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WHEN DOES CULTURE MATTER?

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WHEN DOES CULTURE MATTER?

ABSTRACT

Past research has shown that national culture does matter – it affects people’s behavior – but research has left open the question of *when* culture matters. We examine culture’s effects on four types of individual outcomes, and propose moderators at three levels of analysis. The framework is then illustrated with sample hypotheses.

Key words: national culture; intercultural management; multinational management

The most recent years of research in international management have been dominated by studies of culture's effect on dependent variables of interest to managers. Reviews of research conclude that culture does have an impact, one that cannot be ignored (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992; Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Earley & Sing 1995). However, practice abounds with anecdotes in which cultural differences did not come into play in a multicultural situation, and in many research studies, while culture's impact is significant, it does not explain a large amount of variance. The dilemma is particularly problematic when researchers attempt to explain individual-level phenomena, such as attitudes and behavior, with the group-level phenomenon of culture. Yet these individual-level variables are often those that researchers and managers need to understand to develop and implement effective business decisions across cultures.

This paper seeks to articulate a superordinate position concerning the nature of culture's effect on individuals. We shift the focus of the field's discussion, and instead of addressing whether or not culture makes a difference, we address the issue of *when* it makes a difference. We explore the nature of culture's effect on specific categories of individual-level outcomes, as moderated by a set of contingent variables, and develop a model of the causal relationships which can then be used to generate specific propositions. This model is depicted in Figure 1. Before examining the relationships in depth, we will frame the discussion by defining culture and identifying the variables to be addressed.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Culture

In this research, we adopt the following definition of culture:

Culture is the configuration of basic assumptions about humans and their relationship to each other and to the world around them, shared by an identifiable group of people. Culture is manifested in individuals' values and beliefs, in expected norms for social behavior, and in artifacts such as social institutions and physical items.

This definition is an extension of the cognitive approach that is embedded in many traditional definitions of culture (e.g., Erez & Earley, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn, 1954; Shweder & LeVine, 1984). Several aspects of the definition require elaboration. First is the deliberate choice of the word "configuration," which is consistent with the approach set forth by Meyer, Tsui, and Hinings (1993). A configuration is a "multidimensional constellation of conceptually distinct characteristics that commonly occur together" (Meyer et al., 1993: 1175). As in any configuration, while specific elements of culture can be separated, analyzed, and compared with elements of other cultures in useful ways, the interaction of combined elements has effects different from those expected by a simple summation of the effects of the individual elements. Culture's effects cannot be well-understood unless culture is seen as a gestalt created by combinations of elements.

Second, while we mostly "see" culture in its manifestations, it is the underlying assumptions that constitute the deep level of culture (Schein, 1984). These assumptions are held by individuals, often subconsciously, and are rarely questioned. They are learned in direct and

indirect ways in childhood, and reinforced throughout life by pervasive social values and beliefs, expected norms, and artifacts in the culture's environment.

Third, culture does not concern all assumptions held by individuals -- that set may be infinite or at least undefinable. The set of assumptions that define cultural configurations is bounded by issues concerning the group's survival and social interaction. Since prehistoric times humans have lived in groups, operating in social organizations to coordinate long-term survival and prosperity. For a wide variety of complex reasons, different groups developed different assumptions about how to interact to survive, and these are the substance of culture (Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961).

This content is directly related to a fourth aspect of our definition: the notion that the assumptions are shared (Erez & Earley, 1993). In order for the assumptions to work, that is, for them to facilitate the survival and prosperity of the group, they must guide the culture's members to behave in a coordinated and consistent manner. Interestingly, this "sharedness" does not need to be absolutely complete. Cultures can be described on a continuum from strong to weak (Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1986; Trompenaars, 1993), on which strong cultures are those with a high level of sharedness and weak cultures are those with less sharing of assumptions and beliefs. At some level, a weak culture ceases to be a culture at all, but the dividing line between what is and what is not a culture is sometimes difficult to discern.

