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**MANAGING INTERNATIONALLY:
THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE
MANAGERIAL TASK (Abridged version)**

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MANAGING INTERNATIONALLY:

The International Dimensions of the Managerial Task (Abridged Version)*

* We acknowledge the contribution of Julia Johnston in articulating our ideas.

Literature Review

The current view of managing internationally has its roots in a typology of managing complex organisations developed by Lawrence and Lorsch twenty-five years ago. They argued that for an organisation to perform effectively in diverse environments it must be both appropriately differentiated and adequately integrated, so that the separate units are coordinated and work towards a common goal.

In response to the increasing level of internationalisation, this basic two-variable typology has been developed in order to explain the dynamics of managing complex organisations that operate across borders. Doz (1976) described the need for differentiation in «political» terms, emphasising the tension between the «economic imperative» (large scale efficient facilities) and the «political imperative» (local content laws, local production requirements). Prahalad (1976) developed a typology for multinational companies which stressed the «need for managerial interdependence» (integration) versus the «need for managerial diversity» (local responsiveness), thus highlighting the need for differentiation on a geographical basis.

The political pressures and product/market demands that create the need for differentiation were amalgamated by Prahalad and Doz (1987) into a category termed «pressures for local responsiveness». These pressures, which include host government demands, the local market structure, the need to adapt products to meet customer requirements and the need to develop distinct distribution channels, are forcing MNCs to become more responsive to the local needs of each of the markets they serve. In contrast, the pressures that push MNCs towards global integration and coordination of their activities derive largely from economic imperatives such as cost reduction, access to raw materials, level of technology, investment intensity and the increasing importance of multinational customers and competitors.

In order to maintain an equilibrium between these two conflicting forces, Prahalad and Doz (1987) suggest a multifocal solution where the focus of decision-making shifts

between the international and the local level, depending on the particular problem. They argue that the mindset of managers should have a «global framework, balancing the needs between local responsiveness and a global vision of the firm».

Bartlett and Ghoshal add a third dimension, that of worldwide learning, to those of global efficiency and local differentiation in providing a «transnational» solution. Here, roles and responsibilities are clearly differentiated by business, function and even task in order to eliminate the overlapping of roles which so frequently generates excessive tensions in a global matrix structure.

Thus, there is a basic consensus in the literature to the effect that the difficulties encountered in managing MNCs are due to the diversity of environments in which this sort of firm competes. From an international management perspective, however, the literature on managerial tasks has some limitations. It focuses on top management tasks, that is, on generalists, and yet the roles of international managers are not necessarily generalist in scope. A second limitation is that managerial tasks have in the main been studied from the internal perspective, that is, from the point of view of how managers perform their roles as coordinators and doers within the organisation in order to achieve global integration.

We suggest that the tasks performed by managers outside the legal boundaries of the company must also be taken into account. Here the manager acts as a mediator between the external environment and the company in response to local environmental issues. For managers in companies which operate across geographical borders, the internal and external tasks may include both international and local elements.

Figure 1 provides an example of how the managerial task can be defined in terms of activities carried out inside and outside the company, both locally and internationally.

Figure 1. The Managerial task: Internal And External

	Internal	External
Local	Coordinating local operations Performing local operations Coordinating across business	Dealing with local suppliers customers institutions (govts, unions, etc) partners Gathering information
International	Coordinating across borders Transferring information and know-how Cross-cultural management	Dealing with international customers suppliers regimes Managing international partnerships

Methodology

After our review of the literature and following the feedback received at Arden House, we began the second phase of our study. It appeared to us that even with their increased complexity, international organisations did not differ substantially from complex organisations *per se*. Therefore, in order to investigate whether international managers do in fact have a managerial profile that is significantly different from managers who do not operate internationally, we undertook limited field research with a sample of seven managers in a range of industries, in posts at three different levels; headquarters, country manager and local functional manager. The headquarters position in our sample was that of Senior V-P for Corporate Planning for Philip Morris, one of the largest international firms in consumer packaged goods. The country managers were a Group Company Head at Ciba, the Managing Director of Dunlop, S.A. and the General Manager of Company X, a computer hardware manufacturer. Of the three functional managers in the sample, two were responsible for total quality, at Alcatel and Hewlett-Packard, while the third held the post of Mediterranean Sales Manager for Medical Electric, a company producing X-ray equipment and ultrasound and magnetic resonance machines for medical use. Figure 2 shows the composition of our sample. See the complete version of our study, «Managing Internationally: The International Dimensions of the Managerial Task».

