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Moving Beyond Conventional Wisdom: Advancements in Cross-Cultural Theories of Leadership, Conflict, and Teams

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Abstract
In this article, we discuss the importance of a cross-cultural approach to organizational behavior. To do so, we illustrate how cross-cultural research in the past two decades has enabled us to reconceptualize constructs, revise models, and extend boundary conditions in traditional organizational behavior theories. We focus on three domains—teams, leadership, and conflict—and review cross-cultural empirical evidence that has extended several theories in each of these domains. We support the claim that even well-established organizational behavior theories vary in the extent to which they may be applied unilaterally across cultures, thus identifying the critical need to advance these theories via a cross-cultural research agenda.

Keywords
conflict, cross-cultural, leadership, organizational behavior, teams

Organizational behavior is the study of individuals and groups within an organizational context and of how organizational processes and practices affect individuals and groups. Major topics include individual characteristics such as beliefs, values, and personality; individual processes such as perception, motivation, decision making, judgment, commitment, and control; group characteristics such as size, composition, and structural properties; group processes such as decision making, conflict, and leadership; organizational processes and practices such as goal setting, appraisal, feedback, rewards, and behavioral aspects of task design; and the influence of all of these on such individual, group, and organizational outcomes as performance, turnover, absenteeism, and stress.

A cross-cultural approach to organizational behavior is the study of similarities and differences in processes and behavior at work across different cultures and of the dynamics of cross-cultural interfaces in multicultural domestic and international contexts (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007). In this literature, culture is often defined as a shared meaning system (Shweder & Levine, 1984), which implies that members of the same culture share common meanings and are likely to interpret and evaluate situational events and management practices in similar ways. In contrast, members of different cultures who do not share a common way of interpreting and evaluating situational events are more likely to respond in different ways. Hence, a cross-cultural approach to organizational behavior includes issues such as how culture is related to individual organizational phenomena, such as motives, cognitions and emotions; interpersonal phenomena such as teams and leadership; and organizational-level phenomena such as organizational structure. Beyond just the differences between a Chinese manager and an American manager, this approach stresses the importance of understanding the deep-rooted perspectives, orientations, and assumptions that individuals maintain about behavior based on their cultural lens.

In cross-cultural organizational behavior research, the focus has often been on national cultures; however, it is important to note that nation is not the only meaningful group that can be and has been studied (Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez & Gibson, 2005). Within any given nation, there may exist multiple subcultures, and the national culture may not be completely shared (Rohner, 1984). As of the writing of this article, national groups are still useful units of analysis because they are well defined for many real-life applications; however, the nation-state is a

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relatively new concept in world history, and there is a possibility that it will cease to function as a key feature denoting culture in the future. Regional cultures, religious cultures, ethnic cultures, organizational cultures, and discipline-based cultures are also valid sources of cultural differences and similarities in meaning systems.

Numerous excellent general reviews (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2007; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007) and commentaries (e.g., Earley, 2006; Leung et al., 2005) on cross-cultural organizational behavior have been published. These articles provide both helpful and broadly defined summaries of major findings across the field and general reactions and suggestions for future research. In this article, our aim is somewhat different. Rather than a general overview, we explore the extent to which cross-cultural research in the past two decades has enabled us to reconceptualize constructs, revise models, and extend boundary conditions in a specific set of traditional organizational behavior theories. We focus our efforts and take a deep look at three domains—teams, leadership and conflict—and review cross-cultural empirical evidence that has extended several theories in each of these domains.

Specifically, within teams, we address theories of collective cognition, attitude formation, and virtual team work. Within leadership, we focus on charismatic leadership, empowerment, and supervisor–subordinate dyad theories. Finally, within conflict resolution, we review extensions of theories pertaining to sources of conflict, intergroup relations, and conflict management strategies that have resulted from cross-cultural research. Our review supports the claim that organizational behavior theories vary in the extent to which they may be applied unilaterally across cultures, thus identifying the critical need to advance these theories via a cross-cultural research agenda. That is, we highlight why we cannot accept these theories at face value with results from only one culture, particularly when the predominance of these theories have Western origins (Ailon, 2008; Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008). In a globalized world, a mosaic of cultural perspectives (Chao & Moon, 2005) needs to be acknowledged in behavioral theories. In addition, after we address each domain, we also identify lingering gaps in our knowledge that, if addressed, will increase theoretical precision and enable us to move even further beyond conventional wisdom in organizational behavior.

Teams

A *team* refers to three or more individuals who interact for the accomplishment of a common goal (McGrath, 1984). The use of teams within educational, humanitarian, and business organizations has increased over the last several decades. This increase reflects the belief that teams are an appropriate structure for implementing strategies formulated to deal with performance demands and opportunities presented by a business environment constantly fraught with change. A great deal of the popular press advocates teams as an appropriate design response to performance pressures for speed, cost, quality, and innovation. This is based on the understanding that processes often cut across organizational departments or locations. When adopting team-based systems across global facilities, multinational organizations face special challenges (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Gibson, 2002). Cross-cultural organizational behavior research addresses these challenges. Within the domain of teams, some of the most significant advancements in cross-cultural organizational behavior research have pertained to theories of collective cognition, attitude formation, and virtual team work.

