

Carrying Cultural Baggage: the contribution of socio-cultural anthropology to cross-cultural coaching

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural awareness of professionals working in corporates; business consultants; coaching bodies and those practicing coaching and mentoring. Given the multicultural nature of today's workforce, it is becoming increasingly important for companies and coaches alike to take into account how cross-cultural differences may affect daily working practices. The study drew on a review of current research into cultural dimensions and looked into the complex relationship between personality and culture – our '**cultural baggage**'. In order to explore the opinions and cultural awareness of the study participants, a cultural awareness questionnaire was sent out to survey respondents who had some recognisable expertise on the subject under investigation. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify themes and orientations to cross-cultural issues in terms not only of communality but also of paradoxes. From the analysis, three main themes emerged which provided a framework for the presentation of the results which identified the varying levels of cross-cultural awareness of professionals working in corporates, business consultants, coaching bodies and those practicing coaching and mentoring. The results also highlighted a high level of recognition of cultural dilemmas and a perceived need and willingness to address and reconcile them. However, the diversity of opinions about the potential benefits of specific methods of addressing cultural dilemmas suggested considerable uncertainty about dealing with cross cultural issues.

Key Words: Cross-Cultural, Cultural Baggage, Cultural Dimensions, Coaching, Mentoring, Awareness, Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the emerging discipline of cross-cultural coaching (Rosinski 2003) and to establish the levels of awareness about, and attitudes to cross-cultural issues; the patterns and/or relationships between awareness, attitudes and cultural dimensions among businesses and business consultants, coaches, mentors and coaching/mentoring organisations. (Trompenaars and Hampden-turner, 1997; Hofstede, 1980)

Cross-cultural coaching is about how cultural differences not only affect the daily lives of people, but also about being aware of cultural differences and the effect they can have on the process of managing others and doing business in general. In today's global economy organizations understand that to sustain successful and resilient businesses and to keep their competitive edge, they must develop employees who understand their global business, and employ people with global skills.

Training, often supported by coaching and/or mentoring is an approach more frequently practiced by companies; however, a training approach which is effective with employees from one culture may not necessarily be effective with employees from another. In other words, a formalized approach may be adequate for a group of employees holding similar pedagogical preferences and/or cultural orientations, but not for a group where these views are diverse and/or heterogeneous. (Rosinski, 2003; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Consequently, global businesses are turning to and utilizing those trained in cross-cultural skills, for example socio-cultural anthropologists and interculturalists, as a way of minimizing conflicts between the corporate culture and the cultures of their employees. The rationale being that whereas traditional coaching and mentoring leans towards values and assumptions within the confines of one's own culture, these 'specialists' are experts in the study of customs

and cultures of groups in settings that vary from non-industrial societies to modern urban centres. They are trained to look at the 'larger' societal context; they have a multi-cultural perspective, and they use techniques such as participant observation which exposes what people do and want, in ways that perhaps surveys and focus groups do not i.e., they endeavour to put the insights gained to practical use by helping people from very different cultural backgrounds to work together.

Rosinski (2003) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) have developed pioneering work in cross-cultural competencies and coaching methods. At a fundamental level, their work has been based on the works of socio-cultural anthropologists Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994). Their contribution in overcoming cultural miscommunication, tension and conflict, including the perils of stereotyping and 'mono-culturalism', has helped to formulate and explore the hypothesis of this study.

What is culture?

The word 'culture' comes from the Latin '*colere*' which means to inhabit, to cultivate, to honour. Different definitions of culture reflect different theories for understanding and/or for valuing human activity. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner define culture as: "[...] *a shared system of meanings. Culture dictates what we pay attention to, how we act and what we value*". (p.6) They further suggest that "*a useful way to think about where culture comes from is the following: culture is the way in which a group of people solve problems and reconcile dilemmas*". A similar definition of culture is offered by Rosinski: "*A group's culture is the set of unique characteristics that distinguishes its members from another group*". (p.20) Hofstede (1991) refers to 'culture' as a system of meanings, values and beliefs, expectations and goals which are shared by members of other groups. He defines this as a "*product of the collective programming of the mind*" which is acquired through regular interaction with other members of the group – not dissimilar to Levi-Strauss's (1966) collective constructs.

Cultural baggage: a by-product of cultural systems

Socio-anthropological thinking is based on the premise that all humans are born with the same basic physical characteristics, but depending on where they grow up, each individual is exposed to different climates, foods, languages, religious beliefs etc. Therefore, '*are we really self-made or did our parents, teachers, families and friends have a hand in it?*' (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, p.54)

The key objective of anthropology is to understand the common constraints within which human beings operate, as well as the differences which are evident between particular societies and cultures. Hall (1963) argues that 'interest in other cultures is probably as old as the exposure of human tribes to other tribes, and therefore, an exposure to foreignness'. Thus, one could argue that the socio-anthropological perspective on culture takes a more holistic view, describing culture as a pattern of learned and shared behaviours of people and/or groups consisting of belief systems and languages; and of social relationships be they personal, organizational, or institutional. (Hall, 1963; Hall and Hall, 1987; Hofstede, 1980; Kondo, 1990; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Schwartz, 1994) Therefore, at a fundamental level, it could be argued that culture is a representation of a complete way of life of a people who share the same attitudes, values and practices.

