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Title	Cross-Cultural Management Research Issues
Author(s)	Firkola, Peter; Lim, Lrong
Citation	Economic journal of Hokkaido University, 32, 45-68
Issue Date	2003-07
Doc URL	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/2115/5378">https://hdl.handle.net/2115/5378</a>
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	EJHU_v32_p45-68.pdf



# **Cross-Cultural Management Research Issues**

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The research field of cross-cultural management suffers from an absence of theory capable of explaining the role of culture in organizational behavior. Methodological issues that are at least partly responsible for the above shortcoming, are explored in this paper. The central argument is that, despite efforts by researchers to resolve these issues, many methodological problems continue to resist the remedies prescribed by researchers. This paper seeks to evaluate the reasons why, and based on these evaluations, some suggestions for future research are proposed.

*JEL Classification Numbers* : M12, M14

*Key Words* : Cross Cultural Behavior, Organizational Behavior, Cultural Inferences, Comparative Management

## **1. Introduction**

From the 1960s onwards, management researchers have shown interest in the concept of culture because it was believed that culture has an influence on managerial behavior and performance (Sekaran, 1983 : 67) . At the same time, there are many problems that obstruct the advancement of research in culture, making it difficult to reach a clear understanding of the relationship between culture and management.

The problems faced are accompanied by an increasing necessity to find cultural solutions to organizational problems in a world that has begun to resemble a “global village” (Doktor, Tung, and Von Glinow, 1991a : 259) . The heightened pace of global integration brought about by technological and economical forces point to the direction that managers will increasingly have to deal with counterparts from a culture quite unlike their own. It is thus believed that substantial competitive advantages can be derived by those who are able to tackle these cultural issues appropriately.

Research to date spanning several disciplines such as psychology, sociology, marketing, and management has attempted to provide insightful analyses and solutions for these problems (Adler, 1984 ; Ajiferuke and Boddewyn, 1970 ;

Barrett and Bass, 1970 ; Berry, 1979 ; Cavusgil and Das, 1997 ; Child, 1981 ; Kraut, 1975 ; Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996 ; Nasif et al., 1991 ; Negandhi, 1974 ; Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 ; Schollhammer, 1969 ; Sechrest, Fay, and Zaidi, 1972 ; Sekaran, 1983 ; Tayeb, 1994). Yet, as this paper seeks to argue, many of these problems seem to have remained generally intractable or simply ignored.

This paper first illustrates a situation whereby there is no existence of a general theory in the field of cross cultural management research. The causes of the inability to arrive at a general theory is examined through the investigation of methodological problems. The structure of this investigation adapts in part, that of Adler (1984 : 45-48), Cavusgil and Das (1997 : 72), and Nasif et al. (1991 : 81). Specifically, a process approach is used to discuss the problems and difficulties at each successive stage of the research process (Nasif et al., 1991 : 81) classified into the following five broad categories : definition, sampling, instrumentation and measurement, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation.

At each successive stage, solutions to the problems used in prior research are discussed. Their workability to tackle the problems is evaluated, following which, suggestions are made for future research specifically by the non-Western researcher. A summary of these issues, problems, and solutions is listed in table 1 .

This paper contributes to the existing body of literature through the evaluation of remedies and proposals for future research. In doing so, this research also aims to increase the awareness of the seriousness of these issues. Given the broad range of the research focus, this research is limited in its comprehensiveness. The range covered in the study of organizations comes from so many disciplines that it is “virtually impossible to think simultaneously about the multitude of problems and research strategies” (Roberts, 1997 : 5).

The findings of this research imply that despite several decades of development, meaningful cross cultural management research continues to remain an extremely difficult task. Theoretically, the field has yet to be capable of objectively explaining cultural inferences on organizational behavior. Methodologically, although some aspects of the problems may be solvable, limitations like costs, time, and accessibility seem to continually inhibit researchers from paying attention to the errors.

Table 1 : Summary of Key Issues, Problems, and Solutions

Issue	Problem	Solution
Definition	1 Lack of common and operational definition	1 Use widely referenced definition
Sampling	1 Number of cultures ( 2 ) 2 Representativeness of samples 3 Non-independence of samples (Galton's problem) 4 Opportunistic sampling	1 Increase sample numbers 2 Use of matched samples 3 Use of "Cultunit" 4 Fact of life
Instrumentation and Measurement	1 Equivalence of variables 2 Translation issues 3 Scaling	1 Equivalent concepts 2 Back translation and equivalent meanings 3 Equivalent scales
Data Collection	1 Non-equivalence of responses 2 Biases 3 Cross-sectional versus longitudinal data	1 Uniform procedures 2 Pretesting and advice from local researchers 3 Use of longitudinal data
Data analysis and Interpretation	1 Qualitative versus quantitative data 2 Bivariate versus multivariate analysis 3 Ecological fallacy	1 Triangulation 2 Use of multivariate analysis 3 Check external validity