Collective Cognition

The group processes involved in the acquisition, storage, transmission, manipulation, and use of information have been referred to in the organizational literature as *collective cognition* (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). Individual-level social information processing frameworks have served as a useful source for understanding how the process of collective cognition might occur (e.g., Corner, Kinicki, & Keats, 1994), yet Weick and Roberts (1993) suggested that the key to understanding cognition among groups is recognizing that it consists of the patterns of connections between individuals. Gibson (2001) developed a framework that specified the elements (or phases) involved in collective thought, the process by which one element is related to another, and the catalysts that might bring about the change process. She argued, for example, that in moving from the accumulation of knowledge (perceiving, filtering, storing) to interaction (retrieving, exchanging, structuring), balancing and reconciling task uncertainty and role ambiguity are key. In moving from interaction to examination (negotiating, interpreting, evaluating), knowledge, leadership and conflict management are key. Finally to incorporate the examination of knowledge into action repertoires (integrating, deciding, acting), social comparison and processes of group consensus are key.

These foundational models of collective cognitive theory have been extended through recent cross-cultural studies. For example, Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) found that employees from four different nations construe teamwork through different metaphors, which led to divergent expectations of team roles, scope, membership, and team objectives. These researchers investigated teamwork metaphors used in interviews in France, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and the U.S. in five multinational firms. Using content analysis of the interview data, the authors identified five categories of metaphors: military, family, sports, associates, and community. Results confirmed national variations in the use of the five metaphors. For example, countries high in individualism (such as the United States and France, in which there is greater emphasis on individual goals vs. group goals) tended to use the sports or associates metaphors, whereas countries high in power distance (such as Philippines and Puerto Rico, in which there is a high expectation that there will be differences in power between those in authority and those who are not) tended to use the military or family metaphors. These results suggest that the meaning of teamwork may differ across cultures and, in turn, imply potential differences in team norms and

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team-member behaviors—differences that would have remained hidden in a single-culture sample.

The cognitive schemas for what constitutes a "successful" workgroup may also vary across cultures. For example, using a combination of laboratory and field experiments with Mexican and U.S. students, Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, and Ybarra (2000) found that Mexicans perceived that socioemotional behaviors (i.e., those which direct attention toward interpersonal needs and social harmony) were important for group success, whereas Anglos perceived that high task orientation (i.e., focusing on task goals) and low socioemotional behaviors were important for group success. Although the Mexican sample strongly preferred workgroups with a strong interpersonal orientation, these interpersonal features were less important to the success of the task-focused American student groups.

A study by Wade-Benzoni and colleagues (2002) investigated whether cognitive processes involved in decision making can be predicted by national culture. Results indicated that, as predicted, groups of decision makers from Japan—a collectivist, hierarchical culture—were more cooperative, expected others to be more cooperative, and were more likely to adopt an equal allocation distribution rule to resolve dilemmas than were groups of decision makers from the United States—an individualist, egalitarian culture. Studies have typically shown that group discussion is dominated by, and decisions are made more in favor of, higher status members (Earley, 1999). However, Ng and Van Dyne (2001) showed that the cultural values held by the team members influence this process. Specifically, using an experimental design, they found that individualists and collectivists react differently to minority influence. Teams demonstrated improved decision quality when individuals were exposed to a minority perspective, particularly when the targets being influenced were more individualist than collectivist.

As a final example of research that has extended theories of collective cognition, Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, and Wagner (2004) investigated the process of *cognitive convergence*, defined as the process by which cognitive structures of members gradually become more similar over time, in a culturally heterogeneous team that operated across seven countries. Using a longitudinal, ethnographic design that yielded a rich case study, they found that increases in shared cognition alone were not sufficient to account for performance gains in culturally heterogeneous teams. The authors concluded that cognitive convergence requires leaders and members to explicitly recognize and validate the existence of cultural differences, rather than suppressing or ignoring them. Considering these studies in aggregate, our understanding of the complexities of processes of collective cognition—whether through the metaphors and schemas that help us organize information, the standards we hold for success, or the extent to which collectivities think similarly or differently over time—would be highly limited if tested only within single-culture samples.

Team Attitudes

The examination of attitudes toward and in work teams has a long history dating back to Allport's (1935) assertion that attitude research was "social psychology's most distinctive and indispensable concept" (p. 798), posing groups as sources of attitude formation due to processes such as social conformity, reference group creation, and social projection. Locke (1976) studied how attitudes toward group and team members compelled important outcomes, including job satisfaction and goal attainment, and how attitudes within teams are significantly related to interpersonal attraction among group members, group attendance, and termination anxiety (Evans & Jarvis, 1986).

