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Being International: what do international managers and professionals really think is important – and do the experts agree?

David Trickey, Nigel Ewington & Richard Lowe

Abstract

Results from a database of over 2000 practicing managers with international roles who have completed a self assessment questionnaire, The International Profiler, seem to indicate that gender, expatriation experience and national culture influence the extent to which professionals emphasise a range of 22 international success factors. By combining these results with a survey on how 125 interculturalists rank the same 22 dimensions of international competence we can suggest some key similarities and differences between the perceptions of professionals in the field and the trainers, consultants and academics who develop them.

1. Introduction

Writing this article in July 2009, it is still difficult to predict the impact of the global economic crisis and recessionary climate on the continued investment by organisations in the development of its internationally mobile people. A survey conducted by Cartus, a mobility management firm, in 2007 on 'Emerging Trends in Global Mobility: Policy and Practices Survey' showed there was a trend towards an increase in internationally oriented roles. A report by the Cranfield School of Management back in 2000[1] predicted a shift from long term assignments to what they described as international commuters and frequent flyers. A

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[1] Petrovic, J., Harris, H. and Brewster, C. (2000). New forms of international working. CReME Research Report 1/00. Cranfield, England: Cranfield School of Business.

survey in March 2009 by the consulting firm Mercer[2] focused on obtaining a snapshot from 600 companies based in Europe, Latin America and North America about potential changes to their expatriate strategies as a result of the recession at the time, revealed that 46% were currently adopting a 'wait and see' strategy, however there were clearly shifts towards favouring short-term rather than long-term assignments. On the other hand, the consolidation of certain sectors, such as the automotive industry, means that severe economic downturns and exchange rate fluctuations can produce opportunities for international acquisitions with the consequent need to integrate cross-border teams as a critical factor in long term survival. Fiat Auto's recent Chrysler deal and (failed) interest in taking over General Motor's European Opel operation is one example which hit the headlines in 2009.

2. Questions around international transition development

Whatever the outcome of the recent global shake up it seems unlikely that international managers will have any less need for the skills and attitudes to work across cultures – perhaps it is a clear reminder of how globally interdependent we have become – and making 'transitions' into less familiar cultural contexts bring well-documented challenges: a recent request for articles on "international management challenges" on an academic journal search engine revealed 19,564 results. Such international transitions include taking on an expatriate assignment, leading or working in a globally dispersed virtual team, being a frequently flyer or commuter in a multinational company, or shifting interactions from one geographical area to another as markets metamorphose. Intercultural practitioners have been providing support in these transitions for many years now with training, coaching and consultancy projects. A GMAC (now Brookfield Global relocation Services) Global Relocation Trends survey reported 84% of companies made cross-cultural training available to relocating staff and there is a growing business case to support the general effectiveness of such development. (Black 1990; Hammer 1995; Hammer 1996; Kealey 1996; Mendehall 2000; Bhawuk 2000; Morris 2001; Kirkman 2005; Littrell 2005). But what type of competencies should trainers, coaches and consultants help to develop? What international skills, attitudes and areas of knowledge

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[2] http://www.mercer.com/knowledgecenter/reportsummary.htm?idContent=1341245

do professionals themselves value most (and least) in the disparate roles they cover in different sectors and in different countries? Do professionals with expatriate experience differ in the way they give emphasis to international success factors compared to those who have not lived and worked abroad? Are there any identifiable differences in emphasis on certain competencies across national groups and genders? And, finally, to what extent is there a match between what 'expert' interculturalists prioritise as key success factors in working internationally compared to the clients they work for? The responses to these questions seem critical to ensure that international development is targeted more accurately to the specific role requirements and cultural background of international clients. This is particularly important in an economic climate when companies are likely to be reassessing their budgets for international development. In this article the authors present some research which responds to these questions and, we believe, has important potential implications for the approaches used to develop international professionals and managers.

3. The sources of data

WorldWork Ltd, based in London, specialises in the creation of tools to support managers involved in international 'transition', namely, the transfer of professional skills into less familiar cultural contexts. The data was collected between 2002 and 2006 from two sources. The first is from the use of filters in the biographical database of responses to *The International Profiler*, a web-based psychometric questionnaire and personal feedback process, available in English, Italian, French & German, which reveals the relative emphasis, attention and energy which individuals bring to a set of 10 international competencies - with 22 dimensions representing associated skills, attitudes and areas of knowledge (see Appendix 1). The semi-ipsative, forced choice questionnaire has 80 questions each consisting of a stem and three questions, and the person completing the questionnaire is asked to choose the question which best describes them or their behaviour, and then to select the second question in the same way. The first choice is then scored with a 5 or a 4 depending on how accurate they think it is, and in the same way the second is scored with a 3 or 4. The third choice is left un-scored. There are approximately 10 questions that load onto each of the 22 dimensions.

The feedback process which follows completion of the questionnaire is usually by telephone with a licensed debriefing coach who in a one hour session helps the candidate to interpret the results and draft an action plan on how to close gaps between role requirements and present focus on the 22 dimensions.

The second source of data was a web-based survey conducted in 2006 through a leading site for intercultural trainers (www.dialogin.com) where members were asked to evaluate the 22 areas used in *The International Profiler* according to their degree of importance in contributing to the successful fulfilment of international business roles. The database of responses is based on 125 completed responses.

The original set of 10 international competencies was created in 2000 and was based on three years of researching the personal skills, attitudes and areas of knowledge which differentiate the more successful international operators from the less successful. From existing quantitative and qualitative research, other international competency sets[3] and their own experience of delivering intercultural training and consultancy, the WorldWork team identified extra or enhanced competencies which facilitate the transfer of professional and management skills from a local level to a range of diverse international contexts and, in doing so, leverage the potential for competitive advantage. The results show the individual's relative distribution of emphasis across the 22 areas as well as a normed score which compares their results with all the other candidates in the database as a percentile. In this way they can understand how their own emphasis may differ (or not) from other international professionals.