Cskiszentmaiha (1997) makes the distinction of 'identity' by using snowflakes as a metaphor: "*They look identical as they fall, but taking a closer look, we soon discover that they are not identical*". (p.7) Hence, rather than seeing identity as a single unitary self, perhaps cultural identity should be viewed as being multi-faceted, i.e. acknowledging that people have a number of selves or identities depending on context and setting. For example, the biggest barrier individuals and/or employees encounter is not necessarily that they come from different parts of the world, or that they speak a different language or even occupy a different physical space, it is the baggage they carry in their own cultural suitcases which needs to be explored.

Hofstede argues that as individuals, we generally only become aware of our own culture when confronted with another; likewise, Levi-Strauss (1966) maintains that when 'Hot'

societies (*change and progress oriented*) meet 'Cold' societies (*traditionalists*) they will inevitably encounter culture differences such as culture shock, cultural stereotyping, etc.

The different layers of culture

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner maintain that what people expect depends on where they come from, and the meanings they give to what they have or are experiencing. They argue that "expectations occur on many different levels, from concrete, explicit level to implicit and subconscious ones". (p. 21) Furthermore, they describe culture as consisting of various levels; and because cultural differences can be quite distinct, it could be argued that people view the world through culturally tinted lenses, i.e. the lenses tint their values, relationships and assumptions. For example, from the most basic perspective, culture consists of two levels of values; an invisible and a visible level (see Fig.1); the rationale for which could be explained as culture operating on both a conscious and an unconscious level. One could also say that this view of culture as merely a two-level system is at best too simplistic or *basic* for a meaningful model of culture; unlike Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's model of culture (Fig.2) which is likened to an onion, presenting itself in layers.

Fig.1 A model of Culture
(Adapted from Edgar Schein et al 1992)

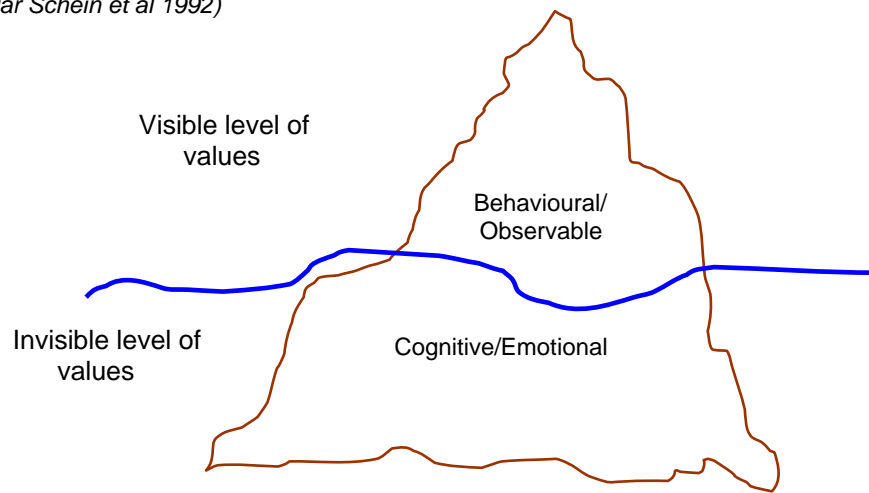
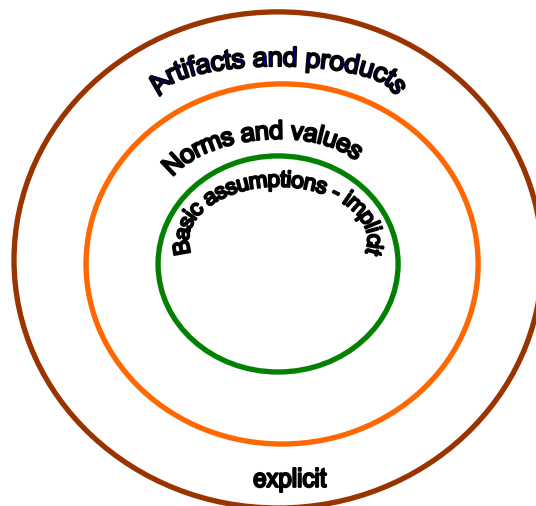


Fig.2 A Model of Culture (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997)



[...The outer layers are the products and artefacts that symbolise the deeper, more basic values and assumptions about life. The different layers are not independent from one another, but are complementary [...]. The shared meanings that are the core of the culture are man-made; are incorporated into people within a culture yet transcend the people in culture. (p. 27)...]

