

**«Intercultural or Crosscultural Management? The confirmation of a research field and the issue concerning the definition and development of an intercultural competency for expatriates and international managers»**

**“Intercultural ou Crosscultural Management? O desenvolvimento de uma competência intercultural para expatriados e gestores internacionais”**

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**Abstract**

Companies have recently gone through several radical modifications due to the speed of environmental changes leading to the confirmation of a “new paradigm of business”, as pointed out by W. Hesterley and C. Brooklyn Derr. An abundance of terms has emerged in recent years to describe this new paradigm: hybrid organizations (POWELL, 1987), network organizations (MILES; SNOW 1986; 1992), horizontal corporations (BYRNE, 1993b), virtual corporations (BYRNE 1993a; DAVIDOW; MALONE, 1992), internal markets (HALAL, 1994), strategic alliance (KANTER, 1989), downsizing (TOMSAKO, 1991) are a representative list of the trends taking place. As a direct consequence of those organizational and strategic trends, personnel management has gone through deep changes.

In addition to the great challenge of forecasting which positions should remain and which should be eliminated, the International Human Resource Management - IHRM now faces a situation where expatriates are fewer, and should be better prepared and carefully chosen from a pre-defined list of valuable individuals the organizations are even more strongly attached to. This reality certainly results from the fact that companies' frontiers are becoming less strict and less determined, the world is becoming more dangerous, and local recruitment practices tend to become more popular and be considered a safer bid. Those selected “key men” must not only have certain technical and linguistic abilities to work anywhere in the world, but also be able to convey and manage strategic values and purposes, as well as be clever enough to seize opportunities and resources offered by local environments and decide what must be adapted, taken into consideration or standardized.

The organization's coherence in the strategic choice of decentralization and in the choice between market and hierarchy is intimately related to specific human competencies. We assume here that the holder of a sort of “intercultural competency” would be someone able mainly to “effectively communicate with people who are from different national, organizational, functional or professional cultures than his own”. Intercultural communication studies confirm that, in order to communicate, two groups of different cultures must interact so as to develop a common pool of values, a re-negotiation of their own identities. The intercultural competency owner's mission consists of making sure his/her organization's values and purposes are properly conveyed through the creation of a shared basis of meanings, and through the achievement of a shared vision implementation (SENGE, 1991).

This article is organized in two sections: the first is longer, and aims to present the evolution of the concept of “culture”, from its origin in the field of anthropology until its insertion into management sciences, focusing on the main difference between a comparative approach (crosscultural) and an interactive one (intercultural). Finally, relevant works carried out in the field of intercultural communication on the components and development of an intercultural competency are presented, as they have not yet been explored or related to existing crosscultural studies.

The second section reflects on some current changes that are provoking an evolution in the field of studies in IHRM, specifically in what concerns the definition of a high-potential individuals' competency profile. Those changes imply the emergence of new paradigms for the ranking of international managers' best competencies. This section is mainly based on

the results of a qualitative survey held between 2000 and 2002, during seminars for the preparation of future French expatriates going to Brazil, through open questionnaires about the components and the importance of an “intercultural competency” for the success of their expatriation. In addition to the narratives, written information was collected during a 2-year period by means of open questionnaires from 37 international French managers aged 30 to 55, participating of crosscultural seminars meant to prepare them for a coming mission abroad as expatriates.

From the analysis, through ethnographic qualitative interviews (RIESSMAN, 1993), of expatriates’ narratives of previous success and failure experiences, some elements were identified as competencies required for successful expatriation. The set of those competencies varied slightly from one company to another. The competency profile of an “expatriable” individual would gather the following main elements: interpersonal and relationship skills, linguistic abilities, curiosity and motivation to live abroad, tolerance in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity, flexibility, patience and respect, cultural empathy and a strong sense of self, in other words, psychological stability and sense of humour. As such, intercultural competency would be the set of all those elements added to the ability to perceive new environments and adapt to them, as mentioned above, and furthermore, the ability to face cultural shocks and avoid cultural pitfalls (GUITEL, 2006).

The paper intends less to present the results of this limited field of research than to stress the discussion of new research perspectives, both in international human resource management and in the area of crosscultural and intercultural management.

**Key words:** Intercultural management; Crosscultural management; Expatriates; International managers.

## **From the origins of anthropology to the emergence of crosscultural and intercultural fields of research**

There is certainly no hardest word to define than the word “culture”. French anthropologist Denys Cuhe (2001) reminds us in his book *La notion de culture dans les sciences sociales* that semantic disagreements happen to be in fact the reflection of national and social disagreements. Thus, the definition of words and concepts is actually a social struggle, the sense of words corresponding to important social issues. Hence, the word “culture” in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century becomes a sort of representation of national identity, while, in France, it remains a long time a synonym of the word “civilization”.

The initial point to launch the discussion on countless definitions of the word “culture” is to avoid the temptation of seizing the concept of culture directly, and rather try to understand the amazing ability to “create symbols” that all human beings have.

French sociologist Jean François Chanlat (2000) reminds us that this “symbol creation ability” is a specific characteristic of human beings implying that “the symbolic dimension is consubstantial to the idea of humanity.” For Chanlat, the human being is different from the rest of the living world as a meaning maker and symbol producer and happens to be the keystone to understand the concept of culture itself because of the subject’s capacity to symbolize, interpret and represent himself and the world around him.

Symbols are an illustrative sign, an animated being or object that represents an abstract thing. They can only exist because they are granted a meaning. The notion of culture is based on this human ability to provide meanings, and related to all that can be granted sense, and consequently, this is all about the difficulty to agree upon a set of different interpretations. Hence, several theories about culture have been developed which are based on the words' different meanings and concepts. We could spend hours citing all kinds of definitions of the word "culture". Actually each cultural group has its own definition of the term.

Culture is the main object of anthropology. The initiative that consists of the observation of human groups' uses and life styles could be found already in the anthropocentric attitude of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment researchers.

The "Society of Observers of Men" (1799-1805) was composed of great scientists and intellectuals, such as naturalists Cuvier, Jussieu, Jauffret, philosophers Destut de Tracy and Gérando, medical doctors Pinel, Cabanis and Moreau de Sarthe, and historian Volney. From the beginning it had an anthropocentric project aiming at the collection and analysis of "wild" man's behaviour, in order to understand how human beings get "built" little by little by education and culture.

Through the observation of men in their different physical, intellectual and moral relations, Volney gathered material on experiences of human history such as revolutions, wars and lifestyles. He aimed to understand how the natural environment influenced each human group's uses and habits. Without knowing it, he was the forerunner of human geography, but also the first one to launch an evaluative approach of culture. As he was also so interested in dynamic phenomena characterized by human interactions, Volney was hence the first researcher to launch a reflection on the analysis of intercultural relations.

As it emerges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, anthropology is deeply related to the consequences of the past three centuries and the New World's discoveries.

The great navigators brought along with their conquests a new reflection on human differences, diversity and lifestyles, as well as different physiologies and beliefs. Even though this issue has existed as an intellectual approach since then, anthropology officially becomes a social science on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the emergence of Lewis Morgan's work (1818-1881).

The founder of ethnography, the science that studies the basis of social cohesion, Morgan carried out an important work about the "family". According to him, this social institution is universal and is the foundation of society. As he observes a group of native Americans, Morgan proposed the first description and systemic analysis of types of parenthood. He noticed that these relations are not defined by nature but in fact, by social criteria, because native Americans' children named "father" not only their own biological father, but also their uncles. He suggested

the idea of evolutionism, looking for paradigms that could justify the classification of societies into two categories: “primitive” or “developed” ones.

Morgan believed that society has gone through great phases since the origins of the family, such as the creation of the State, and later on, the emergence of other social institutions. Before the family, society had a period of great promiscuity, followed by a matriarchal system to finally evolve towards a patriarchal one.

This approach served as guidance for several cultural analyses up to the thirties and forties. His works have deeply inspired Engels (1848) to write his book about the origins of private property and the State.