Finally, the choice of the term "identifiable group of people" must be addressed. It is well-accepted that many types of cultures exist, including ones associated with national, ethnic, religious, professional, gender, age, class, and organizational dimensions. While in international management research we tend to focus on cultures associated with national and ethnic groups –

as we will in this paper – we must acknowledge that other cultural affiliations exist and influence organizational phenomena. A cultural group can be identified either by the members themselves, or by an outside observer. In any case, the identification of the cultural group is a recognition that the group operates in a coordinated way under a relatively cohesive set of assumptions about each other and the world around them.

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES: WHAT CULTURE AFFECTS

Culture has the potential to affect many phenomena important to international management, including those at the individual, group, and institutional levels of analysis. This paper focuses on individual-level manifestations, which we discuss in terms of four categories: perceptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors. This section describes each of these categories and briefly reviews how each is influenced by culture.

Perception: Do You See What I See?

Perception is the process by which individuals select, organize, and evaluate stimuli from the external environment (Singer, 1976). As demonstrated in numerous laboratory experiments (see Pryor & Osterman, 1991 for a review) as well as in the field (Adler, 1997), perception is selective and involves schematic processing. Information is organized into cognitive frameworks or expectations, called schemas (Pryor & Ostrom, 1991). These cognitive structures guide the perceiver to attend to what is important, lend structure to otherwise ambiguous social experience, enable the perceiver to fill in gaps when information is missing, and allow the perceiver to anticipate what will come next (Abelson, 1981). As a result, we can “see” things that do not exist and not “see” things that do exist (Hall, 1976).

Culture has been shown to have a strong influence on the schemas we construct (see Triandis, 1994 for a research review). Many important schemas are developed through childhood socialization and pressures to conform, which are associated with cultural values and patterns (Witkin & Berry, 1975; Gruenfeld & MacEachron, 1975). Culture affects perception primarily through its influence on (1) the content of the schemata, (2) the structure of the schemata, and (3) the propensity to rely strongly on schemata (Shaw, 1990). With regard to content, for example, research indicates that culture is related to the width of schema categories – how broad a category is – such that people from different cultures have systematically different category widths (Detweiler, 1978). With respect to structure, some cultures encourage high differentiation among dimensions of the environment, while other cultures encourage people to perceive the environment as a unidimensional, highly integrated whole (Gruenfeld & MacEachron, 1975; Witkin, 1967; Witkin & Berry, 1975). Finally, research also indicates that culture impacts the extent to which information is processed automatically. For example, culture determines whether we pay attention to the context in which an experience occurs (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), a phenomenon that has been referred to as high context versus low context (Hall & Hall, 1988). In high context cultures, perception is likely to involve a comprehensive, controlled process (Shaw, 1990), while in low context cultures the perceptual process is quicker and more automatic.

Beliefs: What's Related to What?

Beliefs are a person's subjective probability judgment concerning a relation between the object of the belief and some other object, value, concept or attribute (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975: 131). There are three basic categories of beliefs based on how they are formed: descriptive,

inferential and informative (Bem, 1970). Descriptive beliefs are formed on the basis of perception of direct experience, and based on information absorbed through the senses.

Inferential beliefs go beyond the directly observable events and are based on rules of logic that allow inferences, as applied to stored beliefs collected in the past. Finally, informational beliefs are formed on the basis of information provided by outside sources such as other individuals, books, or the media.

Four characteristics of beliefs that are of special importance for the present analysis are: confidence, centrality, interrelationship, and functionality (Bar-Tal, 1990). Confidence differentiates beliefs on the basis of truth attributed to them. A person may have minimal confidence in some beliefs, and will express these using statements such as “maybe” or “possibly,” while having absolute confidence in other beliefs and will state the latter ones in definite ways. Centrality characterizes the extent of beliefs’ accessibility in individuals’ repertoire and their use in various considerations that individuals make. Some beliefs are very central, used often, and are relevant for a wide range of evaluations, decisions, judgments, or behaviors. Others are less central, peripheral beliefs that are only taken into consideration at specific times. Interrelationship describes the extent to which the belief is related to other beliefs in a network or system. For example, a person’s belief about compensation systems may be related to a complex series of beliefs about economic and political systems. On the other hand, a person’s two or three beliefs about the Arctic Sea might be relatively isolated. Finally, functionality differentiates beliefs on the basis of the needs that they fulfill. Beliefs may be utilitarian in that they help people get rewards and avoid punishments; they may protect an

individual's sense of self; they may express personal values; or they may serve a knowledge function, providing meaning, understanding, and organization to what we know (Bar-Tal, 1990).