The onion model extends the core level of the simple two-layered model (Fig.1); the concept being that culture is made up of basic assumptions at a core level. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's views have similarities to the 'values' in Hofstede's model who presents a similar onion-like model of culture, in which he describes his view of culture as a system that can be peeled, layer by layer, in order to reveal the content. At the core of his model of culture are values which form the most hidden layer of culture and which represent the ideas that people have about how things should be. As a result, Hofstede places more emphasis on the assumption that it is these hidden values which strongly influence behaviour. Hofstede's most cited work is linked to his cultural dimensions model of work-related values in which he divides culture into five dimensions (Fig. 3):

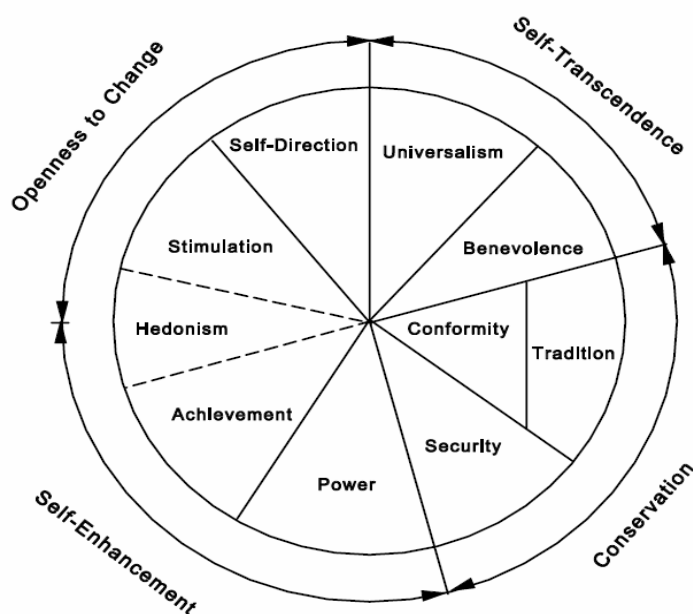
Fig.3 Geert Hofstede – 5 Cultural Dimensions Model (1991)

Source: Hofstede, G. H. (1991), *Cultures and Organizations – Software of the Mind*, London: McGraw-Hill

- **Power Distance** focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society.
- **Individualism/Collectivism** focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships.
- **Masculinity/Femininity** focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance** focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society - i.e. unstructured situations.
- **Long-Term Orientation** focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values.

Schwartz's (1994) values theory has similarities to Hofstede's culture dimensions model in that it distinguishes between value differences and value dimensions. However, Schwartz's work is separated into an individual-level analysis and a culture-level analysis which differs from the works of Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden Turner who, it could be argued, have at times failed to clearly distinguish between these two levels, i.e. cultural values remain in practice, in spite of oversights and compromises; people experience strong emotional reactions when their cultural values are tarnished (*tinted glasses analogy*) or when their cultures' customary behaviours are ignored. According to Schwartz's theory (the data for which was collected in 63 countries with more than 60,000 individuals taking part), his 10 distinct values types are organized dynamically according to their mutual compatibilities and incompatibilities and can be classified according to their content as summarized in the two-dimensional model of relations in (Fig. 4) below. In this model, the two basic values dimensions are labelled '*openness to change versus conservation*', combining stimulation, self-direction and a part of hedonism with self enhancement combining achievement, and power together with the remainder of hedonism; and on the opposite side of the circle, '*self-transcendence versus self-enhancement*', which combines the value orientations of tradition, conformity and security and self-transcendence with universalism and benevolence.

Fig.4 Theoretical model of relations among motivational value types and two basic bipolar value dimensions



Source: Schwartz Value Inventory (Bilsky and Schwartz 1994)

Linking patterns and dimensions of culture

“Basic to understanding cultural change is the understanding that culture is a series of rules and methods which a society or organization has evolved to deal with the regular problems that face it”. (Trompenaars and Woolliams, 2003, p.363) According to Hall (1976) there are two classic dimensions of culture. He identifies the first dimension as high-context and low-context cultures, where the high and low contexted concepts relate mainly to the way in which information is communicated, i.e. the concept of language. Hall argues that the concept of language, which is located in the outer layer of the ‘onion’ model (referring to Hofstede (1991) ‘observable rituals’), is one of the most basic concepts of intercultural communication and miscommunication. For example, when people communicate, they often take for granted how much a listener knows about the subject under discussion. Hall maintains that in low-context communication, the listener knows very little and must be told practically everything; but that in high-context communication, the listener is already ‘contexted’ and therefore does not need to be given much background information. There is, however, little if any statistical data available which can identify whether a given country is located on either the high or low context dimension.

Hall and Hall’s (1990) second concept, i.e. monochronic and polychronic cultures (Fig. 5), was developed to describe some of the predictable patterns between cultures with differing time systems (see *Levi-Strauss (1966) ‘Hot and Cold Societies’*). Simply put, the monochronic time concept follows a ‘one thing at a time’ concept, whereas the polychronic concept focuses on multi-tasking. Although both concepts are constructive and useful, they are also somewhat ambiguous due to the lack of empirical data which makes these concepts more difficult to apply in research.