In 2006 when the data analysis was conducted, WorldWork had 2198 completed questionnaires for *The International Profiler* with responses from 85 nationalities. The database included people from a wide range of sectors, functional backgrounds, ages as well as a mix of roles, organisational seniority, activities and gender. 71% were male and 29% were female. 45% had at some stage worked abroad as an adult compared to 55% who hadn't.

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[3] A full bibliography of the sources of the international competency set can be found on the WorldWork website
http://www.worldwork.biz/legacy/www/downloads/Sources.pdf

4. What professionals value most

Looking at Table 1 at the average hierarchy of emphasis across the whole competency set (the maximum score being 5), the top 8 areas given most attention relate to Openness ('New Thinking' and 'Acceptance'), Emotional Strength ('Spirit of Adventure'), Communication Skills ('Active Listening' and 'Clarity of Communication'), Cultural Knowledge ('Valuing Differences'), Influencing ('Rapport') and finally, Synergy ('Creating New Alternatives').

	Score
LEARNING LANGUAGES	1,55
Sensitivity to Context	1,90
Exposing Intentions	1,95
Coping	2,16
Reflected Awareness	2,19
Range of Styles	2,30
Inner Purpose	2,34
Attuned	2,39
Welcoming Strangers	2,41
Information Gathering	2,41
Resilience	2,45
Focus on Goals	2,46
Flexible Judgement	2,49
Flexible Behaviour	2,53
Spirit of Adventure	2,73
New Thinking	2,74
Rapport	2,75
Valuing Differences	2,76
Clarity of Communication	2,83
Acceptance	2,87
Creating New Alternatives	2,95
ACTIVE LISTENING	2,97

Table 1.

Although each individual's profile is different and should reflect the specific role/contextual challenges the person faces, we can begin to create a profile of the primary success factors as reflected in the prioritisation of this database of international managers and professionals. Such a person would have the ability to show respect for international partners by attentive listening, namely, exploring mutual understanding through checking and clarifying and by ensuring they used explicit signals to show they were listening and negotiating meaning

while probably using a lingua franca such as English ('Active Listening'[4]). They would seek to understand issues from multiple perspectives ('New Thinking') and learn to reconcile different approaches to find creative solutions which reflect the diversity of the teams they work in ('Creating New Alternatives'). They would be accepting of behaviour and practices different to their own, taking people as they found them – even looking for the best in them - and not attempting to force others into complying with their own sense of what is right ('Accepting'). Such people would adapt their style of delivery to be clearly understood by their target audience employing a low risk use of language which focuses on simplicity without being simplistic ('Clarity of Communication'). They would have an intrinsic enjoyment in working with partners from diverse backgrounds ('Valuing Differences') and build long-term trust at a personal level as a key lever to influence them in the pursuit of their professional objectives ('Rapport'). And lastly, they would be people who seek out challenge, variety and stimulating change as a source of learning – akin to professional bungee-jumpers ('Spirit of Adventure').

This would seem to be the most typical profile reflecting where international players in our database put their energy at present. This is not to say that they should be emphasising these aspects above others, but when forced to make a choice, there seem to be clear preferences revealed. What about the three lowest areas of focus?

It is interesting to note that the investment and effort needed to learn different languages is the lowest priority of all. Relatively few people seem to see themselves as intrinsically interested in developing linguistic flexibility and seeking out opportunities to improve their language skills through their professional activity. However, in most development initiatives when a company is internationalising, language development is often the first (and sometimes only) priority to meet the new challenges an international environment will bring (Pym 2008). We would not underestimate the importance of creating competence in a common language, but would point out that the intrinsic motivation to learn languages often found in the intercultural and language training community is not usually matched by the instrumental motivation shown

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[4] The term 'Active Listening' (or any other international competency label) is never explicitly used as an item within the questionnaire. Items included facets of 'Active Listening' such as double-checking, showing you are listening in various ways and giving a priority to 'listening carefully'. Item analysis was conducted to ensure that only items that were contributing to the dimensions were finally included.

by those who completed *The International Profiler* questionnaire. One hypothesis is that once such professionals have reached an operational competence in a passport language like English their motivation to learn even a handful of phrases in other languages seems to be very limited. This has clear implications for how language training is 'sold' to busy professionals where the return on investment can seem low.

The second and third area of focus revealed by the data are 'Sensitivity to Context' and 'Exposing Intentions'. The ability to get things done through an understanding of how hierarchy and decision-making work in other cultures ('Sensitivity to Context') is another area which international professionals do not seem to give particular attention to. Although encoding clear messages was a priority for most, ensuring that your interlocutors understand the deeper reasoning behind your requests, proposals and suggestions ('Exposing Intentions') was again clearly de-emphasised by the professionals in our database.

It may be hypothesised that these two low areas of competency focus may suggest that people who work internationally do not tend to focus on the link between successful cross-border working and the need to make explicit where their suggestions, requests and thinking are coming from (the context of communication) and where decision-making is embedded in organisations (the context of power). However, qualitative research by Goodall and Roberts[5] suggests that local staff (in this case in Colombia and China) valued their manager's ability to expose intentions as a source of respect and trust much more highly than having linguistic competence or flexible behaviour. Goodall and Roberts (Goodall 2003) also suggest that connecting teams across the divide between Corporate Centres and affiliates through a strong network of key sponsors is vital to the effectiveness of expatriates and others who can span the boundaries across global organisations. Perhaps one can ask if the high priority given to 'Active Listening' is a cosy concept of international effectiveness based on a belief in negotiating meaning between individuals, when things happen through sharing understanding and connecting more widely across organisational powerbases?

