

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Foreword</i> <i>Günter Stahl</i>	xiii
Introduction: From Otherness to Synergy – An Alternative Approach to Intercultural Management <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Peter Franklin</i>	1
PART 1 Understanding Otherness and Discord	13
1. Understanding Otherness and Discord: A Necessary but Insufficient First Step Towards Generating Complementarity and Synergy from Cultural Diversity <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Peter Franklin</i>	15
2. Harmonizing Expectations: NSF International’s Experience in Shanghai <i>David A. Victor and Christine R. Day</i>	28
3. Planning a Sino-British Collaborative Workshop: Negotiating Preferences and Achieving Synergy <i>Helen Spencer-Oatey</i>	38
4. Intercultural Challenges in International Mergers and Acquisitions: A German–Bulgarian–Romanian Case Study <i>Petia Genkova and Anna Gajda</i>	51
5. How to Implement Change in a Post-acquisition Multicultural Context: The Lafarge Experience in Britain <i>Evalde Mutabazi and Philippe Poirson</i>	69
6. The Intercultural Challenge of Building the European eSports League for Video Gaming <i>Völker Stein and Tobias M. Scholz</i>	80
7. Leading Change in Mergers and Acquisitions in Asia–Pacific <i>Jenny Plaister-Ten</i>	95

VI CONTENTS

8.	Smart Spacing: The Impact of Locations on Intercultural Trust Building and Decision Making <i>Fritz Audebert, Thilo Beyer and Veronika Hackl</i>	107
9.	IKEA's Ethical Controversies in Saudi Arabia <i>Christof Miska and Michaela Pleskova</i>	120
PART 2 Applying Competencies and Resources		135
10.	Applying Competencies and Resources: Handling Cultural Otherness as the Second Step Towards Generating Complementarity and Synergy from Cultural Diversity <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Peter Franklin</i>	137
11.	adidas and Reebok: What Expatriate Managers Need to Manage M&As Across Cultures <i>Matthias Kempf and Peter Franklin</i>	148
12.	Virtual Chaos at WORLDWIDE Rx: How Cultural Intelligence Can Turn Problems into Solutions <i>David Livermore and Soon Ang</i>	167
13.	Cultural Intelligence at Work – A Case Study from Thailand <i>Claus Schreier and Astrid Kainzbauer</i>	174
14.	Cultural Aspects of Offshoring to India <i>Craig Storti and Peter Franklin</i>	184
PART 3 Achieving Complementarity and Synergy		197
15.	Achieving Complementarity and Synergy: The Third Step to Leveraging Diversity in Intercultural Management <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Peter Franklin</i>	199
16.	Future+: Intercultural Challenges and Success Factors in an International Virtual Project Team <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Ulrike Haupt</i>	214
17.	A Tough Day for a French Expatriate in Vietnam: The Management of a Large International Infrastructure Project <i>Sylvie Chevrier</i>	228
18.	Japan Tobacco International: Managing and Leveraging Cultural Diversity <i>Yih-teen Lee</i>	240
19.	Leveraging the Benefits of Diversity and Biculturalism through Organizational Design <i>Jasmin Mahadevan</i>	256

20. Going Global Versus Staying Local: The Performance Management Dilemma in the International Context <i>Fons Trompenaars and Riana van den Bergh</i>	272
21. A Parcel to Spain: Reconciling Cultural and Managerial Dilemmas Caused by the Implementation of Corporate Culture Instruments <i>Christoph Barmeyer, Eric Davoine and Vincent Merk</i>	285
22. Managing Globally: Resolving Intercultural Challenges in the Management of Local Multicultural Teams in a Multinational Venture <i>Laurence Romani</i>	300
23. Strategic Alliances and Intercultural Organizational Change: The Renault–Nissan Case <i>Christoph Barmeyer and Ulrike Mayrhofer</i>	317
<i>List of Contributors</i>	333
<i>Index</i>	335

1

Understanding Otherness and Discord: A Necessary but Insufficient First Step Towards Generating Complementarity and Synergy from Cultural Diversity

Christoph Barmeyer and Peter Franklin

1 COMPARATIVE MANAGEMENT STUDIES: THE TRADITIONAL ETIC APPROACH

The pioneering culture-comparative studies of management preferences and practices in different countries by Hofstede (1980 and 2001, 1991) and Laurent (1983) first directed the attention of management scholars and practitioners to the insight that management was not – as seen up till then – a cultural universal, something “done” in the same way the world over. These studies made clear that management is indeed a culturally influenced artefact, which may differ from national culture to national culture (d’Iribarne 2002, 2009). Management was thus no different from many other practices and behaviours within a group, driven by culturally influenced values and preferences and oriented to culturally influenced norms.

It was only a short and perhaps too easy a step to make such otherness responsible for dysfunctional communication, discord and ineffective cooperation across national cultural borders (which indeed they may be but need not be). This attention to the way cultures differ and the difficulties the differences may cause in communication and cooperation has stubbornly continued to this day, although both research and management practice have moved on to tackle other more pressing questions such as how to handle the difficulties – a topic dealt with in the part of this book entitled *Applying Competencies and Resources* – and how to leverage them, a subject addressed in Part 3, *Achieving Complementarity and Synergy*.

16 INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

These pioneering studies – and those published later by Trompenaars (1993) and House et al. (2004), for example – have been found especially useful by those interested in international management as a result of their *etic* nature: they are empirical; they are quantitative; they are contrastive; and they use a set of concepts which the investigators believe to be common to all cultures and which quickly become familiar to the users of the studies. They assume that all cultures can to a certain extent be described by “measuring” them with the same yardsticks and by placing them at a certain position on descriptive bipolar continua.

Hofstede’s original empirical research, published in 1980 in his book *Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values* and based on a matched sample of more than 116,000 IBM employees from more than 50 countries, together with subsequent smaller surveys by others, provides the interculturalist, whether scholar or international manager, with insights into differences in work-related values or preferences and the ways in which these values are expressed in behaviour and practices in the organizations and societies to be found in the various country cultures surveyed. Hofstede names the poles of the four basic dimensions he identified in his research: *small power distance* as opposed to *large power distance*; *collectivism* contrasting with *individualism*; *femininity* as opposed to *masculinity*; and *weak uncertainty avoidance* as opposed to *strong uncertainty avoidance*. In subsequent publications, Hofstede, using the results of the Chinese Values Survey (Chinese Culture Connection 1985; Hofstede & Bond 1988) adds a fifth dimension, namely *long-term orientation* as opposed to *short-term orientation*. And most recently, Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) have added a sixth dimension, *indulgence* versus *restraint*. The peculiar power of these studies is intensified by the presenting of their results in tables listing scores and indicating positions from highest to lowest and in Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010) by placing national cultures in global regions leading to an occasional clustering effect.

Since the publication of his work, no examination of a cultural issue in international business or management is complete without at least a mention, either positive or negative, of Hofstede. His quantitative approach has gained many supporters among scholars and HR developers alike – it seems to offer security in a field notoriously subject to the perverting effects of stereotypes and mere individual experience and anecdote. Sometimes, indeed, this interest in applying his results is so dominant as to exclude other insights. Criticism of his insights (for example, by McSweeney (2002), Smith (2002) and Franklin and Spencer-Oatey (2011) and by international managers themselves) has grown in the last decade or more, for example, for being outdated and based on data derived from a single organization, for suggesting a no longer (if ever) current cultural homogeneity, for ignoring the dynamic nature of cultures and for promoting stereotypes.