Evidence for the relationship between culture and beliefs has been gathered by researchers such as Miller (1984) who demonstrated that Americans are much more likely to use internal dispositions as beliefs about behavior (i.e., "He did it because he is dishonest") than external, context factors (i.e., "He did it because it was a hot day"). Conversely, Indians tended to use context factors more often than dispositions.

Values: What is Important?

A value is a belief that is prescriptive – an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is socially preferable to an opposite mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973: 5). Values guide the selection of the means and ends of specific actions, and serve as criteria by which objects, actions, or events are evaluated. Individuals differ with respect to the values they hold or consider important; however, groups can be described by shared value systems.

That culture influences values has been shown by many scholars (Triandis, 1994; Erez & Earley, 1993; Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Rokeach, 1973). We typically adopt values during early socialization experiences as a function of childhood. As a child matures and is exposed to settings of increasing complexity, he or she is likely to reaffirm particular values congruent with the settings and weaken or change other values that are inconsistent with the settings. Major programs of research conducted by both Trompenaars (1993) and Hofstede (1980) provide some indirect evidence for the relationship between culture and values by demonstrating that values vary more between countries than within countries.

Behavior: What Will I Do?

In our framework, behavior encompasses the actions that people take on a daily basis in response to stimuli, choices, or situations. The impact of culture on behaviors has been researched by anthropologists and social psychologists for decades (see Triandis, 1994 for an overview). We note that behavior is a distal outcome of culture. By this we mean that culture probably does not impact behavior directly, but rather that culture impacts behavior through its influence on other more proximal outcomes. In terms of very general categories of behavior, we have evidence that culture is related to aggressive behavior such as being dominant, competitive, or violent (Goldstein and Segall, 1983). In some societies, aggression is common place, in others, it is virtually absent. Empirical research has also established that culture is related to helping behaviors such as providing direction, encouragement, or reassurance (Hinde & Broebel, 1991). Other research has demonstrated strong relationships between culture and conformity and between culture and obedience (see Mann, 1980 for a review). Finally, empirical work has demonstrated links between culture and disclosure or intimacy (Gudykunst, 1983). In more specific terms, research based on Hofstede's (1980) framework has demonstrated links between culture and directive managerial behavior (Gallois, Barker, Jones & Callan, 1992), between culture and providing feedback (Cohen, 1991), and between culture and conflict reduction (Leung, 1988).

Relationships Among Dependent Variables

Of course, separating perceptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors as we have done in this section is somewhat artificial, since the four categories are highly related to each other. What we believe and value influences what we notice and how we interpret it, all of which influences how

we behave. Behavior and its effects on the environment in turn affect what we perceive and believe. The fact that culture affects each element in this continual process makes its influence both pervasive and complex. However, we are still left with the fact that sometimes its influence seems to be greater than others. We now turn to the proposed moderators of the relationship between culture and individual outcomes.

MODERATORS

To address the question of *when* culture affects these outcomes, we outline moderators at three levels of analysis: individual, group, and situational. At the individual level, personality or cognitive process variables can moderate the relationship, as can variables related to individual experiences or self-identity. At the group level, we examine the role of characteristics small work groups as well as larger social groups. At the situational level, elements of the environment and context of the focal variable can moderate the relationship. In this section, we take each level of analysis and propose specific variables that moderate the relationship between culture and each of the four categories of outcomes. This discussion is not intended to identify all moderators of the relationship between culture and individual outcomes, but to illustrate a framework for understanding the role of categories of moderators.