Recent research has shown that attitudes in teams emerge and operate differently across cultural contexts. For example, Ramamoorthy and Flood (2002) examined whether individualism or collectivism orientations predicted employee attitudes and behavioral intentions among over 400 employees in 11 firms. Among many important findings, results indicated that individualists felt more obligated to teamwork when they had higher pay equity (pay related to individual performance), yet the collectivists felt less obligated under this pay structure. Hence, varying levels of equity perceptions are associated with different effects on employees attitudes across cultures. Investigating similar issues, earlier work (Chen, Brockner & Katz, 1998) has demonstrated that individualistic samples have particularly negative attitudes toward teams when they performed well individually but their team performed poorly, whereas the Chinese samples demonstrated more in-group favoritism in these conditions.

Using an experimental design among Japanese and American students, Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, and Takemura (2005) found that trust is developed through different relational bases across cultures. In Japan, indirect personal ties with other group members is an important basis for trust, whereas in the United Stated, a strong identification based on a shared category (e.g., being from the same school) is an important basis for trust. On a related note, Man and Lam (2003) examined attitudes toward teams in the form of group cohesiveness among teams drawn from the Hong Kong and U.S. branches of an international bank. They found that increased job complexity and autonomy were more important for workgroup cohesiveness in the U.S. than it was in Taiwan and that this subsequently translated to better performance. This shows that the construct space of what it means to trust is much broader than originally considered.

Kirkman and Shapiro (2001a) examined resistance to teams using a field survey of over 450 self-managing team members in four countries (Belgium, Finland, the Philippines, and the United States). They found that individualism was associated with general resistance to teams, whereas employee values of high power distance, a "doing" orientation (having a strong work ethic and being goal oriented), and determinism (believing forces outside oneself are in control) are related to resistance to self-management in teams. Further, a second study by these authors (2001b) using the same sample indicated that cultural values compelled employee job attitudes by influencing employee resistance to either teams or to self-management, and these differences affected team effectiveness.

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In a similar study, Harrison, McKinnon, Wu, and Chow (2000) found that Taiwanese (a collectivistic culture who prioritize group member relations) had more negative attitudes than Australians when teams had a highly fluid, changing membership. On the other hand, individualistic Australian managers reported employees that were more readily adapting to working across different teams, working under different leaders, and taking on leadership of project teams. Likewise, Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000) found collectivism to be positively related to affective commitment (i.e., emotional attachment to and identification with) to supervisors and the work group, continuance commitment (i.e., calculating the costs and benefits of commitment) to the work group, and normative commitment (i.e., sense of duty, loyalty, or obligation) to all foci. Among a sample of MBA students, Gomez, Kirkman and Shapiro (2000) found that when a team member was perceived to be part of an ingroup (i.e., similar others) rather than an outgroup (i.e., nonsimilar others) member, collectivists rated that member significantly more generously than did individualists. Collectivists valued maintenance contributions more so than individualists did, and individualists valued task contributions more than did collectivists.

Taken as a whole, these findings illustrate important differences across cultures in team attitudes—differences that accumulate to important variations in attitude theory based on cultural context. Our understandings of the complexities of team attitudes toward pay (individual or group?), trust (personal or structural?), team membership (comply or resist?), and which contributions are most valued (task or team maintenance?) have been expanded by taking a comparative approach across cultures.

Virtual Teams

Finally, teams that contain members who are geographically dispersed and/or electronically dependent are growing in number, yet problematic issues arise when group interactions take place using technology rather than face-to-face interaction. One reason for this is the difficulty of capturing gestures, nonverbal cues, symbolic content, and contextual information using virtual communication channels—all aspects to communication that vary widely across cultures (Hall, 1976). Recent research indicates that theories of virtual teams must take both technology and culture into account. For example, Hardin, Fuller, and Davison (2007) found that regardless of cultural background, team members reported less confidence in their ability to work virtually, yet individualistic team members reported higher virtual team self-efficacy beliefs than did collectivists.

Several factors seem to be particularly crucial to the success of globally dispersed, culturally diverse teams. Such teams have been found to be more effective when they incorporate formal coordinating and scheduling mechanisms supported by communication technologies that help team members contribute at different points in time (Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001), when they swiftly develop intergroup trust (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), and when they develop temporal rhythms around periods of high interdependence (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000), highlighting the importance of including these processes in theories of virtual team effectiveness.

Finally, Gibson and Gibbs (2006) examined four characteristics often associated with new "virtual" team designs: geographic dispersion, electronic dependence, structural dynamism, and national diversity. In doing so, they examined a curious paradox. Although teams with these characteristics are often implemented by organizations to increase innovation, these structures were found to actually hinder innovation. They first tested the plausibility of their arguments using in-depth qualitative analysis of interviews with 177 members of 14 teams in a variety of industries. A second study constituted a more formal test of hypotheses using survey data collected from 266 members of 56 aerospace design teams. They found that the four team design characteristics were not highly intercorrelated, yielding independent and differential effects on innovation, with negative effects documented in most teams. In explaining the rationale for the negative relationship, Gibson and Gibbs (2006) argued that national diversity, being a salient source of identity, can hinder internal team communication, conflict resolution, and the development of a shared vision. This is because it creates different expectations for communication practices (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003) and reduces identification with the team as a whole (Hambrick, Davison, Snell, & Snow, 1998). Interestingly, Gibson and Gibbs (2006) found that the four elements of virtuality were positively associated with innovation in a psychologically safe communication climate—a climate that can help bridge national differences and reduce ingroup/outgroup bias (Gudykunst, 1991).

