

12-31-2012

Intercultural Management Cases for the Business Language Class

Christine Uber Grosse

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl>

Recommended Citation

Grosse, Christine Uber (2012) "Intercultural Management Cases for the Business Language Class," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 17 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol17/iss1/7>

Copyright © 2012 by Purdue Research Foundation. Global Business Languages is produced by Purdue CIBER. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl>

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Christine Uber Grosse
University of Mary Washington

INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT CASES FOR THE BUSINESS LANGUAGE CLASS

ABSTRACT

This article explores the use of intercultural management cases as alternative instructional materials in business language courses. These cases use the power of story to teach about successful global leaders who effectively lead across cultures. As the cases engage and inform business language students, they also serve as a valuable resource for teaching language, communication, and culture. Additionally, the cases develop situation analysis and problem-solving skills.

Three prominent CEOs serve as examples of intercultural management case subjects for the business language class: Jack Ma of China's Alibaba, Carlos Ghosn of France and Japan's Renault-Nissan Alliance, and Ratan Tata of India's Tata Group.

KEYWORDS: intercultural management cases, business language cases, leading across cultures, Jack Ma, Ratan Tata, Carlos Ghosn

INTRODUCTION

Global managers today must deal with the complexity of managing across cultures. How can business language faculty help train the new generation of managers to communicate effectively in their target culture? Incorporating intercultural management cases in the curriculum is one possible solution. When choosing instructional materials, business language instructors might consider intercultural management cases as a supplement to traditional course materials.

Intercultural management cases often tell stories of global leaders working across cultures. Some deal with how managers overcame cultural barriers in their organizations. These leadership stories capture the interest of business students, and provide valuable lessons in how to manage across cultures. Business language faculty can use intercultural management cases for a variety of purposes: to teach language, culture, and communication skills as well as business content.

Cases provide a useful instructional tool to acquaint students with ways to address cultural issues and communicate effectively across cultures (Grosse,

1988). Students learn from the challenges that real-life leaders face in their companies. The leaders featured in the cases serve as role models to aspiring business students, and provide examples of successful global leaders. Situation analysis in cases allows students to experience the challenges they would face in a company. It provides a valuable tool for learning, and simulates problems that occur in a global company.

To illustrate the value of using intercultural management cases, this article examines the cases and stories of prominent CEOs Jack Ma from China, Carlos Ghosn from Brazil, and Ratan Tata from India. These cases shed light on their leadership style, and how they overcame obstacles to lead their companies to success.

INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS LANGUAGES

The fields of intercultural management and business languages have much in common, as the intercultural management literature suggests. For example, Ferraro (2009) explores the relationship between the fields of cultural anthropology and international business, and provides a framework for understanding the cultural dimension of international business. Cabrera and Unruh (2012) emphasize the key role that cultural understanding plays in the development of global managers. Lane et al. (2009) provide a framework for understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural management challenges, and explore ways to manage people from different cultures. Lewis (2005) discusses the importance of language and cultural diversity in global business, and offers country-specific advice on how to communicate across cultures.

In a seminal work on managing cultural differences, Moran, Harris, and Moran (2011) emphasize how to create a successful management style while working across different cultures. Another guide for doing business around the world, by Morrison, Conaway, and Douress (2000), provides cultural tips as well as information on negotiating styles for forty countries. Schuster and Copeland (2006) offer models to address management challenges in different cultures.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) write about cultural issues in human resources management, with an emphasis on innovation, flexibility, and the elimination of functional barriers. Walker, Walker, and Schmitz (2003) provide a guide to doing business internationally with an emphasis on cross-cultural understanding. The authors developed the Cultural Orientations Inventory (COI), to identify skills gaps and diverse performance styles in the workplace.

In the business language literature, Yang (2009) describes the importance of teaching her students about Chinese business culture. She proposes a valuable plan for instructors to develop the cultural competence of their business Chinese students. Hedderich (2011) advocates the inclusion of current events in the business language curriculum to enhance the transcultural competence of the learner. The synergy of intercultural management and business language deserves more attention in the literature.