Individual-level Moderators

Probably the most pervasive moderator at the individual level is that of personality, or characteristics which capture stable individual differences in personal traits. Research reported in the personality literature provides evidence for five major personality factors that exist in all cultures (see Digman, 1990 for a review). These five factors have been given various labels; however the general consensus seems to be that the following traits capture the essence of the

five factors: Social Adaptability, Conformity, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness (Benet & Waller, 1995; Digman, 1990; Yang & Bond, 1990). Individuals' perceptions, beliefs, values and behavior are also influenced by previous experiences and strengths, as discussed in examples below.

Perception. An important personality characteristic that affects perception is Openness, which captures the degree to which a person has an inquiring intellect and an independence of thinking (Digman, 1990). Persons characterized by openness will demonstrate openness to ways of perceiving other than those typical of their native culture. They will perceive in a manner that is independent of their culture, thus, for those high on openness, there will be little relationship between culture and perception. For those low on openness, we would expect perception to be more dependent upon the cultural modes of thinking.

A number of other individual differences likely moderate the impact of culture on perceptions. For example, the extent of familiarity with other cultures may influence how individuals process information. When a person has acquired extensive international experience, he or she may no longer perceive in a manner that is characteristic of his or her native culture, therefore there may be little relationship between culture and perception. Several studies have shown that exposure to foreign cultures and business practices reduce cognitive differences between individuals from different cultures (Pick, 1980; Toyne, 1976). When a person has not been exposed to foreign cultures, the relationship between culture and perception will likely remain.

Beliefs. Personality characteristics such as Conformity – a tendency to match one's self to others – will moderate the impact of culture on beliefs. People who are high on conformity

tend to follow social norms (Fiske, 1949). They also tend to demonstrate “friendly compliance” with the status quo (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981). Within a culture, then, those people who are characterized by the Conformity personality characteristic will hold beliefs that are in line with their culture. On the other hand, people low on conformity tend to demonstrate hostile noncompliance (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981). These individuals are not likely to hold beliefs based on cultural characteristics.

Another individual difference variable that will moderate the impact of culture on beliefs is lineal descent. People native to a given culture will demonstrate the strongest relationship between that culture and their belief system. As families immigrate from their native culture and spend more time in a new culture, they slowly take on the culture of their new home. This process has been referred to as acculturation (Earley & Erez, 1997). Thus, over time as new persons are born into these families, successive generations demonstrate fewer and fewer of the characteristic beliefs of the original culture held by their ancestors. There will be little or no relationship between the family’s original native culture and the beliefs held by these new generations.

Values. One personality characteristic that will moderate culture’s affect on values is Social Adaptability, which has also been referred to as extraversion (Digman, 1990) and interpersonal involvement (Lorr, 1986). This trait captures whether or not a person is comfortable socially and the extent to which he or she is socially active. People who demonstrate social adaptability are more likely to change their values to fit the social setting they happen to be in at any given time. These persons tend to take to heart the old adage “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” thus demonstrating malleability in terms of what they deem important or

desirable. Such individuals are not likely to be as driven by their own cultural assumptions in determining what will be valued. For them, culture will have little impact on their value system.

A second important individual difference moderator is the extent to which a person identifies with his or her culture. Not all individuals within a society identify with their national culture. According to Social Categorization Theory, individuals view themselves as members of a number of groups and make personal self-categorizations regarding their membership within these groups (Turner, 1987). For example, one of the authors views herself as a member of the “female” group, the academic profession group, and the “North American” cultural group. She categorizes herself as a female above all else and identifies most strongly with this group. She does not identify with “North American” culture. Her values are characteristic of females in general, but not characteristic of North Americans as a cultural group. Thus her level of identification with North American culture moderates the extent to which that culture impacts her values.

Behavior. A number of individual characteristics will moderate the impact of culture on behavior. For example, the personality trait Conscientiousness, which has also been referred to as “constraint” (Tellegen, 1985) and “prudence” (Hogan, 1986) implies a degree of caution in one’s actions. People described as conscientious or prudent are also characterized as having “good common sense” or a “practical wisdom.” This suggests that people who are conscientious will comply with behaviors that are deemed acceptable in a given culture. For example, a particular society may incorporate a set of cultural assumptions concerning the importance of protecting the well being of their in-group. In this society, a person with the Conscientiousness personality trait is likely to demonstrate behaviors that promote the group’s well being. On the

other hand, a person who does not have the Conscientiousness personality trait may disregard these culturally prescribed behaviors and instead engage in behaviors that maximize self-interests.