Work on virtual teams across cultures is emerging and burgeoning. Results show how the differences in what can help virtual teamwork, such as feeling confident and coordinating communication practices, and what can hinder it, such as low trust and diversity in an unsafe psychological communication climate, can vary across cultures and across different team compositions (diverse vs. homogeneous).

Leadership

Like the teams domain, the study of leadership has a long history in the organizational behavior literature, with even very early studies of leadership examining international and cross-cultural differences (e.g., Haire, Ghiselli, & Porter, 1966). More recently, massive undertakings such as the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project, in which multiple samples of nations and within-nation groups (17,000 managers across 62 cultures) were used to examine leadership, societal culture values, organizational culture, and industry-level outcomes, have provided insight into how cultural values may be critical mechanisms connecting leadership characteristics to industry performance (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Here, we zero in on three areas of leadership literature that have resulted from

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recent cross-cultural research: extensions of charismatic leadership theory, theories of empowerment, and supervisor–subordinate dyad theory.

Charismatic Leadership Theory

Of the numerous typologies of leadership styles, one of the most significant is *charismatic leadership*, defined as transformational visionaries who inspire and have extraordinary effects on followers. This style is contrasted with other forms of leadership, such as a transactional leadership style, where leaders give followers something they want in exchange for something the leader wants (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Historically, research has generally suggested that charismatic leadership results in superior performance (for a review, see Gilmartin & D'Aunno, 2007), and charismatic leadership theory is one of the few organizational behavior theories that has received some support for universal adoption across cultures (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999; House et al., 2004). For example, Javidan and Carl found that Canadian and Taiwanese managers described their supervisors with terms such as *visionary, symbolizer, auditor*, and *self-sacrificer* commonly across the two cultures (Javidan & Carl, 2005) and that Canadian and Iranian samples similarly described charismatic leadership using terms such as *vision, tenacity, intellectual challenge, self-sacrifice*, and *eloquence* (Javidan & Carl, 2004).

However, even within the GLOBE study, both organizational and societal values are significantly related to leadership prototypes. For example, power distance was positively associated with self-protective leadership and negatively associated with charismatic and participative leadership. Recent studies also show that manifestations of charisma may vary across cultures (Pillai & Meindl, 1998). Results from a study examining nearly 600 managers across 101 work units indicated that collectivistic orientation was positively associated with the emergence of charismatic leadership, suggesting that collectivistic work groups provide "the fertile soil" for a charismatic leader to foster self-managing team activities and drive consensus. Subordinates ratings of leader charisma were related to leader ratings of work unit performance. Likewise, Turetgen, Unsal, and Erdem (2008) found that the only personality trait predicting leader emergence among a sample of Turkish university students was self-monitoring, which differs from studies conducted in Western cultures. Dominance, self-efficacy, sex, and gender-role orientation (common predictors in the West) did not predict group leadership perceptions. Ensari and Murphy (2003) found that perception of charisma in individualistic cultures was based on recognition based perceptions (i.e., how well a person fits the characteristics of a "good" or "effective" leaders), whereas it is based on inference based perceptions (i.e., group or organizational outcomes) in collectivistic cultures. Recent evidence also indicates there may be cross-cultural differences in the outcomes of charisma. Using data from 12 European countries, Elenkov and Manev (2005) found that culture moderated the relationship between type of leadership and work outcomes, such that no one leadership style (including charismatic) would be equally endorsed across cultures.

Broadly, these studies help show how views of leadership and criteria for assessing leadership effectiveness are largely driven by cultural orientation. Charismatic leadership, however, provides an interesting example of universality and cross-cultural diversity. Although descriptions of what it means to be a charismatic leader and performance outcomes of charismatic leadership may be similarly identified across cultures, the indicators and perceptions of such leadership demonstrate cultural variance.

Empowerment

Organizational techniques, human resource practices, and the psychological composition of empowerment, defined as behaviors whereby power is shared with subordinates in a manner that raises their level of intrinsic motivation (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006), have received a high degree of attention in the organizational behavior literature in recent decades. Like charismatic leadership, empowerment has generally been found to have a positive effect on work place outcomes (e.g., Gibson, Porath, Benson, & Lawler, 2007; Srivastava et al., 2006), although this is not universal even domestically (e.g., Staw & Epstein, 2000), with some studies finding no effect or even a negative effect due to the cost of implementing empowerment practices (e.g., Cappelli & Neumark, 2001).