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[5] *Only Connect: Teamwork in the Multinational*, Keith Goodall & John Roberts, Journal of World Business 38 (2003) 150–164.

5. Comparing those with and without expatriate experience

If we explore the data to compare those who said they had 'lived abroad for at least 6 months after the age of 18' with those who had never lived abroad, we can see some significant differences in prioritisation. There seems to be a significant connection between depth of international experience and relative emphasis across 'push' and 'pull' competencies[6]. 'Push' competencies we would define as those which allow professionals to actively drive forward their proposals, ensuring that their internal ideas are 'pushed' out in the clearest way possible for people to understand and accept, and being sufficiently robust and determined not to be distracted along the way. It's a 'from the inside-out' approach. 'Pull' competencies, on the other hand, ensure that we start with others first, 'pulling' their world into our own and extending our own perspective, learning on the way and then creating win-win solutions together with our partners. It's a 'from the outside-in' approach.

We can see from Table 2 that professionals who have lived abroad give significantly more emphasis to the 'pull' areas of competence such as 'Welcoming Strangers', 'Acceptance', 'Learning Languages', 'Spirit of Adventure', 'Information Gathering', 'Range of Styles' and 'Creating New Alternatives'. On the other hand, those who had never had an expatriate experience gave significantly more emphasis to the 'Personal Autonomy' competencies of 'Inner Purpose' and 'Focus on Goals' and also the transparency with which they 'push' their messages out ('Clarity of Communication').

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[6] See Su Craig's book Make your Mark (McGraw Hill, 1997), for a development of push/pull influencing approaches – although she refers to push and build.

LIVED ABROAD	AREAS OF COMPETENCE	NOT LIVED ABROAD
	NEW THINKING	
▲▲▲	WELCOMING STRANGERS	
▲▲▲	ACCEPTANCE	
	FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	
	FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT	
▲▲▲	LEARNING LANGUAGES	
	INNER PURPOSE	▲
	FOCUS ON GOALS	▲▲▲
	RESILIENCE	
	COPING	▲
▲▲▲	SPRIT OF ADVENTURE	
	ATTUNED	
	REFLECTED AWARENESS	▲
	ACTIVE LISTENING	
	CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION	▲▲
	EXPOSING INTENTIONS	▲▲▲
▲▲▲	INFORMATION GATHERING	
▲▲▲	VALUING DIFFERENCES	
	RAPPORT	
▲▲▲	RANGE OF STYLES	
▲	SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT	
▲▲▲	CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES	

Table 2. The International Profiler: comparing those who have lived abroad (608) with those who haven't (732).

Probability of significance in being higher:
▲▲▲ = 99.8%; ▲▲ = 99%; ▲ = 95%

One hypothesis as to why home-based managers give more emphasis to 'Reflected Awareness' is that they may be less skilled in judging how their own behaviour is being perceived by their international counterparts, and thus more concerned as to the impression they are making. An overdeveloped emphasis on 'Reflected Awareness' may lead to dysfunctional behaviours such as self-consciousness with unfamiliar people. If, over time, you have built an understanding as to how you may come across to others in one particular culture, this skill may become de-emphasised over time.

These results may suggest that those with expatriate experience are more likely to have developed certain leadership skills, including the ability to draw on a 'Range of Styles' when influencing others and in surfacing differences as a source of problem-solving and creativity ('Creating New Alternatives').

As stated earlier, the questionnaire allows discretion in the scoring attributed to each item chosen and, in general, we have found that those who had had at least one expatriate experience associated more easily with the choices in the questionnaire by assigning scores (5 or 3, for first and second choices respectively, rather than 4 or 2) which reflect a higher correlation between the question items and their own attitudes, self perceptions and behaviour. This correlation between high scores and prior expatriate experience suggests that, overall, expatriates see themselves more easily reflected in the competency set than their home-based colleagues.

What could be some implications of these results? Do people develop these attitudes and skills as a result of their expatriate experience or do those with this mind and skills set actively look for international experience? Should we prepare home-based managers to facilitate the 'pull' side of their approach and to those returning from abroad to the 'home base' build (or rebuild) their ability to privilege the 'push' aspects more, so as not to become nomadic professional expatriates? To understand if this is a developmental process or if it tells us something about those who seek out international expatriate roles, more research will need to be conducted comparing people completing the questionnaire both prior to and after a first major international assignment.

6. Comparing men and women

When we compared the emphasis given by men and women in the database across the international competency set we found some significant differences (see Table 3). To a large extent we see that the 449 women who responded to the questionnaire gave a very similar emphasis to the areas of competency as those who have lived abroad (irrespective of gender).

'Welcoming Strangers', 'Acceptance', 'Learning Languages', 'Spirit of Adventure', 'Information Gathering', 'Valuing Differences' and 'Range of Styles' are all significantly given more emphasis by women than men. These areas are also given significantly more emphasis by those with prior expatriate experience. It is as if those women who completed the questionnaire showed a tendency to exhibit an intrinsic expatriate mindset even when they may never have had such an experience. This

seems to have implications for expatriate selection since the number of women sent on an expatriate assignment is still very low (on average 15%) compared to men (see GMAC's Global Relocation Trends – 2008 survey report[7]).