Building on the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) and Parsons and Shils (1951), Trompenaars (1993), in his *etic* study of international managers at Royal Dutch-Shell, generated a set of seven dimensions of cultural variability: *neutral* versus *affective* in the disclosure of feelings; *ascription* versus

achievement in the assigning of status; *diffuse* versus *specific* in the range of interpersonal involvement; *collectivism* versus *individualism*; *universalism* versus *particularism* in behaviour in relationships with others; and the management of time (*sequential* versus *synchronic*; and *past, present and future*). Although criticism, possibly justified, of the soundness of his data and of the conclusions he has drawn from it has been made by some, in particular by Hofstede (1996), Trompenaars' insights into the dimensions of cultural variation to be found in business and management have also established themselves firmly in the field, particularly when it comes to consultancy and training.

Expanding and refining Hofstede's dimensions, The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research program (GLOBE) (House et al. 2004) more recently investigated the relationship between culture and societal, organizational and leadership effectiveness. Some 170 scholars questioned more than 17,000 middle managers in 62 cultures. Though based on a much smaller sample, it meets some of the criticism levelled at Hofstede's pioneering work: the data was collected in companies in three industries (financial services, food processing and telecommunications) and not just one; the study was the work of a multicultural team of investigators bringing with them all the benefits of multiple, culturally influenced perspectives; and the study's insights are more recent than Hofstede's – work began on the investigation in 1994 and was published in 2004. Strangely, perhaps, despite these obvious merits, the GLOBE study has still not superseded Hofstede in the favours of many scholars, HR development specialists and trainers. And, of course, the study has been the butt of criticism, not least by Hofstede (2006) himself.

2 CRITICISM OF THE ETIC STUDIES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

These later etic studies can be criticized in certain respects in much the same way that Hofstede's work is: the bipolar continua of the "national cultural model" attempt to describe national and organizational cultures which in their nature may contradict the tacit assumption of the studies that such cultures are homogeneous and static. As McSweeney (2009:936) remarks:

Culture is not a pre-established monolith. An acknowledgement of internal divisions, gaps and ambiguities inserts an essential element of distance at the heart of tradition and thus the possibility of critical interpretation, action variation and unpredictability within a country.

The "national cultural model" also assumes that cultures are delimited units which reject and fail to influence each other, as if, as Wolf (1982:6) describes, they were billiard balls which merely bounce off each other:

By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls.

18 INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

This metaphor contrasts starkly with how national cultures, especially, are commonly experienced, appositely summed up by Hannerz (1992:266) as dynamic entities which influence and are influenced by others:

(T)he flow of culture between countries and continents may result in another diversity of culture, based more on interconnections than on autonomy. It also allows the sense of a complex culture as a network of perspectives, or as an ongoing debate.

Hannerz (1992:266) borrows a term from linguistics when he goes on to speak of the creolization of culture in which:

a creole culture could also stabilize, or the interplay of center and periphery could go on and on, never settling into a fixed form precisely because of the openness of the global whole.

Precisely the failure to consider this hybridity in the national cultural model is criticized, for example, by Brannen and Salk (2000). In common with others, they point to both structural and contextual factors, and also to individual cultural identities different from a putative group norm, as being critical in the development of hybrid, culturally diverse work-setting cultures and organizations. It seems to be the case that the cultural identities of individuals engaged in intercultural interactions undergo development and are redefined. Static and decontextualized notions of culture are scarcely fit for the purpose of describing and analysing intercultural processes (Primecz et al. 2011; Romani 2008; Söderberg & Holden 2002). National cultural models thus lose their significance as a result of increasing cultural complexity (Hannerz 1992; Romani 2008), increasing intercultural complexity in international management and work settings and the increasing tendency towards multiple membership by individuals of a number of different cultures (Bjerregaard et al. 2009; Zander & Romani 2004), which may in turn vary from core to peripheral membership (Wenger 1998).

Taking account of these considerations, Sackmann and Phillips (2004) distinguish three streams of research in international management:

- The *Cross-National Comparison* stream assumes an equivalence of nation-state and culture. Cultural identity is considered as a given and immutable individual characteristic. Therefore culture is tractable. Generalizations and clustering, as well as cross-national testing of organizational theories, processes and practices, are possible.
- The *Intercultural Interaction* stream considers culture as socially constructed. Nevertheless, national culture and identity are of importance; context and subcultures, as well as organizational culture, may be salient, even if at the moment of interaction new cultures emerge and are negotiated. This stream is based on anthropological theories and interpretive methods.
- The *Multiple Cultures* stream sees culture as a socially constructed collective phenomenon that recognizes the complexity of personal identity in organizational settings, e.g. the multiplicity of cultures. The salience of any

cultural group depends on the particular case. The research focus relies on sense-making as well as taking into account cultural differences and similarities. This offers possibilities to achieve synergies by building on similar cultural identities.

In short, Sackmann and Phillips' model makes clear that the role concepts and work practices of managers and staff are increasingly shaped not merely by a single, static (national) culture. New dynamic forms of cooperation and work-setting culture result from hybrid meanings and actions (Brannen & Salk 2000) which are constructed and negotiated (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009) by interactants from the various cultural groups involved.

In a controversy among scholars started by Hofstede (1996) and in accordance with this notion of dynamic negotiated culture, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars present the more static, Hofstedian notion of culture and cultural dimensions and contrast it with their own more dynamic concept:

Instead of running the risk of getting stuck by perceiving cultures as static points on a dual axis map, we believe that cultures dance from one preferred end to the opposite and back. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997:27; see also Hampden-Turner 2000 and Trompenaars 1993)

3 THE EMIC APPROACH TO CULTURAL OTHERNESS IN INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT

The etic studies described above and typified by Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences* and the GLOBE study are quantitative and tend to be positivistic in nature (Romani 2008). They contrast with qualitative and, on the whole interpretative, *emic* studies. Like the term etic, the term emic is derived from the field of ethno-linguistics and describes a methodological, culturally adapted research approach in which the researcher takes up a position within a system (Pike 1954). What is to be investigated are system-immanent contextual features. To collect data, researchers use concepts and instruments which to the members of the culture to be investigated appear to be appropriate, relevant and reasonable (Headland et al. 1990; Triandis 1995). Triandis (1994:67–68) appositely compares the two approaches, underlining their usefulness to each other:

Emics, roughly speaking, are ideas, behaviours, items, and concepts that are culture-specific. Etics, roughly speaking, are ideas, behaviours, items, and concepts that are culture-general – i.e., universal. [...] Emic concepts are essential for understanding a culture. However, since they are unique to the particular culture, they are not useful for cross-cultural comparisons. [...] More formally, emics are studied within the system in one culture, and their structure is discovered within the system. Etics are studies outside the system in more than one culture, and their structure is theoretical. To

20 INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

develop “scientific” generalizations about relationships among variables, we must use etics. However, if we are going to understand a culture, we must use emics.

Not only methods but also the results and insights of research can display emic, that is to say, context-specific, features. International management research has yielded numerous publications which supply insights into the specifics of organizations and management. Examples are those by Barmeyer and Davoine (2013), Barmeyer and Mayrhofer (2014), Chevrier (2009), Davoine et al. (2014), Delmestri and Walgenbach (2005), Ebster-Grosz and Pugh (1996), Heidenreich et al. (2012), Jackson (2011), Primecz et al. (2011), Stewart et al. (1994), v. Helmolt (1997), Winch et al. (2000) and Witt and Redding (2009).