Further exploration as to the effects of empowerment has recently revealed cultural contingencies. Among a sample of leaders in a firm with operations in the U.S., Mexico, Poland and India, Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, and Lawler (2000) found that the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction differed across levels of power distance, such that empowerment was negatively associated with satisfaction in high power distance samples. Likewise, across a sample of 13 East Asian, North American, and Northern European countries, Eylon and Au (1999) found that level of power distance moderated the relationship between empowerment practices and performance, such that there was lower performance for countries assumed to be high in power distance and no change in performance for low power distance countries.

There may also be differences in the extent to which empowerment is demonstrated across cultures. In a 10-country comparison, Aycan and colleagues (2000) found that managers in both fatalistic and high power distance socio-cultural environments did not engage in empowerment, whereas managers who valued high loyalty did. In a sample of 244 Turkish sales associates, Erdogan and Bauer (2009) found that empowerment moderated the relationship between perceived overqualification (or believing that one is overqualified for a job) and outcomes such as job satisfaction, such that being empowered mitigated previously found negative effects of overqualification on these outcomes. The authors argued that Turkey is a country where empowerment seems to be desired and functional, and that they would not have expected

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similar results in a country which less readily accepts empowerment.

These findings collectively warn against the unilateral application of management practices such as empowerment across different cultures. Acceptance and utility of empowerment management practices and empowering work environments seems to be predicated on individual and collective preferences toward power structure and hierarchy.

Supervisor–Subordinate Dyad Theory

Finally, important boundary conditions for relations between supervisors and subordinates have been evidenced in cross-cultural studies of relationship properties between supervisors and their subordinates. For example, in a 47-nation study, Smith, Peterson, and Schwartz (2002) found that cultural values, including high collectivism, power distance, conservatism (maintaining the status quo, propriety, and group order), and loyal involvement, were related to reliance on formal rules and superiors (what they refer to as "vertical sources of guidance") more so than reliance on peers or tacit sources of guidance. In another impressive study, Van de Vliert and Smith (2004) analyzed survey responses from over 19,000 managers in 84 nations and found that leader reliance on subordinates for information or delegation varied with the nation's level of development (a combined index of per capita income, educational attainment, and life expectancy) and harshness of climate. These findings remained after controlling for the cultural values of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The authors built an "ecological leadership theory" based on these findings, demonstrating that cross-national studies of organizational behavior can expand beyond culture to find other meaningful differentiators. Including data from both leaders and followers, Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, and Lowe (2009) sampled 560 followers and 174 leaders in China and the U.S. and found that relationships among transformational leadership, procedural justice, and organizational citizenship behaviors differed depending on level of power distance orientation.

Studies specific to leader–member exchange (LMX; otherwise referred to as *vertical dyad linkage*, defined as the quality of exchange relationship between subordinate and supervisor; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999) have demonstrated cross-cultural variations. Law, Wong, Wang, and Wang (2000) found LMX to be conceptually and empirically distinct from *guanxi* (i.e., interpersonal connections) in a Chinese sample, showing how a phenomenon that might appear to be similar (i.e., relations between supervisor and subordinate and guanxi) can be differentially manifested across cultures and should be included in theories accordingly. Studying the impacts of specific Mexican and U.S. leader behaviors on follower attitudes and performance in a Mexican *maquiladora* setting, Howell, Romero, Dorfman, Paul, and Bautista (2003) found that culture moderated the impact of leadership behavior on important organizational outcomes. Contrary to existing assumptions in cross-cultural leadership literature, managerial leaders from the U.S. had approximately the same effects on the Mexican workforce as did managerial leaders from Mexico. However, regional differences within Mexico and organizational affiliation were significant moderators, as the relationship between leader variables and outcomes differed based on comparisons between residents of the "border culture" and those who lived in interior regions. Pellegrini and Scandura (2006) found LMX to be positively related to delegation and job satisfaction, but they also found that this relationship was moderated by the cultural value of paternalism. In a comparison of two countries that traditionally vary on power distance, Varma, Srinivas, and Stroh (2005) found that the correlation between supervisor and subordinate ratings on LMX was significantly higher in an Indian sample than in a U.S. sample. The authors attributed this to the belief that subordinates in India can be expected to be much more respectful of their supervisors' right to make decisions about the subordinates' careers.

Both explicit and implied properties of relationships between supervisors and subordinates also appear to vary across cultural settings. Assumptions regarding relationship properties—such as the nature of status, the relationship between delegation and satisfaction, and the extent to which supervisors and subordinates may agree on the quality of their relationships—that have been found in studies of North American cultures have not held true in others. These complex relationships strongly support a culture-specific view of supervisor–subordinate relationships and demonstrate the contribution of a cross-cultural perspective to LMX theory.

Conflict

The final domain we address, conflict, is equally as well-represented in the organizational behavior literature as are the domains of teams and leadership. In the most general sense, conflict is defined as a dynamic sequence of episodes in which two or more parties engage in opposing or competitive viewpoints (Pondy, 1967). Research has established different types of conflict and a variety of conflict management strategies, with most of the literature calling for a contingency approach to conflict management (for a recent treatment, see Behfar & Thompson, 2007). Cross-cultural research on conflict has extended theories pertaining to sources of conflict and intergroup relations, as well as the differential effectiveness of specific conflict management strategies.