In France, the word “ethnology” has corresponded to the Anglo-Saxon term “anthropology” for a long time, the French word “anthropologie” being often negatively related, until recently, to the idea of races’ morphology. It is Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958) that introduces in France the term “anthropologie” as it is understood in the Anglo-Saxon world, which means the studies of man in global aspects of life in society.

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss are two French ethnologists founders of French anthropology. Durkheim (1912) underlines the role of religion within archaic societies and works also on collective unconsciousness and suicide. In his book *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), he writes about the religious phenomenon as the psychic expression of group life, expressed through the “mana”, a sort of spiritual power of the group that manages it.

Religion has had a cohesive function through rules and rites, a reference to a sacred symbol of the clan. Mauss (1947) also worked on rituals and sorcery, but he became famous when he wrote about the “potchlach”, the practice of gift exchanging, a kind of contract that contributes to the maintenance of social relations at different levels. The institution of gift exchanging would be one of the keystones of social link, because it establishes interdependence links between men. Honour and prestige would have an important role in this relation, which would not necessarily be a friendly link but mainly a struggle for prestige and hegemony. The gift would represent the “total social fact” due to all the dimensions it holds, not only social and economic, but also religious and judicial.

Anthropologists have long been concerned about the discovery and analysis of primitive societies, exotism being one of its main attractions. As primitive groups disappeared, the researchers’ eyes turned to the aspects of their own culture, in an attempt to understand their own habits.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of evolution of cultures becomes obsolete and new approaches to the diffusion of the existence of cultural areas emerge.

The great turn comes along with American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942). He detaches the idea of culture from the idea of races and biological heritage. Culture is more important than biological conditions in order to understand men's behaviour and attitudes. One of the first discoveries in the field is that culture is learnt, not inherited. Boas (1938) establishes the "cultural relativism as rule" to perpetrate cultural studies, stressing the fact that Western culture's supremacy is the conclusion of an analysis whose main arguments are paradigms of this same culture.

Hence, there are no "races" more developed than others, no "cultures" more evolved than or superior to others. Boas was the tutor and professor of a whole generation of famous anthropologists, among whom Ralph Linton and Alfred Kroeber. He represents the age of transition in the field of anthropological studies, which has influenced several approaches such as cultural geography, social anthropology and cultural studies, as well as what is known as cultural anthropology or culturalism, and is the basis of future works on crosscultural and intercultural management.

In the USA, the main representative of the Cultural School of Diffusionism is Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960), who was Franz Boas' student and, along with Clyde Kluckhohn in 1952, gathered more than 52 definitions of the word "culture". According to him, culture could create a "super-organic" order. This order would shape Man's lifestyle. A researcher in cultural areas, he has divided North America into fifty of them. Each culture would be defined by a pattern, and similarities could be identified between close patterns. Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), one of the culturalistic anthropologists, based her work on this "pattern" or "model" reflection.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, founder of a structural approach, is the main representative of post-World War II French anthropology. His works have been deeply influenced by those of linguistic researcher Roman Jakobson (1963). Inspired by the structural linguistic method, he develops a Cartesian approach where rules of parenthood, as well as myths, are built from logical frames that the structural approach aims to identify and analyse. In his book *The elementary structures of parenthood* (1949), he tries to reconstruct the set of parenthood systems of primitive societies, on the basis of some elementary structures. Primitive mythologies would emerge from several variations of those basic frames.

The functional approach, also known as social anthropology, has as main representatives English anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. Omar Aktouf (2000) reminds us that this approach corresponds to a very relevant basis for the comprehension of organizational culture's functions. As the name says, the functional approach has developed the idea that all cultures are composed by elements with a specific function within culture itself. This

approach could be compared to the allegory of a human body, where each organ has its own function.

Social structures, rites and parenthood structures would have a role to play within an ordered system. What is most interesting about this approach, besides its systemic trait, is precisely culture's teleological aspect. Moreover, Malinowski's contribution is also methodological, as he preaches the researcher's total immersion into the studied culture, which is also called "participant observation". Having done his research in New Guinea, he contests Sigmund Freud (1912) by saying that the Oedipus complex is not universal, but a trait of patriarchal societies. In his book related to the issue, written between 1912 and 1913, Freud made an effort to elucidate the origins of religion and morality. Another of Malinowski's important contributions is the *kula*, a social mechanism similar to the *potchlach* studied by Mauss, whose work happened to be an inspiration to Malinowski's further anthropological interpretation. Malinowski could be considered a forerunner of cultural anthropology, for his works take into consideration human and historical aspects in society, and grant a psychological trait to cultural facts.

To him, however, freedom of choice belongs to individuals not submitted to a symbolic cage inherited from past generations. This is a very important trait, and it does not fit into the cultural "bounding rationale" that is one of the characteristics of culturalistic approaches.

Culturalism or cultural anthropology has its roots in Franz Boas' legacy. Following a "bounding rationale", culture would explain some behaviour and personal traits, which confirms its effort to associate culture to psychology. The core idea is that education carried out by culture and society coin a specific sort of personality. The main contributors to this approach are Abram Kardiner, Ralph Linton, Ruth Benedict and Margareth Mead.

The approach is characterized by a disturbing interdisciplinarity for the time (the 30's), and for many years it was very badly received in France. European difficulties to find a satisfying classification for it seems not to have disturbed American researchers, maybe only in what concerned the elaboration of theoretical functional concepts in order to allow its integration into the concrete field.

This phenomenon could be explained by the difference between deductive and inductive approaches, the first mainly adopted by Latin scholars, and the second by the Anglo-Saxons. J-C Filloux (1986), in the preface to Linton's French version of the book, illustrates it well:<sup>1</sup> "The aim of a concept is to ease the solution of a problem: it will be a useful concept if it can be used

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<sup>1</sup> Free translation by the author of the following:

«La seule utilité du concept est de favoriser la solution d'un problème: il est bon, s'il la favorise, mauvais s'il ne la favorise pas. Alors qu'un esprit européen se demanderait plutôt: Que puis-je faire avec ce concept?, le chercheur américain se pose la question suivante: Quel concept me faut-il pour résoudre tel problème concret?» (FILLOUX, 1986, preface to Linton's book).

to solve problems, it will be a bad concept if it does not. If, on the one hand, a European mind asks: “What could I do with this concept?”, on the other hand, an American mind asks: “What concepts do I need to solve this real problem?”

According to Filloux, the Americans need to “psychologize” social problems for many reasons, as, for instance, the fact that they had to find a quick solution to the integration of new-coming immigrants in their country, who brought their own culture with them and became the so-called hyphenated Americans. In order to integrate those people into a new culture, they had to combine the new culture’s aspects and the individuals’ psychological traits. This explanation could not be valid, though, if one considers that the American culture is actually what it is today due to numerous cultural contributions from those immigrants, who have constructed the country and who had, from the beginning, different cultural backgrounds.

One could say that the ideological struggle between France and North America’s researchers brings out two different kinds of universalistic attitudes.

French universalism here would seek to erase differences, considering people individuals and not members of their sub-cultures, once the republican values to which they adhere whenever they integrate French society are applicable to all. American universalism, on the other hand, insists on differences, and claims for the integration of each sub-culture or community differently, which is concretely seen through the application of the positive action system to applicants’ admission to companies and universities.

Consequently, all studies trying to treat the influences of cultural aspects on people’s personalities are not an easy issue in France, for they go against French universalistic rationale. This could be the explanation for the late development of this field of research in that country. Anyway, cultural anthropology studies have been an inspiration to several great authors in the intercultural and crosscultural communication field, such as Edward T. Hall (in the 50’s), and in the crosscultural and intercultural management field, such as Geert Hofstede (1977, 1998, 2001), Fons Trompenaars (1993) and many others.

In his book, Ralph Linton (1986) presents culture as the heritage transmitted to children in order to enable their adaptation to the environment. Linton distinguishes three basic needs of the human being: affective response, long-term or immediate security, and novelty. Hence, the first need would be non-negotiable, while the other two could be negotiated. In other words, a person could sacrifice his or her security in order to get some novelty in his or her life, and so on. Learning how to behave in order to fulfil their own needs, individuals start developing habits that later become models.