THE POWER OF STORY

When choosing course materials, instructors have many choices. Intercultural management cases make an attractive alternative to traditional course materials. Cases have the power to engage students in meaningful dialogue about important business issues facing companies. They are widely used in business schools across their various areas: management, accounting, marketing, and communication courses.

Viewing the case as story is a compelling reason to use cases in business language class. The stories that cases tell capture the interest and hold the attention of the learner. They engage, inform, and inspire business students. The story format is familiar to both student and professor, adding to the appeal of cases for teaching about global leaders and how they manage people from diverse cultures.

Business language faculty can harness the power of story through intercultural management cases particularly about CEOs of global companies. These provide a valuable source of information for students. Intercultural management cases often make reference to the cultural competence and communication skills of the leader and others in the company. They tend to provide information about the country, its culture, as well as the company's history. They also present students with a management dilemma, and generate discussion on managing cultural differences.

In addition to teaching about intercultural management, these cases promote language acquisition, and the development of communication skills and cultural competence. With their emphasis on situation analysis, cases promote critical thinking about real-world business issues and challenges. As they engage student interest, they serve as a valuable forum for dialogue about business issues.

SOURCES FOR INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT CASES

Finding appropriate cases for classroom use has posed challenges for business language faculty who want to incorporate case-based teaching in their courses.

Lately, however, it has become much easier to locate suitable materials with the growing collection of international cases on Web sites.

One of the most comprehensive clearinghouses, the European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, provides easy access to cases from universities around the world. In addition to cases, ECCH also sells books, book chapters, DVDs, instructor materials, multimedia, and software.

Although the majority of cases are written in English, ECCH does offer a number of cases in languages other than English, such as Chinese, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages. The cases come from institutions such as Harvard Business School, London Business School, MIT Sloan, Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, Thunderbird School of Global Management, Monterrey Tec, IMD (International Institute for Management Development), Babson, and Stanford University, among others.

For the US, ECCH charges \$3.15 per case for electronic download and permission to reproduce, and \$3.65 per case for a hard copy. In addition, ECCH offers a number of free cases from its university members around the globe.

Looking at the numbers of cases available at <http://www.ecch.com> for the CEOs featured here, ECCH has 46 cases on Jack Ma, CEO of the Chinese company Alibaba. These include: “Jack Ma and Alibaba.com” (Gupta and Kumar, 2006), “B2B E-Commerce in China: Essentials That Make Jack Ma an Exceptional Leader” (Pfoertsch and Dai, 2009), “Alibaba’s Jack Ma: Rise of the New Chinese Entrepreneur” (Farhoomand and Lai, 2010), “Alibaba: Competing in China and Beyond” (Purkayastha and Faheem, 2008), and “Alibaba vs EBay: Competing in the Chinese C2C Market” (Xin, Nie, and Pucik, 2007). Four cases are written in simplified Chinese, while one is in Spanish.

ECCH also offers 39 cases about Carlos Ghosn, CEO of Renault-Nissan Alliance, including “Carlos Ghosn as CEO of Nissan & Renault: Can He Rework the ‘Nissan Magic’?” (Phani Madhav and Gayatri, 2005), “The Global Leadership of Carlos Ghosn at Nissan” (Milikin and Fu, 2003), “Nissan’s Electric Vehicle Strategy” (Burgelman and Schiffrin, 2011), “Redesigning Nissan, Carlos Ghosn Takes Charge” (Manzoni, Hughes, and Barsoux, 2003), “Carlos Ghosn: The Turnaround Specialist” (Dutta and Subhadra, 2003), and “Carlos Ghosn: Leader without Borders” (Kets De Vries et al., 2005). In foreign languages, ECCH has two cases about Ghosn and Nissan in Spanish, one case translated into Portuguese, and another translated into French.

