



MOHAMED BRANINE

MANAGING

ACROSS CULTURES

CONCEPTS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES





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Author Biography

Professor Mohamed Branine is Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees and Postgraduate Admissions, and MBA Programme Director at Dundee Business School (DBS), University of Abertay Dundee. He graduated in economics and management from Algiers University, Algeria and received a PgDipBA, an MPhil and a PhD from Lancaster University in England. In 1991 he became a United Nations human resource management specialist teaching in its UNDP (United Nations Development Program) projects. He has taught at several universities including Lancaster, Manchester, Bradford and Stirling in the UK, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (Canada), and the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing (People's Republic of China). Before joining the University of Abertay Dundee in 2002 he was a senior lecturer and MBA Programme Director at Stirling University. He is a well-known scholar in many African, Middle and Far Eastern countries for his comparative work which is published in several academic papers, research monographs and professional articles. His research interests are in international and comparative human resource management with particular focus on:

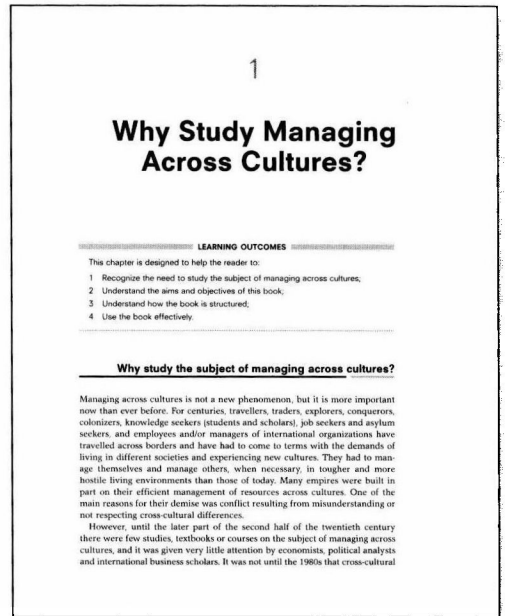
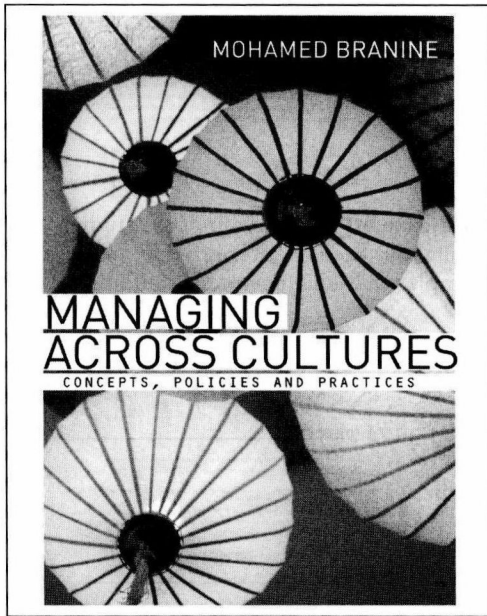
- The determinants of different approaches to management and organization in different countries;
- The practical challenges of managing across cultures for international managers in a competitive business environment;
- The effects of international strategic alliances on national and international human resource development;
- Graduate recruitment, job creation and labour market trends in Europe;
- Culture and environmental awareness in the workplace; and
- Perceptions of age and gender in work and employment in different cultures.

Dr Branine is an active supervisor of doctoral students and masters' degree dissertations as well as teaching Human Resource Management, International Business and Business Research Methods to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Acknowledgements

