3

MANAGEMENT ACROSS CULTURES WHEN THE BOUNDARIES ARE INTRA-NATIONAL

Leslie Stager, Joe Gladstone, and Linda Beamer

Introduction

Scholars and practitioners of international management (IM) have struggled to find a succinct definition for management that takes place when more than one nation is involved. Various suggestions have been proposed (Boddewyn, 1999; Boddewyn, Toyne, and Martinez, 2004; Faria and Guedes, 2005; Guedes and Faria, 2007); however, the Academy of Management, the largest and arguably the most prestigious management organization for scholars and practitioners in the world, has provided a working definition that may be the most widely used. The Academy of Management has temporarily settled on this definition of international management (IM) in its IM Division domain statement:

[International Management encompasses] . . . content pertaining to the theory, research, and practice of management with a cross-border or cross-cultural dimension. Major topics include: the cross-border management of operations, including multi-country, multi-unit, strategy formulations and implementation; evolving organizational forms and management practices in cross-border business; the cross-border differential impact of cultural, social, economic, technological, political, and other institutional forces on strategies, organizational forms, and management practices; the international competitiveness of firms, industries, and nations; and comparative management studies involving two or more countries.

(Academy of Management Online, 2012)

Management cultures when the other population is indigenous

The Academy of Management’s IM definition relies on traditional notions of Western management rules, mores, and values derived from theories mostly formed from American and European cultural values (see Üsdiken, 1997). This focus does not address management within countries that have indigenous populations, who have their own boundaries, language, cultural values, and behavior, including their own management practices. Definitions of indigenous people vary, but in this chapter we consider indigenous peoples as ethnic groups who were first in a geographical
Management across cultures

location and who retain their ethnicity today. In this chapter, we consider the definitions of management that generally overlook values of indigenous peoples that affect their management practices. We also consider key differences between indigenous ethnic groups in Western countries and what mainstream management can learn in order to cooperate effectively with indigenous peoples.

Many countries have native peoples who have been colonized by a persistent, dominant, Western culture and whose culture has survived in spite of a changed environment. These countries include the USA, Canada, Mexico, Iceland, all central and South American countries, Australia, New Zealand, many African countries with European colonial histories, several countries in the Middle East, and such Asian countries as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. (Many other countries have colonial histories that do not involve Western nations.) The notion of indigeneity—that is, of people who were settled before colonizers arrived—does not figure in the Western-based Academy of Management’s (2012) discourse on management across cultures; indigeneity is not included in the definition of management between nations as shown above. Nor do studies of management between culturally-other native people within a single nation occur in the management literature. One might argue that indigenous perspectives are included in the IM concept of culture or diversity, but these terms do not capture the existence of a “nation within a nation,” such as the Navajo Nation or Naabeehó Bináhásdzo in the state of Arizona, USA. The Academy of Management (2012) definition states that IM takes place where management has a “cross-border business or cross-cultural dimension.” However, the Navajo Nation, to take one case, is a nation within the geographical country of the USA, but with its own specific boundaries, flag, seal, government, citizenship, constitution, law enforcement, and educational system. It has its own language and culture. The Academy of Management has no definition to cover management with, of, or by the Navajo Nation, and consequently the Navajo Nation is overlooked entirely. This blindness to, and zeroing out of, native indigenous cultures by dominant colonial cultures happens in many countries.

Definitions of culture in the management literature

Ozkazanc-Pan (2008: 970) asks, “How did management ideas and practices developed in the west become normalized as universal theories for studying people and business?” For a holistic perspective of IM, one needs knowledge of different cultural norms, values, and beliefs within countries as well as across borders. Indeed, cultural differences in management by indigenous peoples may well be acknowledged by the colonizers’ descendants; however, simply taking note of diversity may fail to remind us of the foundational violence (Veracini, 2008) of the colonization process from the viewpoint of the colonized that often results in a shallow notion of difference—the conquered and the conquerors.