## 2. The situation : An absence of theory

The main interests of cross cultural management researchers lie in the issue of cultural influences on organizational behavior and outcomes. Specifically, can it be proven that cultural factors influence human behavior in organizations ? Or, can it be posited that organizational performances are a consequence of cultural elements ? In essence, is there an acceptable theory that can be used to explain relationships among culture, human behavior in organizations, and the outcomes of organizations ? Unfortunately, the research to date suggests that there is no general theory (Bhagat and McQuaid 1982 : 675 ; Child, 1981 : 304). [Since it is beyond the scope of this non-

comprehensive paper to examine closely the various attempts at theory building, the reader is encouraged to look up comprehensive review papers that probe deeper into this lack of theoretical pinnings.<sup>1)</sup>

A decade after its emergence around 1960 as a distinctive research entity (Schollhammer, 1969 : 82), the early cross cultural research works were proclaimed by Ajiferuke and Boddewyn (1970 : 161) as ; “much of the claim about ‘culture’ being the most significant variable in management comparisons rest more on speculation than on facts.” Two decades later, Budde, Child, Francis, and Kieser (1982 : 1) commented that researchers are still not in a position to theorize about culture. This state of affairs has led Redding (1997 : 1453) to pass judgment on the progress of cross cultural research that “thirty years’ work has made little impression on the immensely complex problem of cultures and organizational behavior.” This is a discouraging comment for the research sub—area of comparative management, which has the luxury of having four major models<sup>2)</sup> (Chen, 1997 ; Nath, 1988 : 4 ; Schollhammer, 1969) enshrined in a 1500 paged, selected reprints “mini-library of reference” (Warner, 1997 : xiii).

As a consequence, an absence of theory to serve as a research guide is particularly damaging to the advancement in the understanding of cross cultural behaviors. Budde, Child, Francis, and Kieser (1982 : 1) reminded researchers that Roberts’ 1970 declaration (1997 : 8) remains as valid and as urgent as ever : “without some theoretical notions of explaining culture and predicting its effects on other variables, we cannot make sense of cross-cultural comparisons.”

Yet, many researchers as mirrored by Lammers and Hickson (1979 : 403) insist that culture has a potential impact on organizational forms and processes for at least three reasons : “because outside agencies set cultural constraints for an organization ; because dominant elites in an organization design and redesign organizational life in terms of culturally given models of

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1) See Bhagat and McQuaid (1982) for a theoretical critic on the sub-themes of cognitive style, attitudes and values, work motivation, and job satisfaction ; Redding (1997) for inter-cultural relations, human resource management, leadership, and organization development and corporate culture ; and Roberts (1997) for attitudes and values, leadership, motivation, and communication at the individual employee level, and management styles, conflict and cooperation, group decision making, deviance and conformity, efficiency, and communication at the organizational sub-unit level.

2) The models may be more precisely viewed as “approaches” (Schollhammer, 1969) to the research on cross cultural management rather than “theories”. These models are economic development model (Harbison and Myers, 1959) ; environmental model (Farmer and Richman, 1965) ; behavioral model (Barrett and Bass, 1970 ; Davies, 1971) ; and open systems model (Negandhi and Prasad, 1971).

organizing ; because members themselves unofficially tend to organize and to 'counter-organize' in ways derived from sub-cultures."

There is a large inventory of non-exhaustive literature depicting cultural influences on a variety of subjects. While not necessarily representative, some recent examples of such literature relate culture to work values (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, and Yu, 1997), productivity of R&D units (Kedia, Keller, and Julian, 1992), preference for innovation roles (Shane, 1995), perception of ethical problems (Armstrong, 1996), ownership preferences (Erramilli, 1996), economic performance (Franke, Hofstede, and Bond, 1991), performance of brand image strategies (Roth, 1995), human resource management (Laurent, 1986 ; Schneider, 1988), constraints on technology transfer across nations (Kedia and Bhagat, 1988), and performance fit (Weber, 1996).

Indeed, Barrett and Bass (1970 : 208) charged that "it would seem naive to maintain that culture is not an important variable in influencing managerial attitudes and behavior." This state of partial knowledge keeps a continuous tension on researchers who acknowledge that "a variable called culture exerts some influence on organizations, but do not know exactly what culture is" (Sekaran, 1983 : 67). Three decades later, "culture" still remains the "black box" that was often made to stand for many unspecified influences (Ajiferuke and Boddewyn, 1970 : 161).