The French management scholar Philippe d’Iribarne (2003, 2009) and his team have developed a particular emic and contextualized approach to their management research, an approach which interestingly (but unsurprisingly as significant publications are not available in English) has scarcely found its way into the Anglo-American research literature. D’Iribarne (1994) criticizes the fact that much research into the functioning of organizations tends to stress scales of attitudes and values (Hofstede 1980, 2001; Parsons 1952), interactants’ strategies (Crozier & Friedberg 1977), or the role of institutions (Maurice et al. 1986; Sorge 1996) and the fact that such studies ignore phenomena which generate continuity in cultures.

D’Iribarne (2009) chooses an ethnographic and interpretive approach and his notion of culture is anthropological in nature. Only by means of an ethnographic-type *thick* description (Geertz 1973), i.e. the most comprehensive collection of features from multiple perspectives which can explain a situation, is it possible to arrive at a comprehensible interpretation of interculturality. (Inter)cultural action is embedded in systems of reference, according to Geertz (1973), that enable interactants to make sense of the world in which they live and of their own actions:

All cultures denote, classify, identify, evaluate, connect and order. They establish criteria for distinguishing good from evil; the legitimate from the illegitimate. They define the principles of classification by means of which society can be seen to be made up of separate groups. They provide interpretative systems that give meaning to the problems of existence, presenting them as elements in a given order that have therefore to be endured, or as the result of a disturbance of that order, that have consequently to be corrected. (1994:92)

In the same way, action is located in a context and moreover can be derived historically from societal framework conditions. Here, d’Iribarne finds explanations for culturally typical behaviour in the social history of a culture (much as Thomas (1996a, 1996b) does in explaining culture standards). Using corporate case studies, d’Iribarne (2003) impressively shows how interactants in “third-world countries” such as Argentina, Cameroon, Morocco and Mexico

who are not able to apply US management methods develop and successfully employ their own contextually adapted management techniques. The interactants d'Iribarne describes question what is customary, are open to what is old and has worked in the past and to what is new and have adapted to the context. They dare to take up contradictory positions which do not accord with the decontextualized, mainstream and so-called success factors such as the best practice of US management models (d'Iribarne 2002).

4 THE CASE STUDIES

Where differences exist, difficulties can be predicted and when difficulties exist, differences can be assumed to be the cause. Those at least are the convenient conclusions which have been drawn from etic and emic studies by scholars and practitioners for many years and which indeed have some foundation in reality. Unfortunately though, this conventional approach rather leaves users of the insights in the lurch: how are they to tackle the difficulties they experience and which – thanks to the studies – they now understand better? Although the cases studies in this part of the book use these contrastive (and to a lesser extent emic) studies to explain the occurrence of cultural differences and difficulties, they in fact go one step further and offer various concepts, models and tools to handle them. The underlying assumption is that cultures are not a source of intractable problems but, indeed, are tractable (Sackmann & Phillips 2004) and that the differences and their consequences are susceptible to being handled effectively and appropriately by the use of the models and tools presented.

The US–Chinese case written by David A. Victor and Christine R. Day, “Harmonizing Expectations: NSF International’s Experience in Shanghai”, not only explores power distance, one of the cultural dimensions described by Hofstede in his pioneering etic study, but also – particularly crucial in this case – the contrasting behavioural orientations with respect to communication style as described by Hall (1981) in his anthropological studies. However, readers are not simply expected to discover that cultures may differ in certain categories of behaviour and to name these categories. The simple but effective tool that readers are provided with for analysing the cultural aspects of international cooperation also takes due account of the significance of broader contextual factors when it comes to explaining problematic international cooperation.

The case “Planning a Sino-British Workshop: Negotiating Preferences and Achieving Synergy” by Helen Spencer-Oatey also features power distance as a crucial cultural dimension in Chinese–Western intercultural cooperation but in addition devotes attention to the task–relationship dimension, which is well-established if under-researched in the intercultural management literature. These two dimensions (or perspectives as the author refers to them) are interestingly complemented by a discussion of how learning styles may differ across cultures (Barmeyer 2004; Hofstede 1986), with attention here being devoted to two contrasting concepts: on the one hand, that learning consists

22 INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

in knowledge transfer and, on the other, that learning results from a process of co-construction (Jin & Cortazzi 1998; Watkins & Biggs 1996). Borrowing further from Moran (2001), the author introduces the 3Ps (Products, Practices and Perspectives) model as a tool to analyse the dysfunctionality described in the case and to enable the reader to generate a solution.

Taking a step towards correcting the relative lack of attention given to the GLOBE study in the literature, “Intercultural Challenges in International Mergers and Acquisitions: A German–Bulgarian–Romanian Case Study” by Petia Genkova and Anna Gajda uses the results of the GLOBE study to help readers to explain the different expectations and experiences of the various participants in the merger/acquisition (M&A) concerned. Connections are elicited not only to the cultural dimensions results generated by the study but also to its taxonomy of leadership styles. Besides placing the case described against the background of a conventional stages model of M&A, the case also uses Nahavandi and Malekzadeh’s (1993) acculturation model to anticipate the cultural change likely to be preferred by the various parties to the M&A.

The Anglo-French case “How to Implement Change in a Post-acquisition Multicultural Context: The Lafarge Experience in Britain” also deals with an M&A. Against the backdrop of a picture of management and working practices perhaps more reminiscent of pre-Thatcherite Britain than the turn of the century when Lafarge’s acquisition actually took place, the authors, Evalde Mutabazi and Philippe Poirson, illustrate the difficulties and the confusion which a top manager may experience with diverging managerial approaches in a foreign context (manufacturing, working class, legal framework). They present their own procedural model, which helps to build up “something new” using different organizational and managerial cultures and practices and to guide the M&A process from searching for a suitable partner to integrating two companies. After conducting a cultural analysis readers trace the change process implemented by the French acquirer in the British company and are requested to make further suggestions of their own.

A further tool for handling interculturality and its potential for dysfunctionality is described by Volker Stein and Tobias M. Scholz in “The Intercultural Challenge of Building the European eSports League for Video Gaming”. The case describes a truly multicultural cooperation, taking place in the undeniably demanding conditions of virtuality. International teams of the sort described here have to cope with the dual challenge to transactional effectiveness posed not just by its interculturality but also by its virtuality and the impediments this brings, in particular to communication. The virt.cube framework (Scholz 2000) presented makes it possible to assess a virtual team’s progress on its way to an optimally functioning virtuality.

Just as virt.cube takes account of factors apart from interculturality which may result from international cooperation, the Cross-Cultural Kaleidoscope™ model described in “Leading Change in Mergers and Acquisitions in Asia-Pacific” by Jenny Plaister-Ten pays due attention to cultural factors but also to the organizational structure of the parties to an M&A and the external

environment in which it takes place. The Cross-Cultural Kaleidoscope™ model provides both a macro and a micro view of what contributes to the formation of the values and beliefs that motivate behaviours and influence decisions in organizations operating in culturally complex contexts.