According to Linton, each environment demands a pattern, a sort of behaviour: show business, companies, etc. Here, a parallel can be made with French sociologist Renaud Sainsaulieu's approach (1997) on the emergence of different professional cultures.

Sainsaulieu considers the organization a structure, a producer of interpersonal relations, identities and values. Individuals would define themselves according to their attachment to certain communities, highly integrative to its members. To some extent, those communities could correspond to the organization, to the patterns or generic behaviour of a culture as defined by Linton.

Linton believes each psychosocial pattern is composed by universal elements shared by all society members, and by specific elements limited to certain social categories. As a consequence, some cultures would offer more social options than others. French culture, for example, would have lots of specificities and not many options. Those options are here understood as individuals' prerogatives, in certain situations, to be free to make certain choices.

Culture would then be a set of responses to essential needs, learnt and accepted within a group. Moreover, his work presents an interesting division between what he calls "real culture" and what is presented as "built culture". The first one would correspond to an often unconscious reality, and the second one, to the judgement each individual has of his own culture, which would be partially true.

Ruth Benedict (1934) has studied the diversity of different kinds of personalities related to the diversity of cultures. She claims that the individual is born with a diversified range of potentialities and the environment selects some of them, by presenting him/her a set of patterns. Hence, each culture would have a predominant sort of personality globally approved by its members.

Margareth Mead also works on the diversity of types of personalities related to different cultural aspects. In her main book *Coming of age in Samoa* (1929), she analyses the puberty period of girls in Samoa, characterized by sexual freedom and absence of conflict as compared to American teenagers. This reflects her efforts to link certain psychological aspects of people to specific aspects of culture.

Abram Kardiner (1939) has proposed the concept of ground personality. According to him, identical environmental conditions would produce, during childhood, the same kind of complexes that would create a ground personality. This personality would be the reflection of a culture's stability. Its influence on institutions would really correspond to the founding elements of a culture.

**Crosscultural and intercultural approaches: is there a difference?**



William Hart (2001), Professor of Intercultural and International Communication in the University of New Mexico, in the USA, classifies the works on cultures in three categories or levels: a monocultural phase, a crosscultural phase, and a more advanced stage, which is the intercultural level. This is easily understood when he stresses that intercultural communication focuses on the interpersonal interaction of people who represent different cultures. To further clarify the distinction, he says, that anthropologists typically investigate single cultures, and crosscultural studies compare the characteristics of two or more cultures, and finally that . “monocultural communication studies” and “crosscultural studies” served as necessary precursors to the study of intercultural communication. (HART, 2001).

If the monocultural approach concerns the observation of a culture in an exclusive way, and crosscultural studies concern the comparison of different cultural characteristics from one culture to another, having as reference a set of shared variables, the intercultural approach treats the interaction of cultures, from the interactive process itself to its consequences. Jacques Demorgon (2005) defines the intercultural approach as the “dynamic process of two or more different culture’s encounter”. This dynamic process is risky because it could bear conflicts and question the identities of different actors belonging to the concerned cultures.

From this point of view, cultures are not immovable and can evolve as they interact with other cultures, some cultures would be more open to integration of new aspects coming from different cultures, and some other cultures, on the other hand, would be more strict and conservative.

Jacques Demorgon reminds us that, even if they have lately become fashionable, intercultural issues are not a consequence of globalisation, as most of people might suppose. The relations between human groups belonging to different cultures have always taken place, in the world’s history, but it is clear that phenomena directly related to globalisation as the reduction of physical distances have made them more relevant nowadays.

The intercultural aspect is dynamic because it treats the process that takes place whenever two or more cultures get crossed, interact, and exchange elements, and doing so, contribute to their mutual enrichment and evolution. In ancient times, this phenomenon was not so frequent and took place only on a large scale, whenever there was a war or any other expansive project. The Roman Empire, the route of the silk, Marco Polo’s trips and great discoveries are the best examples of periods of intense intercultural activity in the history of mankind.

As Professor William Hart reminds us, the intercultural field of research is characterized by a high interdisciplinarity, and one could cite contributions to the fields of law, psychology, sociology, communication and management. Nevertheless, even if the intercultural level has

known a great improvement in recent years, most management studies in this field adopt a crosscultural or comparative approach instead of an interactive one.

### **Main crosscultural and intercultural approaches**

The Anglo-Saxons, mainly the Americans, are the authors of a large set of cultural studies in both comparative and interactive perspectives. Their work is often characterized by a quantitative approach that presents “theorems” and mathematical formulas aimed at confirming universal paradigms that must make it possible to anticipate the consequences of the encounter of two different cultural worlds. Even if they have a large internal diversity of works available, those researchers ignore most other studies that have not been made in their own native language, which limits their point of reference and their knowledge of the field.

The studies that adopt a crosscultural approach are mainly characterized by a constructivist effort, although they actually display a positivist trait.

The basis of those studies was launched by Forchi and Hales in the seventies. They believe that, whenever a culture is treated as a theoretical variable, an approach of the “X” culture facing the “Y” culture approach is an element of help to define functional characteristics of “X” that both cultures will finally have on different levels.

Geert Hofstede’s and Fons Trompenaars’ studies belong to this crosscultural approach. They treat national cultures as stable sets, ignoring their dynamics and granting them a certain list of incontestable characteristics based on common variables, obtained through the analysis of closed questionnaires: those shared variables are considered universal references for the comparison of cultures, which would produce a sort of dichotomy: universalism *versus* collectivism, feminine *versus* masculine, and so on.

The limits of this kind of approach are mainly the labelling process they institute for cultures and individuals. Cultures are then condemned to fit into one or another category, and their statistical results and methods are never questioned. Ethnologists see this approach with mistrust.

So far, those works have been the main source of inspiration of most books written on intercultural issues within organizations. This has resulted in the fact that crosscultural and intercultural management are often associated to comparative studies of national cultures and their specificities by most management researchers, which corresponds to a limited approach to this field of research: a sort of *stricto sensu* approach to intercultural management.

A broader approach to the issue is proposed by Schneider and Barsoux (1997), and would not only include national cultures’ studies and their management implications, but also take into consideration the existence and influences of other types of culture, such as corporate culture,

industry culture and professional culture, proposing an interaction of different spheres of culture as a broader and more comprehensive point of view.

This corresponds to what we understand as the *lato sensu* intercultural management approach. It is from this perspective that we consider the identification and development of an intercultural competency for expatriates and international managers.

One of the trends finds its place in the approach launched by Prof. Nancy Adler (2001). Following an analysis within the field of organizational behaviour, inspired by Cyert *et* March, among others, Adler has developed a domain of intercultural management that treats cultures' influences on international behaviour of organizations. Adler is a forerunner, as she establishes the co-relation between organizational behaviour and cultural differences.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, in the field of comparative (crosscultural) research, one must also consider the contributions of Kuckhohn and Strodbeck (1961) to values diversity understanding, those of Parsons and Shils (1951) to patterns diversity, and, more recently, Richard Mead's (1988) and Earley and Singh's (2000) works concerning projects and innovations in the crosscultural management field.

In France, the crosscultural approach was introduced not by researchers but by consultants Frank Gauthey and Dominique Xardel in the eighties, as well as by Daniel Bollinger, co-author of a Hofstede's book published in that country, and by Philippe Deval.

The intercultural approach has also been inspired by the works of Linton, Mead and Benedict, founders of the Boasian school. Benedict actually coined the term "cultural shock" to name the traumatic experience individuals go through whenever they encounter a different cultural environment.

Within this approach, which treats interactions between cultures and their consequences, most management research works are based on and influenced by intercultural communication studies, whose main precursor is American anthropologist Edward T. Hall.

Edward T. Hall was in charge of the US government's diplomats training program, where he worked and developed a research between 1950 and 1955. Within that program framework, Hall conceptualised the new field of research, getting inspiration from his own intercultural life experiences, including working with native Americans Hopis and Navajos in the thirties, his command of an African American regiment during World War II, and his doctoral training in anthropology in Columbia University.

