

## Chapter 67

# Bicultural Managers and their Role in Multinational Corporations: An Exploratory Study in Japan

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Exposure to other cultures is common through extensive travel, living in ethnically diverse environments, attending universities abroad, or having work assignments in other countries. In places like the US, more and more people cannot fit themselves into certain ethnic categories, thinking of themselves as being “mixed” (Goldstein & Morning, 2000) or bicultural. This phenomenon has been recognized and researched increasingly in recent years. One aspect is the question on how different societies deal with bicultural people. In this chapter, the authors investigate individuals with a bicultural family background and investigate how this biculturality reflects on their role in business. The survey presented in this paper investigates the relevance of bicultural skills and consequently the roles that bicultural managers play in multinational corporations. To investigate this issue the survey was conducted among managers who had one Japanese and a Non-Japanese parent and worked in a multinational corporation in Japan. Japan was chosen, because it is a more controversial issue in Japan than in other industrialized countries.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Exposure to other cultures is common through extensive travel, living in ethnically diverse environments, attending universities abroad, or having work assignments in other countries. Even people who have not traveled abroad are exposed to other cultures through TV, movies and class work. Some places in the world are highly multicultural, due to either historic mixture of cultures (e.g., Hong Kong or Singapore), or high levels of migration (e.g., New York). Moreover, cultural “diversity” has moved from just being a process of including different people from different countries to a team or a school classroom to being a process that occurs within an individual (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). In countries such as the USA, increasingly more people cannot fit themselves into certain ethnic categories, instead thinking of themselves as being “mixed” (Goldstein & Morning, 2000) or bicultural.

This phenomenon has been recognized and increasingly researched in recent years (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). The development of a new “global” culture with people who are distinctly international is being discussed by some scholars (e.g., Anthias, 2001). Early research on biculturals suggests that individuals must surrender their identity with one culture to identify with a new one (LaFramboise et al., 1993). Today, it is the prevailing opinion that individuals can internalize more than one culture without losing their original cultural identity. In other words, they can maintain multiple cultural systems within themselves. Bicultural individuals can identify with two distinct cultures and their values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioral assumptions. So they can easily operate within and between those cultures (Hong et al., 2000, LaFramboise et al., 1993, Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Hence, biculturals not only bring the knowledge of their dominant culture, but also the hidden abilities to understand and bridge between other cultures (Brannen, Garcia & Thomas, 2009).

## Definition

There are many definitions of biculturalism, ranging from general (i.e. based on demographic characteristics) to psychologically specific (e.g., cultural identifications). Bicultural individuals can be immigrants, refugees, sojourners like international students or expatriates, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, individuals in interethnic relationships, and mixed-ethnic individuals (Berry, 2003, p. 17).

From a psychological viewpoint, there is more than one definition of biculturalism. Loosely defined, a bicultural individual is somebody who labels himself e.g. ‘I am bicultural’ or ‘I am Japanese-American’ and this reflects their cultural dualism. More strictly defined, a bicultural individual can be described as having internalized two cultures and both cultures are alive inside of him or her. Accordingly, both of these cultures guide biculturals’ thoughts, feelings and behavior (Benet Martinez et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2000; LaFramboise et al., 1993).

This implies that internalized cultures are not necessarily mixed, and adopting a second culture does not always mean replacing the original culture with the new one. Furthermore, it is believed bicultural individuals can combine cultural norms from two groups into one behavioral repertoire (Rotheram-Borus, 1993), or they are able to switch between cultural schemas, norms, and behaviors in response to cultural stimulus (Hong et al., 2000).

It should be noted that bicultural competence is related to, but different from, cultural intelligence (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence is defined as “a person’s capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 9). Biculturalism refers to the presence within an individual of two cultural systems (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2000; LaFramboise et al., 1993). Although biculturalism may contribute to cultural intelligence, cultural intelligence does not necessarily require biculturalism. Additionally, whereas cultural

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