Fig.5 Common Time Differences in Business

Monochronic People	Polychronic People
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Highly distractible and subject to interruptions
Take time commitments seriously (deadlines, schedules)	Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved only if possible
Low-context and need information	High-context and already have information
Committed to the job	Committed to people
Adhere religiously to plans	Change plans often and easily
Concerned about not disturbing others; Follow rules of privacy and consideration	More concerned with relations (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
Show great respect for private property, seldom borrow or lend	Borrow and lend things often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Accustomed to short-term relationships	Strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

Source: Hall and Hall (1989)

In his chapter on 'How to Leverage Time Management Approaches' (p. 91-104), Rosinski argues that his concept of monochronic and polychronic cultures is not strictly equivalent to Hall's example. He argues that the notion of time is inherently ambiguous, and that a period of time and the activity attached to it is dependent on where the boundaries are set. He gives as an example, watching television whilst channel switching, arguing that watching television could be viewed as one activity or as a multiple activity, i.e. when switching channels the agent is watching several television programmes at once. Rosinski's interpretation therefore is that a monochronic culture can, at a deeper level, be both polychronic and monochronic.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) use a similar approach to time however, they refer to the same dimensions as sequential and synchronous. These dimensions of culture are part of their seven value orientations model which is not that dissimilar to Hofstede's five dimensions of culture.

Fig.6 Trompenaars and Hampden Turner – Overview of 'The Seven Dimensions of Culture'

Source: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997)
 (In-depth source: <http://www.trompenaars.net/index1.html> - 04.2)

Universalism vs. Particularism
 (What is more important – rules or relationships?)

Individualism vs. Communitarianism
 (Do we function in a group or as an individual?)

Specific vs. Diffuse cultures
 (How far do we get involved?)

Affective vs. Neutral cultures
 (Do we display our emotions?)

Achievement vs. Ascription
 (Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status or is it given to us?)

Sequential vs. Synchronic cultures
(Do we do things one at a time or several things at once?)

Internal vs. External control
(Do we control our environment or work with it?)

Cross-cultural dilemmas

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner argue that “Every culture distinguishes itself from others by the specific solutions it chooses to certain problems which reveal themselves as dilemmas” (p. 8); to this end, they have incorporated best management theories into their own analysis of the task of managing across cultures. These theories were realized by using a participant questionnaire profiler, which was based on their Seven Dimensions of Culture model and by incorporating Trompenaars and Woolliams framework for managing change across cultures (Fig.7)

Fig.7 The extreme stereotypes of corporate culture

The Incubator

This culture is like a leaderless team. This person-oriented culture is characterised by a low degree of both centralisation and formalisation. In this culture, the individualisation of all related individuals is one of the most important features. The organization exists only to serve the needs of its members.

The organization has no intrinsic values beyond these goals. The organization is an instrument for the specific needs of the individuals in the organization.

Responsibilities and tasks within this type of organization are assigned primarily according to the member's own preference and needs. Structure is loose and flexible control takes place through persuasion and mutual concern for the needs and values of other members.

Its main characteristics are:

- person oriented
- power of the individual
- self-realisation
- commitment to oneself
- professional recognition

The Guided Missile

This task-oriented culture has a low degree of centralisation and a high degree of formalisation. This rational culture is, in its ideal type, task and project oriented. ‘Getting the job done’ with ‘the right man in the right place’ are favourite expressions.

Organizational relationships are very results oriented, based on rational/instrumental considerations and limited to specific functional aspects of the persons involved. Achievement and effectiveness are weighted above the demands of authority, procedures or people. Authority and responsibility are placed where the qualifications lie, and they may shift rapidly as the nature of the [task] changes. Everything in the Guided Missile culture is subordinated to an all-encompassing goal.

The management of the organization is predominantly seen as a continuous process of solving problems successfully. The manager is a team leader, the commander of a commando unit, in whose hands lie absolute authority. This [task] oriented culture, because of its flexibility and dynamism, is highly adaptive but at the same time is difficult to manage. Decentralised control and management contribute to the shortness of channels of communications. The task-oriented culture is designed for a rapid reaction to extreme changes. Therefore, matrix and project types of organizations are favourite designs for the Guided Missile.

Its main characteristics are:

- task orientation
 - power of knowledge/expertise
 - commitment to (tasks)
 - management by objectives
 - pay for performance
-

The extreme stereotypes of corporate culture – cont'd.....

The Family Culture

The Family Culture is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and a low degree of formalisation. It generally reflects a highly personalised organization and is predominantly power oriented.

Employees in the 'family' seem to interact around the centralised power of father or mother. The power of the organization is based on an autocratic leader who, like a spider in a web, directs the organization. There are not many rules and thus there is little bureaucracy. Organizational members tend to be as near to the centre as possible, as that is the source of power. Hence the climate inside the organization is highly manipulative and full of intrigues. In this political system, the prime logic of vertical differentiation is hierarchical differentiation of power and status.