The central themes of the new field of research were launched in his book *The silent language* (1959). He has developed a participative training style of communication between cultures, established the basis of the future crosscultural approach instead of the existing monocultural one, and underlined the importance of non-verbal language, contributing to the

understanding of a cultural unconsciousness and consolidating Boas's proposal of cultural relativism against all forms of ethnocentrism.

A decade later, in the sixties, a group of scholars started to gather round Hall's paradigms and organize intercultural communication trainings in American and British universities. At the beginning, they were interested in general aspects of intercultural communication. Later on, they started to care about professional intercultural communication, meetings and negotiations. In 1977, to a certain extent inspired by Hall's work, Hofstede published his book *Culture's consequences*, presenting the results of his comparative studies of cultures within IBM, thus establishing the link between national cultures and management.

In addition to Hall's work in the field of intercultural communication, we can add contributions of other precursors such as David Efron (1941 and 1972), who was Franz Boas's PhD student and made an analysis of the influence of culture on non-verbal communication; Oberg (1960), who studied the advanced understanding of intercultural adaptation, which was the basis of expatriation studies; Kim and Gudykunst (1988), who researched into differences management and immigrants assimilation in the USA; Georg Simmel (1908), who developed the concept of "foreigner"; Kurt Lewin (1949) and Gordon Allport (1954 and 1979), who studied prejudices; Erving Goffman (1973, 1974, 1987) and his works on the rites of interaction and speech styles; and, finally, William Graham Sumner (1906 and 1940), who coined the concept of "ethnocentrism" inspired by Boas, which means the tendency to judge other cultures through one's own cultural paradigms.

At first, most subjects of intercultural analysis treated the adaptation process during a long stay in a foreign country, the dialectical question between assimilation and cultural resistance or between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, non-verbal communication (BURGEON; BULLER; WOODALL, 1996; KNAPP; HALL, 1997) or uncertainty due to initial contact with foreigners (BERGER; CALABRESE, 1975), and the opposition between collectivism and individualism (GUDYKUNST; KIM, 1997), a research inspired by the eighties' economical context characterized by Japan's economical emergence. Considered a collectivist country, Japan became the main partner and rival of American industries.

Then, the field evolved with the emergence of studies in negotiation process, identities construction and management, decision-making process, conflict resolution and team management, this last topic being subdivided into studies of team-building process and cultural adjustment and studies of the synergy creation process.

Among the main current studies, the Cultural Convergence Theory of Barnett & Kincaid (1983) treats communication as the process where two or more people and groups share information to reach a mutual agreement in accordance with the environment. The Anxiety

Uncertainty Theory, by Gudykunst (1995), treats the consequences of cultural shock and the reactions to differences.

The Cultural Convergence Theory states that, through much iteration and information exchange, two or more people can converge towards a mutual agreement partially corresponding to the re-negotiation of each other's sense-making process. Barnett and Kincaid developed it in 1983, on a mathematical basis, in order to understand the effects of communication on cultural differences. In their viewpoint, thermodynamics rules affirm that all participants of a closed system must converge, with time, towards a collective pattern of thinking, if communication takes place freely during a certain period. Information external to the system may retard or reverse the converging process.

The model foresees the convergence of cognitive states of mind within a group whose members come from different cultures, as they are in constant interaction. Even if it is characterized by a quantitative approach, which makes it rather stiff; this theory is interesting because it reverses the research logic, trying to treat the effects of communication over culture and not the contrary.

The Anxiety Uncertainty Theory - AUT was developed by Gudykunst in 1995, inspired by Berger & Calabrese's (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory. It places the first inter-group encounter as the first step towards the construction of an analytical process of anxiety and uncertainty management, to predict and anticipate behaviour and emotions, and to try to reach a cultural adjustment.

The key factor to effective success would be the fact that individuals could be conscious of their own behaviour, which would influence considerably uncertainty and incertitude management. The model proposes a measurement guide composed by all sorts of variables and sub-variables in order to calculate one's own degree of anxiety and uncertainty as the motivation to get along with foreigners and the reactions to differences and, furthermore, individual aspects such as self esteem, identity, shame and shyness, without forgetting to mention the structural qualities of normative supports of the context.

Even if there is an actual effort to seize the dynamic interaction of cultures, and if there is an interesting proposition of self-analysis instead of the judgement of the other's cultures, AUT is a very complex and ethnocentric model. At the end, one finds the same effort of labelling individuals and their behaviour in order to get a valid universal model, to anticipate reactions effectively.

One needs also to mention Oetzel's work (1995) on his effective decision making theory and states that he gets its inspiration from the Vigilant Interaction Theory developed by Hirokawa & Rost in 1992, Ting-Toomey's Crosscultural Theory of Face Negotiation and

Conflict Management (1988), and Steiner's Theory of the Composition Effects (1972). Oetzel believes the way members of a group treat subjects, such as problems associated to decision-making, for instance, influence their decision, in other words, the way individuals consider issues related to the decision-making process affects the quality of their decision. The final decision is the result of a series of interconnected sub-decisions.

There are studies that get their inspiration from linguistics and deal with the communicative adaptation to the intercultural context, such as, for instance, the Communication Accommodation Theory, developed by Gallois, Giles, Jones, Carlige and Ota in 1995. Based on the Speech Accommodation Theory - SAT, it states that interlocutors use linguistic strategies to obtain approval or demonstrate "distinction" in their interactive relations, using intercultural variables of the speech adaptation process. It tries to take the social and historical contexts into consideration, and to define a path that a speech would follow on the course of a speech-adaptation process, in a movement that increases and decreases the communicative distance, either towards convergence or towards divergence. In order to effectuate a diagnosis, one must consider the implications of the subjects' contexts, the objectives to be reached, the issue being discussed or negotiated, socio-linguistic strategies, the identification of behaviour and tactics, and the evaluative prediction of their future intentions.

Ellingsworth (1983) has also studied intercultural adjustment within the framework of a negotiation. To him, interpersonal communication analysis includes cultural factors that integrate the personality, as Linton once said. He develops eight statements, according to which interlocutors adapt themselves whenever they are attending intentional encounters, in other words, encounters where issues concerning both parties are being discussed. This adaptation of communication style would affect beliefs in cultural differences on a long-term basis. The burden of adaptive behaviour would be represented, to a certain extent, by the decision made by the individual who sacrifices part of his symbolical universe in order to find an agreement with his interlocutor. The propositions suggest a functional adaptation of communication, and the equity level of this adaptation makes the task easier to be executed.

Orbe (1998) developed a social intercultural theory in order to treat integration, named Co-Cultural Theory. To him, certain hierarchies inside society tend to help certain groups better than others. Co-cultural communication makes reference to interactions between dominant groups and weak or marginalized ones, represented by all levels of differences (blacks, gays, lesbians, Muslims, immigrants). Its aim is to provide a framework through which the members of a co-cultural (dominated) group negotiate their expectations with the others, so that their opinion can be listened to and discrimination is reduced within dominant social structures.

This theory has two premises: (1) the members of a co-cultural group are discriminated within a dominant social structure; (2) the members of those groups use certain communication styles to interact and reach success whenever they face oppressive dominating structures.

The reached objectives correspond to possible reactions to a cultural shock, that is: assimilation, adaptation or total rupture with society. In order to reach one of those three situations, the members of a co-cultural group are influenced by the context and the social and economic environment. Orbe ranks 26 degrees of empirical variation of the “practices” or behaviour co-cultural groups adopt in their interactions with dominating groups. For instance, a non-confirmed segregation within society would tease an reserved behaviour and would reinforce personal barriers, just as, on the other hand, a non-confirmed adaptation would create an increase of social visibility and the rebukement of stereotypes, and a non-confirmed assimilation would cause a reinforcement of an attitude of similarities and the development of a positive “face”.