Hofstede's (1984) research, however, is frequently suggested to be the "beginnings of a foundation that could help scientific theory building in cross cultural research" (Sekaran, 1983 : 69). His well reviewed (Sondergaard, 1994) and highly praised (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1995 : 118 ; Prasad, 1990 : xi ; Tayeb, 1994 : 434) research, encompassed data from 67 nations (Hofstede, 1984 : 45), had large longitudinal data, and utilized multivariate analyses to conceive general theories of national culture along four, later five dimensions.<sup>3)</sup>

Yet, despite all the praises of being extolled as a premier showcase for subsequent research, Hofstede's work has also been criticized for a variety of reasons (Sondergaard, 1994 : 449), the least being the representativeness of the research population. A more prominent criticism focused on his efforts to make some theoretical post-hoc proposals on how organizational behavior theories

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3) The five dimensions are ; individualism versus collectivism, large or small power distance, strong or weak uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, and long versus short term orientation (Hofstede and Bond, 1988).

which emanate from certain societies are culture influenced (Sekaran, 1983 : 69). The resulting conclusions of overwhelming influence of cultural elements on organizational behavior are criticized by Tayeb (1994 : 435) as being based on conceptual speculations and ‘after-event’ verifications with findings of other studies rather than on ‘hard’ evidence. Hofstede’s study was in fact, not “planned in advance as an investigation into effects of culture on organizations and their members.”

In seeking for the causes for this lack of theory, some researchers suggested the “infancy” reason (Adler, 1983 : 231 ; Sekaran, 1983 : 69). This youthful stage of research leads the discipline to its current “pre-paradigm state of development” (Black and Mendenhall, 1990 : 113 ; Nasif et al., 1991 : 80 ; Roberts and Boyacigiller (1984 : 426). Other less forgiving researchers maintained that the “discipline has long gone past its infancy and adolescence and there can be no excuse for avoidable imperfections and amateurism” (Tayeb, 1994 : 444).

Perhaps a more relevant reason for the lack of theory is propounded by Roberts (1997 : 8) “Culture is still a reality to be explained and as such cannot yet explain other realities... At least we should be able to define ‘culture,’ for without this definition, a theory of culture is impossible to derive... The problem is to explain the effects of culture on behavior, not to make inferences about behavior in spite of culture.” The moot point here is, how can culture be used as an independent variable to explain some dependent variable when researchers do not even have a clear understanding of the independent variable itself?

### **3. The search for the elusive definition**

Most early papers on cross-cultural management were found to have rarely defined “culture” (Ajiferuke and Boddewyn, 1970 : 155 ; Barrett and Bass, 1970 : 208). Yet for other papers with definitions furnished, there existed little consensus among them (Kraut, 1975 : 544). Several articles (Adler, 1984 : 44 ; Child, 1981 : 323 ; LaJaunie and Sambharya, 1990 : 213 ; Negandhi, 1983 : 25) have noted an anthropology source that revealed up to 164 definitions of the culture concept.<sup>4)</sup>

As Tayeb (1994 : 439) presented it plainly ; “culture can be argued to include a gamut of all norms, beliefs, values, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, or

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4) The anthropology source is Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1952 : 43-55).

culture can take a form that is devoid of economics, politics, law, religion, language, education, technology, industrial environment, society, or the market.” Concurred Ajiferuke and Boddewyn (1970 : 154) , “culture is one of those terms that defy a single all-purpose definition, and there are almost as many meanings of ‘culture’ as people using the term”. Decades later, the academic world of cross cultural management research still suffers from the same problem as Redding (1997 : 1453) confessed, “we are still without a widely accepted definition of culture.”

The penchant for chasing after the elusive definition of culture may be understood through Chapman (1992 : 9 quoted in Tayeb, 1994 : 430) who poked at the academic circle ; “the literature on management and culture is rich in assertions of the need to define culture. If it is not defined, how can it be operationalized ? If it is not operationalized, how can it be measured ? If it is not measured, how can it take its place in the scientific literature, with its multiple regression, its patterns of causation, and its ambitions of rigor ? ”

Adler, Doktor and Redding (1997 : 63) proposed that five major debates encounter cross cultural researchers, of which three are reproduced here. The first looks at whether organizational behavior varies across cultures in the world. The second queries if the variations, if any, may be attributed to cultural factors. And the third asks if these worldwide variances are converging or diverging. It becomes quite obvious to the reader that, the answers to the three debates will come to depend on how culture is defined, hence the rich assertions of the necessity in definition.

Referring to Tayeb’s definition above, if culture is taken to include all the norms related to human beings, then quite obviously, organizational behavior would vary across cultures, and these variations are attributed to cultural factors, and that these variances are diverging (Adler, 1997 : 60 ; Joynt and Warner, 1996 : 4 ). But if culture is taken to exclude anything that has the slightest relation, then obviously the findings will be in the reverse. Roberts and Boyacigiller (1984 : 428) thus commented that this problem is at the heart of all cross cultural studies.

Recalling Chapman’s (1992) series of “ifs,” expectedly, researchers have not done a good job at operationalizing the culture concept (Negandhi, 1983 : 25). An undesirable result of poor operationalization is that, although researchers meant that culture is to be used as an independent variable, it often ends up being a residual “catch-all” variable (Child, 1981 : 306 ; Kraut,

1975 : 544) which does not really contribute to theory building. On a similar front, most cross cultural studies treat “culture” as synonymous with “nation” (Child, 1981 : 304), which by default operationalizes the “culture” variable as “nation” (Adler, 1984 : 49). In the process, researchers habitually ignore the possibility that a nation may in fact house multiple cultures such that cultural heterogeneity exists (Schollhammer, 1969 : 92).