Its main characteristics are:

- power orientation
- personal relationships
- entrepreneurial
- affinity/trust
- power of person

The Eiffel Tower Culture

This role-oriented culture is characterised by a high degree of formalisation together with a high degree of centralisation and is symbolically represented by the Eiffel Tower. It is steep, stately and very robust. Control is exercised through systems of rules, legalistic procedures, assigned rights and responsibilities.

Bureaucracy and the high degree of formalisation make this organization inflexible. Respect for authority is based on the respect for functional position and status. The bureau or desk has depersonalised authority.

In contrast to highly personalised Family, members in the Eiffel Tower are continuously subordinated to universally applicable rules and procedures. Employees are very precise and meticulous. Order and predictability are highly valued in the process of managing the organization. Duty is an important concept for an employee in this role-oriented culture. It is duty one feels within oneself, rather than an obligation one feels towards a concrete individual.

Procedures for change tend to be cumbersome, and the role-oriented organization is slow to adapt to change.

Its main characteristics are:

- role orientation
- power of position/role
- job description/evaluation
- rules and procedures
- order and predictability

Source: Trompenaars and Woolliams (2003), Journal of Change Management Vol.3, 4, 361-375: Henry Stewart Publication

Similarly, Rosinski points out the dangers of our assumptions and beliefs systems when working with coachees from varying origins and backgrounds. He argues that by providing a framework for integrating coaching and cultural perspectives, i.e. examining numerous cultural orientations, styles and approaches to coaching, the development of a cross-cultural mindset will be facilitated. For example, he states:

Our identity could be viewed as this personal and dynamic synthesis of multiple cultures. Our behaviour will typically vary depending on the group we happen to be associated with [...]. The fact that our behaviours depend in part on the particular cultural context further justifies the need for coaches to integrate the cultural perspective into their practice. In some cases the obstacle to someone's progress may be cultural rather than psychological, thus calling for a different coaching dialogue. (p. 1)

Furthermore, he maintains that cultural awareness is more than just realizing another culture is different from our own; it is also about learning to value that other culture. He argues that culture is behind our behaviour, and often without our realization. It can influence how close we stand, how loud we speak, how we deal with conflict and as a result, by failing to understand how culture impacts our needs and preferences, culture can often lead us to misinterpret behaviour.

Methodology

The positivist and phenomenological paradigms are traditionally classified as *quantitative* or *qualitative* research methods and are respectively concerned with numbers and measurement or with description and understanding, appreciation, interpretation. It was important to consider all the key features of the two main paradigms to make certain that there were no contradictions or flaws in the methodology.

In formulating my methodology, I also needed to consider that I was on the one hand applying a basic exploratory approach, since there were so few previous studies which could be referred to for information in the specific context of cross-cultural coaching and, secondly, I was trying to quantify the level of cross-cultural awareness.

My next step, therefore, was to look into the range of theoretical frameworks which would help me to explore the general direction of the research hypothesis. Kerlinger (1986) suggests that good research questions for a positivistic study should:

- Express a relationship between variables
- Be stated in unambiguous terms in question form
- Imply the possibility of empirical testing

Consequently, a positivistic or quantitative theory is developed deductively using conceptual and theoretical structures, i.e. numerical variables, which are developed and tested by empirical observation. Therefore, prior to launching into my investigation, it was necessary to conduct a survey of the relevant literature to see if anyone else had already answered my question, or hypothesis.

As the research was exploratory, I focussed the design on two main aspects: the initial review of literature which drew on a broad array of coaching and socio-anthropological theories and studies, and the less extensive, but nevertheless in-depth cross-cultural coaching work of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), and Rosinski (2003). In turn, this provided the basis for the primary research, which took the form of a questionnaire which was sent to a small expert survey sample to identify cross-cultural themes and patterns. I also considered participative enquiry, in the form of follow-up interviews. However, I decided against this given the volume of data generated by the survey questionnaire and the extensive analysis that it required.

Survey sample

Robson (2002) argues that we form opinions and judge “*people, places and things on the basis of fragmentary evidence*”, and that the focus in the construction of a survey sample is on ‘external validity’ or ‘generalisability’. In other words, it is about the extent to which a given set of results can be said to be time or situation specific, and thus the ‘fragmentary evidence’ cannot be claimed to be representative of a population as a whole.