According to Egan and Bendick (2008), the field of international business studies (IB) traditionally interprets the term culture to mean national culture. The emphasis is on analyzing quantifiable differences among nations. The difficulties with this are twofold: (1) reducing a country’s culture to fit various quantitative dimensions is simplistic, and (2) distinct ethnicities residing within the dominant culture are not accounted for. For example, many Europeans immigrated to the USA in the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, earning it the label of the Great Melting Pot, as first mentioned in a magazine article by Titus Munson Coan (1875: 465).

Kawar (2012: 105) states: “‘culture’ can be defined as the inherited values, concepts, and ways of living which are shared by people of the same social group.” This definition does not refer to physical boundaries. Culture, by this definition, can describe many geographical levels of analysis such as the country, state, region, and neighborhood, as well as factors such as language, cultural
Leslie Stager, Joe Gladstone, and Linda Beamer

values and cultural practices, and a number of other identifiable affiliations. As with this general
definition of culture, when speaking of a group of people, even indigenous people, there will be
diversity within the group. Speaking of the indigenous is akin to speaking of the American people or
Westerners or any other collective term commonly used to refer to a group of people who share
similarities but also differences. Therefore, using a broad concept of culture like Kawar’s (2012)
means not specifying where cultural differences lie. With this awareness, we nevertheless use the
broad term indigenous peoples for convenience.

In moving our focus from a national level to an organizational level, unsurprisingly we see
that cultural diversity in organizations is extremely complex. According to Kautish (2012: 37), a
diverse workforce refers to the “co-existence of people from various socio-cultural backgrounds
within the company that include factors such as race, gender, age, physical ability, and ethnicity.”
Kautish (2012) does not include indigeneity, but perhaps he assumes that indigeneity falls under
the category of race or ethnicity.

In a popular management text, a definition of international management is “the management
of business operations conducted in more than one country . . . The basic management functions
of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling are the same whether a company operates domestically
or internationally” (Daft and Marcic, 2013: 99, italicized for emphasis). Other management scholars
urge that the management functions are not the same domestically and internationally, because
perspectives differ based on cultural, not to mention regulatory, economic, physical, and social
environments. For indigenous peoples, the management processes of planning, organizing,
leading, and controlling differ from the dominant Western paradigm of behavior. For example,
the Māori of Aotearoa, New Zealand, plan and lead by making use of hui, or meetings, which
allow every opinion to be voiced before decisions are made (for a Cree perspective, see also Jolly,
Whiteman, Atkinson, and Radu, 2011). Indigenous values and practices simply do not always
conform to those of “Western” management, although the indigenous peoples may live in the
same geographical region as managers with “Western” perspectives (like the Navajo in Arizona
or the Māori in the North Island of New Zealand). We need a different umbrella term for
managing people of different cultures who share one national boundary.

Key differences in indigenous values and behaviors

Five key areas of difference in cultural viewpoints of a wide range of indigenous peoples’ values
and practices affect management: time, relationship values, rituals and ceremonies, goal achieve-
ment, and communication. The first difference is time. Indigenous cultures throughout the
world time differently from managers who embrace the Western values embodied in the
Academy of Management’s general principles. For indigenous peoples, time is the medium in
which activities take place, and they take as much time as they need (Struthers and Peden-
McAlpine, 2005; Varner and Beamer, 2011). Typically, then, time is not an abstract framework
into which activities must be fitted. A corollary to this is a polychronic view, in which many
different things are unfolding in their own timeframes simultaneously, and time follows broad
cycles. In contrast, Western cultures view time as monochronic, in which people generally tend
to prefer to do one thing at a time and schedule activities consecutively. Management of and
by indigenous peoples involves different attitudes toward timeliness (being on time), deadlines,
and planning. Attitudes toward time therefore affect communication about time-related con-
cepts (see Dingwall, Lewis, Maruff, and Cairney, 2009). Acting promptly may not mean the same
thing to someone adhering to indigenous attitudes and someone adhering to Western manage-
ment attitudes. Yet neither is the correct way to understand time—or perhaps more accurately,
both are correct.
A second cultural value of indigenous peoples that differs from “Western” values involves relationships. Collectivist cultures value relationships as long term, with in-group membership being the most important kind of relationship: family, clan, and tribal relationships endure and are relied upon. These relationships are the basis for commercial endeavors for production and trade of goods and services. Communication within the in-group is different from communication with others. Western-trained managers must first develop a relationship with in-group members in order to cooperate with indigenous peoples and organizations. When management issues arise—say in a cooperative venture—attention first has to be paid to communication that builds relationship. This involves expressions of respect for status and expressions of trust, as well as willingness to cooperate.