Given the cultural complexity of international work settings, the concept of trust with its function in reducing social complexity (Luhmann 1989; Rousseau et al. 1998) takes on a special significance. The role of trust as a tool for handling interculturality features in one of the case studies in this part of the book.

In the German–Russian–Japanese–Egyptian–Argentinian case “Smart Spacing: The Impact of Locations on Cross-Cultural Trust Building and Decision Making”, written by Fritz Audebert, Thilo Beyer and Veronika Hackl, the reader is familiarized with Hall’s insights into culturally influenced behavioural orientations with respect to time and space (Hall 1959/1990, 1990; Hall & Hall 1989) and requested to consider how these may trigger business relations and be connected to the building of trust through relationship cultivation. In the context of international business travel, the case illustrates culture-specific spaces and diverse local perspectives on when and where decisions normally take place.

The theme of ethnocentrism plays a role in “IKEA’s Ethical Controversies in Saudi Arabia” by Christof Miska and Michaela Pleskova. The case study illustrates both the challenges of ethical variation across cultures and societies, as well as the potential opportunities for positive change that these differences might provide. The case focuses on the removal of women from the Saudi Arabian edition of IKEA’s catalogue – a step which was held by some to stand in stark contrast to IKEA’s corporate culture and core values. The dispute exposed IKEA to considerable public criticism, but pointed out the responsibilities of multinational corporations (MNCs) in addressing ethical differences across cultures and societies.

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24 INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

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Index

- acculturation
 Berry's model 252, 253f
 Nahavandi and Malekzadeh's model 60–1, 61f
 achievement *vs.* ascription 16–17, 280f, 281t, 292
 action chains 115
 adidas and Reebok:
 managing M&As 10, 142, 148
 the assignment 150–2
 authors 155–6
 company background 149–50
 competencies in intercultural management 156–8, 158–62t
 handling the assignment 152–3
 looking back on the assignment 153–5
 questions 163–5
 recommended reading 162–3
 Adler, N. J. 91, 92, 204, 205, 207
 affective *vs.* neutral cultures 16, 280f, 281t, 292
 African culture cluster 63t
 Agile Manifesto 95
 Al Ariss, A. *et al.* 267
 AlJazeera 122t
 Althen, G. 194
 Alves, J. C. *et al.* 66
 ambiguity, tolerance for 157, 158t, 159t, 160t, 162t
 analytical approaches 3
 Ang, S. 170, 172, 174, 180, 181
 Anglo culture cluster 63t
 appropriateness 138
 Argandoña, A. 127
 Argentina: culture cluster 63t
 see also space: the impact of locations
 ascription *vs.* achievement 16–17, 280f, 281t, 292
 Asia–Pacific *see* change leadership in Asia–Pacific M&As
 assertiveness 62, 64t
 Audebert, F. 113
 automotive industry *see* Renault–Nissan:
 strategic alliances and organizational change
 autonomous leadership style 65
 “avoiding harm” 126
 Barmeyer, C. *et al.* 114, 139, 205, 208, 209, 221, 236, 291–2, 295–6, 327, 329
 BBC 122t
 Beamer, L. 36
 behaviour
 Cultural Intelligence 172, 181t
 flexibility 157, 159t, 162t
 Benedict, R. 203
 Bengtsson, N. 124
 Bennett, J. 194
 Bennett, J. M. 206
 Bennett, M. J. 142, 328
 Berry, J. 252, 253, 253f
 Beyer, T. 113
 Bhagat, R. S. 139, 204
 Bibu, N. A. 66
 Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) 266–7
 biculturalism 205–6, 266–7, 328–9
 see also diversity and biculturalism through organizational design;
 Japan Tobacco International
 biculturals 328–9
 Bird, A. *et al.* 143, 174, 175, 181
 Björling, W. 123
 Blohm, J. M. 193
 Boeker, W. 329–30
 Bohr, N. 200
 Bolten, J. 139
 Bowe, H. 47–8
 Brancu, L. 66
 Brannen, M. Y. 18, 77, 209, 266, 267, 268, 323, 328, 329, 330, 331
 Brinkmann, U. 142
 Brislin, R. *et al.* 172
 Britain: culture cluster 63t
 see also change implementation post-acquisition; change leadership in Asia–Pacific M&As; Sino-British collaborative workshop
 Brown, P. 190
 Brunelleschi, F. 113
 Bulgaria *see* international M&As: German–Bulgarian–Romanian case study
 Buller, P. G. 128
 Byram, M. 139
 Caligiuri, P. 162
 Cardon, P. W. 35
 case studies
 overview 8–12
 structure 6–7
 Catana, D. 66
 Catana, G.-A. 66
 change implementation post-acquisition 8–9, 22, 69–70
 authors 74
 the challenge 71–4
 cross-cultural management of teams 76–7

336 INDEX

- change implementation
 post-acquisition (*cont.*)
 cross-cultural model
 74–5, 75*f*
 decision-making
 processes 75
 first negotiations 75–6
 human and organizational
 change 76
 implementation of change
 73–4
 mission context and
 company 70–1
 organization and work
 relations management
 72–3
 questions 79
 recommended reading
 77–9
- change leadership in
 Asia-Pacific M&As
 9, 22–3, 95–6
 agile product development
 96–7
 author 100
 the challenge 98–9
 company background
 96–7
 cultural differences and
 consequences 100–4
 multicultural team in
 matrix environment
 98–9, 100*f*
 questions 105–6
 recommended reading
 104–5
- change management *see*
 change implementation
 post-acquisition;
 change leadership in
 Asia-Pacific M&As
- charismatic leadership style
 65
- Chee, F. 85
- Chen, G.-M. 139
- Chevrier, S. 224, 232–3, 236
- Chinese culture 63*t*, 272
see also harmonizing
 expectations; Sino-
 British collaborative
 workshop
- Chinese Ministry of
 Education 38–9,
 42, 43
- chronemics 115
- Chudoba, K. 38, 225
- codes of conduct 286–7
see also cultural and
 managerial dilemmas
- cognition 180*t*
- collectivism
 in-group collectivism
 62, 64*t*
 institutional collectivism
 62, 64*t*
vs. individualism 16, 17,
 190, 279*t*
- communicating across
 cultures 188–90, 324
see also European
 eSports League for
 Video Gaming;
 Future+ Project;
 meta-communication
 skills; offshoring to
 India; Sino-British
 collaborative workshop
- communitarianism 280*f*,
 281*t*, 292
- comparative management
 studies
 cross-national comparison
 18
 emic approach 19–21
 etic studies 15–20
 intercultural interaction
 18
 multiple cultures 18–19
 “national cultural models”
 16–19
- competencies and resources
 appropriateness 138
 case studies 10, 142–3
 competence
 frameworks 139–40
 competencies as
 resources 137–8
 effectiveness 138
 intercultural competence
 138, 191–3, 209
 intercultural competencies
 137, 138–9
 intercultural interaction
 competence (ICIC)
 138, 139, 142, 143,
 156–7
 intercultural management
 competencies 141,
 158–62*t*, 234–5
 message communication
 competencies 140,
 140*t*, 143
 rapport management
 competencies 140,
 143
see also adidas and
 Reebok; managing
 M&As; IKEA’s ethical
- controversies in Saudi
 Arabia
- complementarity 200–2
- complementarity and
 synergy
 case studies 11–12, 202,
 206–7, 208–9
 cultural complementarity
 200–2
 enriching nature of
 intercultural
 199–200
 synergy and intercultural
 synergy 202–9
see also Future+ Project;
 Japan Tobacco
 International; large
 infrastructure
 project in Vietnam
- conceptual frameworks 3
- Confucian culture cluster
 63*t*
- Cooper, C. L. 253–4
- corporate culture 285
- business management
 perspective 286
- codes of conduct 286–7
- corporate values 286,
 287–8, 288*t*, 289*f*
- human resources
 perspective 286
- implicit vs explicit
 cultures 285
- international transfer
 286
- as resource 285
- strong cultures 285–6
see also cultural and
 managerial dilemmas
- Corporate Social
 Responsibility (CSR)
 125, 126, 289
- framework of transnational
 CSR 127, 127*f*
- global CSR approach
 127–8
- local CSR approach 128
- prototypical approaches
 127
- transnational CSR
 approach 128
- corporate values 286,
 287–8, 288*t*, 289*f*
- cosmopolitans 206
- CQ *see* Cultural Intelligence
- creolization of culture 17
- CRM (customer relationship
 management) tools
 258