Following this rationale, violent segregation would have as consequence a hostile behaviour that could become worse and encourage acts of terrorism or boycott, just as, on the other hand, violent assimilation would result in dissociation, a kind of “mirror effect” (based on G.H. Mead’s works) that would imply the acknowledgement of oneself in the other, and violent adaptation would lead towards a strategic distance-keeping and self-derision attitude.

### **Existing works on intercultural competency: an identity study perspective in the field of intercultural communication**

Orbe’s works, as most intercultural studies, give great importance to reactions and results of a cultural shock and consequences of the encounter with the “Other”. The “Other”, as Professor Sylvie Chevrier (2000) reminds us, has always been both the great issue and the great inspiration of intercultural approaches. The quality of what is different has intimate relations with the individual’s identity issue: the “Other” is a confirmation of us. Hence, there are numerous works of negotiation of identities within intercultural interactions, whose main examples are Cupach & Imahori’s Identity Management Theory (1993), Ting-Toomey’s Identity Negotiation Theory (1993) and Collier and Thomas’s Cultural Identity Theory (1988).

Cupach and Imahori state their viewpoint of Identity Management Theory over interpersonal communicative skills, and rename this competency as a generic intercultural one. This approach is based on Erving Goffman’s work (1967) on deference, interactions and the “face”. Goffman believes<sup>2</sup> “Every person lives in a social world that makes him/her establish

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<sup>2</sup> Free translation by the author: «Toute personne vit dans un monde social qui l’amène à avoir des contacts, face à face ou médiatisés, avec les autres».

contacts, face to face or mediated, with the others”. As they establish those contacts, people will adopt some behaviour to express their opinion, which actually corresponds to their interlocutors’ expectations. The “face” is then understood<sup>3</sup> as “the positive social value a person effectively claims through her behaviour, the attitude the others believe he/she had at a specific contact. The face is the image of self defined according to some social traits that are approved and shared by the group, through which the person can provide a good image of his/her profession by providing a good image of him/her”.

Hence, in the Identity Management Theory, one tries to establish an interpretative frame for interactive experience. This frame reproduces individuals’ behavioural expectations. People would then have multiple identities, but Cupach & Imahori consider cultural identity the most important relational role they play in order to identify this frame. Identities vary according to the number of people who share them, their degree of importance within a society, and the intensity of their communication with others. Aspects of individual identities would be revealed through the presentation of the “face”, a natural and unavoidable condition to human interaction. Interpersonal communicative competency would be the capacity individuals have to mutually and successfully negotiate acceptable identities on the course of interaction. Keeping one’s face during one of those interactions would then be a sign of competency.

Within an intercultural communication process, individuals are ignorant of deep aspects of their interlocutor’s culture, and look for a way to effectively protect their “face” during interaction by using stereotypes. However, stereotypes can become a threat to the person’s face, because they are constructed on externally imposed identities. The result of this mechanism would be a dialectical tension concerning three traits of the “face”: a collective aspect, an autonomous aspect and a competency aspect. Effective intercultural communication implies the management of these three features.

It can be done in three steps: a first phase of attempts, characterized by a process of identity searching, when the interlocutors share elements; a second phase, consisting of a mix of identities of all participants, leading to the consolidation of a shared relational identity that would be accepted and convergent, even if the interlocutors’ cultural identities remain divergent. The third phase implies a re-negotiation of identities, and the interlocutors would then use the shared constructed relational identity of the second phase as the basis for the re-negotiation of their separated cultural identities.

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<sup>3</sup> «la valeur sociale positive qu’une personne revendique effectivement à travers la ligne d’action que les autres supposent qu’elle a adoptée au cours d’un contact particulier. La face est une image du moi délinéée selon certains attributs sociaux approuvés et néanmoins partageable, puisque, par exemple, on peut donner une bonne image de sa profession ou de la confession en donnant une bonne image de soi» (GOFFMAN, 1974).



According to Ting-Toomey, intercultural communicative competency is the effective process of identity negotiation between two or more people. She has eight hypotheses, inspired by Ralph Linton's and Goffman's works, such as, for instance, "everyone has multiple images of his/her own self perception", or still, "the cultural diversity influences the self perception", to finally conclude that a deeper self-identification is positively co-related to a greater capacity for interaction, and that the individuals' degree of vulnerability is affected by their need of security (Linton).

The more individuals need acceptance, the more they will value frontiers and intra-group values. The more they need differentiation as particular human beings, the greater will be the distance they will place between themselves and the others. And, as a final consideration, a high degree of self-esteem is an asset to interaction.

Collier & Thomas (1988) present an interpretative theory to explain how cultural identities are created during intercultural interaction. Their hypotheses, as in previous studies, try to consider aspects of the identity negotiation process during interaction, in order to find parameters to characterize what would be intercultural competency. According to them, intercultural competency would imply the negotiation of meanings, rules and mutual positive results, which would ultimately lead to the validation of a cultural identity through the Other's acceptance or integration inside a group. They present four conclusions: (1) the more rules and meanings vary during speech, the more intercultural the contact will be; (2) if the identity granted to an individual goes along with the identity he accepts for himself, his degree of intercultural competency will be greater; (3) linguistic references to cultural identity systematically go along with social and environmental factors and the type of situation concerning the discussed issue. Summing up, the more cultural identities are accepted, the more they will be important as compared to other identities.

Some studies focus on interaction networks, stating that individuals' behaviour is more influenced by the relations they have than by their individual traits. This view corresponds, according to some scholars, to the best existing possibility to approach an intercultural relationship. Yves Winkin (1994) regrets the fact that, in France, intercultural communication research ignores most interaction aspects:<sup>4</sup> "intercultural communication research cannot be

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<sup>4</sup> Free translation by the author from:

«La recherche en communication interculturelle ne peut consister en comparaison terme à terme; Des analyses de négociations, d'affrontements, d'évitements entre groupes anthropologiquement différenciés doivent être présentées. Or, c'est encore rarement le cas. Tout se passe comme si l'interculturel était acquis d'avance: ce sont les pôles de la communication qui sont étudiés, non le processus de communication. Erving Goffman évoquait, il a trente ans, cette situation négligée: son texte n'a malheureusement guère perdu de son actualité.» (WINKIN, Y, «Emergence et développement de la communication interculturelle aux Etats Unis et en France», in *Enjeux dans les contacts interethniques et interculturels*, sous la direction de K FALL, D. SIMEONI et G. VIGNAUX, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1994).

limited to some isolated comparisons. The analysis of negotiation processes, confrontations and the avoidance of situations among differentiated anthropological groups must be presented. Yet, they seldom are. Things simply go on as if intercultural challenge were already overcome: the communication poles are studied, not the communication processes. Erving Goffman used to denounce, thirty years ago, this neglected reality: unfortunately his text is not old-fashioned.”

Kim (1977, 1986, 2001) studies communicative competency outside a group. She points out that the fact of belonging to a group or community can influence communicative competency outside boundaries. Her work concerns the process of cultural integration of Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese and Mexican people in the US.

Yum (1988) tries to explain the differences between intracultural and intercultural networks. Hence, intercultural networks would be “radial”, that is, their members would be connected to other individuals that are not necessarily connected between them; and then they would be heavier than intracultural networks, which imply the need of a greater amount of contact and message exchanging. Individuals play the role of a “bridge” or “link” common to all intercultural networks.

Those individuals would be intermediaries who could establish indirect links between members of different groups. “Transitivity” would play a less important role in the elaboration of intercultural networks than in intracultural networks. The author understands by “transitivity” the attitude expressed by the sentence: “My husband’s friends are my friends”.

The most interesting works on integration are those of Smith (1999), who says cultural identities strategies are identifiable within the social network structure. Hence, immigrants would have a tendency to feel connected to individuals that define their identity, other natives from his country. Perceptions influenced by culture would shape the function and nature of experienced social networks. This means that the way immigrants perceive their social networks is influenced by their original culture.

As long as the social structural heterogeneity increases, the probabilities of cultural integration do as well. The more natives integrate immigrants’ social networks, the more the latter will be able to feel culturally integrated.