Table 3.
The International Profiler: differences in the competences valued by male and female

Probability of signifi-cance in being higher:

▲▲▲ = 99.8%
▲▲ = 99%
▲ = 95%

Female focus (449)	AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Male focus (1012)
	NEW THINKING	▲
▲▲▲	WELCOMING STRANGERS	
▲▲▲	ACCEPTANCE	
	FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▲
	FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT	▲▲▲
▲▲▲	LEARNING LANGUAGES	
	INNER PURPOSE	
	FOCUS ON GOALS	▲▲▲
	RESILIENCE	
	COPING	▲▲▲
▲▲▲	SPRIT OF ADVENTURE	
▲▲▲	ATTUNED	
▲	REFLECTED AWARENESS	
▲▲	ACTIVE LISTENING	
	CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION	▲▲▲
	EXPOSING INTENTIONS	▲▲▲
▲▲▲	INFORMATION GATHERING	
▲▲	VALUING DIFFERENCES	
▲	RAPPORT	
▲▲	RANGE OF STYLES	
	SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT	▲▲▲
	CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES	

Other differences noted between the 'lived abroad'/'not lived abroad' comparison included women giving more emphasis to the non-verbal aspects of international communication (see 'Attuned') while men emphasising the 'lower context' skills of clear oral communication (see 'Clarity of Communication') and clarification of intentions ('Exposing Intentions'). The women in the database show themselves to be significantly more focused on active listening skills but seem to de-emphasise aspects of flexibility linked to 'Flexible Judgement' and 'Flexible Behaviour', focusing more on their interest in linguistic adaptability.

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[7] http://www.brookfieldgrs.com/insights_ideas/grts/ now called Brookfield Relocation Services.

However, in terms of influencing skills women differed from men in emphasising a range of influencing styles and in focusing on building warmth in personal relationships and in building personal trust ('Rapport'). The men tended to emphasise the political aspect of influencing, giving more attention to identifying the centres of power to get things done ('Sensitivity to Context'). Men also seemed to be more interested in setting specific goals and targets in their work environment and in maintaining a high degree of focus and determination in achieving them regardless of the pressures to compromise and distractions on the way ('Focus on Goals).

The men also seemed to have an interest in extending their understanding into new and unfamiliar fields ('New Thinking') while the women had an overall stronger readiness to take risks by seeking out challenge, variety and change ('Spirit of Adventure') in their international role.

While some of these findings may be hardly unexpected, and connect to a growing canon of literature on gender differences, there are others that at first sight might seem counter-intuitive. For example why did the women focus more highly than men on 'Spirit of Adventure' in an international context? Perhaps one hypothesis is that those women who move into positions of responsibility internationally generally need a higher spirit of adventure in the first place to push themselves forward into such positions in what remains a very male-dominated area of management. Do the lower levels of focus on 'Flexible Behaviour' compared to men also suggest that women may show less flexible behaviour to 'fitting in' (which may be perceived as weakness) to be given the same quotient of professional competency? Perhaps our results can corroborate some thinking by Willa Hallowell and Cornelius Grove[8] that female traits of consensus building, relationship orientation, greater sensitivity to non-verbal cues are more valued in many non-Western cultures and this can give female assignees an advantage.

Their other point is that women are often accustomed to operating in a system where most of the power is held by people unlike themselves (men) and they have to rely more on interpersonal influencing, collaboration and sensitivity to the views of others. Many women are operating as a minority group in a context of cultural diversity even when they are not expatriated. Our findings in this study on women's

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[8] Female Assignees: Lessons Learned, W. Hallowell & C. Grove, Runzheimer Reports on Relocation (Runzheimer, 1997).

emphasis on 'Rapport' and 'Range of Styles' in the area of influencing again supports Hallowell and Grove's assertion.

7. Comparing different nationalities

The main groups of nationalities represented in the database were British (376), German (324), Italian (208), French (95), US American (93) and Indian (47). We conducted comparisons of the mean scores of the different national groups using the independent t-test to explore the statistical significance of how each national group in the database differed in emphasis across the competency set compared to the others.

AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Indian	British	German	French	Italian
NEW THINKING			▲		
WELCOMING STRANGERS	▲▲				
ACCEPTANCE					
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▽▽▽	▽▽▽		▽▽▽	▽▽▽
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT			▽▽▽	▽▽	▽▽▽
LEARNING LANGUAGES		▲▲	▽▽▽		▽▽▽
INNER PURPOSE		▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE		▲			
COPING				▲	
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE					▲
ATTUNED				▲	▲
REFLECTED AWARENESS	▽▽▽				
ACTIVE LISTENING			▲▲▲		
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION					
EXPOSING INTENTIONS	▽			▽▽▽	
INFORMATION GATHERING		▲▲▲			
VALUING DIFFERENCES	▲	▲		▲	▲
RAPPORT				▲▲	
RANGE OF STYLES					
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT			▲		▲▲▲
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES	▲	▲▲▲		▲	

Table 4. The International Profiler: How US Americans compared to 5 other nationalities.
Probability of significance in giving more focus:
▲▲▲ = 99.8%
▲▲ = 99%
▲ = 95%
OR less focus:
▽▽▽ = 99.8%
▽▽ = 99%
▽ = 95%

Areas of interest focused on in the article:
• lower focus on areas in shaded darker
• higher focus on areas shaded lighter

Table 4 shows how the **US American** group compares. Apart from the Indian national respondents in the database US Americans emphasised 'Inner Purpose' more than any other group, namely, strong personal values and beliefs to provide consistency and balance when dealing with unfamiliar circumstances, or when facing pressures that question judgement or challenge self worth.

However, they also showed the least focus on 'Flexible Behaviour' (apart from the German group) and 'Flexible Judgement' (apart from the British), that is, they were comparatively less likely to adapt their behaviour to different cultural environments, and to keep an open mind

about culturally diverse colleagues and partners. These two factors combined can lead to a profile of intransigence but to some extent this is mitigated by a stronger than average emphasis on the intrinsic valuing of group diversity ('Valuing Differences').