Generally, researchers like Budde, Child, Francis, and Kieser (1982 : 4), and Bhagat and McQuaid (1982 : 675) argued that culture must be more refined in its definition in order to be meaningfully researched although Tayeb (1994 : 431) did not suppose that a tighter definition of culture may solve problems. One response to the difficult situation of handling culture (Child, 1981 : 307) included opinions that culture should be dropped off from the research field (Kraut, 1975 : 544 ; Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984 : 428). A second response is a proposal to replace culture with “subjective culture” which refers to a group’s particularistic way of perceiving its social environment, and thereby providing a more rigorous basis for the definition of culture (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982 : 655). Yet a third option is to borrow from a widely referenced definition (Adler, 1997 : 14-15).

This research asserts that dropping off the term from research tantamounts to running away from the problem. Dropping off the term would be to imply that culture has nothing to do with management, which is not likely to reflect the true social reality. The other option to use subjective culture is attractive as it allows the researcher to define culture in emic (culture specific) terms which gives a tighter picture. But if every researcher were to rely on subjective culture, then the scenario does not differ much from what it is now. We shall then have many different types of definition, subjectively. The third option of referencing a widely accepted definition is probably the most convenient and thereby appealing for many researchers. Among the many choices, Hofstede’s definition<sup>5)</sup> is probably one of the most widely referenced in cross cultural literature. This has the advantage of unity in terminology among researchers, which could enable them to speak in the same “language”, thus achieving some form of “forced” objectivity.

#### **4. Sampling**

Roberts (1997 : 26) imputed that one of the most blatant problems in cross cultural research is sampling. Sampling issues include the number of cultures

5) Hofstede (1984 : 21) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.”

to be considered, selection of cultures and subjects, representativeness of samples, and independence of samples (Nasif et al., 1991 : 84).

Most studies, as Nath (1969 : 217) revealed, incorporated only two cultures in the sample. There is doubt as to whether a two culture study could offer a sufficiently deep understanding of the effects of culture on behavior (Sekaran, 1983 : 64). The reason is that, for any one proposition of a two-sample comparison, many rival hypotheses can be counter-proposed, thus introducing ambiguity in comparisons (Berry, 1979 : 419).

The counter measure suggested by researchers for this problem is to increase the number of samples. Along this line, Kraut (1975 : 540) has noted that more studies are incorporating a larger number of cultures of which Hofstede's (1984) work is a fine example. Other studies that cover four nations (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, and Yu, 1997), five nations (Pavett and Morris, 1995), eight nations (Yeung and Ready, 1995), nine nations (Ng et al., 1982), or ten nations (Roth, 1995) seem to be more feasible for the average researcher.

While agreeing with the suggestion to increase the number of cultures in the sample, it is important to note that researchers have to work under some restrictions of which cost and time constraints remain a formidable obstacle. Researchers thus, may in fact be conducting two-culture studies not solely by choice. Consequently, this research shares the opinion of Adler (1984 : 52) whereby two culture studies should not be discouraged but should be treated as pilot studies upon which findings can later be systematically integrated (Sekaran, 1983 : 64).

The selection of cultures and targets are mainly opportunistic (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982 : 676 ; Nath, 1970 : 145 ; Roberts, 1997 : 27) and are not based on their theoretical standing towards the variables in question. University students, executives attending courses, and organizations with good university relations have often been selected, along with similar captive targets at the location of sabbaticals. Differences found are thus more of a "happy accident rather than an anticipated theoretical result" (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982 : 676). The way to solve this problem is to select cultures and targets based on their theoretical standing on the independent culture variable and the dependent variable (Roberts, 1997 : 27).

This recommendation is easier said than done. Opportunistic sampling is

a fact of life in cross cultural studies (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982 : 676). Scholars like Sekaran (1983 : 69) for example, have been honest to admit this undeniable fact and has even went further to defend it. The research community, she said, should be more flexible on opportunistic sampling because it is surely easier for an Indian in the US to compare India and US rather than any third country. This paper shares her view in that, this is probably an efficient manner to access a culture in which one is already quite familiar with. The familiar ground probably could help to expedite the research process. To access a culture that is not so familiar to the researcher may open up a different genre of difficulties and biases (discussed below under data collection).

A third problem in sampling concerns the non-representativeness of the sample. Representative samples are supposed to reflect the total population of a culture on all key demographic variables (Adler, 1984 : 52). In social sciences, random selection of organizations and samples is probably not possible (Barrett and Bass, 1970 : 206 ; Roberts, 1997 : 29). As an alternative solution, Adler (1984 : 52) and Sekaran (1983 : 64) recommended the option of using matched samples as found in the work of Ng et al. (1982). Another suggestion is to conduct "randomization at some level of the sampling plan" (Cavusgil and Das, 1997 : 80).

