

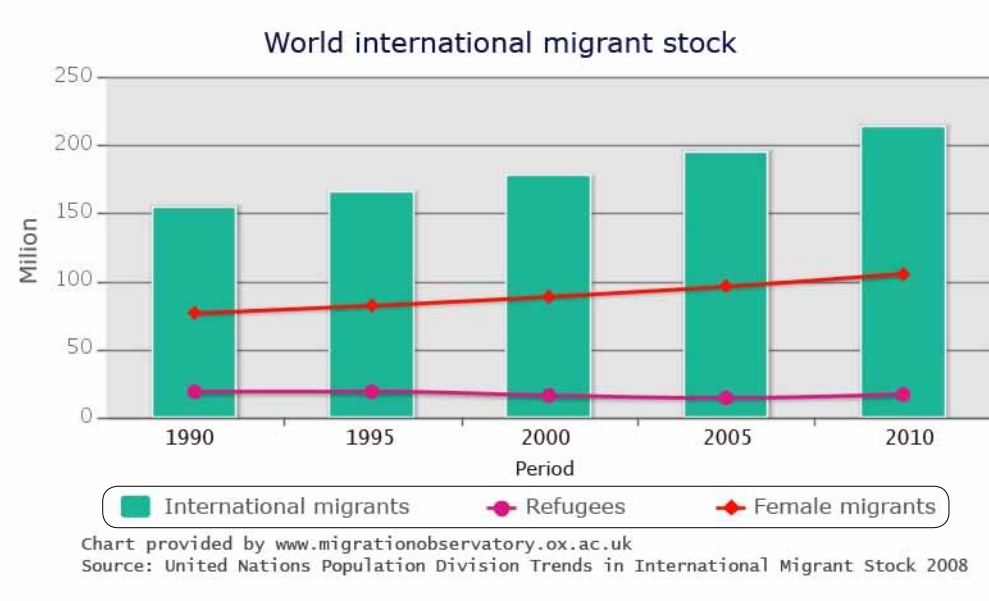


Cultural diversity and international education

The business case and the “expat cycle”

What exactly is an expatriate? And how does this term differ from “migrant”? The term **expatriate** – derived from the Latin “*ex-patriare*” – means “to leave one’s country”. The sometimes blurred distinction between the “expatriate” and the more common and all encompassing “migrant” lies in the fact that the former is usually more skilled and qualified and doesn’t plan to establish in the foreign country, while other migrants move in order to settle in the new territory to improve their quality of life, for example finding a job (economic migrants), a safe haven (asylum seekers - refugees), or living in a country with a pleasant climate (lifestyle migrants).

The numbers are pretty significant, with some **214 million** estimated overall migrants in 2010.





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In this article, we will focus on **expatriates**, whose number is steadily growing. There has been an increasing attention in recent years to providing more support to them, in particular to those professionals working for **multinational companies and on a temporary assignment abroad**. The focus on this type of support has historically been on a more practical level: assistance with moving, accommodation, language lessons, etc.. However, more recently, there has been a concentrated effort on assisting expatriates with the more **personal aspects** of international mobility and giving them the knowledge, awareness and instruments to be able to understand more about themselves therefore helping them to **integrate more easily** into their new environment.

Specific training programmes have been therefore developed by most far-sighted multinational conglomerates – including Generali Group via its Innovation Academy – specifically aimed at:

- Equipping participants with skills to live with, adapt to, make sense of and promote **change**
- Building cross-cultural competence in order to ensure that individuals and the Group create value from **diversity**
- Facilitating the speed and effectiveness of **integration** in a new job and new working environment
- Fostering the **exchange of knowledge** and experience from one country and company to another through a network of internationally mobile managers: growing a set of **change agents** for the Group
- Reinforcing the perception of the Group as a distinctive and diverse whole and build a sense of Group-wide **identity**

It is extremely common for an expatriate to go through a cultural adaptation cycle.



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The “**expat cycle**” is a cycle that shows the various emotions that expatriates are likely to feel at certain points in their transition:

- ✓ The initial “**honeymoon period**” just after arriving in the new country
- ✓ a **dip** over the next few months during which an expatriate may have difficulties with the language, feeling home-sick, problems with country bureaucracy
- ✓ a period of **recovery**, where the difficulties appear less serious and even humorous
- ✓ the final phase where expatriates finally start to **feel at home**



If problems persist and expatriates do not get to the recovery stage they may decide to terminate their assignment and return to their home country. Given this well-known **emotional roller-coaster** an organisation who can support the expatriate through this cycle with tools to navigate this period well is likely to have a more effective and satisfied employee.