This book has drawn on many sources and it would have not been completed without the support of many people. I am indebted to all my colleagues, students, friends and family members for their support, encouragement and patience. I am indebted to all the authors whose work is reviewed, developed or just cited in this book. My particular thanks are to the reviewers and the editors of the first draft of the manuscript for their constructive comments and professional suggestions for improvements. My sincere thanks are to the team at Sage for their professional assistance and patience, in particular Natalie Aguilera, Clare Wells, Ruth Stitt, Rachel Eley and Ben Griffin-Sherwood. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my mentors and former colleagues at Lancaster University, in particular Professor David H. Brown, Professor Frank Blackler and Dr Colin Brown for setting me on the right path to an academic career and for inspiring the ideas for this book; all my former colleagues at Stirling University, in particular Professor Chris Baldry and Dr Ian Glover for reviewing and supporting the proposal for this book; and all my current and former colleagues at Abertay University for their friendship and continuous support. My thanks are also to Professor Farhad Analoui and Professor Frank McDonald at Bradford University; Professor Kamel Mellahi at Warwick University; Professor Pawan Budhwar at Aston University; Professor Alex Scott and Iain Lauder at Herriot Watt University; Dr Aminu Mamman, Dr Chris Rees, Derek Edridge and Dr Farhad Hussein at Manchester University; Professor Peter Rosa at Edinburgh University, Martin Dowling at St Andrews University; Professor Robert Chia at Strathclyde University; Dr David Pollard at Leeds Metropolitan University; Professor Mike Hughes and Professor Jeff Hyman at Aberdeen University and Dr Azhdar Karami at Bangor Business School for their support over the years and their direct or indirect contribution to the completion of this project. Last but not least, I would like to thank and dedicate this book to my wife Nadia and our children Salim, Sarah and Nassim for their enduring patience and endless support over the years in which I have given more time to the completion of this book. Although every effort has been made to seek permission of the owners of copyright material and to fully acknowledge the authors whose work has been used, there may still be instances where this has been mistakenly overlooked in the process of undertaking this extensive project and I am very sorry in advance for any unwitting infringements.

Guided Tour



Learning outcomes: A clear set of key learning objectives are provided for each chapter.

Introduction: The introduction outlines the main topics and issues to be covered in each chapter.

- Many companies are merging or forming strategic alliances with companies from other countries, involving negotiations and partnerships, and then having to work with managers and workers from different cultures and backgrounds.
- Managing across cultures is not confined to what multinational companies (MNCs) or profitable organizations do. It affects every organization that operates internationally, regardless of its size, nature or location. Therefore, the need to study the subject of managing across cultures is not just for those who want to work for multinational companies but for everyone who may become involved in managing resources in different countries and societies.

ACTIVITY 1

1. List what you remember to be the three last resources you used to study the subject.
2. How might an understanding of this subject affect: (a) statistics in your career development or (b) evaluate the performance of the organization of any of your work?

This book: rationale, aims and structure

Rationale

This book provides a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the concepts, policies and practices of managing resources – especially human resources – in various socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. It provides the reader with an understanding of the theory and practice of different national approaches to management, moving from conceptual analysis to the discussion of policies and practices. The book seeks to develop a broad understanding of the determining characteristics of national management approaches and to enable the reader to distinguish between different approaches to management and to learn from examples of 'good and bad' practice of management in different national cultural settings. While recognizing the importance of cultural influences on management theories and practices and at the same time accepting the argument that many societies are becoming similar rather than different in their management objectives, this book defines the process of managing across cultures simply as the management of local employees globally and international employees locally. In doing so, it helps to establish the ways by which national cultural differences influence employment policies and practices of different countries and the ways by which national and international organizations have responded to them in a world that is determined by a globalizing power of business on the one hand and a localizing power of culture and politics on the other.

MINI CASE STUDY 1

The Western Expatriate in West Africa

When asked about the working and living conditions of expatriates, Mrs Cahé Ugboke, the managing director of a major petroleum company in West Africa, replied, 'Western expatriates are highly valued, highly paid, well respected and admired for their knowledge and expertise, commitment to their work, dedication, careful attention to detail, respect for time and tolerance and sensitivity to other cultures. Our respectful treatment of foreigners has led to increasing numbers of Western and non-Western (third country) expatriates and has facilitated forward diffusion of Western management practices and policies to my country.'