The research asserts that completely representative data is not likely to be obtainable. The use of matched samples constitutes a form of standardized, objective intervention that is aimed at achieving equivalent features of the target samples. This paper considers the use of matched samples to be more workable and logical than partial randomization which may face the additional problem of deciding the level from which to start randomizing. In any case, representativeness of data is sacrificed.

The fourth sampling issue involves the non-independence of samples, which is also referred to as Galton's problem (Ross and Homer, 1976). This problem happens when values, behaviors, and practices become transfused among cultures to a degree that differentiating the idiographic (emic) that describes phenomena unique to a culture, from the nomothetic (etic) that describes universal cultural aspects, becomes difficult (Sekaran, 1983 : 65). In other words, different cultures develop and adopt similar behaviors and practices due to cultural diffusion (Nasif et al. , 1991 : 85). Sampling taken from these culture violates the independence requirement for sound statistical analyses, leading to biased results.

The essence of any solution to Galton's problem is to minimize the effects of diffusion among the units in the sample (Ross and Homer, 1976 : 4). One such solution is to utilize the "cultunit" as a unit of analysis. The cultunit is defined as individuals who speak a common distinct language and who belong either to the same territorial state or the same social contact group (Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996 : 25).

Although this paper finds that using cultunit is a feasible idea, it is still uncertain about its ability to solve Galton's problem. At best, it can only be minimized. When the problem first surfaced in 1889, geographical proximity was primarily used as a measure for diffusion of cultural traits (Ross and Homer, 1976 : 26). Improvements in transportation systems have since punctured this criteria as inter-border crossings escalate. Language helps to ensure independence to a certain degree, although to what degree remains uncertain. In other words, this paper holds that Galton's problem does not seem likely to go away due to the increasing inter-relatedness of the migrating world population into one another's country. This research is in agreement with Adler (1984 : 53) that the pursuance of independent samples appear unfeasible or even undesirable, thus leaving researchers with the other option of being aware of possible adulteration of data, on which care must be exercised during interpretation.

## **5. Instrumentation and measurement**

The process of instrumentation involves the use of culturally equivalent variables, translation into a second language, and scaling. The problem of equivalence of variables arises when variables designed in, by, and for one culture are applied to a second culture without modifications. For example, there are many replication studies of US theories in other countries although concepts developed in the US may not be applicable to those countries (Doktor, Tung, and Von Glinow, 1991b : 363 ; Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 98 ; Sekaran, 1981 : 409). Researchers committing this offense treat variables to be comparable with one another when in actuality they hold different meanings in the second culture. In tackling this problem, researchers have highlighted the need to make sure that variables used in cross cultural research should be conceptually equivalent among the target cultures (Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 98). There should thus be equivalence among targeted respondents in instrument format, social situation of the research, response styles, and levels of anxiety (Adler, 1984 : 54).

This research similarly finds that variables developed for the use in one

culture should not be applied directly to another culture without revision. At the same time, it believes that for cross cultural comparisons to take place, there must be a high enough level of abstraction on which a common dimension exists across cultures. This paper suggests that variables should be first developed in as universal terms as possible. Having done so, the next step is to “localize” the variables to suit a certain culture. This view is consistent with that of Hui and Triandis who also called for the use of a combination of etic and emic approaches, resulting in what is called an “emically defined etic construct” (1985 : quoted in Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 99).

The pursuance of equivalence in meaning put a heavy burden on the process of translation (Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 98). Hofstede (1984 : 27) commented that “language is not a neutral vehicle” as according to the Whorfian hypothesis, people perceive the world differently because of their language differences. The main equivalencies that need to be contemplated concern the use of vocabulary, idioms, grammar and syntax (Sechrest, Fay, and Zaidi, 1972 : 44-46). The task of cross cultural researchers in translating instruments into another language, is to achieve equivalence in meaning rather than in literal form.

To ensure equivalence, many researchers recommended back-translation to the original language after its direct translation to the second language is completed (Sechrest, Fay, and Zaidi, 1972 : 51). The services of several bilingual and multi-lingual translators should also be sought whenever possible (Hofstede, 1984 : 28). Sekaran (1983 : 62) expressed confidence that translation problems are not insurmountable, provided that cooperation of researchers from the local culture is obtained. Kraut (1975 : 541) expressed more confidence in saying that the problem of translation have been overcome.

This research however, does not anticipate that translation problems can be solved so easily. It shares the opinions of researchers such as Bhagat and McQuaid (1982 : 677) who pronounced that translation remains a problem area, at least on the translation of task instructions and subject responses. Peng, Peterson, and Shyi (1991 : 98) also observed that back translations may only be useful to prevent major foul-ups, but are not able to ensure precise equivalence. Meanwhile, Roberts (1997 : 29) plainly stated that back translation is a minimum requirement. Voss et al. (1996 : 56) similarly concluded that while obvious translation problems are easily reconciled, subtle differences resist detection. They also found out that there was no logical basis to assume that similar meanings and interpretations occur across their study of adjectives

across languages. In addition, some words in the English language, probably the major vehicle of cross cultural studies, have no counterparts in other languages. Thus translation problems, although not insurmountable, are not easily solved either. The best researchers can perhaps do, is to hire expert bilingual or multilingual translators who are familiar with the research, to translate and back-translate the material over several iterations. Besides that, researchers have little other choice but to accept working under the condition that a precisely equivalent translation covering the subtlest of nuances is quite beyond reach.