Figure 2. Composition of sample

<i>Managerial level</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Industry</i>
Headquarters	Senior V-P Corporate Planning	Philip Morris	Consumer Packaged Goods
Country Manager	Group Company Head	Ciba	Pharmaceutical, biological and chemical products
	Managing Director	Dunlop, S.A.	Sports equipment and clothing distributor
	General Manager	Company X*	Computer hardware manufacturer
Local Functional Manager	Managing Director for Total Quality	Alcatel	Communications, energy and transport
	Quality Manager	Hewlett-Packard	Computers and electronic instrumentation
	Mediterranean Sales Manager	Medical Electric*	X-ray equipment, ultrasound and magnetic resonance machines

* The names of these companies have been changed to protect their identity.

Results

The results of our research did not support conventional wisdom in three specific areas.

Conventional wisdom suggests:

- a. that most managers should have a global mindset;
- b. that managing internationally means managing globally;
- c. that in the process of internationalisation the internal and external tasks of the manager are affected in equal measure.

We challenge these suppositions on the basis that:

1. *Few industries require global organisations with global strategies, and few firms have developed global operations in which every manager needs to be a global manager.* Most managers do not need the sort of global mindset that makes no distinction between local and international concerns, as relatively few managers have jobs that are globally integrative in nature. For example, in ABB the trend is towards a federation of multidomestic companies, in which the characteristics of the industry in which each company competes determine the degree of globalisation of that company in order to benefit from economies of scale and global knowledge-sharing. Indeed, Percy Barnevik, ABB's CEO, states that only 500 of his 15,000 managers have «global» responsibilities.

Managing internationally does not affect all levels of the organisational hierarchy equally, not even in organisations that are already highly internationalised. We may, as most of the cases explored by our team show, be witnessing a substantial degree of internationalisation of managerial posts that used to be performed primarily within one country (for example, in quality control, production logistics, and human resource functions such as recruiting and career development). However, it is only at the highest level of management in highly internationalised companies, as in the case of the V-P for Strategic Planning in our sample, that no distinction is made between national and international points of view. At these high levels in the organisation, data received from different countries, or from different companies within the group, are homogenized, interpreted and aggregated and global strategic decisions are taken.

Moreover, at these senior levels, and in highly professionalised companies, managers have already acquired a high level of personal proficiency in international operations and their careers have usually developed through international assignments. For them, internationalisation is not a «process» that they happen to be involved in at present, but the medium through which their professional lives have developed. This is true not only of very senior managers but also of managers in certain positions in, for example R&D, purchasing or logistics, which may be global in nature owing to economies of scale and scope.

2. *Managing internationally mainly means managing regionally.* From the evidence of our sample, «regional management» is more widespread than «global management» among managers in international companies. For the vast majority of managers, internationalisation merely means that their influence is extended from national to regional markets, not that they are called upon to assume worldwide responsibilities. This type of internationalisation also occurs

when «national champions» that operate mainly in their own country expand their activities across borders through mergers, acquisitions and alliances or foreign direct investment from one country to multiple countries. Thus, the managers of less internationalised companies face similar problems to the managers of internationalised companies. Every manager in a company that operates internationally has his or her own specific areas of influence and competence, both outside and inside the organisation, in the home country and abroad. The fact that this influence is limited to a certain geographical region, as our research indicates, demonstrates that managers need to have an international perspective but not necessarily a global one. Apart from the manager at Philip Morris, all the activities of the managers in our sample were confined to Europe or to a region within Europe.

The switch to operating on a regional basis is not always easy. In two of our cases we found that the managers experienced problems following regionalisation, as the restructuring of the organisation totally changed the nature of their jobs. Such organisational upheavals undoubtedly present a challenge to those affected by them and can lead to frustration in adapting to the new circumstances. The inevitable changes are relatively easy to adjust to in most cases, although in some cases they are more keenly felt.

In Medical Electric, for example, the Mediterranean Sales Manager, whose post was created after a takeover by an American company, experienced difficulties as a result of the reorganisation. In the new structure important decisions were made at the regional headquarters in France and he felt constrained, as he was unable to negotiate directly with clients and make decisions concerning discounts, credit, delivery dates and customisation, as he used to do in his former capacity as Sales Director of the Spanish subsidiary.

This difficulty in the process of regionalisation has also been identified by Blackwell, Bizet, Child and Hensley (1992), who found that many attempts at regionalisation were unsuccessful because «the commitment to moving beyond traditional national structures failed to take firm enough root, the needed levels of skill capability were not available, or the infrastructure of shared systems and processes was not adequately supplied».

