

# Research in Cultural Management: Approaches and Tasks

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## *Abstract*

*There are 3 main approaches in the research of cultural management. Aggregate (or etic) approach focuses on universal aspects of culture and has developed dimensions or typologies of culture across which different countries are compared. Individual (or emic) approach focuses on unique aspects of a particular company or community culture and has compared different beliefs and cognitive processes across culture (not only cultural values). Cultural Intelligence approach (or Knowledge Management perspective), a new paradigm for the study of cultural management, focuses on individuals' cultural adaptation know-how. Supportive researches for the each approach are presented and the research tasks in cultural management are mentioned. Research tasks in cultural management can be summarized as follows: 1) Triangulation method (combination of qualitative and quantitative research method) is highly recommended for the study of cultural management, 2) Research team diversity is highly recommended to minimize the individual biases, 3) A combined emic-etic approach is desirable for obtaining a comprehensive view of cultural phenomena, 4) Developing consistent measurements for cultural variables is required to assure the clear link between culture and performance, 5) More attention to language and biculturalism is necessary.*

## I. Introduction

Cultural management has been a crucial issue for most organizations due to

the increasing impact of globalization. The world economy is increasingly global and many of the uncertainties the world faces revolve around culture (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003). The ability to manage cross-culturally is an important factor for multinational corporate surviv-

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al and success because cultural differences create additional difficulties to managing business relationships (Nicholson and Stepina, 1998; Lin, 2004).

The research in cultural management has stemmed from the anthropological tradition and the attempt by social psychologists to ‘measure’ cultural differences. Much of the research in cultural management has been focused on the problems of ‘culture shock’ and how to minimize it and on barriers to communication and interaction between people of different cultures (Holden, 2002),

The purpose of this paper is to investigate several approaches in cultural management research followed by supportive researches for each approach. Another purpose of this paper is to review some tasks in the study of cultural management. A new paradigm for understanding management issues in a cultural setting, which is the research trend in cultural management, will be mentioned.

## II. Research Approaches and Supportive Researches

Cultural management research has several methodological approaches. Fon-

taine and Richardson (2003) present two methodological approaches-*etic* and *emic*-which concern whether one is looking for what is similar or to what is different. The *etic* approach makes the assumption that there are universal constructs that transcend individual cultures, that can be identified and then measured scientifically. The *emic* approach assumes that most cultures are unique. Hofstede states that different social disciplines have traditionally taken different positions on the *etic-emic* continuum and the *etic-emic* approaches are complementary. Fontaine and Richardson (2003) recommend researches to use an *etic* approach for comparing national cultures and an *emic* approach for looking at individuals. In other words, the method chosen should reflect the problem investigated.

The same perspective concerning the *etic-emic* approaches is also manifested in another article. Earley and Mosakowski (2004) present 3 approaches in the study of cultural management-Aggregate approach, Individual approach, and Cultural Intelligence approach. The aggregate approach is similar to the *etic* approach and the individual approach is similar to the *emic* approach. The cultural intelligence approach corresponds to the “know-

ledge management perspective” (Holden, 2002). The “knowledge management perspective” considers cultural management as a knowledge domain and culture as an organizational resource.

“This perspective on culture as a knowledge resource and its exploration from the perspective of knowledge management, the facilitation of inter-organizational learning and the sharing of knowledge and experienced is welcome, leading to a conceptualization of knowledge transfer as a form of translation and exploration of the transferability of cross-cultural know-how and the view of the cross-cultural manager as a form of knowledge worker” (p. 82).

Traditional structural-functional perspective considers culture as an external mechanism that influences individual activities and organizational behavior. In a word, the old perspective views the culture as something an organization ‘has.’ However, the cultural intelligence approach or the “knowledge management perspective” views culture as a ‘root metaphor.’ The new perspective has focused on what culture ‘is’ (Holden, 2002).

Earley and Mosakowski (2004) pres-

ent an excellent overview of cultural management research. They discuss the contribution of anthropology, sociology, and psychology to the study of culture in management before explaining a new paradigm for understanding management issues in a cultural setting. The aggregate approach and the individual approach are related to the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology. The cultural intelligence approach is a new paradigm for the study of cultural management.

The 3 approaches and supportive researches for each approach are as follows:

- **Aggregate Approach:** This approach identifies commonalities at a country or regional level and is interested in what people generally believe within a community. This approach has borrowed its ideas from anthropological traditions which often intensively study one community. This sociologically driven approach has emphasized dimensions or typologies of cultures across which different countries are compared.

“Although this overarching approach to culture was a useful beginning, it committed the error that Geert Hof-

tede characterized as the *ecological fallacy*. This fallacy describes the error or difficulty one encounters when taking a generalized cultural value and assuming that it applies to all individuals within a given culture” (p. 152).

- **Supportive Researches:** The field of cross-cultural management has been dominated by research on cultural values. Scholars such as Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, Florence Kluckhohn, Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, Simcha Ronen, Shalom Schwartz and Harry Triandis are prominent examples of such researchers. These authors have developed typologies of various countries’ cultural values and include such dimensions as power orientation, individualism, and time orientation. For example, Japan might be characterized as high in power distance, low in individualism, and with a long-term time orientation.