Scaling is another important issue in the development of measurement instrumentation. As Sekaran (1983 : 62) pointed out, a potential problem exists in the difference in perception of point-scales. Different cultures may exhibit higher sensitivities, for example, to a 7 -point scale more so than to a 4 -point scale (Barry, 1969 : quoted in Sekaran, 1983 : 63). Any remedy thus needs to focus on equivalence of scaling across cultures.

Two approaches are recommended by researchers in the designing of equivalent scales (Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996 : 21) . One approach is to construct scales that are pan-cultural, or free of cultural biases. One such commonly used technique is the semantic differential scale such as the Likert type scale. A second approach is to develop scales that use self defined cultural norms as base referents.

Upon evaluating the two alternatives, this paper does not presume that pan cultural scales can really be “culture free” in the real sense. This has been pointed out by some researchers like Yu, Keown, and Jacobs (1993 : quoted in Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996 : 21) who revealed that semantic differential scales are also culture – specific even in countries like Japan, South Korea, and China, which are supposed to share some similar cultural traits. Voss et al. (1996 : 56) also found out that simple translation of adjectives to another language would not produce equivalent meanings nor approximately interval – scaled data. In addition, while using pan cultural scales, researchers are recommended to test the significance and appropriateness of the anchors prior to the actual project. By this act itself, researchers are adding an element of emic features into the pan cultural etic scales. Hence, this paper supposes that the de facto approach in the development of scales resemble more of the second alternative. In this approach, respondents may be asked to indicate their own preferred anchor point in relation to a culture-specific norm such as attitude toward marital roles (Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996 : 21).

In the quest for equivalence, researchers meanwhile are warned of what is called by Sechrest, Fay, and Zaidi (1972 : 44-49) as a “paradox of equivalence.” This paradox says that it is highly possible that important cultural differences may be obscured by inadvertent over-equivalence as a result of an over-enthusiastic effort to achieve equivalence in almost every stage of the research process.

## **6. Data collection**

There are at least three issues to be considered in data collection : non-equivalence of responses, status and psychologically related biases, and cross-sectional versus longitudinal data.

Non-equivalence of responses with regards to motivation and response attitudes on the part of respondents, arises when variances can be traced to differences in data collection procedures. To achieve equivalence of responses, Sekaran (1983 : 63) suggested the adoption of uniform data collection procedures in all the target cultures. Specifically, identical procedures of introduction to the research project, the team of researchers, task instructions, and closing remarks are expected to provide equivalence of responses on the part of respondents. This paper figures that this is the most objective strategy to adopt in order to solicit response equivalence. But, this paper remains a little skeptical on whether true response equivalence can be achieved, as discussed in the next point.

There are several types of biases that may foul the efforts at uniformity mentioned above, causing inaccuracies in responses. Such inaccuracies may be caused by culturally sensitive topics (Sekaran, 1983 : 63), courtesy or hospitality biases, and “sucker” biases (Mitchell, 1969 : 248). Culturally sensitive topics may include religion as in the case of Pakistan whereby respondents may wish to avoid. Courtesy or hospitality bias has a higher occurrence in Asia, where respondents try to give answers presumed to be pleasing to the researcher. Some cultures like the Japanese tend to under-rate their achievement, while some Middle Eastern cultures tend to exaggerate their achievements. Sucker bias refers to a situation whereby local respondents treat foreign researchers as fair game for deception. Some respondents may also accommodate fears that their countries may be portrayed unfavorably if the researchers are foreigners or are residing in a foreign country, thus leading them to adulterate their responses.

Sekaran (1983 : 63) recommended that researchers can minimize such biases through pre-testing or pilot studying their instrument before launching the full research project. As an add-on feature to improve the effect of these two methods, this paper suggests that local researchers be recruited to keep an eye on the biases. Advice from local researchers is likely to prove valuable in minimizing the biases. With experience, researchers in future projects may be able to take precautions to avoid the same biases from the same culture samples.

Viewed from another angle, the research process is also affected by the cultural biases of the researcher. The researcher as a human being, is a manifestation of his/her own culture, accompanied by its own idiosyncrasies that culturally blinds out features of other cultures. Thus, the manner in which the research is carried out is influenced by this manifestation. To counter this culture-blindness, researchers are encouraged to form multi-cultural teams as suggested above (Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 99). Doktor, Tung, and Von Glinow (1991b : 364) however, lamented that the logic of multi-cultural research teams thus far, has been the necessity to recruit local researchers to aid in data collection from far reaching locations. This paper goes by the recommendation of the above writers in that, to fully maximize the advantage of having local researchers in the team, they should be welcomed to partake in the research planning process from the very start. This way, every member of the multicultural team is able to contribute to the process of theory development.

