your own cultural knowledge of the situation. What additional insights can you offer Markus? What would be your recommendations now? How do they differ from the ones you made after reading the positivist analysis?

The postmodern views

Since the 1990s, postmodern views have gained a prominent position in describing contemporary organizations. Some researchers resisted the post-modern standpoint at first because it departs strongly from positivist ideas of knowledge accumulation and the development of predictive models. It also contrasts with interpretive views which seek to identify cultural patterns. Some see a limitation of postmodern studies in their dispute with traditional scientific knowledge, which appears through two recurrent themes: the role of language and a critical positioning regarding grand narratives.

Language is a key element in the construction of reality; we use language to create constructs, ideas and even entities to which we refer as having independent existence. For example, we work in organisations, we live in countries and we interact across cultures; all of which can be argued to be primarily tangible through language.

Centrality of language

Postmodern thinkers show the strength and impact of the use of language, and even, in some cases, argue that constructs exist only in language. For example, what is an organization? Does any organization exist as a physical entity? Is the building of the organization the organization itself? Do the employees ‘make’ the organisation? If we think about these questions, we can answer ‘no’ to all of them; buildings are sold, employees change and do other things than working. However, the organization exists in language: in legal forms, in contracts, in organization charts, in books, in documents such as procedures and job descriptions. It also exists through oral language: meetings, discussions, agreements, statements or speeches.

A similar argument can be made for 'culture'. What is culture? What is the Moroccan culture? Is it defined by the territory, the borders of the land? If so, which historical borders should be considered? Or do people holding Moroccan citizenship represent its culture? What about those who have lived there for generations but do not have the nationality? What about those who changed their nationality when emigrating? Again we can argue that culture exists through language, such as for example, a constitution, the national anthem, poetry, books, TV spots, speeches, small conversations between people and so on.

In post-modern thinking, meta-narratives (or 'grand narratives') are stories and theories claiming an all encompassing explanation for the world or a state of affairs. Grand narratives can include such phenomena as the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment 'project'[ix] or the Western idea of progress (see Ogilvy, 1990). They can include theories such as Marxism or Hofstede's or GLOBE's concept of culture. For postmodern thinkers, a theory claiming universal dimensions is a meta-narrative. They argue that it is a futile task or even intellectually imperialistic to build theories which explain everything or try to "control" meanings (Parker, 1992), a form of totalitarian endeavour. Their preference is for small stories, local understanding or *petits récits* (Hassard and Kelemen, 2002), because, they argue, we understand the world on a small scale. Any local story which has insights, that opens up new meanings or explains local reality from the insiders' point of view, surely provides valid knowledge for researchers and practitioners alike.

Incredulity toward meta-narratives

Postmodern views reject what are called grand or meta-narratives, that is, theories encompassing other theories. Hofstede's cultural frameworks can be said to be an example of grand narrative, a theory that explains many situations with few explanatory variables. The cultural dimensions, allegedly universal constructs, are themselves based on other theories. Postmodern researchers resist grand narrative for the simplification they impose on reality, but also for the imposition of one view, one story or one part of the story. In Hofstede's work, it is clearly one voice, that of the Western, "modern" world, that talks about "cultural others", using dichotomies resting on Western literature, approaches and values (See for example, Ailon, 2008; Lowe, 2001, 2002; or Fang, 2003).

Postmodern scholars would argue that nations, groups or even individual identities are not fixed; they are constantly "in the making", that is, developing through interactions. Culture is not perceived as something established along dimensions or meaning systems, but rather, the manifestation of differences that may or may not emerge, depending on the situation. Postmodern researchers see and study flux and transformation as essential elements of culture, while positivist researchers such as Hofstede argue that cultures are relatively stable. Depending whether a Dane meets a Japanese or a Senegalese person, the 'cultural differences' that surface and are expressed by each person are different (see e.g., Søderberg and Holden, 2002). These also vary depending on whether one meets someone from a similar educational or professional background or not. Thus, culture can be seen as a phenomenon emerging in interactions, in context, something unstable and changing, in contrast to the ideas of fixed meaning structures or cultural dimensions constructs. Out of a specific cross-cultural encounter a new micro-culture is created specific to that particular on-going relationship.