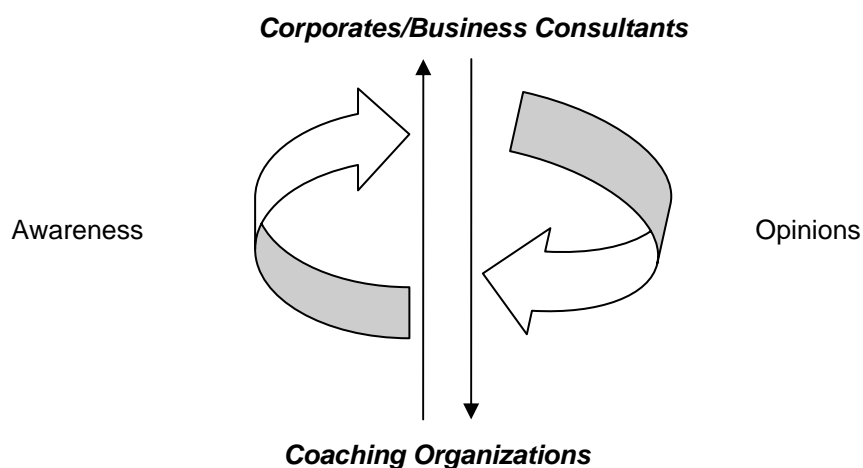
Robson divides sampling techniques into two broad categories: probability and non-probability. Probability sampling starts from the assumption that the “*probability of the selection of each respondent is known*” (p. 261) and as such is representative, which in this research was not an option, because of the shortage of any in-depth previous studies into the specific field of cross-cultural coaching. Therefore, a non-probability sampling approach was adopted, which was better suited to the exploratory nature of the research, as well as to the fact that with limited resources, the survey sample was likely to be small.

Robson identifies a wide range of approaches to non-probability sampling, among which there are a certain amount of overlapping features. The first two approaches, ‘quota’ and ‘dimensional’ sampling, are in essence trying to achieve the same objective as probability sampling. Neither of these approaches was an option, as there was insufficient previous research material in the specific context of cross-cultural coaching, from which groups of attitudes to, and beliefs about cross-cultural dilemmas and coaching could be identified.

The 'convenience' sampling approach is very basic, in that the sample is selected purely on the basis of the respondent being the most accessible, without any consideration of their experience, suitability or background. While there was an element of "trying to get a feel for the issues" (p. 265) involved in this research, (for which convenience sampling is often for a pre-investigative or pilot study) it was more important to ensure that the sample had some rationally identifiable expertise and potential interest in the broad area of cross-cultural issues. Robson argues that the term 'purposive' sampling is sometimes used to refer to all 'non-probability' approaches, but in his definition it is where a sample is chosen on the "researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest" (p. 265), and by extension to fit with the specific requirements of the research. Thus, the rationale for this approach is fundamentally different to any statistical approach which tries to generalize from a sample to a population, and was well suited to the exploratory nature of this study. One variation on purposive sampling is 'snowballing', in which one or more individual(s) (from the population of interest) are selected and interviewed, and then asked for a referral to other members of the population. However, as previously mentioned, I had already decided that this research was to be conducted on the basis of a self-report questionnaire rather than face to face interviews, therefore this was not a suitable approach. This was because it could be a source of obvious bias within the responses, given that a referral was more likely to be made to an acquaintance or friend and, by extension, someone who may well have had similar opinions.

To ensure that the survey participants had some recognizable expertise on the subject under investigation, I adopted the model in (Fig. 8) below. On the one hand, I was attempting to quantify levels of awareness of cross-cultural issues, as well as to explore the accompanying opinions, beliefs and assumptions, and how they relate to the dimensions of culture. I was also trying to make sure that the survey respondents would have an interest in this particular area of study.

Fig.8 Survey Sample and Questionnaire Model
(Source: Barbara StClaire 2005)



The survey sample was not only limited in size, but also in terms of the geographical make-up of the participants, who were mostly from the U.K. with the rest from continental Europe. By extension it would be difficult to generalise from the results, however, this was not the intention of the study. While gender could also be a factor which might influence attitudes and responses, the exploratory nature of the study precluded it from being a controlled variable at this point, although this issue could form the basis for further research.

I also thought it prudent to have a contingency plan in case there was a major imbalance between the number of questionnaires returned by each group. In the event that this occurred, I had considered two options. My first option would be to identify additional coaching organizations and corporates/businesses and consultants to whom I would send out the questionnaire. Secondly, I considered using semi-structured interviews to look for

anomalies within and between the responses to the questionnaire, which would then require a degree of modification to the methodology to incorporate a more qualitative, interpretative approach.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the initial questionnaire was to elicit the opinions of the survey participants in order to identify themes and orientations to cross-cultural issues, in terms of communality as well as potential paradoxes. It was also intended to see how these opinions and orientations fitted with responses to questions about the various cultural dimensions identified and developed by Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. The questionnaire was therefore divided into two parts. The first section addressed the opinions about attitudes, values and behaviours pertaining to culture in general, cultural dilemmas and, to cross-cultural coaching and training specifically. I also decided to use a number of similar questions to check for inconsistencies in responses, which might indicate either a paradox in terms of opinions, possibly a conflict between a 'norm' and a given individual's personal view, or could reflect a lack of appreciation for, or indeed indifference to, a given issue. The second section of the questionnaire was constructed on the basis of Hofstede's and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's cultural dimensions, and sought to elicit culture-specific values, beliefs and assumptions which could influence cross-cultural interaction within a professional environment.