An equally serious problem involves the question of collection of cross-sectional or longitudinal data. Cross-sectional data can only offer a static view of organizations at a certain point of time, which has limitations in painting a realistic picture of organizational behavior. This unfortunately, is the approach taken by most cross cultural studies (Peng, Peterson, and Shyi, 1991 : 96). The cure for this problem is to collect longitudinal data from the same targets (Sekaran, 1983 : 64). Longitudinal data has the advantage of being able to provide a more dynamic and realistic picture of organizations. Hofstede's research which collected data at two time periods of 1968 and 1972, is one rare example of a research encompassing longitudinal data collection.

Although there are repeated calls by researchers, this paper reserves some doubts over the prospects of widespread collection of longitudinal data. Researchers at large, appear to put a blind eye on this problem, possibly due to the big burden in costs and time to conduct another round of data collection. In addition, this paper aligns with Peng, Peterson, and Shyi (1991 : 105) in that

the time interval between data collection periods in longitudinal studies including Hofstede's (Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984 : 449) , is not appropriately estimated based on circumstances affecting the variables. It is still beyond the ability of current research to predict the time lag that warrants when a second round of data collection should be made. Moreover, researchers face what may be called "time equivalence" because even if such a time lag is known in one culture, it may differ in another culture.

## **7. Data analysis and interpretation**

Problems in data analysis of cross-cultural research center around the use of qualitative versus quantitative data, and bivariate versus multivariate data.

Many cross cultural studies are based on qualitative information collected from surveys of subjective opinions. This may be the direct consequence of methodological difficulties in conducting quantitative empirical research, thus leading to a proliferation of qualitative articles (Nasif et al. , 1991 : 87) . These qualitative data do not lend themselves to higher level, more powerful statistical analyses. A way around this is to collect more objective data that could be utilized by parametric statistical analyses. The upcoming trend seems to be shifting toward increasing collection of quantitative data (Sekaran, 1983 : 66). One way of dealing with the qualitative versus quantitative issue is through triangulation (Patton, 1980 : 187). Triangulation refers to the combining of methodologies such as when combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

A problem in the past was that most cross-cultural studies predominantly used bivariate analyses. This was especially the case when computer facilities were lacking. Kraut (1975 : 541) however, related that research using multivariate statistical analyses such as analysis of variance, cluster analysis, factor analysis, and multiple regressions are becoming more routine. In their review of cross-cultural literature from 1981 to 1987, Peng, Peterson, and Shyi (1991 : 97) revealed that the three major analytical methods used were correlation, multiple regression, and analysis of variance. Advances in methodological rigor and refinement is one area that has gained unquestionable recognition in the field of cross-cultural research.

The outlook of this research is that while not disagreeing with the trends mentioned above, an emphasis towards a quantitative statistical approach should not come about at the expense of qualitative research. Qualitative papers, remarked Warner (1997 : xxi) , are always of use parallel to more statis-

tically oriented research. Kyi (1988 : 219) went further to posit that qualitative rather than quantitative research, may contribute more significantly to the understanding of management. This was shown by the evidence that most of the excellent articles in international business were integrative, conceptual, and theory building articles (Ricks, 1985 : 4), rather than purely quantitative empirical articles. Considering that statistical analyses may not necessarily be the savior of all methodological problems in cross cultural research, this paper prefers to take the middle position similar to Warner's in the encouragement of qualitative papers along with quantitative papers.

In interpretation, researchers often treat and categorize cultures as if they were individuals (Adler, 1984 : 58). This was identified by Hofstede (1984 : 24) as "ecological fallacy" whereby researchers interpret ecological (cultural) correlations as if they apply to individuals. Since cultures are not individuals, they cannot be understood in the same terms used for understanding the behavior of individuals (Adler, 1984 : 58). The reverse ecological fallacy on the other hand, is committed when cultures are compared on indices created for the individual level. As Roberts (1997 : 5) found, researchers have a tendency to aggregate individual measures to obtain organizational measures. In agreement, this paper suggests that care should be taken to avoid falling into the interpretation traps mentioned above. It is related with the level of analysis on the one hand and the level of interpretation on the other hand. Researchers should be aware not to mix up the two levels. In addition, this paper recommends researchers to be cautious with regards to the application of external validity of the findings, which could be limited by data sampling procedures that were less than desired.

## **8. Conclusions and future directions**

This paper is led to conclude with a tinge of pessimism on the progress of cross cultural management research. After nearly four decades of cross cultural management research, there has yet to be an acceptable theory capable of explaining cultural influences on organizations. Despite this drawback, researchers hold on to the belief that culture does have an impact on organizations, but are not able to hypothesize exactly how and when culture is an influence. The inability to arrive at a theory to explain the culture impact may be found in the shortcomings of methodology. There is little doubt that over the decades, methodology has made significant progress. For example, samples included in studies have been enlarged to more samples instead of just being two ; researchers are becoming more attentive to equivalence issues ; research teams are admitting more culturally diverse members ; and data analyses are

becoming more sophisticated.