According to Smith, the degree of exchange of a social intercultural network is a dynamic function that will rely on the stage of integration within the host community. This means that, whenever immigrants are integrated, their social network changes. Structural problems will have an impact over the size of the intercultural network and will affect the adaptation processes.

Factors such as the place where the immigrant lives and the social class to which he belongs will have an influence on the ability to integrate those intercultural networks and be integrated in the new culture. Finally, an increase in the demographic density index will reduce

intercultural networks and possibilities for immigrants to obtain resources necessary to their integration. The intercultural network will be lighter with radial links for cultures that possess a rule of relationship based on context, opposite to cultures that have a relationship rule based on the individual.

Reactions to differences appear in the analysis of host responses to the infraction of cultural norms by immigrants. This issue was also treated by Mc Guire and Mc Dermott (1988), who claim that assimilation and adaptation are not permanent results within an adaptive process, but rather temporary ones within a communicative process. They state that, regardless of the degree of integration within a culture, at a certain time, in a certain circumstance, people will sidetrack from the pattern of behaviour dictated by social norms. Hence, immigrants will successfully reach a stage of assimilation when their perceptions receive a positive support from the native communication - in other words, when the individual corresponds to the expectations (implicit norms of behaviour) of the host culture.

The concept of “neglectful communication” corresponds to negative messages or to the absence of a message from natives to immigrants. When foreigners are not rule breakers or get engaged in an assimilative communication (by interacting and increasing their knowledge of the language), natives will respond with an assimilative communication (making compliments to their linguistic efforts and being available). However, when foreigners disregard cultural norms, they will go through a great tension in their new culture. Natives will tend to respond through neglectful communication (low level of communication, negative feedback). One single alternative is then presented to immigrants: segregation from their host culture. This will incite feelings of discrimination, marginalization and social isolation. They will feel they cannot reach their goals and are excluded from that culture. This will not necessarily cause aggressive and violent reaction. The native’s response to alienation will affect the length of this phase.

If natives behave towards a reinforcement of alienation (refusing to interact with foreigners or making fun of them), foreigners will either leave the country or become hostile and, for example, refuse to learn the host language.

## **Section II: from “personnel management” to “human resources management”**

Veltz and Zarifian (1993) remind us of Taylor’s main contribution to work management within organizations: the introduction of interdependent operations. Work then becomes procedural, corresponding to a chain of different activities: the idea of “task”, which corresponds to the formalized division of work into several jobs through which an organization will be able to define the paradigms that will determine the best way to do a job. Since work is divisible, the required know-how to perform each specific task will be limited to it. Men are then easily

replaced. The organization is able to establish what the required skills for each job are, and write a job description.

The ideal candidate will be the one that fulfils all required criteria. Individuals must then adapt themselves to the job and to the organization's needs, and not the opposite. The Taylorist rationale hits its *apogée* in Henry Ford's assembly lines. It is what best represents what is called "*gestion du personnel*" (personnel management), and, although it no longer fits a globalised environment, it is still found in some organizations (mainly in the public sector) eager to resemble Max Weber's ideal type of *bureaucratie*.

The Taylorist model finds its limits as soon as it is demanded to cope with cost quality standards and flexibility. The concentration of competency on the top of the organizational pyramid simply does not make it easy for the company to deal with the alias of a changeable environment. The generalization of competency at all levels of the structure turns out to be a basis for competitive advantage.

"Competency" then becomes the key word and constitutive notion of the Human Resource Management concept. Opposite to what happened in the Taylorist model, Human Resource Management sees in each individual a holder and an owner of a collective estate, an actor of a collective learning process and of the collective ability to cope with unpredictable situations.

From this perspective, from that moment on, companies will try to identify each employee's abilities and skills, anticipate situations where they will be needed and try to optimize the human investment they represent.

This approach inverts the Taylorist model. According to it, organizations must identify and make sure that the individuals' resources are intensively used for collective purposes. The identification and development of "human competency", as well as the development of competency retention mechanisms within the organization, have become the biggest challenge to human resource management.

According to French sociologist Philippe Zarifian (1996), "compétence" would be the employee's capacity to assume personal responsibility whenever facing a productive situation (this situation being associated to the systemic use of this ability) that will have impacts over the task: "compétence" is the employee's capacity to find specific solutions to unprecedented situations.

Durand (1998) classifies them into three dimensions: know-how and knowledge, abilities, and attitudes which take into consideration technical, social and behavioural aspects related to work. Know-how and knowledge would correspond to the information the employee has of products and services, his/her ability to identify internal and external possibilities of action, and

the degree of complexity of his/her tasks within the company. Abilities, the second dimension, correspond to the employee's performance quality whenever doing a job, and the role he/she plays inside the organization (if the employee acts according to the organization's expectations and according to his/her position in the structure). Finally, the third dimension, attitude, is related to goodwill, to the employee's willingness to do something or take an initiative.

Hence, one can affirm an organization is functioning on a competency rationale when an individual's abilities and skills are the factor that determines his responsibilities, and not the job description of his current position. The organization is then challenged to be able to adapt itself in order to take advantage of the resources their employees represent.

Both approaches are extreme and, of course, in real life most structures display a hybrid combination. However, the era of "human capital" now seems to be undergoing a critical period. Organizations are suddenly realizing that attaching too much credit to a person's specificities must not necessarily represent something positive.

This indicates a paradox; as we know, companies are becoming more and more attached to their core employees (STEWART, 1993; PEARSON, 1987; DRUCKER, 1998). The great challenge would then be not to hire employees who already own precious abilities and skills, but instead to determine which valuable human talents the organization would like to have, and consequently, to implement concrete ways to improve them on its employees.

Three researchers from Harvard Business School (GROYSBERG; ASHISH; NOHRIA, 2004) have recently shown that an excess of "stars" may be harmful to an organization. Their studies of the career evolution of the thousand best financial brokers in the United States in the 90's have led to the following main conclusions.

First, the "stars" mobility works badly: most interviewees presented a low level of performance after changing jobs. Sometimes their initial talent never showed up again. In fact, most of their competencies seemed to be related to the work context they experienced in their former jobs.

Second: because they are considered "stars", they refused to integrate new ways of doing, hence rebuking and blocking a healthy learning process.

Finally, they are not loyal: 36% of the interviewees had changed jobs three years before their arrival at the company. Another aspect to take into consideration: the arrival of a "star" within a team is often a source of resentment and tensions that causes harm to the performance of the group as a whole.

According to these conclusions, one could affirm that, against all odds, the human capital idea is not totally fake, but it is important to remember that an organization's main objective is

not only to properly identify and use competencies of hundreds of people, but mainly to execute and coordinate all those people's efforts towards reaching its goals.

Consequently, human competencies must not be too idiosyncratic, and the best performing organizations are those where the system as a whole prevails over individuals. Big companies such as L'Oréal, Saint Gobain and Procter & Gamble are now investing in the development of the employees' competencies they have judged "generalizable". Instead of recruiting "star" individuals holding a large set of idiosyncratic competencies, they seem to look forward to having average individuals holding a smaller set of a previously established generalized set of essential competencies.

Regardless of all this, what seems to be definitely confirmed as a trend in HI-PO management studies is the fact that human competencies cannot be measured unless they are considered within a specific context, a real situation where their use is required at daily work. Following this track, one is led to the conclusion that a manager will be more or less competent if his/her action and use of competency fits the context and is useful to reach the organization's goals.

This article intends to launch the possibility of identifying a generalized essential competency related to employees' intercultural skills and abilities. What is here understood as intercultural competency would correspond to what we have elsewhere said, that is, ability the individual has to avoid the cultural traps such as an adoption of an universalistic or an ethnocentric behaviour, and to adapt himself to an interactive context, pace and style of communication with a foreigner or a person belonging to a different functional or professional cultural background in an efficient and effective way which would enable him to well perform his job and also learn what is required to contribute to the organizational well functioning as a whole.

### **From expatriates to "international managers", and then, from "international managers" to widespread employees' international responsibilities: towards a generalized intercultural competency development**

The expatriation management process is organized according to three main trends. The first is represented by an ethnocentric policy that preaches the choice of the headquarters' country natives for international assignments (home-country nationals).