- Cross, B. J. 237
- Cross-Cultural Adaptability
Inventory 142
- Cross-Cultural
Kaleidoscope™ model
100–4, 101*f*
- cross-national comparison
research 18
- Crouch, C. 201
- CSR *see* Corporate Social
Responsibility
- cultural and managerial
dilemmas 12, 208–9,
287
- authors 291–2
- code of conduct 287,
288, 289–90, 290*f*
- company background
287
- corporate values 287–8,
288*t*, 289*f*
- cultural dimensions
292–3
- dilemma theory 293–5,
295*f*
- dilemmas 293
- questions 298
- recommended reading
295–7
- steps to reconciliation
294–5, 295*f*
- violation of code of
conduct 290–1, 291*f*
- cultural complementarity
200–2
- cultural dimensions
279–81, 279*t*, 280*f*,
281*t*
- GLOBE 17, 61–2
- Hofstede 16
- LESCANT model 34
- Trompenaars 16–17
- cultural diversity 167,
200, 306
- see also* diversity and
biculturalism through
organizational design;
going global vs staying
local; Japan Tobacco
International
- cultural dynamics model
116, 117*f*
- cultural identities 205–6,
251–2, 328–9
- Cultural Intelligence (CQ)
142–3, 167–8, 170–1,
174–5, 180–1
- capabilities 171–2, 174,
180–1*t*
- CQ Action/behaviour
172, 181*t*
- CQ Drive/motivation
171, 181*t*
- CQ Knowledge/cognition
171, 180*t*
- CQ Strategy/metacognition
171, 181*t*
- definition 174
- framework 180*f*
- see also* Thailand:
Cultural Intelligence;
WORLDWIDE Rx
- cultural marginals 206
- cultural self 100, 102
- cultural synergy 91–2, 204
- see also* Renault–Nissan:
strategic alliances and
organizational change
- culture clusters (GLOBE)
63*t*, 64*t*
- Cunliffe, A. 264, 268
- customer relationship
management (CRM)
tools 258
- questions
- Dalton, K. 236
- Davel, E. *et al.* 77
- Davidow, W. H. 92
- Davoine, E. 205, 236,
291–2, 295–6
- Day, C. R. 33–4
- De Luque, M. S. 62
- decision making 75, 107
- see also* change leadership
in Asia–Pacific M&As
- Degler, C. 194
- Delmestri, G. 78
- Den Hartog, D. N. 62
- Developmental Model
of Intercultural
Sensitivity 142
- diffuse *vs.* specific
interpersonal
involvement 16–17,
280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- dilemma theory 293–5, 295*f*
- see also* cultural and
managerial dilemmas
- direction 281*t*
- D'Iribarne, P. 20–1, 78,
232, 233–4, 236–7
- DiStefano, J. J. 205, 209,
311
- diversity and biculturalism
through organizational
design 11, 206–7,
256–7
- author 263
- biculturalism as focal
point for HRM 266–7
- the company 257–8
- competencies required
262–3
- network design and
technology 264–5
- organization theory 264
- organizational design
258–9, 259*f*, 260*t*,
262–3
- questions 269–70
- recommended reading
267–9
- resource-based view of
the firm 265, 267
- work practice in the
projects 260–2
- “doing good” 126
- Donaldson, T. 128
- Druker, J. 236
- Dunfee, T. W. 128
- Earley, P. C. *et al.* 142,
174, 180, 181–2
- Eastern European culture
cluster 63*t*
- eChina–UK Programme
see Sino-British
collaborative workshop
- Edwards, T. *et al.* 296
- effectiveness 138
- EGOS (European Group
for Organizational
Studies) 256
- Egypt: culture cluster 63*t*
- see also* space: the impact
of locations
- Emerson, V. 321, 322,
323, 324, 330
- emic approach to cultural
otherness 19–21
- Emotional Intelligence
(EQ) 180
- empathy 157, 158, 162*t*,
323
- energy *see* international
M&As: German–
Bulgarian–Romanian
case study
- environment *see*
harmonizing
expectations
- ethics *see* cultural and mana-
gerial dilemmas; IKEA's
ethical controversies
in Saudi Arabia; large
infrastructure project in
Vietnam

338 INDEX

- ethnographic approach 20
ethnorelativism 328
etic approach to comparative management studies 15–17, 19–20
criticisms of 17–19
European eSports League for Video Gaming 9, 22, 80–1
authors 90
the challenge 86–9
Electronic Sports League (ESL) as distinct company 85–6
eSports as end-used support service 83–5
gamer culture 84–5
intercultural synergy 91–2
internationalization of ESL 86–9, 87*t*, 88*t*
questions 93
recommended reading 92–3
video gaming as an industry 81–3, 82*t*
virtualization and international virtual teams 90–1
European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) 256
European perspective 4
explicit vs implicit cultures 285
external vs internal control 293
- face 189–90
Faurie, C. 78–9
femininity *vs.* masculinity 16
Fitzsimmons, S. R. *et al.* 206, 253, 324
flexibility, behavioural 157, 159*t*, 162*t*
Fowler, S. 193
France
corporate values 288*t*
culture cluster 63*t*
see also change implementation post-acquisition; Future+ Project; large infrastructure project in Vietnam; local multicultural teams in a multinational venture; Renault–Nissan: strategic alliances and organizational change
Franklin, P. 138, 139, 140, 156, 163, 188, 189, 190, 194
Friedman, T. L. 104
Fuller, B. R. 203
future orientation 62, 64*t*
Future+ Project 11, 202, 214–15
authors 221
case description 215–21
the company 215*f*, 216
difficult team work 215–21
French view 217–18
German view 217
intercultural complementarity 222–4, 224*f*
physical proximity *vs.* virtual distance 214–15
questions 225–6
recommended reading 224–5
team leaders' view 218–21
three-factor model 221–2, 221*f*, 222*t*
virtual teams 214
- Gajda, A. 59
Gannon, M. J. 204
Geertz, C. 20
gender egalitarianism 62, 64*t*
see also IKEA's ethical controversies in Saudi Arabia; Japan Tobacco International
Genkova, P. 59
Germanic culture cluster 63*t*
see also adidas and Reebok: managing M&As; cultural and managerial dilemmas; diversity and biculturalism through organizational design; European eSports League for Video Gaming; Future+ Project; going global vs staying local; international M&As: German–Bulgarian–Romanian case study; space: the impact of locations
Ghosn, C. 209, 321–2, 321*f*, 323, 324, 328, 329
global business services *see* offshoring to India
global leaders *see* Intercultural Competence for Global Leaders
global mindset 241, 250, 251–2
global nomads 206
global teams *see* Future+ Project; local multicultural teams in a multinational venture; WORLDWIDE Rx
globalization 256
GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research) study 17, 22, 61–5
cultural dimensions 17, 61–2
culture clusters 63*t*, 64*t*
Leadership Categorization Theory 64–5
goal orientation 157, 160*t*
Goffman, E. 189–90
going global vs staying local 12, 208, 272–3
authors 278
the challenge 276–8
company background 273–6
contrasting cultural profiles 279*t*, 280*f*, 281, 281*t*
cultural differences and consequences 279
questions 283–4
recommended reading 282–3
reconciling tensions 281–2
role of cultural values in performance management 282*t*
The Guardian 122*t*
Gudykunst, W. B. *et al.* 139, 191, 192*f*
Gundersen, A. 91, 92