Cultural dimensions and the Trompenaars studies



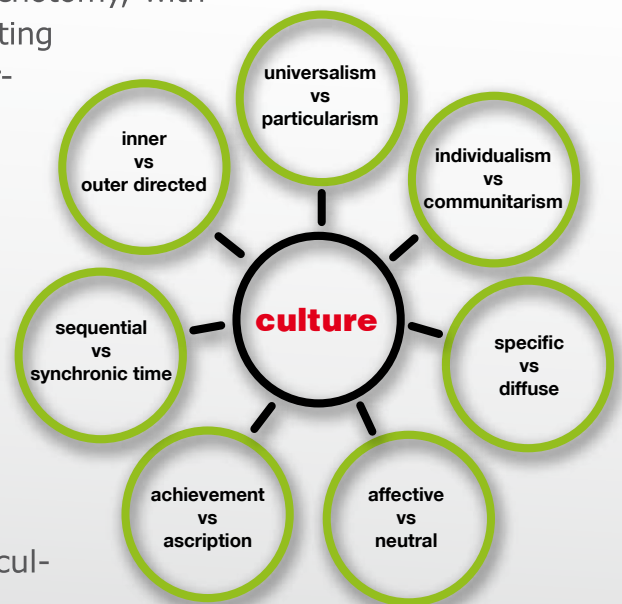
The overall expatriate experience, however, needs to be properly evaluated within the cross-cultural context, a very interesting field of study where **Fons Trompenaars** – and his company Trompenaars Hampden-Turner (THT) – has emerged as one of the culture gurus of contemporary society, in particular for his studies on the 7 dimension model of culture. Research has shown that often when we work with people, we expect them to act like us, to make similar decisions as us and to communicate in a similar way, especially if they are of the same nationality. When

people do not act in the way that we expect there can be **conflict**. Trompenaars argues that this can happen because our culture influences our value system and different cultures may have different value systems that are different to our own.

This **model of 7 dimensions** provides insights into the differences in these value systems and therefore helps to explain why cultures may react in the same, similar, or completely different ways to our own.

Each of the 7 dimensions are composed of a dichotomy, with each culture (and therefore country) demonstrating a lean towards one or the other opposite. Understanding where a particular country sits within this model helps us to understand more about them. The dimensions look at the following categories:

- **Universalism vs Particularism:** the emphasis on rules or relationships
- **Individualism vs Communitarianism:** the emphasis on groups or individuals
- **Specificity vs Diffuseness:** to what extent and how cultures get involved
- **Affectivity vs Neutrality:** to what extent cultures display emotion
- **Inner directed vs Outer directed:** levels of control of nature
- **Achieved status vs Ascribed status:** how and what type of status is rewarded
- **Sequential time vs Synchronic time:** approach to time



Each country will sit on one or the other side of this model and is therefore likely to display certain norms and behaviours according to this placing.

So, what does this mean for business? For business this understanding becomes important as elements of culture become part of (often nationally defined) '**business systems**', i.e., the way that business activities are coordinated in different countries. In a country which is used to doing business in a certain way the 'interference' of a new culture may be unwelcome. It is a well-known fact that one of the main reasons that **company mergers** fail is contrasting cultures, where one business is used to doing things in one way, and the other in its, different, way.



The Generali Group's Innovation Academy: "e-learning" cultural diversity

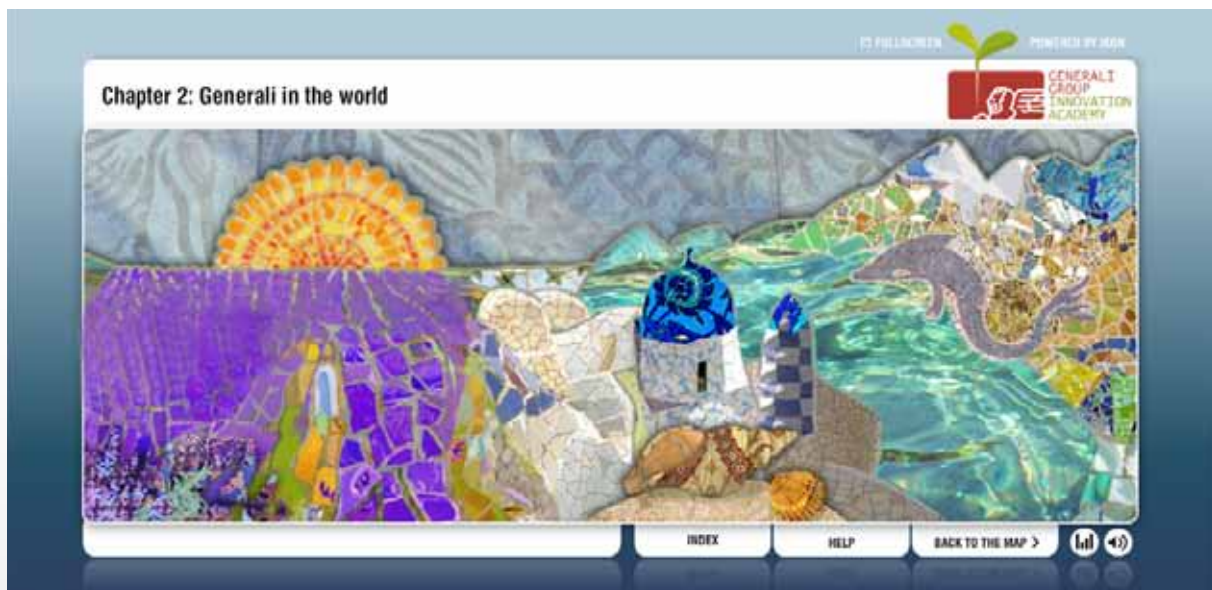
Generali Group employs approximately 82.000 people and is present in more than 60 countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia. International Mobility has always been a lever inside Generali Group, with a strong