3. Our exploratory research indicates that the internationalisation of management affects the internal task of the manager more than his/her external activities. This is a natural consequence of the increased need for integration of the company's activities. We found that the range of tasks undertaken by international managers is comparable to that of managers in companies which are local in nature.

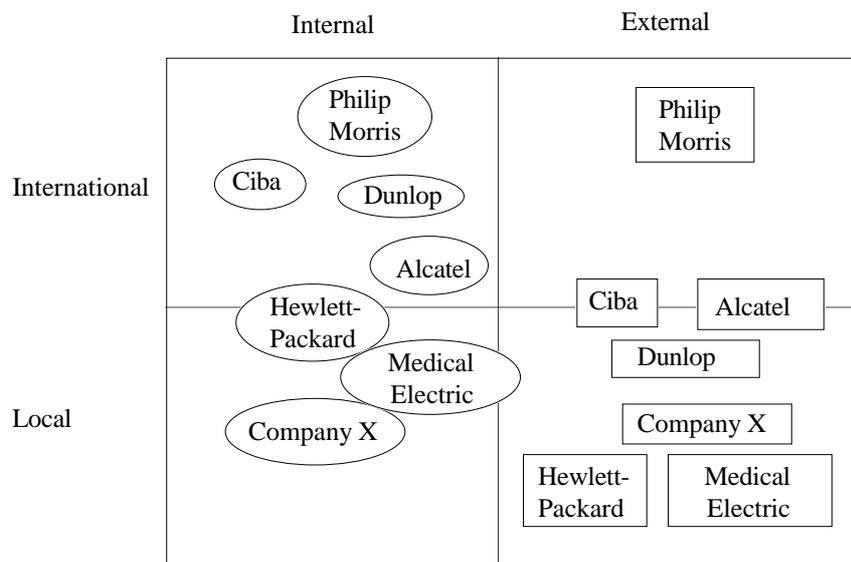
The key internal task common to most managerial positions is that of coordinating activities within the company. When a firm goes international, the geographical, cultural and psychological distance makes coordination more difficult. International managers accordingly allocate a significant amount of time to this concrete task, coordinating not only the business activities of the different units within the organisation but also cultural aspects, policies and know-how. Of course, different managerial positions are affected in different ways by this integration imperative.

At Philip Morris, the V-P of Strategic Planning devoted a great deal of his time to global activities, making no distinction between local (US) and international tasks. On the other hand, our managers at Medical Electronics and Company X were mainly involved in local operations with a very small international content. The main task of the head of Ciba in Spain was to supervise the head of the local operating companies within the country, as Ciba is organised by global product divisions headquartered in Basle (Switzerland).

Mapping the managerial task

As part of our research we looked closely at the nature of the job of each of the seven managers in our sample in terms of its external and internal components. The resulting map, shown in Figure 3 below, demonstrates that the degree of internationalisation of tasks carried out inside and outside the organisation is different for different positions.

Figure 3. Mapping the managerial task



External Managerial Tasks

All the managers had, to a greater or lesser extent, contact with stakeholders outside the firm. The managers from Ciba, Medical Electric and Company X made visits to customers to build relations and find out their needs and generally to maintain a knowledge of the market. The Hewlett-Packard Quality Manager made consultancy visits to customers to provide operational support.

Publicising the company and its products was a significant part of the job of the country managers. The Group Company Head of Ciba (Spain) sought to develop contacts with various sections of the media and arranged special publicity events as part of this activity. A major task of the Managing Director of Dunlop, S.A. was to develop relations with the trade to increase their confidence in the product, which he did, for example, by attending trade fairs. Company X's General Manager was responsible for advertising nationally and internationally.

Contact outside the boundaries of the company was often with institutions, either locally or internationally. This was particularly the case with the Senior Vice-President of Corporate Planning at Philip Morris. He sat on the boards of directors of a variety of international cultural, economic and civic organisations. He also developed and cultivated relationships with government representatives in the countries in which Philip Morris operated.

The Ciba Country Manager was required to represent his company in its dealings with regional and central government in Spain.

Obtaining information that would enable the company to operate more effectively was central to the role of all the managers. For the functional managers, it was particularly important that they kept up to date with current developments in their particular field. The two Quality Managers, at Hewlett-Packard and Alcatel, differed in their approach to this activity. The Hewlett-Packard manager obtained the information he needed at a local level, by attending conferences and seminars on Quality issues and by participating in benchmarking with other firms in Spain. The Total Quality Manager from Alcatel attended meetings and exchanged experiences with companies outside the Group, internationally as well as in Spain.