Sources of Conflict

Recent research indicates that conflict emerges from varied sources across different cultures, particularly in multicultural settings. In a sample of MBA students from 38 different countries, Zellmer-Bruhn, Maloney, Bhappu, and Salvador (2008) found that certain kinds of diversity were positively related to conflict in teams and that this conflict was negatively related to subsequent estimates of perceived work style similarity (or the degree to which group members view themselves as having differences from each other). Gelfand and colleagues (2001)

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found culture-specific perceptions of sources of conflict across samples of U.S. and Japanese individuals, with Americans perceiving conflicts as stemming more from the desire to win and individual rights, whereas Japanese perceived the same conflict as a result of compromise and duty violations. These findings suggest that identical conflict episodes can be perceived differently across cultures.

In a related vein, Buchan, Croson, and Johnson (2004) found that the judgment of negotiators in non-Western cultures was more affected by relational concerns than in Western cultures. Specifically, Japanese were found to base their fairness assessments on obligations to others, whereas Americans based their fairness assessments on their own alternative economic options. Giebels and Taylor (2009) compared 25 police negotiations involving low context cultures (which send accurate and clear messages with explicit content) and high context cultures (which send messages with hidden or implicit meanings) and found that low context negotiators were more likely to communicate threats (a potential source of conflict), whereas high context negotiators were more likely to reciprocate them.

As conflict during negotiations inherently has an emotional component (Pondy, 1967), understanding the cultural variations in which antecedent conditions may serve as sources of conflict may be particularly important. Understanding the culturally derived meanings behind conflict sources—including diversity, goals of negotiation, perceptions of fairness, and use of threats—may help illuminate why conflict arises and suggest how best to mitigate it across cultures.

Conflict Management

Recent research on conflict management strategies indicates that there are no universal resolutions to conflict. In fact, attempts to remedy conflict may be culturally inappropriate, yield unfavorable results, and even increases the propensity toward future conflict. Tinsley and Pillutla (1998) found that culture filters information and guides members toward a particular model for conflict resolution. In their 3-country sample, U.S. business managers preferred integrating mutual interests while resolving conflicts, Germans preferred utilizing existing regulations for conflict resolution, and Japanese deferred to those with higher status. In a second study, Tinsley (2001) again found that a sample of German, Japanese, and American employees demonstrated a diverse mix of conflict management strategies. This mix was predicted based on both nation and measurement of cultural value dimensions, including individualism, hierarchy, polochronicity (a value for multitasking or simultaneous processing), and explicit contracting (value of explicit, generalized principles and overt communications). For example, participants who ranked more highly on collectivism and hierarchy and low on explicit contracting tended to use power strategies (i.e., attempting to force conciliation based on social status) more than interest strategies (i.e., promoting resolution of dilemmas through cognitive problem solving and satisfying mutual needs).

Tinsley and Brett (2001) found similar cross-cultural conflict management differences—specifically, that Americans held conflict management norms for discussing parties' interests and synthesizing multiple issues, whereas the Chinese were oriented toward prioritizing collective interest and having concern for authority. Friedman, Chi, and Liu (2006) found a higher Chinese tendency to avoid conflict, explained by higher Chinese expectations that direct conflict will hurt the relationship with the other party and by greater concern for the other party among Chinese. Also, Chinese were more sensitive to hierarchy than Americans, so the tendency to avoid conflict is heightened more for Chinese than for Americans when the other party is of higher status. However, using a qualitative analysis of conflict incidents reported by Chinese employees in a variety of industries, Chen, Tjosvold, and Fang (2005) found that a cooperative approach to conflict, rather than a competitive or avoidance approach, helped Chinese employees and their managers strengthen their relationship and improve their productivity. Finally, Kopelman, and Rosette (2008) join a recent stream of research examining the strategic display of emotions, investigating how purposive emotional displays can serve as conflict management strategies that vary across cultures. Among other interesting findings, the authors found that Hong Kong managers were less likely to accept an offer from a negotiator displaying negative emotion than were Israeli managers, who did not hold humility and deference in such high regard. This research suggests that it may not be appropriate to display negative emotions such as anger or frustration in some cultures, whereas in others, this may be a useful communication technique to help understand the nature of conflict and speed resolution.

As the implications of conflict in organizations may, under certain conditions, be both harmful and useful, the strategies to successfully manage conflict are crucial to understand. These studies teach us that cultural orientation shapes our preferences and the effectiveness of how we manage conflict, whether we rely on status differentials or rules, use power or mutual needs, coordinate or compete, or choose to strategically display emotions.