Using postmodern views and analyses when confronted with an intercultural situation enables us to reach a different level of analysis and shed new light on the situation. A postmodern focus on language looks at management matters as narrative. One method inspired by postmodernism is deconstruction; based on Derrida's seminal work. Derrida (e.g., 1967) argues for multiple interpretations of a text, insisting that the author alone does not have the monopoly of the meaning of a text, but that readers too develop their own valid interpretations. To translate this to organizational life, managers do not have the monopoly of what a code of conduct or a job description means or should mean to employees, for example. On this argument it is meaningless to look for an objectively neutral and "correct" description of the code.

Application to the case

Deconstructing the text of the introductory case helps reveal hidden ideology and assumptions. The text can be rewritten using alternative terms in dichotomies and oppositions. The key persons and places are changed for their 'opposite' and suddenly, the case feels very different although the problem is still the same: lack of participation of employees. Markus becomes Gang, a Chinese manager, Sveab becomes Pu Dong export, a Singaporean corporation and the action no longer takes place in Shanghai, but in Hamburg, Germany.

By changing a few terms in the text (using their opposites) implicit assumptions become clear. In the original version of the case, and in our positivist and interpretive analyses of it, there is a strong implicit assumption that employee's behaviour is linked to their (national) culture. By placing the action in Hamburg, European readers and certainly those used to the Germanic environment realise immediately that there are other alternative explanations. For example, maybe employees do not understand fully what is expected from them, seeing this 'Singaporean practice' as out of place, or maybe simply they are resisting the chosen format for the workshop. From Foucault (e.g. 1979), an influential postmodern thinker, we know that resistance happens where there is exercised power. If employees are indeed resisting workshops, what power are they actually resisting? It is likely that they resist the organisational processes of workshops, maybe because these processes are either imposed or institutionalised by the headquarters. The reconstructed story progressively appears as potentially also a story about headquarters-subsidiary relationships and maybe about tensions between them. This case is most probably about cultural differences coupled with power differences between headquarters, management and local employees. It seems that although the organisation is multinational, the headquarters exercise a certain degree of control through organisational processes of workshops and the use of expatriates so this case is also likely to be about employees' resistance to this control.

To sum up this analysis of the case, using deconstruction enables us to see that the situation is not only cultural, as the positivist and interpretive analyses clearly show, but may also be linked to power discrepancies. Power imbalance is present in the case between the subsidiary and the headquarters, between local employees and expatriate implementing processes, and between the position of the managers and that of the employees who do not necessarily have a recognized role in such decisions.

Pause for reflection

Try to deepen this new analysis of the case by using other dichotomies in your deconstruction. What additional insights can you bring to Markus? What will be your recommendations now? How do they differ from the ones you made after the positivist and interpretive analyses?

The critical views

Critical and postcolonial perspectives have much internal diversity, just like the other three views presented above. In our categorization, these studies have in common that they approach societal structures as the outcome of power struggles, where the winners impose their views in a form of domination. They also pay attention to the influence of societal and structural elements in the explanation of (work) interactions. In studies concerned with culture and cultural differences, this perspective will pay attention, for example, to how the discourse on cultural differences is constructed[x] and to whose advantage. They are thus not concerned for example with the origin of different value systems as such, or causal explanations of cultural variations in management practices, which some scholars see as a limitation.

Critical studies are a key contribution to cross-cultural management because they highlight, for example, power imbalance embedded in a discourse on culture. In the study of mergers between several banks in the Nordic European region, researchers show how the talks about cultural differences (between e.g. Danish, Finnish and Swedish) contributed, for example, to exclude females from top management positions (see Tienari et al., 2005; Vaara et al., 2003). They show how the (male) managers in a dominant position describe their respective national identities in a way that distances gender: a focus on females appears irrelevant or out of place, thus, implicitly justifying the fact that women are absent from top management positions. Revealing the social construction of a "male" reality at the top management of this bank can help bring the issue of gender discrimination on to the agenda and can contribute to changing the situation. There are also many cases which can be analysed using critical analysis, such as the Socometal case (Stahl et al., 2011; Mutabasi and Derr, 2003), where a play of interests between financial accountants and collective intrinsic motivation of local workers overlaid probable postcolonial attitudes on the part of the French manager. These cases underline, among other things, that power can masquerade as cultural difference and thus that using positivist and interpretive analyses that principally address cultural differences are not enough.