Table 5.
The International Profiler: How British compared to 5 other nationalities

AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Indian	USA	German	French	Italian
NEW THINKING		▽		▽	
WELCOMING STRANGERS	▲▲▲			▲	▲
ACCEPTANCE					▲▲
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▽▽▽	▲▲▲	▲▲▲		
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT			▽▽▽	▽	▽▽▽
LEARNING LANGUAGES		▽	▽▽▽	▽▽▽	▽▽▽
INNER PURPOSE					
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE		▽			
COPING			▲▲	▲▲▲	
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE	▲		▲▲	▲	▲▲▲
ATTUNED			▲▲▲	▲▲▲	
REFLECTED AWARENESS				▲▲▲	▲▲▲
ACTIVE LISTENING	▲		▲		
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION					
EXPOSING INTENTIONS				▽▽▽	
INFORMATION GATHERING		▽▽			▽
VALUING DIFFERENCES		▽			
RAPPORT			▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲
RANGE OF STYLES			▲▲▲	▲	▲▲▲
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT			▲▲▲		▲▲▲
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES		▽▽▽			▽▽▽

Table 5 shows some key comparisons with the **British** nationals. While 'Learning Languages' has the lowest ranked mean focus among all respondents, the British give significantly lower focus to this area than the Germans, French and Italians in the database. They are also significantly lower on 'Flexible Judgement' than Germans, French and Italians. However they display the highest risk orientation compared to all other groups with the exception of the US (See 'Spirit of Adventure'). Some people might say this is reflected in those countries hit most severely by the recent financial crisis. Interestingly, the British group gave generally more emphasis to all aspects of influencing compared to

their European colleagues (apart from the French with their equally strong emphasis on 'Sensitivity to Context').

Table 6.
The International Profiler: How the French compared to 5 other nationalities

AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Indian	USA	German	British	Italian
NEW THINKING					
WELCOMING STRANGERS			▽		
ACCEPTANCE					▲▲
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▽▽	▲▲▲	▲▲▲		
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT		▲▲			
LEARNING LANGUAGES	▲▲▲	▲▲		▲▲▲	
INNER PURPOSE		▽▽▽			
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE					
COPING	▽▽	▽	▽▽	▽▽▽	▽▽▽
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE				▽	
ATTUNED				▽▽▽	
REFLECTED AWARENESS				▽▽▽	
ACTIVE LISTENING	▲		▲		▲
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION					
EXPOSING INTENTIONS		▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲
INFORMATION GATHERING					
VALUING DIFFERENCES					
RAPPORT	▽▽	▽▽	▽	▽▽▽	
RANGE OF STYLES				▽	
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT					▲
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES					

Table 6 focuses on **French** nationals, and indicates that the French give a higher emphasis to 'Exposing Intentions' than any other group apart from India. One hypothesis is that the results may reflect the valuing in French business culture of a clear rationale for any requests or decisions made (Leesem, 1994). The aspect of 'Coping' – or the ability to deal with the emotional impact of change and loss of personal control – is significantly lower than all the main groups and, apart from the Italians, 'Reflected Awareness' is given a lower level of attention too.

Table 7.
The International Profiler: How the Germans compared to 5 other nationalities

AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Indian	USA	French	British	Italian
NEW THINKING		▽			
WELCOMING STRANGERS	▲▲▲		▲▲		▲▲▲
ACCEPTANCE					
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▽▽▽		▽▽▽	▽▽▽	▽▽▽
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT		▲▲▲		▲▲▲	
LEARNING LANGUAGES	▲▲▲	▲▲▲		▲▲▲	
INNER PURPOSE		▽▽▽			
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE					
COPING			▲▲	▽▽	
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE				▽▽	▲
ATTUNED	▽			▽▽▽	
REFLECTED AWARENESS	▽▽▽		▲▲		▲▲▲
ACTIVE LISTENING		▽▽▽	▽	▽	
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION					
EXPOSING INTENTIONS	▽				▽
INFORMATION GATHERING			▽▽▽	▲▲	
VALUING DIFFERENCES					▲
RAPPORT			▲	▽▽▽	
RANGE OF STYLES				▽▽▽	
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT		▽		▽▽▽	▲
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES					▽

Table 7 shows that, apart from the Anglo-Saxons, the **German** group focuses most strongly on proactively making contact with new people ('Welcoming Strangers') but with the exception of the US group gives least attention to 'Flexible Behaviour'. Interestingly, the whole area of influencing is less emphasised than the British group. A possible interpretation could be that in a culture which emphasises clear delivery of the facts (Schroll-Machl 2003), interpersonal influencing to build commitment is considered a kind of manipulation.

Table 8.
The International Profiler: How the Italians compared to 5 other nationalities

AREAS OF COMPETENCE	Indian	USA	French	British	German
NEW THINKING					
WELCOMING STRANGERS	▲			▽▽	▽▽▽
ACCEPTANCE	▽		▽		▽
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▽▽▽	▲▲▲			▲▲▲
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT	▲	▲▲▲		▲▲▲	
LEARNING LANGUAGES	▲▲▲	▲▲▲		▲▲▲	
INNER PURPOSE		▽▽			
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE					
COPING			▲▲▲		
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE		▽		▽▽▽	▽
ATTUNED				▽	
REFLECTED AWARENESS	▽▽▽	▽		▽▽▽	▽▽▽
ACTIVE LISTENING		▽▽	▽		
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION					
EXPOSING INTENTIONS			▽▽		▲
INFORMATION GATHERING				▲	
VALUING DIFFERENCES		▽			▽
RAPPORT	▽▽	▽		▽▽▽	
RANGE OF STYLES				▽▽▽	
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT	▽	▽▽▽	▽	▽▽▽	▽
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES				▲▲▲	▲

Table 8 reveals that the **Italian** group in general shows much less emphasis than the others across the whole competency set with some exceptions. The group shows significantly more Flexibility across all three areas compared to the US American group. The focus on 'Sensitivity to Context' is lower than all the other groups.