Questions

1. Speculate on (a) the context in which the comment was made and (b) what might be the positive and the negative connotations of Mrs Ugboke's statement.
2. Judging from the manager's comment, what types of knowledge and skills do you think the local employees may learn from forward diffusion?

Managing global employees locally

Just as local employees have to be managed globally through the building of global corporate culture and the forward diffusion of knowledge and skills, global employees, mainly expatriates, have to be managed locally in order to achieve their assignment objectives successfully. Global employees, as home country expatriates or third country employees, have to understand the local working environment, the local employees, the local institutions and the local norms and values in order to work with or to manage the local workforces globally. In other words, global employees have to respond to the localizing power of culture and, very often, politics as well.

National differences in norms, values, traditions and beliefs, in levels of economic growth and development, and in institutional settings are the main sources for divergence in management policies and practices between societies. Though it is possible to assimilate organisational structures, to reformulate processes and to standardize products and services between countries, it is not, as Adler (2002) pointed out, easy to assimilate people's behaviour because of their culturally, economically and politically based differences. Therefore managing across cultures requires managers to be aware of the effects that these differences may have on their management policies and practices. They should be aware of the main national norms and values, of the national economic trends and organisational characteristics, and of the national institutions and the legal system.

Activity: In-class activities encourage discussion and provoke thought.

Mini case study: The mini case studies throughout each chapter provide 'real life' examples that enhance understanding.

activities is to share learning and generate new knowledge from the local operations. Encouraging reverse diffusion of management theories and practices can lead to better understanding of the local working environment and to the development of appropriate approaches to managing across cultures.

Summary

1. The subject of managing across cultures has emerged in recent years as a significant field of academic research and study as a result of a number of triggers and drivers. Among the triggers are: the failure of expatriates to complete their assignments abroad; the economic recession of the 1980s; the rise and successes of South-east Asian countries; the openness of China and later India to the west; and the end of the Cold War and the 'Westernisation' of Eastern Europe. The main drivers have been: the growth and spread of multinational companies, international competition; regional economic integration; technical changes and international mobility of information; open trading and availability of financial services; political and cultural influences; internationalisation of Western management education with the use of English as the international language of business; and the liberalisation and democratisation of developing countries.
2. Most of the definitions of managing across cultures focus on the concept of culture and the effects of cultural differences on management in different countries. This book acknowledges the importance of culture and its effects on management and goes beyond the need to understand the similarities and differences between societies to see the process of managing across cultures as the management of local employees globally and global employees locally, including expatriates, host and third country employees, national and international employee regulations, and national and international employees and employer organisations.
3. The management of local employees globally requires, at least, the building of a global corporate culture that local employees can understand and identify with, and having a strategy of forward diffusion of knowledge and skills from the home to the host countries.
4. Just as local employees have to be managed globally, global employees, mainly expatriates, have to be managed locally in order to achieve their assignment objectives successfully. Global employees have to understand the local working environment, employees, institutions, and norms and values in order to manage the local workforces globally.
5. The process of managing across cultures sits between the globalizing power of business and the localizing power of culture and politics. The problem in implementing such a process effectively lies in knowing the unknown. The more familiar the international manager (expatriate) is with the local working environment and local employees, and the more the local employees know about the corporate culture and its operations, the greater and better the global integration and local responsiveness. The factors that may facilitate the process of knowing the unknown are the ability to assess and avoid risks, and the encouragement of 'reverse diffusion' of management good practices from the host to the home country.

Revision questions

1. Discuss with the use of examples the main factors and events that have led to the emergence of cross-cultural management as a significant field of academic research and study.
2. What does 'managing across cultures' mean? Elaborate your answer by referring to at least two contrasting definitions.
3. What do you think are the main things that international organizations can do to be successful in (a) managing global employees locally and (b) managing their local employees globally?

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Summary: The main points of each chapter are pulled together, making revision easy.

Revision questions: Questions at the end of each chapter help you to check your understanding of the key issues in each chapter.

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