

# Preface

Wittgenstein asserted that we cannot step out of our language by means of language. He got this wrong. When misunderstandings arise, some find refuge in blaming differences of culture and language as barriers to communication. I find this a feeble excuse. I get intensely irritated when I hear a statement such as “You can take a Japanese out of Japan but you cannot take Japan out of a Japanese”, not just because it is puerile and offensive but because it exhibits a resignation of attitude and a laziness of mind. It denies the sapience in *Homo sapiens*.

Culture and language are the means to communication; they are not barriers. No doubt they are intertwined and culture can only be properly represented as values which in turn can only be articulated and described by language. But culture is a consequence of sapience, and language is merely a tool. They are not the drivers of human behaviour. It is not necessary to be a linguist or a cultural specialist to communicate across languages and cultures. But it does require an awareness of where differences lie. Whether using Japanese or Mandarin or Spanish or Tamil or any of the various forms of English found around the world, it is being aware of the differences in language and culture which allow them to be used as the tools that they are. And being aware of the differences in these tools enables the penetration of the “packaging” to reach the underlying and common drivers of human behaviour.

Since receiving my first wage packet as an engineering apprentice in England in 1964, fresh from completing school in India, I have had the good fortune to be active in academia, industry and the corporate world over the subsequent 45 years. I have been stationed in England, in Sweden, in Japan, in India, in Germany and then in Sweden again. During this time I have reported directly to at least 200 different individuals of some 18 nationalities who were either my direct managers or their superiors (not including reporting to company Boards of Directors and many thousands of shareholders at Annual General Meetings). I have visited some 40 countries and have managed operations in over 50. Over the years, in excess of 800 individuals of over 25 nationalities have reported to me directly as their manager or as their superior’s superior and for whose performance I have had some responsibility. I have probably interviewed around 1,000 individuals to appoint

some 200 of them as managers. I estimate that I must have had meaningful interactions with between 6,000 and 10,000 individuals in managerial positions. They have been colleagues, customers, suppliers, competitors, partners, consultants, academics, politicians or civil servants in government. They have been men and women of all ages and have come from across all continents.

I have found managers worthy of respect and admiration across all the countries I have worked in, and among all the nationalities I have worked with. I have also found incompetence and stupidity and cowardice and lack of integrity and questionable ethics in all countries and with all nationalities. I have found skilled professionals and rank amateurs everywhere. There have been examples of clumsy beginners and lords of the dance. But underneath the veneer of culture and language, the primal driving forces for managerial behaviour have been much the same all over the world.

But differences do exist. They exist just above the level of the primal drivers. I have found that these show up first as differences of attitude and subsequently in behaviour. Fundamental values are not so very different between peoples around the world but the variations on these basic values are endless. Culture and language and religion are inextricably linked with differences of nuance in values and value systems. The values of an individual and his surrounding environment in turn strongly influence the attitudes and behaviours he exhibits. The “Essence of a Manager” lies here, in getting under the surface of the outer veneer and addressing the fundamental drivers of human behaviour.

It has been a fascinating and an educational journey which still continues. There has been and still is something new to learn every day; about technology, about science, about commerce, about governing and governance, about ethics and integrity, about bribery and corruption, about human relationships, about human behaviour, about cultural differences, and, above all, about the common drivers of human behaviour which lie beneath the outer packaging of culture and language and religion. I have been lucky with, and am profoundly grateful to, all my immediate superiors who have – without exception – given me the room to learn and to grow. I cannot think of any one of my colleagues and subordinates who did not have something to teach me. Even those people who I have not had much respect for or just did not get on with, have provided opportunities to learn – even if only as behaviour to be avoided.

From my personal reservoir of experiences I find I have developed very decided opinions about many areas of management and people and relationships and behaviour. These have hardened over the years and appear – at least to me – to be insights which may have some value for others. This work is not intended to be a scientific treatise with a hypothesis followed by the collection of evidence leading to an analysis and a synthesis of data to formulate a new scientific law or a better hypothesis. I hope that I have by now outgrown the stereotyped attitudes of the right or the left and no longer have any particular political agenda. In any case, I have never had much time or respect for political correctness. I am hopeful therefore that the opinions I put down – and which I hold at times very strongly – are as objective as they reasonably can be but which are no doubt coloured by faulty and inaccurate memory.

I count myself fortunate to have had a great deal of satisfaction and a fair share of fun in all my assignments. I hope I have demonstrated over the years that you don't have to be sad to be serious. But, it is all just opinion – my op-ed column rather than “hard news”. However, not everything Wittgenstein had to say was wrong. The world is indeed a totality of facts and not just an accumulation of things. And what I do not know and cannot speak about, I must pass over in silence.

Finspång, Sweden

Krishna Pillai