Among critical studies, critical intercultural communication research (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010) aims to understand the role of power and contextual constraints on communication between different groups. In its 'critical' agenda to make a change, it contrasts with positivist cross-cultural communication studies, in that it insists more on the group and the historical, institutional and political forces that play a role in this communication. Inspired for example by the work of Stuart Hall (e.g. Morley and Chen, 1996), studies see culture as the site of struggles where some meanings will take prevalence. Consider for example, our previous description of meanings systems on leadership in Sweden. How come that these views are seen as socially and culturally desirable? Is it because they are enacted by many managers, or could it be that large, successful and influential Swedish corporations have established such practices and then presented them as a distinctive feature, in line with a dominant political ideology of equality and respect of individuals? In addition, do all social groups (e.g. blue collar workers, craftsmen, etc.) in Sweden see it as equally desirable? Or is this description mostly appropriate for the Swedish middle class and those in positions of middle or top management? How do they use these established views on good leadership in their interactions with other groups? Do they tend to impose them? How are other groups rejecting, or adopting and transforming these views? How do they contribute to cultural dynamism? Critical intercultural studies build on these questions and help us understand that culture is a place of contested meanings between different cultural groups in a relationship of unequal power (e.g., Sorrells, 2010, 2013).

The postcolonial research stream is inspired by the seminal work of Said (1978) that shows that Western European scholars have constructed knowledge about non-Western populations by using classifications and simplifications (such as "culture"), but mostly by developing a scientific expertise that serves military and political agendas. For example, when the West claims that some countries are not fit for democracy because it does not belong to their culture, or their cultural values, this is a simplification. Firstly, these simplifications present culture as if it were homogeneous and stable, thus denying internal social, racial or religious diversity; culture is seen as something immutable, resisting modernity and change. Secondly, it does not mention the present and past ideological, economic and military power inequalities between the West and these countries. Such simplifications were used by colonial powers to justify their imposition of political and military order in these territories. In the aftermath of September 11th, these simplifications have gained renewed popularity with the ideas of 'the clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1996). Yet, these simplifications do not stand up to rigorous examination using historical evidence or demographic analyses nor do they have conceptual consistency (Said, 2001). Using the terminology of postmodern studies, we could call them deceptive grand-narratives: they reduce a complex reality to narrow categories of culture (or a few 'civilisations'), implicitly presenting Western civilisation as universally desirable and thus implicitly also justifying its potential agenda of cultural and political imperialism (Michaelson, 2010; Rittenhofer, 2011).

Postcolonial thinkers worked on the theme of 'the Other' and 'othering' (Fanon, 1967; Jackson and Moshin, 2010). When we talk about cultural differences, we 'otherize', that is, we create an 'other' in opposition to which we can build our own (cultural) identity, most often in a way that empowers us and to the disadvantage of the others concerned. Cultural dimension constructs can be said to do this. For example, Trompenaars (1993)' dimension "Neutral - Affective" hides under the cover of a neutral and value-judgment free theoretical construct, the opposition between "rational" and "emotional". Likewise, his dimension 'Universalism-Particularism' hides the dichotomy between a disciplined environment and one of nepotism where relationships prevail over the law. Such bipolar dichotomies are shown by Said to be bricks in the construction of an evaluative discourse about cultural others, for example, in the opposition between the "rational", "civilized", "disciplined", "democratic" and "modern" West and the "emotional", "savage", "natural", "nepotic" or "traditional" East. Similar oppositions are implicitly used in today's cross-cultural management training (Jack and Lorbiecki, 2003) for example in the preparation of managers' expatriation, and have tangible consequences on how managers will perceive and deal with cultural differences.