Yet, many persistent problems prevail. Cultures continue to be sampled based on convenience, leading to doubts about data authenticity with regards to representativeness and independence. Non-equivalences of variables and scaling continue to intimidate researchers, while translation problems remain a challenge as subtle nuances escape detection. Cultural biases of both respondents and researchers keep on blinding one another of important facets, resulting in faulty data collection. But the core of these problems is reserved for the lack of consensus among researchers on the term “culture.” The inability of researchers to see eye to eye on this key terminology has led to a large extent, the subsequent inability to arrive at a theory capable of explaining cultural inferences on organizations.

Researchers sometimes have been quick to admit that methodological problems are not easily rectified. Such is the case of sampling, whereby representative or independent data cannot be obtained easily, if at all. When solutions are not at hand, the most logical “escape route” researchers opt to take is to describe, for example, the characteristics of samples in detail, especially those that have potential influence on the data analysis, interpretation, and external validity. However, this is not exactly a “solution” to problems in the real sense. At best, this alternative resembles an admittance of defeat in the inability to solve the methodological problem.

Some scholars have likened this inability of researchers to study culture, which is a social system, to a bunch of blind men in front of an elephant.<sup>6)</sup> No one scholar by him/herself is able to visualize the whole picture of the social reality, like no one blind man is able to imagine the whole shape of the elephant. Each picture is subjective to each individual’s perspective. The situation of this inability appears to perpetuate itself because scholars, albeit from different disciplines, are not exactly in agreement with one another over the same terminology.

Still, there is little hesitancy that research on cross-cultural management issues shall go on. What holds for future research in cross-culture management research?

Roberts (1997 : 30) suggested that researchers may retrench from cross-

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6) See Hofstede (1984 : 15), Roberts (1997 : 3), and Roberts and Boyacigiller (1984 : 425).

cultural research and try first to understand one's own cultural behavior before trying to understand the behavior of others. Adler (1984 : 63) recommended that researchers should neither limit themselves to narrow concepts nor rigid methodology because many conceptual and methodological issues are still unresolved. Sekaran (1983 : 69) was sympathetic to submit that there should be more tolerance towards opportunistic sampling and two culture studies. Knowledge gained from these studies, she said, could be integrated for the construction of theories. She added that researchers ought to be willing to settle for less because of the time and resource consuming nature of cross-cultural research. Bhagat and McQuaid (1982 : 679-681) meantime, urged researchers to examine the rationale for doing cross-cultural research, to commit themselves to theory while adopting a rigorous concern for methodologies, and to form multicultural teams to achieve these ends.

This paper first speaks in the frequency of Roberts (1997) in that researchers should first study about themselves and the societies from which they come grew up. Even though she was obviously looking at a Western audience particularly that of US, non-Western researchers are probably best placed in this situation to jump into the cross-cultural research wagon. Such studies are intrinsically emic in approach. All the problems discussed in cross-cultural research are present in single culture research. They are however, less complicated and less confusing, especially with regards to sampling issues. Hence, it is anticipated to be easier to formulate hypotheses based on single culture data.

A overwhelming hurdle lying ahead of researchers from a non-Western background is the theoretical constructs and methodological tools. Most if not all, are US made, and are therefore US biased. Studies conducted by non-Western researchers are subsequently heavily dependent on such theories and tools. US developed constructs and tools until this point of time are considered to be the most "universal." To date, there has been scant effort made to develop theoretical constructs and methodological tools from the non-Western society. An exception may be the theoretical construct "Confucian work dynamism" which was later re-named long term orientation (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987 : 158). This construct is supposedly found only in Confucian societies depicting if a society has a dynamic, long term, future-oriented mentality or a static, tradition-bounded short term mentality. Future studies may be able to unearth similar emic dimensions in other non-Western societies, thus enhancing the understanding of their cultural impacts on their organizations.

A continuing line of thought adopted by this paper is the proposal to form multicultural research teams. Western scholars have unknowingly been biased towards their own culture while researching on societies that are unfamiliar. Important aspects of culture may escape scrutiny. Joining forces with non-Western researchers would help to alleviate the problem. There is another advantage in this joint enterprise. Non-Western scholars could certainly need a helping hand in this area as well. Through the formation of multicultural teams, non-Western scholars can reap the benefit of working with other researchers who may be more experienced. This would also enable non-Western researchers to tap the research fundings made available to multicultural teams.

For multicultural teams to work, all members must be treated equally as regards to opinions and contributions. As mentioned above, if non-Western members are recruited simply for the sake of data collection, then the aims will fall short. All members should be involved in all stages of the research, particularly on the construction of theoretical foundations. As discussed above, the study of social phenomenon is inherently narrowed by the subjective cultural background of the researcher. Each presents his/her own perspective that is different from the other. Through joint efforts, all the different subjective perspectives can be combined together to form a larger and better focused view.

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