- Hackl, V. 113
- Hall, E. T. 21, 113, 114,
115, 117–18, 281
- Hall, M. R. 114, 115
- Hammer, M. R. 191,
192*f*
- Hampden-Turner, C. 19,
205, 208, 224–5, 281,
283, 292, 294, 296–7,
311
- Hannerz, U. 18
harmonizing expectations
8, 21, 28
authors 33–4
compensation issues 33
cultural differences:
LESCANT model 34
need for laboratory in
China 29–30
NSF International 28–9
questions 36–7
recommended reading
35–6
staffing in China 30–3
- Harris, P. 204
- Haupt, U. 221
- HEFCE *see* Higher
Education Funding
Council for England
- Heisenberg, W. 201
- Helin, S. 297
- Henry, A. 234
- Heyer, K. 259
- higher education *see* Sino-
British collaborative
workshop
- Higher Education Funding
Council for England
(HEFCE) 38–9, 40
- Hofstede, G. *et al.* 15, 16,
17, 19, 104–5, 114,
190, 204, 281, 294
- Honigman, J. J. 203
- House, R. J. *et al.* 16, 17,
61–2, 65, 190
- human resources (HR)
see adidas and
Reebok: managing
M&As; diversity and
biculturalism through
organizational design;
going global vs staying
local; harmonizing
expectations;
Japan Tobacco
International; local
multicultural teams in a
multinational venture
- Human Rights Watch 125
- humane leadership style
65
- humane orientation 62, 64*t*
- hypernorms 126–7
- ICIC *see* intercultural
interaction competence
- IKEA's ethical controversies
in Saudi Arabia 9,
23, 121
authors 125
case situation 121–5,
122*t*
the challenge 125
company background
122–3
“doing good” and
“avoiding harm” 126
ethical variation across
cultures 120–1
hypernorms 126–7
IKEA's Swedish legacy
123–4
prototypical CSR
approaches 127–8
questions 129–30
recommended reading
128
Saudi Arabia's cultural
traditions 124–5
- implicit vs explicit cultures
285
- in-group collectivism 62,
64*t*
- inclusion 124, 250–1,
251*f*, 257
- India: culture 63*t*, 190*t*,
191
see also offshoring to
India
- individualism 107
vs. collectivism 16, 17,
190, 279*t*
vs. communitarianism
280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- indulgence *vs.* restraint 16
- infrastructure *see* large
infrastructure project
in Vietnam
- INSEAD 323
- institutional
collectivism 62, 64*t*
- Integrative Social Contracts
Theory (ISCT) 126
- intercultural collaboration
see large infrastructure
project in Vietnam;
Sino-British
collaborative workshop
- intercultural competence
138, 209
training techniques
191–3, 192*f*, 193*t*
- Intercultural Competence
for Global Leaders
143, 175
- intercultural competencies
137, 138–9
see also adidas and
Reebok: managing
M&As
- intercultural complementarity
200, 222–4, 224*f*
see also Future+ Project
Intercultural Development
Inventory 142
- intercultural interaction
18, 224
- intercultural interaction
competence (ICIC)
138, 139, 142, 143,
156–7
- ABC components 139
see also Cultural Intelligence
- intercultural management
competencies 141,
156–8, 158–62*t*, 235
- Intercultural Readiness
Check 142
- intercultural synergy 91–2,
202–3, 204–5, 207,
235–6
- interculturality, enriching
nature of 199–200
- internal vs external control
293
- International Competency
Framework 142,
158–62*t*, 207
- international M&As:
German–Bulgarian–
Romanian case
study 18, 22, 51–2
authors 59
Bulgarian employees
56–7
cultural patterns and
expressions 61–5,
63–4*t*
German company
background 52–6
post-merger integration
59–61
questions 67
recommended reading
66–7
Romanian employees
58–9

340 INDEX

- The International Profiler 142, 158
 interpretative approach to culture 233–4
 involvement 17, 280*f*, 281*t*
 ISCT (Integrative Social Contracts Theory) 126
 IT (information technology) *see* change leadership in Asia–Pacific M&As; diversity and biculturalism through organizational design; European eSports League for Video Gaming; Future+ Project
 Italy *see* going global vs staying local
- Jack, G. 204
 Jackson, T. 272, 282
 Japan
 culture 63*t*, 272
Keiretsu system 322
see also going global vs staying local; Japan Tobacco International; Renault–Nissan: strategic alliances and organizational change; space: the impact of locations
 Japan Tobacco International (JTI) 11, 206, 240–1
 acquisition and integration of Gallaher 242–4
 author 250
 company background 241–2
 cultural differences and consequences 250–1
 diversity within JTI 244–8, 245*f*, 246*f*
 future challenges 248–9
 global mindset 241, 250, 251–2
 HR system 247–8
 multicultural identities 251–2
 questions 254
 recommended reading 253–4
- Javidan, M. 62, 250
Journal of International Business Studies 200
- Kainzbauer, A. 179
 Kakar, K. 194
 Kakar, S. 194
 Kelley, C. 142
 Kempf, M. 155
 Kitayama, S. 105
 Kleinberg, J. 205
 Kluckhohn, F. R. 16
 Korea: culture cluster 63*t*
see also WORLDWIDE Rx
 Korine, H. *et al.* 330
 Kühlmann, T. 142, 156–7
 Kusstatscher, V. 253–4
- Lafarge Group *see* change implementation post-acquisition
 Landis, D. 139
 large infrastructure project in Vietnam 11, 202, 228–9
 author 232–3
 the challenge 230–2
 company background 229–30
 ethics of loyalty, ethics of purity 234
 intercultural synergy 235–6
 interpretative approach to culture 233–4
 questions 238
 recommended reading 236–8
 transfer of management practices 234–5
- Latin American culture cluster 63*t*
 Latin European culture cluster 63*t*
 Laurent, A. 15
 leadership *see* GLOBE; Intercultural Competence for Global Leaders; offshoring to India; Renault–Nissan: strategic alliances and organizational change; Thailand: Cultural Intelligence
 Leadership Categorization Theory (GLOBE) 64–5
 learning 47
 Lee, J. A. 116, 118
 Lee, Y. T. 206, 250
 Leech, G. 189
- Lengnick-Hall, M. L. *et al.* 268
 LESCANT model 34
 Levinson, S. C. 190
 Levy, O. *et al.* 254
 Lim, E. N. 35–6
 Liu, S. *et al.* 114, 115
 Livermore, D. *et al.* 142, 170, 172–3
- local multicultural teams in a multinational venture 12, 209, 300–1
 author 306
 the challenge 305–6
 company background 301–5
 cultural differences 306–7
 MBI model 209, 307, 307*f*, 308–10*t*
 organizational culture 300–1
 questions 311–15
 recommended reading 307, 311
- logistics *see* Thailand: Cultural Intelligence
 long-/short-term orientation 16
 Lord, R. 64–5
- McElroy, J. H. 194
 McGregor, J. 35
 McSweeney, B. 17
 Mahadevan, J. *et al.* 206–7, 263, 268–9
 Maher, K. 64–5
 Malekzadeh, A. 60–1, 61*f*
 Malone, M. S. 92
 Maloney, M. 311
 management practices transfer *see* adidas and Reebok: managing M&As; cultural and managerial dilemmas; going global vs staying local; intercultural management competencies; large infrastructure project in Vietnam; local multicultural teams in a multinational venture
 managerial capability 328
 manufacturing *see* change implementation post-acquisition; Future+ Project