- **Individual Approach:** This approach expanded upon the aggregate approach by adding psychological concepts to the mix, and it tried to understand how an individual’s actions are in part the result of national and even organizational values.

This approach tried to find how beliefs and cognitive processes also differ across cultures (not only cultural values) and emphasized the uniqueness of a particular company or community culture. The potential usefulness of this approach is for understanding how cultural values and managerial practices influence work outcomes through their effect on individual self-knowledge and motives.

- **Supportive Researches:**

- 1) Erez and Earley (1993): Forerunners of the individual approach
- 2) Nicholson and Stepina (1998): Work-related cultural values were examined across 3 culturally distinct nations—the USA, Venezuela, and the P.R. China. Multiple analyses of variance revealed significant differences in value structures across the 3 nations.
- 3) Hisrich (2003): The empirical findings regarding the ethical attitudes of business people in 4 culturally and economically different countries reveal that US ranked the highest in ethical attitudes, followed by Slovenia and Turkey, and then Russia.
- 4) Huang (2003): The results of the cross-cultural study regarding custo-

- mer value perceptions yield a wide array of both cross-cultural differences and similarities in East Asia.
- 5) Wang and Clegg (2002): The results of the study indicate that there is a significant difference between Chinese and Australian managers on levels of trust in employees' psychological maturity, managers from both countries display similar trust in employees' ability to perform their jobs.
  - 6) Brodebeck et al. (2000): The findings of the study support the assumption that leadership concepts are culturally endorsed ...
  - 7) Li and Karakowsky (2001): A laboratory study was conducted to examine the potential for discrepancies in observer judgment making among Asian American and Caucasian American subjects ...
  - 8) Groeschl (2003): This article presents a number of implications for the appraisal process and its different functions and characteristics when applied within a cross-cultural context.
  - 9) Yavas and Rezayal (2003): The findings of the study indicate that both organizational and cultural variables are important in explaining the differences in managerial perceptions of quality.
  - 10) Schein (1996): The author insists that there are 3 occupational cultures within an organization and the conflicts among these cultures are the very reason for the failure of organizational learning.
- **Cultural Intelligence Approach:** This approach is a new paradigm for the study of cultural management. This approach stems largely from the field of psychology, and it emphasizes a primary part of human thinking-intelligence, or a person's capacity to solve problems and adapt to changing situations. This approach does not focus on the macro-societal influences and culture per se, but it focuses on the individual and the person's cultural adaptation know-how. "In essence, it is a paradigm shift, taking focus away from the top-down influence of culture on the individual to ask the bottom-up question of how the person can operate effectively in different societal contexts" (p. 152). This approach presents the 3 features of cultural intelligence-head (understanding), heart (motivated), and body (act well).

• **Supportive Researches:**

- 1) Holden (2002); Earley and Mosakowski (2004): Forerunner of the cultural intelligence approach
- 2) Elsey and Leung (2004): The operational roles for implementing Continuous Process Improvement strategy include innovator, broker, producer, director, coordinator, monitor, facilitator, and mentor.
- 3) Thompson (1997): Integrating disparate value systems is needed ...
- 4) Grahn and Swenson (2000): Cross-cultural training should analyze the needs of expatriate training, identify the countries for this training, and should match the indicated needs with global business growth patterns.
- 5) Nimwegen, Soeters and Luijk (2004): Describe how an internationally operating bank has formulated 4 company values in order to implement basic standards in their organization on a worldwide scale.
- 6) Selmer (2005): Expatriates should be selected with recent positive experiences of the host country since such experience could be regarded as a perfect substitute for cross-cultural training.
- 7) Harris and Kumra (2000): Experiential exercises are highly recommended for cross-cultural training to MBA students.
- 8) MacNab (2012): An experiential CQ education process was initially developed to increase CQ capacity by engaging in a new cultural contact experience.
- 9) Lin (2004): The survey results show that cultural adaptation is driven by relationship commitment and relative dependence among both Chinese and US joint venture partners.

The following <Table 1> is a summary of the 3 approaches in cultural management research and supportive researches for each approach:

### III. Research Tasks

Research in cultural management has begun by studying cultural values. Since cultural studies are originated from anthropological traditions which emphasize careful ethnographic or clinical observation, cultural management studies should also take observation seriously. However, most studies in cultural management un-

<Table 1> Research Approaches and Supportive Researches

Approaches	Forerunners of the Approaches	Supportive Researches
Aggregate Approach = <i>etic</i>	Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, Florence Kluckhohn, Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, Simcha Ronen, Shalom Schwartz and Harry Triandis, et al.	Fontaine and Richardson (2003); et al.
Individual Approach = <i>emic</i>	Erez and Earley (1993), et al.	Fontaine and Richardson (2003); Nicholson and Stepina (1998); Hisrich (2003); Huang (2003); Wang and Clegg (2002); Brodebeck et al. (2000); Li and Karakowsky (2001); Groeschl (2003); Yavas and Rezayal (2003); Schein (1996); et al.
Cultural Intelligence Approach = <i>Knowledge Mgt. Perspective</i>	Holden (2002); Earley and Mosakowski (2004); et al.	Elsey and Leung (2004); Thompson (1997); Grahn and Swenson (2000); Nimwegen, Soeters and Luijk (2004); Selmer (2005); Harris and Kumra (2000); MacNab (2012); Lin (2004); et al.