The second trend is the opposite, since it defends a polycentric view that preaches the recruitment of native professionals for key positions (host-country nationals).

Finally, the third and most popular trend is represented by a geocentric policy that determines the choice of managers whose knowledge of the company and years of international experience prevail over their nationality for them to be assigned. They are then called "third-

country nationals”. No matter what policy is adopted for the choice of expatriates, it seems that the ability to cope with different cultural backgrounds would always be required and is not always present.

In a recent past, expatriates were considered a synonym of international managers. Later on, an international manager became a sort of employee who did not need to be expatriated in order to be abroad: what was required was that he/she be “expatriable”. Currently, those individuals come mainly from the elite of their home countries, are able to represent the company and do their jobs worldwide, are constantly walking around with their laptops in airports, and live in hotel rooms and airplanes.

Several competency profiles have been elaborated corresponding to the abilities required from an international manager, but they all seem to describe a utopia kind of “super hero”. As a matter of fact, the “international manager”, as Scheinder and Barsoux (1997) describe him/her, would be a “new type of cosmopolitan, multilingual, multifaceted, executive who is operational across national borders (somewhat like James Bond)” (SCHNEIDER; BARSOUX, 1997, p. 157).

But, as those authors remind us, although they operate across boundaries, it does not mean their minds are travelling across boundaries. Concerning expatriates, companies seem to have understood that a previous crosscultural or intercultural training is certainly worth investing in, though much remains to be done in terms of “returning-home” cultural shock consequences. Of course, criteria establishing an expatriable international manager’s competencies are intimately related to the companies’ ideal criteria, which correspond to high-performance behaviour.

Most career and human development researchers today work intensively on the emergence of a new pattern of high potential individuals’ identification and the management of their track within the organization. High Potentials’ management has as its main object the analysis of companies’ competency modelling and paths for career evolution. Through competency modelling, human resources managers are able to identify a set of knowledge, skills, behaviour patterns, characteristics and abilities deeply related to the individual’s high performance. “High-potential” individuals (HI-POs) are those employees who are worth an investment.

They are identified by the organization through a series of task-tests as owners of those characteristics most valued and considered a concrete resource, hence as part of the company’s estate. Given the high level of employees’ turn-over, American human resources managers have stressed the importance to identify the HI-PO’s competency profile, and the arguments they could make up and use to keep those individuals in the company.

The first HI-PO's competency profiles considered "loyalty to the company" and "willingness to take any assignments" (DERR; JONES; TOOMEY, 1988) essential competencies to the definition of high-potential employees.

The emergence of a new paradigm of business represented by downsizing, decentralization and network organizational trends have been the cause of some changes in what is currently considered an essential competency of a HI-PO manager. The path of the HI-PO inside the company still remains almost the same: those individuals usually go through a kind of funnel, and their level of valued competency is measured in different phases that will finally lead them to the top levels of the company's direction.

Nevertheless, the development and diffusion of some business practices, such as cross-functional and cross-companies teamwork, are operating a subtle modification in the competency profiles. General Electric, for instance, has determined that the ability to work across organizational boundaries of all kinds (across functions, gender lines and national cultures), as well as the years of international experience, are the most important competencies to be identified in a HI-PO manager, and must then prevail over the willingness to accept no matter what assignment or the loyalty to the company (HESTERLY; DERR, 2002).

In conclusion, the increase of flexible organization structures has indeed triggered the implementation of several business practices that have now become current within MNC (multinational companies): cross-functional teamwork, cross-national coordination, new modalities of control of network organizations, and so on. Companies seem to be attentive to the fact that some specific competencies are related to high performance in most of these new practices. However, what companies still seem not to realize entirely is the fact that not only international HI-PO managers and expatriates are concerned with this new emerging competency profile: all employees are, to a certain extent.

A study ordered by Fiat surprisingly confirmed that over 40% of their employees had already dealt somehow with international matters (AUTERI; TESIO, 1990, p. 6-16). The results of this survey show to what extent companies are underestimating the amount of "international managing" done by their employees, in other words, the amount of international responsibilities each employee carries whenever doing his/her job. As Schneider and Barsoux (1997) state, the distinction between the international and the domestic manager is fading, given the broader distribution of international responsibilities on all organizational levels.

This leads us to the conclusion that not only those who go to work abroad are required to have an ability to deal with cultural differences: all employees having, at some level, an international responsibility, from the top international manager who negotiates international



deals abroad to the receptionist who receives an international visitor, are concerned with this kind of competency.

We can then affirm that an intercultural competency has become essential and generalized, and as such, it has become a competitive advantage and a point of reference in terms of HI-PO management and international human resources management. But what could be the confirmed components of such a competency? This issue seems not to have been deeply explored yet by international human resources management researchers, despite its increasing importance and interest.

All that companies have for now is the expatriates' experience. Satisfying methods for the exploitation of this resource have not yet been developed enough, nor has their efficiency been tested yet. Big companies seem to have some encouraging first results through the implementation of internal corporate universities (MEISTER, 1993; ALLEN, 2000), although some sceptics say this management tool has not yet paid off nor proved to be effective and useful to the organization.

From the analysis of expatriates' success and failure, some elements have been identified as competencies required for successful expatriation missions. The information was collected during a 2-year period by means of open questionnaires from 37 international French managers, aged 30 to 55, participating of crosscultural seminars meant to prepare them to a coming mission abroad as expatriates. The set of those competencies varies little from one company to another.

The competency profile of an expatriable individual would gather the following main elements: interpersonal and relationship skills, linguistic abilities, curiosity and motivation to live abroad, tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, flexibility, patience and respect, cultural empathy and a strong sense of self (ego strength), in other words, psychological stability and sense of humour. Intercultural competency would be the set of all these elements added to the ability to perceive new environments and adapt to them, as already mentioned above, and furthermore, the ability to go over cultural shocks and avoid cultural pitfalls (GUITEL, 2006). The main cultural pitfalls would correspond to the already mentioned attitudes of universalism (the one way), ethnocentrism (the best way), the stereotypes' pitfall (the systematic judgement of others' behaviour), and the temptation to have differences prevail over similarities as something illegal, illegitimate or undesirable, as well as the opposite, the temptation of having assumed similarities hide existing differences.

Therefore, an intercultural competency would also gather essential elements such as sensitivity and humbleness, unfortunately difficult to detect and missing in numerous experienced international managers.

Cultural sensitivity is mainly perceived as the individual's capacity to observe without being tempted to analyze, in other words, the ability to "feel" instinctively the surrounding environment: (social, political, economical, regional and even family contexts) of his/her interlocutors, as well as their ways of communicating: verbal and non-verbal communication, social rites and their degree of relevance, facial expressions and body language, noises they make, all that may flee a rational approach in a very first analysis.

Not only must the individual be able to seize all the details, he must be conscious of this ability and pay attention to what deserves to be taken into account. He must be cautious as to the fact that his own cultural paradigms and filters must not interfere with and infect all that his sensitivity could perceive.

An individual endowed with an intercultural competency is then able to put aside his rational judgement when it is required, and to select the specific information that might be important to guarantee the success of his task: then he must find the balance between what is worth adapting and what is worth imposing and insisting on doing, if we consider a top direction's expatriate mission, for example.

This practice is not as simple as it seems. Rational judgement and analysis are defence mechanisms that provide a sort of comfort, as one feels lost and dizzy after a cultural shock. Being strong enough to avoid the temptation of rationalizing the situation, and being conscious of the fact that their sensitivity and instincts must prevail, are not easy tasks for individuals that have been trained all their lives to approach issues in a rational way in order to keep control over unpredictable situations.

The ability to be humble is maybe the most important mentioned component of intercultural competency. Humbleness is not easy to practise when one is an experienced manager on a top position. However, humbleness allows the individual to defend himself/herself against pitfalls consisting of the denial of one's own cultural boundaries, of the adoption of an ethnocentric behaviour, and, at last, of the belief that he/she is experienced enough to master the situation.