focus on the quality of the moves and time devoted to processes such as selection, integration, and assistance to the expatriates and their families.

The learning vehicle of the Generali Group is the **Generali Group Innovation Academy (GGIA)** which is located in Mogliano Veneto's Generali Headquarters, close to Venice, and since its foundation back in 2005 it has provided numerous hours of learning to employees within and outside of Italy, at all levels. In 2011 some 168.000 hours of training were delivered. Around five years ago the GGIA developed a classroom – based training program named **Marco Polo** targeted specifically at expatriate needs in regards to culture and working with colleagues and other stakeholders in their new host country. With assistance from the International Mobility Team based in the Corporate Centre of Generali and a selection of Local Mobility Managers the group used their experience in welcoming expatriates to build a learning intervention that would help expatriates understand more about themselves, their cultural context, the cultural context of others and also the practical processes that would accompany their assignment. The content of the programme was a balance of the theory of culture, practice and process and ensured that participants were set up for success for their international assignment.

Having realized the complexity of the challenge it was later decided to extend the idea of the Marco Polo training, albeit in a different form, to a **broader population**. In late 2011 the GGIA began work on what was to be the sister programme of Marco Polo, **Pangea**. The target audience was those **managers and teams hosting the expatriates**. Given that this target group would be much higher than actual expatriate numbers, for reasons of economies of scale it was decided that an **e-learning** product would be much more effective as a learning intervention; significantly lower costs per head, easy to access, comfort in accessibility, etc. In order to understand the learning needs of this new programme, a focus





group, made up by expatriates and managers of expatriates, was invited to share their experiences, the difficulties they encountered, examples of best-practice they had seen, in order to build content for the e-learning that would be very relevant to the users.

Pangea will focus on **four key areas**:

- The business case for diversity
- Generali in the world
- The theory of cultural dimensions
- Inclusion



Whilst the focus of the e-learning is geared towards cultural diversity, the programme has allowed the GGIA to introduce the concept of **diversity as a whole**. The theme of diversity is one that has possibly been more prevalent in North American and Anglosaxon business cultures, where the introduction of equality legislation in general (race, gender, religious, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc) has encouraged a more speedy approach to integration, acceptance and inclusion of minority groups within the workplace. Since studies on diversity began around the 1980s the idea that the **quality of decision-making within heterogeneous groups outperforms that of homogenous groups** has become a fairly accepted standard.

The course looks specifically at the relationship of Generali and culture and how through the process of international mobility the Group can support its internationalisation, promote an international mind-set, share knowledge across teams and



countries, increase intercultural awareness and maximise cross-cultural collaboration, create a diverse workforce reflecting a diverse client base, create a “pool” of skilled and talented managers for all international functions and aim to become an employer of choice at a global level.

In addition, the course focuses on the **skills** required by managers and team members to help expatriates feel more integrated. The intention is to create a set of **emotionally intelligent** managers who feel the necessary responsibility for the welfare of the expatriates assigned to the team. As the Generali workforce becomes increasingly more global these skills will be required by everyone.

The theory of cultural dimensions is thoroughly covered, also thanks to the direct collaboration with THT and Trompenaars.



Pangea is to be officially launched shortly and will be targeted at managers and teams who already host/are due to host expatriates. Feedback will continue to be sought from expatriates to see if the e-learning really has helped to create a more culturally sensitive and emotionally intelligent workforce.

As **Mr. Francesco Garelo** – DGM Head of HR and GGIA – points out *“For Generali, cultural diversity has been a key success factor in building our international group. Cultural awareness must therefore be an integral part of how we do business as we seek to consolidate our worldwide presence”*.

Lida Miskiw

International Education

Generali Group Innovation Academy