The headquarters manager at Philip Morris developed contacts with investment bankers, lawyers and management consultants in New York who acted as advisors to the company.

From an analysis of the range of activities described above, we have identified three types of external managerial tasks:

1. Relations with stakeholders.
2. Institutional relations.
3. Gathering know-how.

Figure 4 shows the importance of these external tasks in the work of each of the managers in our sample.

Figure 4. External task: Local v International

	Local	International
1. Institutional relations	Ciba Philip Morris	Philip Morris
2. Gathering know-how	Hewlett-Packard	Alcatel
3. Relations with stakeholders	Ciba Dunlop Medical Electric Company X	Philip Morris Alcatel

Internal Managerial Tasks

The tasks carried out by managers within the company at a local level were largely those of coordination and control. The Quality Manager in Alcatel, for example, defined and developed the Quality Assurance system and ensured that the philosophy and methodology of Total Quality was disseminated throughout the Business Units. Ensuring adherence to policies defined by Group headquarters was the major task of the Ciba and Dunlop managers. The Ciba Country Manager was charged with fostering the Ciba culture and the general policies of the Executive Committee vis-a-vis all stakeholders, and ensuring that Executive Committee guidelines on communication, safety, environmental protection, personnel policy, local legal requirements and good citizenship were adhered to. Similarly, the Dunlop manager was responsible for ensuring that BTR credit policies were strictly adhered to.

Other tasks included administration (Hewlett-Packard and Dunlop); executive evaluation and rewards (Ciba); development and presentation of training courses (Alcatel and Hewlett-Packard) and communication in its various forms.

In addition to these coordination, control and general management tasks, the managers at Alcatel, Ciba, Hewlett-Packard and Medical Electric had an advisory element in their jobs. The Ciba manager served the Executive Committee in an advisory capacity. The Total Quality functional managers in Alcatel and Hewlett-Packard provided guidance and support in operating Total Quality and were members, respectively, of a Standard-Setting Committee and a European Task Force to develop a 5-year European business plan. The manager in Medical Electric was a member of the company's Customer Service and Account Management Task Forces.

When we analysed the spread of tasks carried out by the managers within the firms, we found that the tasks fell into two distinct categories: those for which the manager had direct performance responsibility (either locally or internationally), which we have called Executive Tasks; and those in which the manager made an expert contribution, or participated in policy-making or systems and procedures development, which we have termed Consultative Tasks.

We have shown in our research that the internal consultative tasks are generally more strongly affected by the process of internationalisation than the executive tasks.

For six of our seven managers, the internal executive tasks of coordination, control and general management were largely local in character. Issues such as span of control and geographical dispersion imposed limitations on the scope of their task. Their international internal executive tasks were therefore mainly confined to reporting to headquarters. Only the manager at Philip Morris, who was the only manager holding a headquarters post, had executive tasks which were global in scope.

The tendency we identified in our small sample was towards an increment in the international consulting activities of operating managers, who still retained their executive tasks. Consultancy tasks were the main international activities of the two Quality Managers and of Ciba's Country manager. The managers in Medical Electric and Company X had the scope of their executive activities reduced as a result of European centralisation, but their consultative activities increased as a result of their involvement in European committees; however, both managers felt that this change was detrimental to their level of job satisfaction.

These findings are summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The findings: Cases

	LOCAL	INTERNATIONAL
– The INTERNAL task:		
1. Executive	High	Low
2. Consultative	Low	High
– The EXTERNAL task		
1. Institutional relations	High	Low
2. Gathering know-how	Low	High
3. Relations with stakeholders	High	High

Overcoming barriers to international managerial efficiency

A number of design tools for internally coordinating the operations of international companies do exist. However, it is ever more widely acknowledged that no matter how sophisticated –or even proven– these committees and systems may be, they do not guarantee that the organisation will perform successfully. As Blackwell, Bizet, Child and Hensley (1992) said: «Once the most suitable form of organization has been identified, the problems really start.» For these authors, typical problems include the lack of widespread commitment, power barriers, and the lack of communication skills –in other words, issues which are mostly to do with what we have called the internal dimension.

Why do the problems in international organisations lie so much in the implementation of systems and not in their design? We suggest that the origin of these problems may be the underlying social structure of multinational corporations, spanning nationalities and cultures. Different social systems or networks of informal and political relationships are to be found in all types of organisation, even in those that operate in just one place or in only one society. The plurality of informal social systems is a considerable challenge to the efficiency of managers. In organisations that operate internationally, units are differentiated not only in terms of the function or operations they perform, but also with regard to the cultural and social make-up of their staff (which impacts on, amongst other dimensions, their employees' attitude to power). These differences are aggravated by geographical distance and the lack of social cohesion among the various informal subgroups which are created; and this can seriously impinge on the ability of managers to get things done and to be successful.