Table 9. The International Profiler: How the Indians compared to 5 other nationalities					
AREAS OF COMPETENCE	**Italian**	**USA**	**French**	**British**	**German**
NEW THINKING					
WELCOMING STRANGERS		▽▽		▽▽▽	▽▽▽
ACCEPTANCE	▲				
FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲
FLEXIBLE JUDGEMENT					
LEARNING LANGUAGES	▽▽▽		▽▽▽		▽▽▽
INNER PURPOSE					
FOCUS ON GOALS					
RESILIENCE					
COPING			▲▲		
SPRIT OF ADVENTURE				▽	
ATTUNED			▲		▲
REFLECTED AWARENESS	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲	▲▲▲
ACTIVE LISTENING		▽▽	▽	▽	
CLARIFTY OF COMMUNICATION		▽			
EXPOSING INTENTIONS					▲
INFORMATION GATHERING					
VALUING DIFFERENCES		▽			
RAPPORT			▲		
RANGE OF STYLES					
SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT					
CREATING NEW ALTERNATIVES		▽			

Finally, Table 9 shows that the **Indian** group had some significant differences in focus when compared to groups from Britain, Germany, Italy, France and the USA. Both 'Flexible Behaviour' and 'Reflected Awareness' score significantly higher than in any of the other groups, suggesting that this small but heterogeneous subset of Indian nationals tend to give more emphasis to fitting in with others through understanding how their own behaviour is being perceived.

8. Comparing the priorities of interculturalists and their clients

During the first half of 2006 WorldWork conducted a survey through the site of one of Europe's leading intercultural management forums, www.dialogin.com, with over 8000 members. The survey was aimed at opening a debate on the level of alignment between the ranking given to international competencies as factors for international management success by intercultural practitioners and academics, on the one hand, and by the international business community, on the other. Although a number of researched international competency sets already exist

(Overseas Assignment Inventory – OAI; The Intercultural Development Inventory – IDI; The Intercultural Readiness Check – IRC; the Survey on Intercultural Relocation Adaptability - SIRA; Bryam, 2001) there is little agreement around a common definition of intercultural competence (Humphrey 2007: 18). To our knowledge no-one has, up until now, asked the intercultural consultancy & training community to pronounce their own collective verdict on the relative importance of international competencies. As already mentioned, the 22 dimensions which make up the international competency set, and which form the basis for *The International Profiler,* were developed out of existing competency sets, research into intercultural effectiveness studies as well as first hand experience during training and development programmes over a 20 year period. We believed that the set was robust enough to be validated by a community of peers and so put it to the test.

In total, over a 3-month period, we received 125 responses to the questionnaire which was set up with a simple 5 point Likert scale for each of the definitions of the 22 dimensions of international competency used in *The International Profiler*. We asked respondents to evaluate each aspect of international attitude, skill and knowledge based on their experience as an international business person, academic, consultant or trainer. The scale ranged from 'unimportant' to 'critical importance'.

To provide a weighting for each of the areas under examination we used the following formula:

Unimportant =	number of people x –2
Marginal importance =	number of people x 0
Moderate importance =	number of people x 1
Very important =	number of people x 2
Critical importance =	number of people x 3

Then we summed the scores for each area of competence and ranked them. The ranking with the scores is presented in Table 10. We note that for both the 'Intercultural Experts' sample and for the business professionals who have completed the International Profiler, 'Active Listening' emerges as the primary success factor. When language is fragile, it seems critical to focus on aligning meaning and be seen to be listening as a way of acknowledging, respecting and valuing international business partners.
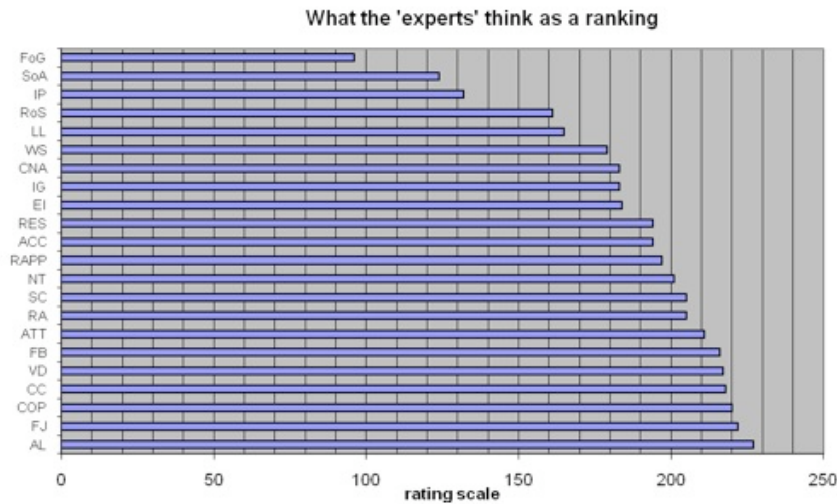
What the 'experts' think as a ranking

Table 10. What the 'experts' think as a ranking

Other results show that over 90% of the 'Intercultural Experts' believed that 19 out of the 22 areas of competence were of moderate to critical importance. The survey also shows that between 65% and 86% thought that 19 out of the 22 areas were either very or critically important to transfer professional ability into an unfamiliar international context. This seems to provide a considerable endorsement for the WorldWork competency set among this 'Expert' community. We also asked the respondents to indicate if any key factors were missing from the international competency set or if people wanted to comment in some way. Checking through the 30 responses to this question we noted that all of the 'additions' could be included in the more detailed description WorldWork uses to define the areas of competency and which are included in the questionnaire as items.