Intergroup Relations

A final arena within the conflict domain pertains to cooperation and competition between groups, commonly referred to in the organizational behavior literature as intergroup relations. Less cross-cultural attention has been given to this domain of conflict, but two important studies stand out. In the first, cultural values have been shown to influence how cooperative or competitive group members are with each other, as well as with other groups (Probst, Carnevale, & Triandis, 1999). In a complex experiment, Probst and colleagues (1999) found that individualists were least cooperative in a single-group dilemma but were more cooperative in an intergroup dilemma, in which cooperation with the group yielded higher personal outcomes. Collectivists were most cooperative in the single-group dilemma but less cooperative in the intergroup dilemma, in which group defection resulted in higher group outcomes.

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Second, Gelfand and colleagues (2002) advanced a cultural view of self-serving biases of fairness in conflict situations, exploring the extent to which negotiators varied in their efforts to either stand out from each other or blend in. Across four studies, the authors found that Japanese focused on their negative characteristics to blend in and maintain interdependence with others, whereas the Americans focused on their own positive attributes to stand out and be better than others. Negotiators in the U.S. were particularly susceptible to competitive judgment biases, such as self-serving biases (i.e., that people tend to perceive themselves as better than others).

Gelfand et al.'s findings expand existing theories of judgment biases and the role of intergroup relations in conflict, using the lens of interpersonal cross-cultural relations. The assumptions regarding how intergroup behavior is characterized—as helping oneself or contributing to a more general perception of fairness, cooperating or competing with others, or preferring to stand out or blend in—hold true in some cultures, but not in others.

Summary and Directions for Future Research

Despite the reconceptualizations, revisions to models, and extensions to boundary conditions promoted by the cross-cultural organizational behavior research reviewed above, there are numerous opportunities for advancing theory on teams, leadership, and conflict using a cross-cultural lens. Here, we discuss the need to include alternative operationalizations of culture, the importance of examining cultural phenomena as dependent variables, and the role of culture in multicultural interactions.

Operationalizations of Culture

Much of the cross-cultural organizational behavior research over the last two decades has relied on a values-based approach, which assumes that cultural effects can be captured by discrete dimensions of cultural values, which are formed during early childhood and remain relatively stable throughout one's lifetime and are shared within a nation. Even more specifically, much of the organizational behavior research focuses on values pertaining to individualism or collectivism, defined as a focus on individual goals or group goals (Earley & Gibson, 1998). For example, one review of over 180 articles published between 1980 and 2002 in 40 leading psychology and business journals (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006) found that 67% of the studies examined individualism or collectivism!

As others before us, we see promise in the investigation of non-value-based features of culture that do not assume that culture is synonymous with nation. For example, Leung and colleagues (Leung & Bond, 2004; Leung et al., 2002) developed a social axioms approach. Whereas values are preferences for ideal states, social axioms are generalized expectancies (Leung et al., 2002). In other words, a value represents what people think should happen, but a belief is what they think will happen. Of the five social axioms developed by Leung and colleagues (2002)—cynicism, social complexity, reward for application, spirituality, and fate control—one of the most promising for key issues in organizational behavior may be social complexity, representing a set of beliefs about the degree of consistency and inconsistency in human behavior. People who rank high in social complexity believe in situational variability and that promoting social behavior may be contradictory across different contexts. Those low in social complexity believe in fixed, established methods for success, such that similarly positive outcomes can result from the same behaviors applied across situations. Social complexity has potential implications for each of the domains we reviewed, in terms of adapting across different team contexts, a leader's need to meet challenges of changing markets and constituents, and matching appropriate conflict resolution strategies to a variety of situations.

More broadly, this concept taps into what may be a more fundamental approach to evaluating differences between and amongst people. Others include the relationship with nature orientation, or an individual's tendency to be in harmony with or exhibit mastery and control over external forces (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961); interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or relational self-construal, or the extent to which we cognitively represent ourselves as connected to others (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006); cultural "tightness" or "looseness" (Gelfand et al., 2006), or the strength of social norms and degree of sanctioning within a societal group; and Protestant relational ideology, or the extent to which relational and personal considerations are considered appropriate in the workplace (Sanchez-Burks, 2005). Due to the cultural orientation of the researchers themselves, research questions that are theoretically developed and empirically tested may represent a Protestant relational ideology, in that there is a tendency to downplay or ignore relational and affective considerations (Gelfand et al., 2008). Rather than seeing personal life and nonwork roles as disjointed from organizational behavior, viewing these particulars as integrated—that is, seeing work and life as a multiplex whole rather than distinct and unilateral—may be a useful lens for cultural researchers to incorporate. We encourage exploration of these and other promising approaches to culture that transcend the traditional values approaches.

Culture as Dynamic and Reciprocal

Much of the organizational behavior research over the last two decades has assumed that culture, however it might be defined, is a causal variable that affects attitudes, behavior or other phenomena. Kirkman and colleagues (2006) found that only 18% of the studies included in their review examined culture in some other role. Yet, culture may also change the nature of the relationship between two other phenomena (i.e., serve as a moderator), such as when management practices yield differential behavioral results in different cultural environments. In addition, culture may be affected (i.e., serve as the dependent

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variable or outcome) by other phenomena, such as when a societal shift influences changes in individual behavioral patterns, which ultimately shapes an entire culture. Though cultural change may be admittedly slow (Hofstede, 2001), it is not negligible.