- Mapping Bridging
Integrating (MBI)
process model 209,
307, 307*f*, 308–10*t*
- marketing *see* change
leadership in Asia–
Pacific M&As;
harmonizing
expectations
- Markus, H. R. 105
- Martin, K. 47–8
- M&As *see* mergers and
acquisitions (M&As)
- masculinity *vs.* femininity
16
- Maslow, A. H. 203
- Matabazi, E. 74
- Matten, D. 127
- Mayrhofer, U. 209, 327,
329, 330–1
- Maznevski, M. L. 38, 205,
209, 225, 311
- MBI *see* Mapping Bridging
Integrating (MBI)
process model
- Mercier, S. 288
- mergers and acquisitions
(M&As) 51–2, 148
post-merger integration
(PMI) 51, 59–61
stages 51, 59–60, 60*f*
see also adidas and
Reebok: managing
M&As; change
implementation
post-acquisition;
change leadership
in Asia–Pacific
M&As; international
M&As; German–
Bulgarian–Romanian
case study; Japan
Tobacco International;
Renault–Nissan:
strategic alliances and
organizational change
- Merk, V. 291–2
- message communication
competencies 140,
140*t*, 143
- meta-communication skills
157, 158, 161*t*, 162*t*
- metacognition 181*t*
- Metro* 121, 122–3
- Meyers, J. W. 142
- Middle Eastern culture
cluster 63*t*
- Miska, C. 125
- MNCs *see* multinational
companies
- monochronic use of time
115
- Moon, J. 127
- Moran, A. M. 204
- Moran, R. T. *et al.* 105
- Mosakowski, E. 182
- motivation 181*t*
- multicultural diversity
205–6
see also diversity and
biculturalism through
organizational design;
Japan Tobacco
International;
Renault–Nissan:
strategic alliances and
organizational change
- multicultural identities and
global mindset 251–2,
328–9
- multinational companies
(MNCs)
corporate culture 286
ethical standards 120
intercultural management
competencies 141
see also change leadership
in Asia–Pacific M&As;
cultural and managerial
dilemmas; IKEA's
ethical controversies
in Saudi Arabia;
Japan Tobacco
International; local
multicultural teams in a
multinational venture
- multiple cultures research
18–19
- Nahavandi, A. 60–1, 61*f*
- Netherlands: culture
cluster 63*t*
see also local multicultural
teams in a
multinational venture
- network organizations 264
- networking 116
- neutral *vs.* affective cultures
16, 280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- Newman, K. L. 204
- Niffenegger, P. *et al.* 182
- Nissan *see* Renault–Nissan:
strategic alliances and
organizational change
- non-judgmentalness 157,
158, 159*t*, 161*t*
- Nordic culture cluster
63*t*
- NSF International
see harmonizing
expectations
- OD *see* organizational
development
- offshoring to India 10,
143, 184–5
authors 188
case situation 185–6
the challenge 186–8
communicating across
cultures 188–90
cultural issue 185, 186
cultures of USA and
India 190–1, 190*t*
intercultural competence
development 191–3,
192*f*, 193*t*
language issue 185,
186, 187
questions 195
reasons 184–5
recommended reading
193–4
time difference 185,
186
- Ohlsson, B. 123
- organization theory 264
- organizational culture *see*
adidas and Reebok:
managing M&As;
change implementation
post-acquisition;
cultural and managerial
dilemmas; IKEA's
ethical controversies
in Saudi Arabia;
international
M&As; German–
Bulgarian–Romanian
case study; local
multicultural teams in a
multinational venture;
Renault–Nissan:
strategic alliances and
organizational change;
Thailand: Cultural
Intelligence
- organizational design
see diversity and
biculturalism through
organizational design
- organizational development
(OD)
defined 327

342 INDEX

- organizational development (OD) (*cont.*)
 intercultural organizational development 3–4, 327–8
see also adidas and Reebok: managing M&As; Renault–Nissan: strategic alliances and organizational change
- organizations, defined 3
- otherness and discord
 case studies 8–9, 21–3
 emic approach to cultural otherness 19–21
 etic approach to comparative management studies 15–20
- Palazzo, B. 297
- Parsons, T. 16
- participative leadership style 65
- particularism *vs.* universalism 17, 280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- performance orientation 47, 62, 64*t*
- Perlmutter, H. V. 272, 283
- Peterson, M. F. 77, 204
- pharmaceuticals *see* cultural and managerial dilemmas; WORLDWIDE Rx
- Phillips, M. E. 18–19
- Plaister–Ten, J. 100
- planning *see* Sino–British collaborative workshop
- Pleskova, M. 125
- Poirson, P. 74
- politeness theory 189–90
- polychronic use of time 115
- post-merger integration in international M&As 51, 59–61
see also local multicultural teams in a multinational venture
- power distance 16, 47, 62, 64*t*
- Primecz, H. *et al.* 204, 233, 237
- project management
see diversity and biculturalism through organizational design; Future+ Project
- proxemics 113
- public health *see* harmonizing expectations
- public relations *see* IKEA’s ethical controversies in Saudi Arabia
- Quinn, B. 123, 125
- rapport management
 competencies 140, 143
- RBV *see* resource-based view
- Reebok *see* adidas and Reebok: managing M&As
- relationship orientation 47
- Renault–Nissan:
 strategic alliances and organizational change 209, 317–18
 authors 327
 Cross-Functional Teams (CFT) 324, 326
 cultural change and transcultural leadership 321–3
 failure rates 318
 intercultural structuring and processing 324–6, 325*f*, 326*t*
 international strategic alliance 320–1
 managerial capabilities and ethno-relativism 328–9
 organizational development 209, 327–8
 questions 331
 recommended reading 329–31
 Renault–Nissan Alliance Board 324, 325*f*, 326*t*
 Renault–Nissan and the automotive market 318–20, 319*t*, 320*t*
 strategic alliances defined 317
 resource-based view (RBV) 137–8, 265, 267
 resources 137–8, 285
 restraint *vs.* indulgence 16
- retailing *see* adidas and Reebok: managing M&As; IKEA’s ethical controversies in Saudi Arabia
- Rhinesmith, S. 35
- Ringstrom, A. 123
- Rizk, S. 323
- Robert, J. G. 283
- Romani, L. 208, 306
- Romania *see* international M&As: German–Bulgarian–Romanian case study
- Rousseau, D. M. 269
- Routamaa, V. *et al.* 66–7
- Russia: culture cluster 63*t*
see also space: the impact of locations
- Sabuni, N. 123
- Sackmann, S. A. 18–19
- Salk, J. 18
- Sandström, J. 297
- Saudi Arabia *see* IKEA’s ethical controversies in Saudi Arabia
- Scandinavia *see* change leadership in Asia–Pacific M&As
- Schein, E. H. 105
- Scholz, C. 92–3
- Scholz, T. M. 83, 90, 93
- Schreiber, C. 179
- Schweiger, U. 116, 118
- Segal, J. 237
- self-protective leadership style 65
- sequential *vs.* synchronic time management 17, 280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- service industry *see* local multicultural teams in a multinational venture; offshoring to India
- Shils, E. A. 16
- Shore, B. 237
- Shore, L. M. *et al.* 250, 251*f*, 254
- short-/long-term orientation 16
- Sino–British collaborative workshop 8, 21–2, 38
 author 46–7
 eChina–UK Programme 38–40, 39*t*
 learning 47