Results, discussions and recommendations

I began this study from the perspective that while there has been some research into mentoring and coaching, there appeared to be little that focussed specifically on cross-cultural influences. In my review of the available literature, it became increasingly clear that the integration of a cultural perspective into coaching was very much at the 'pioneering' stage. The main aims of this study were to try and establish levels of awareness about, and attitudes to cross-cultural issues; and to study the patterns and/or relationships between awareness, attitudes and the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner among businesses and business consultants, and coaching organizations.

In analyzing the responses to the questionnaire, it was evident that there was a high level of recognition of the importance of cross-cultural issues, and the need to address and reconcile them. However it was very difficult to define or quantify levels of cultural awareness, which was to some extent unsurprising given the complexity of the issues involved. But as I outlined in the methodology, a major objective was also to explore the quality of awareness and understanding of cultural dilemmas and dimensions. In this respect, the first section of the questionnaire (on attitudes to culture and potential cross-cultural training solutions) was very instructive in terms of perceptions about the relationship between culture and personality. In my opinion, the most notable contrast was that there was considerably greater agreement that culture shapes the personality and a lot more uncertainty about how the individual shapes culture. This impression was further reinforced by the general agreement that managers from different cultures do not necessarily find it easy to adapt their behaviour to fit the different needs of another culture. From a coaching perspective, it suggests some attention needs to be paid to how an individual perceives and relates to his/her culture. For example, there is a clear difference between seeing culture as providing a framework for social interaction, which is constantly evolving, and on the other hand perceiving culture as providing a set of social constraints. In either case, there may be some elements of our culture, which at an individual level are considered to be important in our everyday lives, while there are others which may be difficult to accept, which could be sources of tension with other members of our culture. Given that such perceptions may be operating partly at a subconscious level, this may not be easy to establish. But they appear to me to be a significant element in the process of gaining a better understanding of our cultural baggage, i.e. in how we synthesize the myriad of cultural groupings to which we are exposed on a daily basis.

There was greater diversity of opinion about the benefits of specific cross-cultural training solutions, and when, where and how they might be applied. The initial conclusion that can be

drawn is this shows that the process of integrating the cross-cultural domain into both business and coaching practice is still at an early stage of development.

As far as improving the general awareness and understanding of the benefits of cross-cultural training, three sets of responses in the first section seem to me to define some of the issues that need to be addressed. Firstly the fact that half of the respondents believed that cultural issues within organisations are dealt with only if they relate to behavioural issues is indicative of a certain level of resistance to dealing with these issues, which may be due to an appreciation of the complexity of such issues. On the other hand, if cultural issues in some organizations are only addressed when there is a behavioural conflict, then this will tend to cast them in negative light. Hence it does lead to the conclusion that some organizations are not sufficiently aware that ignoring and playing down cultural differences, as well as evaluating them negatively is a major contributor to miscommunication, misunderstanding and conflict. Secondly, while coaches largely agreed that business managers recognise that diversity training should now include cross-cultural training for employees sent on global assignments, the business organization responses were much divided. This leads me to conclude that some businesses are either unaware, or possibly not persuaded of the benefits of this specific approach. Nevertheless this set of responses, and the fact that none of the respondents disagreed that incorporating the dilemmas deriving from the differences in cultural dimensions help organisations to integrate their cultural orientations suggests that the key area of uncertainty among businesses and coaches is the method and/or models of integrating cultural dilemmas. The point that this suggests to me is, that before any attempt is made to develop the skills necessary to negotiate the differences between cultures, a greater awareness of how we negotiate difference in our own culture is required. This is to say we need to be more consciously and self-critically aware of the assumptions that underlie our habitual responses and modes of interaction, in other words our cultural baggage. In principal this is already the main focus of traditional coaching and mentoring. But I believe considerably more research needs to be conducted into how these methods and skills can be developed to take account of and integrate cross-cultural issues and dilemmas.

From national to cross-cultural perspectives

Cross-cultural research has largely focused on national differences because it is much easier to establish a person's nationality, than to identify him/her as belonging to another type of cultural grouping, be that regional, professional, political, economic or social. The most frequently cited reason is that a given individual will be a member of numerous forms of so-called sub-cultures or higher level cultures (e.g. European), which in effect rules them out as unique independent variables. But I believe that without exercising some control for the effect of these 'other' cultural variables, it is difficult to be sure that attributing a given behaviour, belief, value or attitude expressed by an individual to national cultural influences is theoretically or empirically valid. For example, even at a national level, there has to be particular care to acknowledge the difference between ethnically diverse nations such as Canada or Malaysia; ethnically and/or religiously divided nations such as Belgium or the former Yugoslavia, or relatively homogeneous nations such as Japan or Korea, let alone very complex national cultures such as China or India. In essence, this does nothing more than acknowledge that socio-cultural anthropology is the study of the dilemmas and problems of differences and similarities not only *between*, but also *within* societies.