Recent research has started to recognize this. For example, Buchan and her associates (2009) have explored how globalization influences individuals' cooperation with people in their own locality, relative to cooperation with other people around the globe. This research asks whether globalization prompts people to be more parochial—that is to pull into their own local, ethnic, or language groupings (e.g., Choi & Bowles, 2007)—or prompts them to strengthen their cosmopolitan attitudes, weakening parochial ingroup boundaries and strengthening a common identity and consciousness of being connected with people worldwide (e.g., Cheah & Robbins, 1998). Results suggest that "globalized" individuals may draw broader group boundaries than others, eschewing parochial motivations in favor of cosmopolitan ones. Providing credence to this approach, Fertig (1996) found that cultural values change over time and that they change more rapidly during a period of environmental transformation in economy or technology. Likewise, Ralston, Terpstra-Tong, Terpstra, Wang, and Egri (2006) found that cultural values changed more in China than in the U.S. in a recent 12-year period.

It is important to note that many, if not most, studies consider culture to be the only influence, including only cultural predictors in tested models (Gelfand et al., 2008). Future researchers should also consider the relative influence of alternative predictors, including other societal or organizational level factors likely to influence behavior. That is, there are likely interaction effects between aspects of culture and other societal or organizational properties, such as features of a work environment or job design, that enact a combinatory influence on organizational behavior outcomes (Gelfand et al., 2008). Culture and noncultural contextual factors may influence phenomena of interest either simultaneously or independently (Johns, 2006). We see pursuing this line of work as particularly important and promising.

Multicultural Enactment

Perhaps due to the rich history of comparative work that examines similarities and differences in organizational behavior phenomena across cultures, it is surprising how little research has examined multicultural interactions. As we mentioned in our section on work teams, a growing number of researchers are addressing challenges that arise when multiple cultures are represented on globally dispersed teams. However, the typical approach to capturing culture is using nationality as a surrogate for culture, which is a very limited view of the vast variety of cultural differences that may exist on a multicultural team (Stanko & Gibson, in press).

Although still rare, recent research has begun to help to fill the void in terms of understanding multicultural interactions, while at the same time bridging the three domains that we reviewed here (teams, leadership, and conflict). For example, a study by Ayoko, Hartel, and Callan (2002) examined the communicative behaviors and strategies employed in culturally heterogeneous workgroups using participant observations, semistructured interviews, and questionnaires. They found that the more groups used discourse management strategies, the more they experienced productive conflict. In addition, the use of explanation and checking of own and others' understanding was a major feature of productive conflict, whereas speech interruptions emerged as a strategy leading to potential destructive conflict. Groups in which leaders emerged and assisted in reversing communication breakdowns were better able to manage their discourse and achieved consensus on task processes. Other promising approaches include focusing on the positive effects of identification with the team as a whole (vs. identifying with one's own cultural background; e.g., Randel, 2003), as well as strategies that involve creating a hybrid team culture, which helps create a foundation for interacting and communicating effectively even in highly culturally heterogeneous teams (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000) and provides process-related feedback that help such teams utilize diversity to their advantage (Thomas, 1999; Watson, Johnson, Kumar, & Critelli, 1998). In a sample of 51 individuals across six teams, factors of cultural intelligence, or an individual's capability to effectively deal with cultural diversity (Earley & Ang, 2003), have been positively associated with acceptance of diverse team members and integration of these members into multinational teams (Flaherty, 2008).

A final useful approach views cultural differences through the metaphor of the mosaic, with different tiles representing different cultural identities and any one individual composed of a variety of cultural identities (Chao & Moon, 2005). When these mosaics interact within a team, any number of the set of identities may be invoked, or none of them may be, hence adding to the complexity and richness of multicultural interactions. Understanding these multiple identities and the perspectives, preferences, and knowledge that they can bring to a team opens a treasure chest of potential assets for improving innovation, creativity, and marketability (Earley & Gibson, 2002). As very little theory exists to guide this process, we see future research that extends the work in these domains as highly impactful and important.

Conclusion

Our objective has been to strengthen the case that the development of organizational behavior theory should not be undertaken with a "one size fits all" approach and that there are cultural limitations to the universal applicability of organizational behavior theory. As observed by other scholars before us, our review provides evidence that a science of organizations is incomplete without the integration of concepts of culture, interdependence, and self-awareness. This holds true for both preference, as in what individuals may naturally prefer to do, as well as acceptance, or what is generally considered to be

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acceptable behavior in a particular cultural environment. No longer is it appropriate to describe or predict organizational activities and employee actions without incorporating a more comprehensive view of where such activities take place. Not only must we include an immediate social context, we must deal with the international and cultural aspects of the social world. More than ever, understanding employee action requires knowledge of how action is related to the environment in which it is embedded.

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The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

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