Another aspect of relationship from an indigenous perspective is not only with persons, but also relationship with the immediate environment. Indigenous people’s knowledge about how to use the natural world around them to provide food, clothing, and shelter differs from Western knowledge about using resources from the environment. The differences reflect deep spiritual and cosmic understandings about what natural and human-created resources signify. For indigenous groups whose skills and religious beliefs have persisted for centuries, environmental knowledge grounds them relationally to their part of the world and influences their attitudes and actions in management. Jolly et al. (2011) illustrate this “deep sense of space” (p. 27) and how it is embodied inter-generationally as “traditional ecological knowledge” (p. 30).

A third value difference is in the importance attached to certain rituals and ceremonies, and their meanings. Often members of indigenous societies who do business engage in a rite to purify or cleanse themselves of negative influences and prepare themselves and their business counterparts to cooperate productively. Where formal rites do not take place initially, even residual meanings from formal rites can attach to expressions of goodwill. Where a Western-culture manager from the USA may shake hands with indigenous counterparts, which is a rite, to signify goodwill at the start of a cooperative project, Native Americans may burn sweetgrass for purification and positive cooperation. The Aotearoa New Zealand Māori may conduct a powhiri, or a welcoming ceremony for important guests. Many indigenous peoples’ communications invoke the witness by or help of ancestors and/or spirits and divine power at the start of meetings. This value of ritual and ceremony involves communication that links the activity at hand with eternally present spiritual powers. This sort of language is unfamiliar to most Western-culture managers in a workplace setting.

A fourth area of difference has to do with goal planning. Because of their collectivist cultures, indigenous peoples are primarily engaged in realizing goals for their own people and communities, and they usually have a strong social import. Western-trained managers are primarily engaged in reaching goals for their employers that have a strong monetary import. Often management as developed in Western countries, especially the USA, operates within fairly short-term frameworks. Long-term strategic planning usually means five years. Indigenous peoples are likely to think in much longer terms. Their planning for achieving goals is related to a worldview that looks far back into roots that continue to nourish the present and will make the future possible (see Jolly et al. (2011) for an example of this concept). It is a timeline that is unfamiliar to most business managers.

The goal orientation of indigenous peoples also affects their communication. For example, for a project concerning the development of a medical facility for indigenous peoples that will be partially funded by a government, the indigenous participants are likely to be very well versed in any legislation that may affect the project for their people. The government managers may be less well prepared, especially if the legislation is from a historical period. The communication from the indigenous peoples may seem isolationist to the Western-trained managers, and the communication from the government managers may seem dismissive of their goals to the...
Leslie Stager, Joe Gladstone, and Linda Beamer

indigenous peoples. Just such a real-world example is illustrated by Jolly et al. (2011). FJ, a James Bay Cree Indian in Canada, works a family trapline (traditional hunting territory) as a tallyman (leader). He opposed a large-scale hydroelectric development with Quebec that would negatively affect his trapline by the building of a dam and spillways.

FJ tried to explain that governments, developers, and Cree decision makers lacked a local understanding of the land and thus did not have the bush legitimacy to make such decisions. He felt that Cree hunters had a different understanding because of their daily education by the bush:

We’re the ones who are supposed to decide whatever the government wants to do up here, up north, because we know our trapes. We walk on our trapes all winter. We hunt. We fish. We trap. So it’s very hard for them to decide [on economic development activities] because they only sit in their office.