A review of the classic literature on the main requirements for successful managerial action shows that it is precisely this lack of social and political cohesiveness that makes coordinating «internally» the crucial and most elusive of managerial skills. If this is true in non-international organisations or operations, it is all the more so when it comes to managing international organisations. The ability to manage complex social systems is more important

here than devising a strategy to take into account global scenarios or drawing complex organisation charts.

The work of authors such as Kotter and Mintzberg, whose main arguments have been confirmed by later research (Kurke and Aldrich, 1983; Luthans, Rosenkrantz and Hennessey, 1985; Kraut, Pedigo, McKenna and Dunnette, 1989), indicates that the main managerial tasks are those of managing interpersonal relationships, managing information, and decision-making. Each of these tasks demands a high level of interaction with subordinates, peers and superiors. These interactions take place through a large number of brief encounters, which should be based on a high level of trust and a minimum of mutual personal and professional knowledge. In sum, efficiency within an organisation demands a rich web of social acquaintances, which often cut through organisational hierarchies and units, and through which trust, information and decisions circulate. Otherwise, organisational politicking and inefficiency may take over.

Managing internationally should not, therefore, be considered in a different category from managing *tout court*, but as a high point in the dimension of managing complexity.

Conclusions

The conclusions which we have drawn from this research may be grouped under four main headings: the literature; the typology; our findings; and limitations and prospects.

Literature review

The existing literature on managing multinational companies is rooted in the literature on managing complex organisations. It focuses on activities which take place inside the organisation rather than on those which take place externally.

In international organisations, the social distance that arises as a consequence of the different cultures, backgrounds, careers and experiences of the staff and their different interests (based on different functions or business units, positions in the value chain, or structural power) is aggravated by physical distance, and in many cases by the lack of stable and long-standing relationships. This makes managerial performance extremely difficult, particularly with regard to what we have termed the «internal» dimension of managing internationally. The nature of these difficulties suggests that the formal design of the coordinating mechanisms of international organisations can only partially solve these problems. Non-structured integration devices are more appropriate.

The Typology

The typology that we have developed is not complex; it could be seen more as a classification of tasks than as a typology of managers. We have stressed the international dimension of the managerial task and the manager's relationships with the external environment.

The primary use of the typology is in identifying the pattern of skills which managers need to have within a multinational organisation in order for it to operate effectively.

Preliminary Findings (I)

The results of our research show that although managers need to have an «international» perspective, the need for a «global» mindset is confined to a small number of managers in certain senior positions or in certain functional specialisms. For most managers, managing internationally means managing within a given geographical region, rather than assuming worldwide responsibilities.

The internationalisation of an organisation affects different managerial positions in different ways. However, the internal tasks of the manager are more affected by the process than his or her external activities.

Preliminary Findings (II)

What has emerged quite clearly from our research is that the degree of internationalisation of the internal managerial task depends on the nature of the task. We have identified two different dimensions of the managerial task: the executive and the consultative. The executive dimension has to do with those aspects of the business for which the manager has direct responsibility, while the latter is concerned with the aspects where the manager has a say but no direct vote, and which go beyond his/her span of control.

In the process of internationalisation the consultative tasks of the manager are the ones most affected. The tendency in our small sample was towards an increment in the international consultative activities of operating managers. Issues such as span of control and geographical dispersion prescribe the limits of the executive dimension of the international task. At the operational level, the executive task is therefore mainly confined to the local environment, where managers have the authority to change things. We found that, suprisingly, the external task was less significant than we expected, although it is increasing in importance.

Limitations of the Study

We recognise that our study was limited in its scope in a number of areas. Firstly, it concentrated on managers in MNCs. Secondly, given such a small sample it was not possible to include all possible managerial positions nor the diversity of organisational structures. Finally, it confined itself to describing the facts as they were presented to us. More work is needed to investigate the extent of the formal and informal dimensions of managing integration and the importance of the external task.

Challenges

There are now two major challenges facing us in our research into «Managing Internationally». It is important that we establish the precise roles that the Executive and Consultative tasks play in managing the opposing forces of integration and decentralisation within an international organisation. We also need to look at the effect that the different social contexts can have on the Consultative tasks performed by managers in an international environment. □

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