However, there were 3 areas which only attracted a 40-50% evaluation as very or critically important, namely, 'Inner Purpose' (ranked 20th), 'Spirit of Adventure' (ranked 21st) and 'Focus on Goals' (ranked 22nd). This compares to our business professionals who completed the International Profiler who ranked these as follows:

· Inner Purpose (ranked 16th),
· Spirit of Adventure (ranked 8th)
· Focus on Goals (ranked 11th)

While there may only be a slight shift from 16th to 20th place on 'Inner

Purpose', there is a clear discrepancy between the priorities on the other two areas for development indicated by the Dialogin members (the interculturalists) and the actual focus of energy, attention and emphasis given by professionals in the field. One provocative thought is that either interculturalists are lacking in the corporate realism of their clients by de-emphasising the importance of a pioneering drive towards goals as an important ingredient for international management success or they are pushing their own agenda of pull-oriented competencies

As can be seen in Table 11, there are however clear matches (marked in black) between the ranking of the two groups of Intercultural Experts and Business Professionals, but also some differences (marked in grey) between what interculturalists believe are important attributes and skills compared to the priorities revealed by *The International Profiler* database. This is not to say that the interculturalists are not 'right' in their ranking but simply that it may be useful to know that the clients they deal with may not immediately be aligned, based on a self-perception of their current behaviours.

Table 11.	
INTERCULTURALISTS' RANKING	**BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS' RANKING** (from The International Profiler)
1. **Active Listening**	1. **Active Listening**
2. **Flexible Judgement**	2. Creating New Alternatives
3. Coping	3. Acceptance
4. **Clarity of Communication**	4. **Clarity of Communication**
5. **Valuing Differences**	5. **Valuing Differences**
6. Flexible Behaviour	6. Rapport
7. **Attuned**	7. New Thinking
8. Reflected Awareness	8. **Spirit of Adventure**
9. **Sensitivity to Context**	9. Flexible Behaviour
10. New Thinking	10. **Flexible Judgement**
11. Rapport	11. **Focus on Goals**
12. Acceptance	12. **Resilience**
13. **Resilience**	13. Welcoming Strangers
14. Exposing Intentions	14. **Information Gathering**
15. **Information Gathering**	15. **Attuned**
16. **Creating New Alternatives**	16. **Inner Purpose**
17. Welcoming Strangers	17. Range of Styles
18. Language Learning	18. Reflected Awareness
19. Range of Styles	19. **Coping**
20. **Inner Purpose**	20. Exposing Intentions
21. **Spirit of Adventure**	21. **Sensitivity to Context**
22. **Focus on Goals**	22. Language Learning

This may have implications for how the development focus for intercultural programmes is 'sold' or even for what is included in such programmes. For example Michael Bryam *et al* (2001)[9] broadly ignore the 'push' competencies in the WorldWork set in favour of the 'pull' aspects of intercultural competence. How many intercultural programmes explicitly develop a 'Spirit of Adventure' or 'Inner Purpose' or the ability

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[9] Byram *et al* (2001) underline attitudes for intercultural competence which clearly deemphasise the 'push' competencies on the WorldWork set and privilege the 'pull' aspects of curiosity, openness, suspending disbelief.

to make things happen in the surrounding world even when under pressure to compromise? Perhaps clients should be doubtful of an approach to intercultural management development that is not firmly grounded in the business issues and corporate objectives of the client organisation. Perhaps it is necessary to be more aware of the need to more evenly balance the development of both 'push' and 'pull' competencies, where an interculturalist's natural instinct may be to privilege the latter.

Are intercultural consultants and trainers overestimating the importance of their own skills in listening, when giving direction, winning support and connecting others to the organisation or may this be a more realistic key to making things work across borders? Are we turning all of our clients into consultants? Perhaps interculturalists are suffering from the Pygmalion syndrome of falling in love with their own creation – the perfect international manager who accepts, adapts and integrates – when out there in the real world are people who need to blend assertive drive with diplomacy, and determination with a deep understanding of others.

We believe our findings clearly challenge some fundamental assumptions about how we prepare people for international assignments. In the past, international managers have been prepared by exploring values and approaches that are relevant to how they behave in their own mono-cultural operating context. However, our findings indicate that in transferring skills to new and unfamiliar contexts different groups of people (defined under gender, level of international experience and nationality) have significantly different approaches at the interface where cultures meet. Everyone is making some kind of adaptation in a cross-cultural context, but the scope and nature of that adaptation can be culturally specific.

9. What are the implications for moving this debate forward?

What comes first? Does international experience lead to the consequent development of 'pull' competencies or do those who have these qualities inherent in their personality seek out international assignments more frequently? This issue could be explored by collecting answers to questions integrated into the debriefing process conducted by

licensed coaches of the instrument and subsequently reported back for analysis.

Perhaps interculturalists need to be giving more focus to areas that research shows are key factors which create effective international operators even though people in the field emphasize them less – such as 'Exposing Intentions', 'Sensitivity to Context' and 'Learning Languages'. This research suggests that those who are offering intercultural development need to learn to communicate the value of these areas more effectively for them to compete for the limited learning focus available to business professionals.

We hope that by drawing on this research we can start to inform organisations as to how specific groups and sub-cultures approach the bridgeheads between cultures and hypotheses about potential mismatches that are predictable between groups. Trainers and educators could begin to tailor their approach to different groups to support them in their specific areas of need when cultures meet.