- planning 39–46, 41–2*t*,
 43–5*t*
 power distance 47
 questions 49–50
 recommended reading
 47–9
 task and relationship
 orientation 47
 sociability 157, 158, 158*t*,
 162*t*
 social learning 201
 Sondergaard, M. 204
 South America *see*
 WORLDWIDE Rx
 Southeast Asian culture
 cluster 63*t*
 space: cultural dimension
 113
 micro-space 114
 proxemics 113
 territoriality 113–14
 and time 115–16
 space: the impact of
 locations 9, 23, 107–8
 authors 113
 Buenos Aires 112
 Cairo 111–12
 case description 108–9
 conclusions 112–13
 cultural dimension of
 space 113–14
 cultural dimension of
 time 114–16
 Moscow 109–11
 questions 118
 recommended reading
 117–18
 Tokyo 111
 trust building 107, 108,
 113, 116, 117
 specific *vs.* diffuse
 interpersonal
 involvement 16–17,
 280*f*, 281*t*, 292
 Spencer-Oatey, H. 46,
 48–9, 138, 139, 140,
 163, 189, 190, 194
 Stahl, G. K. *et al.* 127,
 127*f*, 128, 139–40, 142,
 156–7, 163, 200, 209,
 225, 254, 323, 328,
 329, 331
 Starosta, W. J. 139
 Statistic Brain 184
 status 16–17, 280*f*, 281*t*
 Steers, R. M. 204
 Stein, V. 90, 92
 Storti, C. 188, 194
 strategic alliances, defined
 317
see also Renault–Nissan:
 strategic alliances and
 organizational change
 Strodtbeck, F. L. 16
 Sweden: culture cluster
 63*t*
see also IKEA's ethical
 controversies in
 Saudi Arabia; local
 multicultural teams in a
 multinational venture
 Switzerland: culture cluster
 63*t*
see also Japan Tobacco
 International; Thailand:
 Cultural Intelligence
 synchronic time *see*
 sequential *vs.* synchronic
 time management
 synergy 2–3, 202–5
 cultural synergy 91–2,
 204
 defined 203, 323
 framework conditions and
 interactants 205–7,
 209
 intercultural synergy
 91–2, 202–3, 204–5,
 207, 235–6
 processes and methods
 207–9
 Tan, J. S. 35–6
 Tang, M. 48–9
 Tarique, I. 162
 Taylor, T. L. 84, 85, 93
 TCIs *see* third culture
 individuals
 TCKs *see* third culture
 kids
 TCN (third-country
 nationals) 329
 team-oriented leadership
 style 65
 teams *see* change
 implementation
 post-acquisition;
 change leadership in
 Asia–Pacific M&As;
 Future+ Project; local
 multicultural teams
 in a multinational
 venture; virtual teams;
 WORLDWIDE Rx
The Telegraph 122*t*
 territoriality 113–14
 Thailand: Cultural
 Intelligence 10, 143,
 174–5
 authors 179–80
 case description
 175–9
 Cultural Intelligence
 180–1, 180–1*t*, 180*f*
 questions 182
 recommended
 reading 181–2
 Thailand: culture
 cluster 63*t*
 third-country nationals
 (TCN) 329
 third culture individuals
 (TCIs) 205, 328–9
 third culture kids
 (TCKs) 205, 328–9
 Thomas, A. 20
 Thomas, D. C. 266, 267,
 268, 329, 330
 three-factor model 221–2,
 221*f*, 222*t*
 Tian, X. 36
 time
 chronemics 115
 cultural dimension 17,
 114–16, 280*f*, 281*t*,
 292
 past, present, future 17
 sequential *vs.* synchronic
 time management 17,
 280*f*, 281*t*, 292
 and space 115–16
Time 122*t*
 Ting-Toomey, S. 49, 139,
 190
 tobacco *see* Japan Tobacco
 International
 transportation *see* large
 infrastructure project
 in Vietnam
 Triandis, H. C. *et al.*
 19–20, 105
 Trompenaars, F. 16–17,
 19, 208, 224–5, 234,
 237–8, 278, 279, 281,
 283, 292, 294, 296–7,
 311
 trust building 107, 108,
 113, 116, 117
 Tschang, F. T. 81–2
 Tung, R. L. 141, 200
 uncertainty avoidance 16,
 62, 64*t*
 understanding 189

344 INDEX

- United Arab emirates
(UAE) *see* going global
vs staying local
- United States: culture 63*t*,
190*t*, 191, 272
see also adidas and
Reebok: managing
M&As; cultural and
managerial dilemmas;
going global vs staying
local; harmonizing
expectations;
offshoring to India;
WORLDWIDE Rx
- universalism *vs.*
particularism 17,
280*f*, 281*t*, 292
- US-American DFC
Intelligence 80
- Usunier, J.-C. 116, 118
- value-based leadership
style 65
- values 137, 294
see also cultural and
managerial dilemmas;
going global vs staying
local; IKEA's ethical
controversies in Saudi
Arabia
- Van Den Bergh, R. 208,
278
- Van Dyne, L. 172
- Van Weerdenburg, O.
142
- Varma, P. K. 194
- Varner, I. 36
- Verluyten, P. 36
- Victor, D. A. 33–4, 36
- video gaming industry *see*
European eSports
League for Video
Gaming
- Vietnam *see* large
infrastructure project
in Vietnam
- virt.cube framework 90–1
- virtual teams 90–1, 214
- Voigt, A. 163
- Von Weizsäcker, C. F. 201
- Von Weltzien Hoivik, H.
127
- Walgenbach, P. 78
- Westwood, R. 204
- Wiltbank, R. 329–30
- Winch, G. M. *et al.* 238
- The Wire* 122*t*
- Wolf, E. R. 17
- Wooliams, P. 297
- World Values Survey
124
- WORLDWIDE Rx 10,
142
authors 170
case situation 168
the challenge 168–70
Cultural Intelligence
(CQ) 170–2
question 173
recommended
reading 172–3
- WorldWork Ltd. 142,
158–62*t*, 207
- Yagi N. 205
- Zellmer-Bruhn, M. 311