ECCH lists 96 cases about Ratan Tata and the Tata Group, a conglomerate company. For example, at the European Case Clearinghouse Web site, one

can find “Tata Group: The Benign Hunter” (Thakur and Sharma, 2010), “The Tata Group: Going Global” (Phani Madhav and Dakshi, 2004), “Tata Group: Under Ratan Tata” (Rajshekar and Dakshi, 2004), “Tata Group’s Strategy: Ratan Tata’s Vision” (John, Nightingale, and Krishnan, 2008), and “Global Aspirations of Tata” (Thadamalla and Hotchandani, 2007). Although most cases are in English, ECCH had one case about Tata written in Portuguese, and another written in Spanish.

Other cases on international management can be found in management textbooks such as Deresky’s *International Management* (2011). That text has a case about Jack Ma and Alibaba called “Alibaba: Competing in China and Beyond.” I became familiar with this case, and others about Ratan Tata and Carlos Ghosn, when using the Deresky text in my Intercultural Management class in Aalto University’s International Business program in Mikkeli, Finland.

Other mini-cases designed especially for business language students can be found in textbooks written for business language students, such as *Éxito Comercial* (Doyle, Fryer, and Cere, 2011) and *Saldo a Favor* (Galloway, Labarca, and Rodriguez, 2013).

Other instructional materials can be found at the corporate Web sites <http://www.alibaba.com>, <http://www.nissan.com>, <http://www.renault.com>, and <http://www.tatagroup.com>. Students can do additional research on the CEOs on the Internet, for example listening to them in person on video clips found on the Web. Other information on the CEOs is available on their corporate Web sites, YouTube, and business news sites such as cnn.com, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, and bbc.com.

THE STORIES OF THREE GLOBAL MANAGERS

To illustrate the value of intercultural management cases in business language courses, it is helpful to know something about the lives of the managers spotlighted here. We will examine briefly the lives and careers of global managers Jack Ma, Ratan Tata, and Carlos Ghosn.

Jack Ma, CEO of China’s Alibaba Group

Jack Ma, Chairman and CEO of the Alibaba Group in China, built several of the world’s largest Internet-based companies. Born in Hangzhou, China in 1964, Jack Ma earned a bachelor’s degree in English from the Hangzhou Normal College. Subsequently, he taught English and International Trade at the Hangzhou Dianzi University. At an early age, he worked with friends in the US to build Web sites for companies in China.

In 1995, Jack Ma started China's first Internet-based company, China Yellowpages. He became director of information technology for China's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation. Then in 1999, he started Alibaba.com, a business-to-business market site for China. It now serves about 80 million members around the world. Today Ma heads the Alibaba Group, which consists of six subsidiaries including Yahoo! China, Taobao Marketplace, and Alibaba Cloud Computing.

Ma has a strong personal commitment to corporate social responsibility. *Forbes Asia* selected him as one of "Asia's heroes of philanthropy" for his generous contributions to disaster relief and the poor. He is the first Chinese member to serve on the board of the Nature Conservancy. In 2010, he agreed to contribute 0.03% of Alibaba Group's annual revenue to environmental protection, specifically air and water quality improvement.

Carlos Ghosn, CEO of France and Japan's Renault-Nissan Alliance

Brazilian-born and French-educated CEO Carlos Ghosn is highly respected internationally for turning around Nissan, the Japanese automaker. Since 2005, he has been CEO of both Renault and Nissan, two of the world's leading car manufacturers. Renault, the French car company, owns 44% of Nissan. Carlos Ghosn's background is truly international. Born in Brazil in 1954 to Lebanese parents, he is a French citizen. Ghosn is fluent in French, Arabic, English, and Portuguese, and he continues to work on his Japanese.

Ghosn studied engineering in France, and began his career at Michelin in 1978. He worked there for eighteen years, moving up in the corporate ranks to become Chief Operating Officer. In 1996 he went to work at Renault, and then the company sent him to Japan in 1999 to head its struggling subsidiary Nissan. At first, he was viewed with suspicion, but with his co-workers he crafted the Nissan Revival Plan. He cut 20,000 jobs, closed assembly plants, and saved the company, a year ahead of schedule. In Japan he acquired the nickname "Samurai," while in France he became known as "Le Cost Cutter."