In the specific context of this study, one of the most interesting aspects of the responses to the second section of the questionnaire on cultural dimensions was the differences in opinions both within and between coaches and business organizations. My original intention in including a section on cultural dimensions was to explore the relationship between these responses and those on the first section of the questionnaire. But the differences of opinions between the two sets of respondents on the universalism vs. particularism and individualism vs. communitarianism suggested to me that I had to consider whether these opinions in some way reflected values that were influenced by the differing needs and requirements of the corporate and coaching environments. I cannot conclude whether this was the key influence on these responses. However I do think this emphasizes that it is tenuous to assume that the responses to such value dimensions questionnaires can be ascribed largely to national culture. I also believe that the way that corporate and professional culture influences our habits and values requires a great deal more in-depth research. For example, it might be

interesting to establish whether there are differences in the responses to a cultural dimensions questionnaire between professional groups, e.g. doctors, police officers, computer programmers, sports professionals, etc., and how these compare to national differences. However, it also has to be acknowledged that the difficulty of drawing any definite conclusions about key influences is clearly a limitation to the use of questionnaires in general. This does suggest it would have been preferable to be able to expand and explore the data that was generated by the questionnaires via follow-up interviews. But, as discussed in the methodology, this would have required a lot more time and resources than were available to me in this study.

Nevertheless analyzing the results in relation to the problem of ignoring and playing down the importance of cultural differences also suggested that the questionnaire design needed refinement. Specifically, I was unable to deduce or make any assumptions about what level of importance each respondent attached to each of the dimensions. A system of ranking the various value dimensions is not a new concept or methodology, in that it is very similar to the two 'basic bipolar' dimensions of 'openness to change vs. conservation' and 'self-enhancement vs. self transcendence' that are incorporated as higher dimensions in the Schwartz Value Inventory (Fig. 4). But more importantly I think that more research into developing a system of ranking the value dimensions would not only help to identify those value dimensions, which may be ignored, downplayed or even negatively evaluated, but also provide a potentially very useful tool for integrating the cross-cultural dimension into traditional coaching and mentoring practices.

Methodological issues

There are also broader methodological issues about whether questionnaires and the results that they produce are necessarily the best way of exploring cross-cultural issues and dilemmas, which I think need to be considered. A major criticism of *Attitude* theory is that it is a poor predictor of behaviour, with the greatest weakness being that it researches general attitudes in the hope of predicting behaviour in a specific context, while struggling to account for either situational, contextual or normative factors. For example, in this study, it was not possible to deduce if the generally positive attitudes to addressing cultural dilemmas were in fact a reflection of 'norm'. As importantly the issue of individual attitude variability has to be taken into account, which can take a number of different forms: expressing a contradictory set of attitudes about a given issue, person or group of people in the same interview; changes and contradictions in attitudes according to time and/or context; and the very complex issue of people having an attitude or value, but making an exception for themselves (Potter & Wetherell, 1995).

Conclusion

From this specific perspective, a focus on quantifying how national cultures differ along the various value dimensions that have been identified does run some risk of contributing to the formation of cultural stereotypes, which have little or no predictive value.

This is why greater emphasis needs to be placed on understanding our own 'cultural baggage' from a coaching perspective, particularly on the dynamic processes of the way in which our own culture has, and is evolving. The building blocks of improving cultural awareness and developing cross-cultural skills therefore have much in common with the key skills associated with building rapport as a coach or mentor. For the coach or business organization, it is therefore about understanding the processes involved with the different ways in which we negotiate social interaction, and the elements of the various models of culture. These range from the apparently simple distinction between the visible and invisible level of values (Fig.1) to the complexity of Schwartz's 'Theoretical model of relations among motivational value types and two basic bipolar value dimensions' (Fig.4). It is about raising our awareness of what is subconscious and invisible up to a conscious and visible level; and from there we can develop the skills necessary to negotiate ways of interacting with others whose values, attitudes and habits, or indeed in contexts are unfamiliar to us. I believe that if this is to be achieved, coaching and cross-cultural research needs to transcend the limitations of a focus on national culture. It needs to acknowledge that cultural identity should be viewed

as being multi-faceted, and that people have a number of selves or identities depending on context and setting.

The work of Schwartz, Hofstede and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner has provided very valuable insight into the cultural dimensions, which help to identify the way in which values differ between national cultures. However, they would also be the first to acknowledge that national cultures are in a constant state of change, and this in turn dictates the need to evolve their questionnaires, re-analyze the accompanying databases of results, and amend and redefine their models accordingly. But perhaps the key aspect for further research is to develop methods that place a greater emphasis on the processes through which culture changes. In other words how human actions and practices change, and new meanings evolve in response to changes to social contexts. By this I mean for example: the impact of increased migration (whether voluntary, or in response to political or economic factors), or the proliferation of new forms of communication like the internet, not only on working environments, but on the myriad ways in which we organize our social lives. The point being that this should help to move research and practice from a focus on more abstract concepts such as values, to the ways in which culture is produced and negotiated. Consequently, as Rosinski (2003, p. xviii) said, 'intercultural professionals will be better equipped to fulfil their commitment to extend people's worldviews, bridge cultural gaps, and enable successful work across cultures'.

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