Application to the case

In the introductory case, culture and cultural differences are presented as the explanation of the difficulties encountered by Markus. Chinese culture is mentioned, and especially employees' relationship to hierarchy. In his depiction of the 'cultural' behaviour of the employees, Markus uses terminologies that are not neutral, but rather depict his collaborators in negative terms regarding the purpose of the workshop: 'passive', 'sit in silence'. There are no positive terms associated with the Chinese collaborators. This indicates that Markus is most probably using culture as a simplification to explain a problem: the lack of active participation. In other words, Markus constructs a cultural other. He does so by using common discourses about Asians as silent and passive; at best he uses cultural dimension constructs (e.g, high Power Distance). This means that Markus is not considering the so-called cultural practices of his employees in neutral terms and therefore, that this is likely to impact on his management negatively.

The critical analysis of the case helps us investigate further the power differences between the actors present: the supervisor Markus and the Chinese subordinates. It is in view of his power position that Markus identifies and describes the cultural differences of his employees. As in the case by Ybema and Byun, culture is presented as hampering the hierarchical project and frustrating hierarchical ambitions. In other words, Markus is implicitly justifying the fact that he is in a position of power, because his views are in line with the corporate agenda; local employees, however, are not. By stating that this is their culture, Markus sees culture as determining behaviour, a simplification that imprisons employees in a position of inferiority and of misfit with the corporate agenda, that is, he over-rides their specific interests with a blanket generalization about culture. With such a view of his employees, is Markus likely to manage them well? It is probable that his opinion of the employees result in their low motivation.

The third element that critical analysis of the case brings out is Markus's stance regarding cultural differences: "I cannot over-ride their culture, I cannot ask them to change". Although it might appear at first a respectful position regarding cultural differences, this comment translates the idea that culture are immutable, that people are caught in their cultural frames and cannot or will not change. This is a limiting and reductionist view on culture and on people, since both are dynamic and flexible and transformations do occur in (inter-cultural) encounters. If respect for the others' culture is an important element of successful intercultural interaction, this should not be confused with trapping a person into a difference and thereby closing opportunities for dialogue and reciprocal learning. This is probably why Anna is saying that if Markus is to use ideas such as "it's their culture", he won't go far in his analysis, nor his management of the cultural differences.

Pause for reflection

Use this new perspective to further analyse the case. What additional insights can you offer Markus? What would be your final recommendations, taking into consideration insights from each perspective? Can you see how your recommendations improved after each new analysis?

There is nothing so practical as four good theories

Although this chapter has not presented four theories but rather four scientific views on research on culture in management, the intention has been to demonstrate how multiple perspectives are mutually enriching and lead to a much more powerful analysis and thus resolution of management situations.

Insights gained from the positivist analysis clearly point at established and well-documented cultural differences perceptible in management across countries (e.g. different views on Power Distance, Individualism, and communication conventions). This analysis enables us to establish that the situation is about the prevalence of different values and by implication, different management systems.

With the interpretive analysis, we understand the motivation and legitimacy of the attempt to implement workshops in the Shanghai operations: it's about the management being convinced that these practices are better and their reasons why. This provides added explanatory power the case and justification for the established (or attempt at establishing) practices: the interpretive analysis contributes to sense-giving.

With the postmodern analysis, the case appears suddenly in a totally new light: power imbalance is identified and it becomes clear that we are missing half of the information about the case: we only have the managerial point of view. In addition, the case appears also to be a matter of headquarters-subsidiary relationship, thus going beyond good management practices or leadership. With this analysis, we reach a higher level of understanding of the situation: no longer just as a problem of employee participation or leadership, but also potentially an issue of organisational control in a headquarter-subsidiary relationship.

With the critical analysis, we further explore the power dichotomies between the different actors in the case and in particular, it becomes clear that Markus' position is both judgmental and aimed at limiting his local employees to inferior (cultural) positions. In addition to having a reductionist view on culture, he does not see that with cultural encounters comes an opportunity for (co-)learning and improvement. He believes that cultures are fixed and should be 'respected', when in fact he does not seem to respect his employees' differences in values and thereby misses the opportunity to enter in relationship with them or with other members of the organizations.