(Jolly et al., 2011: 41)

The need for rethinking indigenous peoples’ cultural viewpoints

Issues of identity remain for and about the indigenous. Are they included in the discourse under racial or ethnic labels? These labels do not fully capture their cultural beliefs and traditions because they are citizens of a country, and yet are their own nation–within–a–nation. The concept of a nation–within–a–nation suggests two issues: (1) that the concept of nation must be more fully explored and defined for purposes of IM scholarship and practice, and (2) the concept of categorizing indigenous peoples under cultural diversity labels according to nationality as defined by the colonizers is problematic due to the nation–within–a–nation status. For example, calling Māori New Zealanders is robbing them of their cultural identity. Cultural identity is what you refer to when asserting who you are. Perhaps a characteristic of indigeneity—the persistence of ethnicity—can be related to the preference of many indigenous peoples to identify their membership in an indigenous group first, before their national citizenship. Historically, some indigenous peoples resisted colonizers’ cultures, while other indigenous peoples assimilated in strategic ways, and still others were marginalized by a refusal to assimilate.

To what extent have indigenous cultural values contributed to dominant cultures’ management practices? While the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in a definition of international management is generally overlooked, it may be important to investigate in what ways indigenous perspectives may have historically influenced the values of the colonizing culture, and how an understanding of indigenous perspectives may further influence current management practices.

Trading between countries is generally conducted in dominant-culture business paradigms, and how much indigenous cultures influence the paradigms varies. For example, when businesses are dealing with the US government, little consideration is given to Native American business paradigms; however, when businesses are dealing with the government of New Zealand, more substantive diligence is given to the Māori because of the Treaty of Waitangi, a founding document of New Zealand, which identifies rights of the Māori and the Crown (the Government of New Zealand). Admittedly, many disputes about interpretation arise today of what the Treaty of Waitangi means.

Certainly research opportunities are plentiful for examining what managers have learned from indigenous peoples. The sad truth is that little work has been done on management and indigenous groups. A rich range of difference lies ready to be investigated for a better understanding of how and why others plan, organize, lead, control, monitor, and encourage. Not only can Western-trained managers become more effective with indigenous peoples, they can also
broaden their knowledge base for management of other groups. As a fringe benefit, managers have an opportunity to learn about the values and practices of different ethnic groups in their own countries as a good preparation for international management.

Prior to Western colonization, indigenous nations lived in cultures that were influenced by their environments. Colonizers brought different cultures, which had been influenced by their different environments, and they challenged the traditional cultures of the native population. It is not the aim of this chapter to discuss political issues that colonization creates. However, areas that yield information about the affect of colonization on indigenous peoples include past and current demographics, physical environments, and research into colonization processes throughout the world that share common characteristics. Research may show that residual indigenous influences are evident in underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that are now tacit knowledge in Western management practices, especially in states and countries where indigenous populations remain high. We suggest that this tacit knowledge be made explicit and acknowledged as indigenous contributions to management practice. We also suggest that the study of management across cultures continues to be extended to include indigenous perspectives.

Conclusion

In sum, although management with and by indigenous peoples involves cross-cultural competence, it is an area that has received almost no attention by mainstream management. Because of the importance of culture, including language, to cross-cultural management, the closest the literature comes to addressing this intra-national, cross-cultural management is by extrapolation from international management. However, the application of international management constructs remains debatable. Scholars, practitioners, and the Academy of Management have attempted to make explicit a holistic definition of international management that takes cultural difference into account, but obviously managing indigenous peoples is not international—between nations—in the sense of going outside national borders. Furthermore, some authors still maintain management is the same, whether domestic or international, refusing to acknowledge cultural difference in any context.

We also suggest that further cross-disciplinary research be conducted to source the grounding cultural influences of any remaining traditions that are tacit in local cultures. Understanding native cultures can make managers more effective, just as understanding any foreign national culture can make a manager more effective when going beyond national borders.

Bibliography

Leslie Stager, Joe Gladstone, and Linda Beamer

Guedes, A.L. and Faria, A. 2007. Globalization and international management: in search of an interdisciplin-


3(6): 105–111.


Ozkazanc-Pan, B. 2008. International management research meets “The rest of the world.” *Academy of 

1264–1276.


McGraw-Hill.

Veracini, L. 2008. The evolution of historical redescription in Israel and Australia: the question of the 