derestimate the importance of culture and “put a greater premium on abstractions that can be measured” (Schein, 1996, p. 229). Schein (1996) describes the wrong practices as follows:

“As I look back, what is missing most in our methods of research is the anchoring of our concepts in observed reality. We have gone too quickly to

formal elegant abstractions that seemingly could be operationally defined and measure, i.e., centralization-decentralization, differentiation-integration, power, etc., and failed to link these to observed reality. I say ‘seemingly’ because in the effort to define such concepts, we often relied on further abstractions, i.e., questionnaire responses, and began to treat the abstractions as

the reality. Not only does this create fuzzy theory and research that is made significant only by massaging the data statistically, but the results are often useless to the practitioner” (p. 232).

As a cultural integration is needed to prevent the failure of organizational learning caused by the conflicts among occupational cultures, a disciplinary integration is also needed to better understand the cultural issues. In other words, the disciplines of psychology, sociology and anthropology should be integrated and each discipline should take others’ perspectives to observe cultures. Psychologists are not accustomed to the careful ethnographic observation which sociologist and anthropologists are familiar with. On the other hands, Sociologists are not good at investigating the individual influences on the society which psychologist and anthropologists are familiar with. Consequently, psychologists trained in questionnaire or laboratory methods should “go into the field with an ethnographer or become a participant observer in a real organization” (p. 239). To sum up, research in cultural issues should combine different research tools. However, each tool has its advantages and dis-

advantages and it is up to the researcher to understand when one tool is more useful than the other (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003).

Although corporate culture actually related to performance, there are no enough empirical studies demonstrating a clear link between culture and performance. The very reasons for this phenomenon include the lack of consistent measurements for cultural strength due to the adaptation of different definitions, erroneous assumption that organizations possess a single and unitary culture, and the lack of appropriate comparison or control groups (Furnham and Gunter, 1993).

A combined *emic-etic* approach is highly desirable for better understanding of cultural phenomena. In other words, the combined approach enables researchers to obtain “a richer and more integrated and balanced view of the universal and culture-specific aspects of a target construct or theory than could be obtained by the use of an *emic* or *etic* method separately” (Cheung et al., 2011, p. 597). The combined approach can take on various forms and could comprise:

- a: The use of a combination of *etic* and *emic* measurement
- b: Studies in which universal and cul-



ture-specific aspects are delineated in an iterative process of data collections with continually adapted instruments

- c: Use of mixed methods (e.g., the use of an *etic* measure combined with interview for collecting information about culture-specific features not covered by the *etic* instrument (p. 597).

Future research in cultural management should consider the following matters (Furnham and Gunter, 1993; Usunier, 1998, Fontaine and Richardson, 2003):

- 1) Use qualitative and quantitative research methods simultaneously to enhance the validity of a study.
- 2) Pay more attention to language as a means for uncovering crucial cultural influence on managerial practices.
- 3) Research design should not be too complex; research questions should be clear and concise.
- 4) Multidimensional or multicultural research team is necessary to eliminate the unconscious cultural assumptions or biases.
- 5) Multidisciplinary research team is needed to measure how much of

the variance in organizational structure and performance is attributable to cultural variables.

- 6) Research instruments should have high level of reliability and validity.
- 7) Sample surveys need at least 2 modes of cross-societal comparisons.
- 8) Pay more attention to Biculturalism and Terror Management Theory (TMT).

## IV. Conclusions and Discussions

This paper reviewed some research approaches and tasks in cultural management. Based on the 3 approaches indicated by Earley and Mosakowski (2004), supportive researches for each approach were presented to justify the approaches. *Etic-emic* approaches (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003) and “knowledge management perspective” (Holden, 2002) each corresponds to the aggregate-individual approaches and the cultural intelligence approach.

Research in cultural management has evolved from the study of cultural values on national or regional level (aggregate approach) to individual level (individual

approach), then is moving to ‘knowledge’ level (cultural intelligence approach). As indicated by <Table 1>, the aggregate approach is out-of-date now and most current researches adapt the individual or cultural intelligence approach. In general, research trend is moving from the individual approach to the cultural intelligence approach which is a new paradigm for the study of cultural management. While traditional researches (individual approach) have focused on comparing different cultures, the new paradigm (cultural intelligence approach) tries to ‘excavate’ management know-how in a cultural setting. We expect more valuable know-how about cultural management will be ‘excavated’ in the near future.

Most scholars highly recommended the triangulation method (combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods) for the study of cultural management. Research team diversity is also recommended to minimize the individual biases. Developing consistent measurements for cultural variables is required to assure the clear link between culture and performance. It is also highly recommended to use a combined *emic-etic* approach to obtain a comprehensive view of cultural phenomena. More attention to

language and biculturalism is also requested.

Although current research in cultural management has many deficiencies, we expect it will be improved day by day since today’s fast-moving pace enables every discipline to update immediately.

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