Furthermore, tolerance and patience are very important. People who are easily irritable and lack a sense of humour will be less likely to develop intercultural competency. Being irritable and getting angry with other peoples' mentalities and ways of doing is certainly not a good way to get integrated to a new environment, and is surely the main source of stress and dissatisfaction.

Individuals who are likely to be interculturally competent must be patient not only towards the others but also towards themselves. An intercultural relation is a continuous co-built process that requires daily efforts and huge personal investments. One must deeply believe that

all moments of anger and confusion will be overcome and will at last allow a common learning experience for both participants of an intercultural dyad that is certainly not to be neglected.

### **Final considerations**

Intercultural and crosscultural studies are recently independent interdisciplinary fields of research that represent a rich source of analysis for several organizational issues, especially within the scope of international human resources management. If, on the one hand, crosscultural approaches propose a comparative analysis of certain aspects of different cultures, on the other hand, intercultural approaches propose an intrinsic analysis of the interaction of two different cultural realms. Intercultural communication studies are of great relevance to the studies and probable identification of an “intercultural competency” of expatriates and international managers, an issue that seems to become so important nowadays.

As a matter of fact, international human resources management is presently going through deep changes due to the corroborated emergence of new organizational trends confirming the diffusion of “business practices” that require a new kind of professional profile in order to be executed. Companies no longer spend their time making up research to define specific competencies required for specific positions. Instead, human resources managers are currently opting for a generic set of competencies considered essential to perform all kinds of jobs. In the past, cultural competency was considered an essential quality to expatriates and international managers (VRIES; MEAD, 1991). Nowadays, it would correspond to a generic essential competency all employees should have (LAURENT; LEE, 2005). The main characteristics of such a competency would be its owner’s abilities to communicate effectively and convey values and purposes to people from other cultural backgrounds, and to reach a high level of performance in doing his/her jobs.

Although the elements of intercultural competency have not yet been well defined by field research, it is probable that they correspond to the elements acknowledged as relevant to the success of most expatriates’ experiences, in addition to some other characteristics that would enable the individual to use his/her instincts when required, overcome cultural shock pitfalls, deal with his/her own cultural boundaries and, at the end, do a good job.

### **Resumo**

As empresas e as organizações em geral têm passado por muitas modificações nos últimos anos, devido a mudanças em seu meio externo. Tais mudanças corroboram um novo paradigma de gestão preconizado, por exemplo, pelos pesquisadores W. Hesterley e C. Brooklyn Derr. Uma abundância de termos tem emergido nos últimos anos a fim de descrever esse novo paradigma: organizações híbridas (POWELL, 1987), organizações em rede (MILES; SNOW, 1986; 1992), organizações horizontais (HALAL, 1994), alianças

estratégicas (KANTER, 1989) e *downsizing* (TOMSAKO, 1991) são algumas das tendências mais representativas presentes na lista”.

Uma das principais consequências dessas tendências organizacionais e estratégicas reflete-se diretamente na gestão de pessoas, de maneira que esta também tem passado por profundas mudanças nos últimos anos. Além do grande desafio que consiste em prever quais cargos devem continuar e quais devem ser extintos, a Gestão Internacional de Recursos Humanos (GIRH) vê-se em face de uma situação em que o número de expatriados é cada vez menor, e os gestores indicados para expatriação devem ser, por conseguinte, muito bem preparados, e escolhidos com cuidado a partir de uma lista pré-estabelecida de indivíduos altamente qualificados e valorizados pelas organizações. Essa realidade advém do fato de que as fronteiras das organizações estão cada vez mais difusas e mal delimitadas, o mundo de maneira geral está se tornando mais perigoso, e as práticas locais de recrutamento têm se disseminado como tendência por toda parte.

Os indivíduos-chave selecionados com grande apreço têm um novo papel a desempenhar nesse novo paradigma organizacional. Além de serem portadores de grandes habilidades lingüísticas e técnicas, que lhes permitam trabalhar em qualquer lugar do mundo, também devem ser capazes de comunicar valores e propósitos estratégicos, aproveitar oportunidades e recursos que o ambiente local tem a oferecer, e decidir o que deve ser adaptado, levado em consideração e padronizado. A coerência das escolhas estratégicas de descentralização, bem como a escolha entre o mercado e a firma, estão intimamente ligadas a competências humanas específicas. Ao escrever este artigo, partimos do postulado segundo o qual uma “competência intercultural” pode ser definida como “a capacidade de se comunicar de maneira eficaz com pessoas de um universo cultural diferente, seja ele nacional, organizacional, funcional ou profissional”.

Estudos realizados no campo da comunicação intercultural confirmam que, para que o processo de comunicação seja bem sucedido, dois grupos de culturas diferentes devem construir, por meio de suas interações, um conjunto comum de valores, no qual ocorre uma re-negociação de suas identidades. O portador de uma competência intercultural tem como missão certificar-se de que os valores e os propósitos de sua organização estão sendo comunicados através da criação de uma base comum de significados, de uma visão compartilhada (SENGE, 1991).

O artigo divide-se em duas seções: a primeira é mais longa e tem por fim apresentar um panorama da evolução do conceito de cultura, desde seus primórdios nas gavetas da antropologia até sua incursão nas ciências de gestão. Nesse percurso, veremos a principal diferença entre uma abordagem comparativa (*crosscultural*) e uma abordagem interativa do mesmo fenômeno (*intercultural*). Finalmente, a primeira parte termina apresentando os principais trabalhos realizados no campo da comunicação intercultural sobre os componentes e o desenvolvimento de uma competência intercultural, pois consideramos que esses trabalhos são valiosos e ainda não foram suficientemente explorados por pesquisadores no âmbito dos estudos organizacionais.

A segunda seção busca refletir sobre algumas mudanças recentes que estão provocando uma evolução no campo da GIRH, especificamente no que diz respeito à definição de um perfil de competências de indivíduos com alto potencial. Tais mudanças confirmam a emergência de novos paradigmas que estabelecem e estabelecerão a lista de competências mais cobiçadas em um gestor internacional. Essa seção baseia-se, sobretudo, nos resultados de uma pesquisa qualitativa realizada, entre 2000 e 2002, com um grupo de gestores entre 30 e 55 anos, de várias empresas francesas de diversos setores, durante seminários de preparação para sua futura expatriação para o Brasil, por meio de questionários abertos sobre os componentes e a importância de certa “competência intercultural”. Foram também realizadas entrevistas qualitativas etnográficas (RIESSMAN, 1993) sobre experiências anteriores de expatriados, com relatos de sucessos e fracassos, o que nos permitiu identificar algumas qualidades necessárias para o sucesso de uma expatriação. O conjunto dessas habilidades varia muito pouco de uma empresa para outra.

De maneira geral, os resultados dessa pesquisa mostram que o perfil de competência de um indivíduo “expatriável” compreenderia os seguintes elementos: habilidades inter-relacionais e inter-pessoais, habilidades lingüísticas, curiosidade e motivação para viver no exterior, tolerância face à incerteza e à ambigüidade, flexibilidade, paciência e respeito, empatia

cultural e personalidade forte (*ego strength*), em outras palavras, estabilidade emocional e senso de humor. Uma competência intercultural seria o conjunto desses elementos adicionados à capacidade de perceber novos ambientes e adaptar-se a eles, como anteriormente mencionado, e, mais ainda, enfrentar um choque cultural e evitar armadilhas culturais (GUITEL, 2006).

Esse artigo pretende, em primeiro lugar, abrir novas perspectivas de pesquisa no âmbito da GIRH e no campo da gestão intercultural, além de apresentar os resultados dessa pesquisa, ainda pequena e com muitos limites. Nosso principal objetivo é suscitar o interesse de pesquisadores e gestores para a problemática, e atrair sua atenção para os trabalhos sobre o assunto realizados no campo da comunicação intercultural.

**Palavras-chave:** Gestão inter-cultural; Gestão *crosscultural*; Expatriados; Gestores internacionais.

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