



## **Perspectives on International Management - Audio**

### *Intercultural Skills*

**MFO:** Mark Fenton-O’Creevy

**HH:** Heather Henry

**MW:** Mur Wunyad (ph)

**BN:** Beru Nyetti

**SJP:** Sir Emyr Jones-Parry

**JB:** Janice Bell

[Music]

**MFO:**

Working across national boundaries and with multicultural groups is a skilled activity. Some of the required skills are learnt through experience and study but others are more innate.

[Music]

**MFO:**

In this podcast we’ll breakdown the ways that multinational organisations are measuring these skills. Surveys of senior executives show that nine in ten of them consider cross-cultural leadership to be one of the biggest management challenges of this century. Around a third of all managers sent on foreign assignments end them early at huge costs to their organisations. The reason given is often not a lack of job skill but failure to adjust culturally. Chris Earley, Sue Nang and colleagues, have developed measures of what they call cultural intelligence, measured by a cultural intelligence quotient or CQ score. The higher your CQ, the more capable you are of functioning effectively in culturally diverse settings. The CQS breaks this down into four different aspects: the first is meta-cognitive cultural intelligence and concerns your awareness and sensitivity to culture during interactions with those from different cultural backgrounds.

Heather Henry works with multicultural community groups in Coventry in the UK. Here, she describes how high meta-cognitive CQ manifests itself in community relations.

**HH:**

One of the issues that the residents have come together around has been around the swimming pool and the potential closure of the swimming pool. Particularly, a group of white men, it seems, have come together to raise a petition and have talked about issues in relation to South Asian women being able to access women only swimming sessions and that just shows the level of integration that they are thinking about each other.

**MFO:**

The next measure is cognitive CQ. This comprises your knowledge of norms, practices and conventions in different cultural settings.

**MW:**

My name is (ph 0.02.00) Mur Wunyad. It's a Zulu name hence the click. People can't believe it that that's actually your name, you know, they're like, "How do you say that?" and "How do you spell it?" you know, to begin with, "How do you spell click?"

**MFO:**

My colleague at the Open University, Dr Beru Nyetti hails from a South African culture which treats its elders in a way you might not expect coming from a western background.

**BN:**

Age plays a significant part, so even if one is young and you are the boss, the way that you will address and speak to that workforce has to take into account that this person is someone who is older than you and that has brought in different pressures, challenges, in terms of how do you motivate and challenge and tell off people who are the same age as your father. And in the West, whilst that doesn't seem to matter, the virtue of the opportunity gives you the authority to carry out whatever and people respect that so they don't see age and in Africa that is one of the challenges that are thrown in to the world of work.

**MFO:**

And it's by being aware of this cultural difference that you're able to change your behaviour as a manager.

**BN:**

One of the ways around that is knowing that, like, you don't call elders by their first name; you call them by their surname. One of the biggest examples, Nelson Mandela, you would not address him as Nelson, you would call him Mandel or Mandiba, the clan name, so that's how you address him and that's giving him the respect, so that's one example of how you go around that. Just being polite and not shout or scream at them, which raises interesting challenges because you think so how do you let off steam or how do you let them know how you feel and how do you deal with those kind of emotions in an African setting or context?

**MFO:**

Your ability to behave appropriately in both verbal and non verbal ways when interacting with those from different cultural backgrounds is measured by the third CQ, behavioural cultural intelligence. Retired British diplomat, Sir Emyr Jones-Parry, describes how behaviour can make or break a deal.

**SJP:**

People do have different approaches, there's no question about that and some of it is the way individuals actually confront each other. I've used the verb 'confront' on purpose. Sometimes, an approach can be interpreted by the other side as being very confrontational and all you've done is spoken fairly frankly and honestly, no intent actually to be offensive but interpreted by the other side as being very offensive. The Asian approach to doing business is really quite different. The Asian model doesn't presume that you will be brutal, frank, upfront, because that's not the way they do business, that's considered a discourtesy. So if you're going into a discussion in that sort of environment then you better take account of that.

**JB:**

My name is Janice Bell and I am an IT outsourcing consultant and one of the things that mattered very much to the Indian team was pleasing people, getting things right and being recognised for getting things right. Sometimes, there was perhaps a little bit of a tendency for people to be too eager to please, to say, yes, I can do that, when maybe not all the resources were in place. And we had to spend time ensuring that both sides understood what was important and what was important was not just making the commitment that something would be done, but actually being able to get it done. The team first felt that the most important thing was always to say, yes, it can be done so we were able to change the basis of that transaction to get the Indian team much more into making commitments on the basis of what had to be put in place rather than on the desire to get it done.

**MFO:**

Has that experienced changed your own approach to management?

**JB:**

I think it's made me aware that the way I approach something from my culture is not the way that everybody I work with may do so.

**MFO:**

The final CQ is motivational cultural intelligence. The good news is if you are listening to this podcast then you would probably score reasonably highly on this measure. It tests your confidence in and motivation in to direct attention and energy towards cultural differences. The value of having motivated individuals across the business community, leaning and taking an interest in other cultures, is that a kind of international common business language is starting to emerge, as Maggie Miller explains.

**MM:**

The business school courses creating a common language help you engage with other cultures. Once you have that common language, it's far easier then to learn to appreciate other cultures and get the best from other cultures and learn from them. And, certainly, it's been a delight for me working in the US where I've been able to take teams of people to India, for example, and see people who may not have fully appreciated that culture and who may have been hesitant in working closely with an Asian culture, when I've been able to make the introductions and have them understand how much they had in common. It's been a delight for me to be able to see those people who had started off a little hostile or a little hesitant or a little uncertain, really start to appreciate that other culture, appreciate the talent and skills, the depth and breath of skills that were available and learn to embrace another culture but all based on a common business language that I was able to help them to develop because of the learnings I gained from the business school education.

**MFO:**

I want to finish by talking about an important but often overlooked set of skills for international managers, managing our identities. Our sense of who we are varies with a context we find ourselves in. I play roles, at various times, as father, husband, son, teacher, research, boss and so on. In each role I behave differently and interact with the world and other people differently, quite rightly too. The manager who comes home and tells their spouse that, "Darling, it's time for your annual appraisal," may trigger unpleasant reactions. Most of the time, though, we move between these different aspects of our identities seamlessly and without noticing. We are well practised in these roles and managing transitions between them. However, place us in unfamiliar circumstances and we may struggle to develop a clear sense of our place and identity in a new situation.

This is particularly true when our assumptions and expectations are overturned, as may happen, for example, to an English manager working for the first time in Germany, or a Japanese manager moving to the USA. In each case, they may have a sense of the kind of manager they are which works well in their former setting and which is now at odds with the expectations of the people around them. Developing resilience in the face of such demands on your sense of who you are is an important developmental task for international managers.

Equally, those managing international teams in their own country need to understand the strains their team members may be facing.

The skill of managing multiple facets of your identity in different settings is not only important for reducing the stress of such experiences, managers who have the ability to manage successful identities in multiple cultural settings are often a vital resource for multinational firms for moving and translating ideas around an organisation. These kinds of skills take time and real practice to develop. They can't be delivered just in a course and certainly not in a podcast but I hope these podcasts have served to open up possibilities.

[Music]

(End of recording)