Further readings (see full references in bibliography)

For the positivist perspective:

The GLOBE project, that is, the work by House et al (2004) and other associated researchers, has made its mark as the newest and most complete work on the measurement of national differences with cultural dimension frameworks.

The studies by Hofstede (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) remain a reference for many and need to be known.

Alternative positions (e.g., Fang, 2012; Gannon, 2004) are increasingly gaining popularity.

For the interpretive perspective:

We recommend the volume by Primecz et al (2011) that first introduces the interpretive perspective and its methodology and then applies it to 10 cases on intercultural collaborations.

The work by d'Iribarne (2012) is currently an international reference for interpretive research in intercultural management.

For the postmodern perspective:

The article by Fougere and Moulettes (2011) provides a clear illustration of the analytical power of deconstruction.

The contribution by Gersten and Søderberg, (2011), 'Intercultural collaborations stories: on narrative inquiry and analysis as tools for research in international business', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42, 787-804 illustrates the use of a narrative analysis on the 'text' of the interview of an expatriate and his superior. Using this tool enables us to identify when and how intercultural learning took place and key moments in the interaction between the managers that led them to successful intercultural co-operation.

For the critical perspective:

The work by Jack and Westwood (2009) presents a detailed critique of cross-cultural management research using a postcolonial perspective.

The article by Ybema and Buyn (2009) is a clear illustration that talking about cultural differences is linked to one's power situation.

Sorrells (2013) adopts a focus on cross-cultural communication and reveals how some dimensions (gender, sexual preferences, economic prosperity of one's country) are also elements that need to be considered in the analysis of intercultural interactions.

The handbook by Nakayama and Halualani (2010) is probably the first compilation of critical intercultural communication studies and provides compelling illustrations of why power and other structural dimensions need to be considered in our intercultural analyses.

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[i] Our paraphase of Lewin's famous saying: 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory'. Although we are not presenting 'theories' here but rather views and perspectives on culture, we aim to show how their combination is practical.

[i] Sveab is a pseudonym.

[ii] This chapter is part of the research project "The hidden side of cross-cultural management" financed by the Swedish Research Council, Vetenskapsrådet (412-2009-2020).

[iii] Although the Burrell-Morgan framework is more widely known in organizational studies, Deetz' approach with open quadrants is more relevant for this chapter. See Burrell & Morgan (1979) and its application to cross-cultural management in Primecz et al. (2009), and Deetz (1996) for his criticism and development of the Burrell and Morgan matrix.

[iv] The distinction beween emics and etics originates from Kenneth L. Pike, developing from his research on phonetics to phonemics, and he was interested in the behavioural (or cultural in our terms) reasons behind the differences in the sounds ("phone-") of different languages. When you investigate phonetics you compare a wide range of languages; when you investigate phonemics you discover the internal system of meanings within any given language; this works by analogy in the study of cultures. (Peterson & Pike, 2002).

[v] Hungary is low on Power Distance in Hofstede (2001) but high in GLOBE (House et al, 2004). See Primecz (2002) or Varga (2003).

[vi] Primecz (2002) shows the presence and the lack of trust between the local workers and expatriates

[vii] See for example Topcu (2005), where the researcher – based on narrative interviews – apply the method to an interpretive study. The *Kulturstandard* method can be used for positivist as well as interpretive studies and thus for bi-paradigm research as showed by Topcu et al. (2007) and Romani et al (2011).

[viii] On www.Harzing.com, 98 country's scores are accessible.

[ix] See Lyotard (1979, 1984) and Rotry (1991)'s criticism of Habermas (1988, 1990) approach to the Enlightenment.

[x] In our model (figure 1) we placed critical approaches at the 'etic' end of the etic-emic dimension. Reality is, as always, more complex than ideal-type classifications. Many critical studies build on emic research and use discourses (language elements) as tools of analysis. These kinds of critical theories have much in common with postmodernism. For clarity and pedagogical purposes, we define the borderline between postmodern and critical approaches by using an emphasis on 'power structures' or 'language'. Other researchers would define this border differently (see for example the work by Burrell & Morgan, 1979).