There are also implications for corporate selection for overseas assignments. Is there a broad case for women who put themselves forward for international assignments to receive more proactive support from organisations because they seem to pre-empt the attitudes and skills shown by already experienced expatriates – irrespective of their actual international exposure?

Since the role requirements for being effective internationally can differ widely according to the mission and individual's present focus of energy, emphasis and attention across our international competency set, intercultural trainers might accept the need to focus not only on sensitising clients to a deeper understanding of other people's drivers but also - when needed - on supporting a pioneering determination towards corporate goals.

We believe that, over time, the research into the data generated from *The International Profiler* questionnaire can provide a growing insight into the what international professionals really emphasise in their response to managing in an international context and, as a result, can continue to challenge and probe the developmental focus of intercultural practitioners.

Appendix 1

The International Competency Set

A Summary of competencies characteristic of those who are highly effective in transferring their professional skills to an unfamiliar international context.

OPENNESS
- New Thinking (NT) - receptive to new ideas, and typically seek to extend understanding into new and unfamiliar fields. Like to work internationally as they are exposed to ideas and approaches with which they are unfamiliar.
- Welcoming Strangers (WS) - keen to initiate contact, and build relationships, with new people, including those who have different experiences, perceptions, and values to themselves. Often take a particular interest in strangers from different and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds.
- Acceptance (ACC) - not only tolerate but positively accept behaviour that is very different from their own. In an international context they rarely feel threatened by, or intolerant of, working practices that conflict with their own sense of best practice.

FLEXIBILITY
- Flexible Behaviour (FB) - adapt easily to a range of different social and cultural situations. Have either learned or are willing to learn a wider range of behaviour patterns. Ready to experiment with different ways of behaving to find those which are most acceptable and most successful.
- Flexible Judgements (FJ) - avoid coming to quick and definitive conclusions about the new people and situations that they encounter. Can also use each experience of people from a different culture to question assumptions and modify stereotypes about how such people operate.
- Learning Languages (LL) - motivated to learn and use the specific languages of important business contacts, over and beyond the lingua franca in which they conduct their everyday business activities. Ready to draw on key expressions and words

from the languages of these international contacts to build trust and show respect.

PERSONAL AUTONOMY

- Inner Purpose (IP) - to hold strong personal values and beliefs that provide consistency or balance when dealing with unfamiliar circumstances, or when facing pressures which question judgement or challenge sense of worth. Such values also give importance and credibility to the tasks that they have to perform.
- Focus on Goals (FoG) - set specific goals and tasks in international projects, combined with a high degree of persistence in achieving them regardless of pressures to compromise, and distractions on the way. Believe they have a strong element of control over their own destiny, and can make things happen in the world around them.

EMOTIONAL STRENGTH

- Resilience (RES) - usually tough enough to risk making mistakes as a way of learning. Able to overcome any embarrassment, criticism or negative feedback they may encounter. Have an optimistic approach to life and tend to 'bounce back' when things go wrong.
- Coping (COP) - able to deal with change and high levels of pressure even in unfamiliar situations. They remain calm under pressure, and have well-developed means of coping even without their normal support networks. Have the personal resources necessary to deal effectively with the stress from culture shock.
- Spirit of Adventure (SoA) - ready to seek out variety, change and stimulation in life, and avoid safe and predictable environments. Push themselves into uncomfortable and ambiguous situations, often unsure whether they have the skills required to be successful.

PERCEPTIVENESS

- Attuned (ATT) - highly focused on picking up meaning from indirect signals such as intonation, eye contact and body language. Adept at observing these signals of meaning and reading them correctly in different contexts - almost like learning a new language.

• Reflected Awareness (RA) - very conscious of how they come across to others; in an inter-cultural context particularly sensitive to how their own 'normal' patterns of communication and behaviour are interpreted in the minds of international partners.

LISTENING ORIENTATION
• Active Listening (AL) - check and clarify, rather than assume understanding of others, by paraphrasing and exploring the words that they use and the meaning they attach to them.

TRANSPARENCY
• Clarity of Communication (CC) - conscious of the need for a 'low-risk' style that minimises the potential for misunderstandings in an international context. Able to adapt 'how' a message is delivered (rather than just 'what' is said) to be more clearly understood by an international audience.
• Exposing Intentions (EI) – able to build and maintain trust in an international context by signalling positive intentions, and putting needs into a clear and explicit context.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE
• Information Gathering (IG) - take time and interest to learn about unfamiliar cultures, and deepen their understanding of those they already know. Employ various information-gathering strategies for understanding the specific context they require.
• Valuing Differences (VD) - like to work with colleagues and partners from diverse backgrounds, and are sensitive to how people see the world differently. Keen not only to explore and understand others' values and beliefs, but also communicate respect for them.

INFLUENCING
• Rapport (RAPP) - exhibit warmth and attentiveness when building relationships in a variety of contexts. Put a premium on choosing verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are comfortable for international counterparts, thus building a sense of 'we'. Able in the longer-term to meet the criteria for trust required by their international partners.
• Range of Styles (RoS) - have a variety of means for influencing

people across a range of international contexts. This gives greater capacity to 'lead' an international partner in a style with which he or she feels comfortable.

- Sensitivity to Context (SC) - good at understanding where political power lies in organisations and keen to figure out how best to play to this. Put energy into understanding the different cultural contexts in which messages are sent and decisions are made.

SYNERGY
- Creating New Alternatives (CNA) - sensitive to the need for a careful and systematic approach to facilitating group and team work to ensure that different cultural perspectives are not suppressed, but are properly understood and used in the problem solving process.

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