According to *Auto Industry News* (2012), he is one of the most highly paid CEOs in Japan, earning \$12.38 million in fiscal year 2011. In fact, he earned more than his Japanese counterparts at Toyota Motor Corporation, President Akio Toyoda, and Honda Motor Company President Takanobu Ito.

Ratan Tata, The Tata Group

Ratan Tata is CEO of the Indian conglomerate the Tata Group, whose revenues exceeded \$83 billion in 2010–11. Tata was born in Mumbai, India in 1937, and earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Cornell

University. He continued his education in the US, studying management at Harvard University.

Ratan Tata's grandfather founded the Tata Group and built it into one of India's most successful companies. Following in his grandfather's footsteps, Ratan Tata took the company global, and became one of the most powerful CEOs in India.

Ratan Tata started his career in 1962 at Tata Steel, after which he left to become Director of the National Radio and Electronics. There he had his first success with a corporate turnaround in 1971. After that, he went to the struggling Empress Mills and tried to turn it around as well. In 1981, JRD Tata, chairman of the Tata Group, chose his grandson Ratan to succeed him.

Although many in the company initially had doubts about Ratan Tata's ability to lead, he took the company to new heights by changing Tata Group from an India-centric conglomerate to one that was truly global. Under his leadership, the company acquired Jaguar, Land Rover, Tetley, and Corus, as well as the development of the Nano automobiles. The Tata Group now consists of about 100 companies including Tata Motors, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Power, Tata Global Beverages, Tata Chemicals, Indian Hotels, and Tata Teleservices. Today about 65% of the company's revenues come from overseas. Mr. Tata plans to retire in December 2012.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, intercultural management cases can make a valuable addition to the course materials for business languages. These cases can engage, motivate, and inspire students as they teach about real global leaders who figured out how to lead successfully across cultures. Instructors can interweave the learning of language, culture, and communication with the rich content of these cases.

REFERENCES

- Burgelman, R., and D. Schiffrin. "Nissan's Electric Vehicle Strategy in 2011: Leading the Way towards Zero-Emission." Stanford Business School. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. SM189. (2011). Web. 44 pgs.
- Cabrera, Angel, and Gregory Unruh. *Being Global: How to Think, Act and Lead in a Transformed World*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012. Print.

- CNN. "The True Story of Carlos Ghosn." 16 June 2008. Web. Accessed 12 Sept. 2012 <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/BUSINESS/06/11/ghosn.profile/#cnnSTCText>.
- Dawson, Chester. "Nissan CEO's Pay Keeps Up Its Pace." *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 June 2012. Web. Accessed 12 Sept. 2012 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304870304577489892180421490.html>.
- Deresky, Helen. *International Management Managing across Borders and Cultures*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2011. Print.
- Doyle, Michael Scott, T. Bruce Fryer, and Ronald Cere. *Éxito Comercial*. 5th ed. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2010. Print.
- Dutta, S., and K. Subhadra. "Carlos Ghosn: The Turnaround Specialist." IBS Center for Management Research. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 803-046-1. 2003. Web. 11 pgs.
- Farhoomand, A., and R. Lai. "Alibaba's Jack Ma: Rise of the New Chinese Entrepreneur." Asia Case Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 810-047-1. 2010. Web. 11 pgs.
- Ferraro, Gary P. *The Cultural Dimension of International Business*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009. Print.
- Galloway, Vicki, Angela Labarca, and Elmer Rodriguez. *Saldo a Favor*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013. Print.
- Grosse, Christine Uber. "The Case Study Approach to Teaching Business English." *The English for Specific Purposes Journal* 7 (1988): 131–36. Print.
- Gupta, V., and M. Vinaya Kumar. "Jack Ma and Alibaba.com." IBS Center for Management Research. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 806-058-1. 2006. Web. 14 pgs.
- Hedderich, Norbert. "The Challenge of Transcultural Competence: Background Reading of Target Culture Current Events Articles." *Global Business Languages* 16 (2011): 75–82. Print.
- John, D., F. Nightingale, and P. Krishnan. "Tata Group's Strategy: Ratan Tata's Vision." IBS Research Center. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>. Reference no. 308-085-1. 2008. Web. 14 pgs.
- Kets De Vries, M., E. Florent-Treacy, M. Mildon, and A. Ting. "Carlos Ghosn: Leader without Borders." INSEAD. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 405-056-1. 2005. Web. 20 pgs.

- Lane, Henry W., Martha L. Maznevski, Joseph J. DiStefano, and Joerg Dietz. *International Management Behavior*. 6th ed. West Sussex, Engl.: Wiley, 2009. Print.
- Lewis, Richard D. *When Cultures Collide: Leading across Cultures*. 3d ed. Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2005. Print.
- Manzoni, J., K. Hughes, and J. Barsoux. "Redesigning Nissan: Carlos Ghosn Takes Charge." INSEAD. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 303-044-1. 2003. Web. 14 pgs.
- Milliken, J., and D. Fu. "The Global Leadership of Carlos Ghosn at Nissan." Thunderbird, School of Global Management. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. A07-03-0014. 2003. Web. 12 pgs.
- Moran, Robert T., Phillip R. Harris, and Sarah V. Moran. *Managing Cultural Differences: Global Leadership Strategies for the 21st Century*. 8th ed. Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011. Print.
- Morrison, Terri, Wayne A. Conaway, and Joseph J. Douress. *Dun & Bradstreet's Guide to Doing Business around the World*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000. Print.
- Pfoertsch, W., and D. Dai. "B2B E-Commerce in China: Essentials That Make Jack Ma an Exceptional Leader." China Europe International Business School. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 309-297-1. 2009. Web. 7 pgs.
- Phani Madhav, T., and M. Dakshi. "The Tata Group: Going Global." IBS Case Development Center. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 304-198-1. 2004. Web. 9 pgs.
- Phani Madhav, T., and D. Gayatri. "Carlos Ghosn as CEO of Nissan and Renault: Can He Rework the 'Nissan Magic'?" IBS Case Development Center. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 305-044-1. 2005. Web. 15 pgs.
- Purkayastha, D., and H. Faheem. "Alibaba: Competing in China and Beyond." IBS Center for Management Research. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 308-278-1. 2008. Web. 26 pgs.
- Rajshekar, N., and M. Dakshi. "Tata Group: Under Ratan Tata." IBS Case Development Center. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 304-225-1. 2004. Web. 10 pgs.
- Schuster, Camille P., and Michael Copeland. *Global Business Practices: Adapting for Success*. Mason, OH: Thomson/South-Western, 2006. Print.

- Thadamalla, J., and S. Hotchandani. "Global Aspirations of Tata." IBS Research Center. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 307-073-1. 2007. Web. 18 pgs.
- Thakur, M., and R. Sharma. "Tata Group: The Benign Hunter." London Business School. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. 310-287-1. 2010. Web. 23 pgs.
- Trompenaars, Fons, and Charles Hampden-Turner. *Managing People across Cultures*. West Sussex, Engl.: Capstone, 2004. Print.
- Walker, Danielle, Thomas Walker, and Joerg Schmitz. *Doing Business Internationally: The Guide to Cross-Cultural Success*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003. Print.
- Xin, K., W. Nie, and V. Pucik. "Alibaba vs Ebay: Competing in the Chinese C2C Market." IMD. European Case Clearinghouse, <http://www.ecch.com>, Reference no. IMD-3-1842. 2007. Web. 3 pgs.
- Yang, Henrietta. "A Proposal for Transcending Barriers of Intercultural Communication in Global Business: An Instructional Innovation." *Global Business Languages* 14 (2009): 29–40. Print.