An additional individual characteristic that moderates the relationship is self-efficacy, which is a judgment of one's capability to accomplish a certain level of performance (Bandura, 1997). People who have a high sense of self-efficacy tend to pursue challenging goals that may be outside the reach of the average person. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy, therefore, may be more willing to step outside the culturally prescribed behaviors to attempt tasks or goals for which success is viewed as improbable by the majority of social actors in a setting. For these individuals, culture will have little or no impact on behavior. For example, Australians tend to endorse the "Tall Poppy Syndrome" (Gibson, 1994). This adage suggests that any "poppy" that outgrows the others in a field will get "cut down;" in other words, any over-achiever will eventually fail. Interviews and observations suggest that most Australians who step outside this culturally prescribed behavior to actually achieve beyond average have very high self-efficacy (Jenner, 1982; Limerick, 1990; Gibson, 1994).

Group-Level Moderators

Past research suggests that group-level moderators, such as characteristics of the group itself can moderate the relationship between culture and individual outcomes. In fact, an interesting study by Meltzer (1963) reported that group averages of variables predicted individual attitudes and behavior better than the individual's own scores on the same variables. This was true for dependent variables related to group-level phenomena such as "attitude towards organization's program," and "own activity on committee projects." Over the last decade, more

and more organizations have adopted team-based approaches to carry out work both in the United States (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995; Osterman, 1994) and in Asia, Europe, and Latin America (Gibson & Kirkman, in press; Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997; Manz & Sims, 1993). As a result, more employees than ever before are working in more formal groups to accomplish their tasks. Relationships with two types of group-level moderators will be described here: moderators related to the larger social or cultural group to which the individual belongs, and moderators more characteristic of smaller work groups.

Perception. One social group level variable that will likely moderate the relationship between culture and perception is the extent of group identification. Some social groups are characterized by strong identification, such that a high proportion of group members know clearly and identify strongly with the group's defining features. In North America, for example, the Canadian media often characterize Canadians as having little sense of self-identity as compared to their United States neighbors (e.g., Byfield, 1997). As demonstrated in laboratory and field studies, being part of an identifiable, interdependent social group lowers self-awareness and heightens group awareness (Bettenhausen, 1991; Kernis, Grannemann, Richie & Hart, 1988). Thus we would expect that members of a social group (or culture) characterized by strong group identification would notice more stimuli that are relevant to their group, and interpret them more in ways that are consistent with the group, than members of a social group with weaker group identification.

A work-group level moderator is the extent to which groups develop a shared social reality, or a shared understanding of criteria for evaluating information and responses. Through social interaction in groups, members learn the labels with which they see and interpret their

world (Bettenhausen, 1991). Shared social realities are negotiated between members more or less successfully depending on skilled performance in four areas (Brown & Hosking, 1986). Skilled organizers: (a) understand “threats” and “opportunities,” (b) effectively link members’ capacities to task demands, (c) recognize and act on key “dilemmas” associated with achievement, maintenance, and dissolution of order, and (d) are able to protect and pursue the values and interests seen to be at stake (Bettenhausen, 1991). Members of groups which construct a strong and effective shared social reality are more likely to perceive and interpret stimuli based on that shared social reality, rather than based on schema related to culture (although these may be mutually compatible).

Beliefs. The social-group level moderator to be discussed here is homogeneity, which is defined as the extent of sameness regarding demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, and education, or other factors such as ability or personality (Bettenhausen, 1991). Some national cultures are characterized by more homogeneity than others, such as Japan compared to Australia. The research conducted to date on homogeneity has focused on smaller groups, but the conclusions can cautiously be generalized to larger groups. It has been found that group members share more similar beliefs when their groups are homogeneous rather than heterogeneous (Bettenhausen, 1991; Levine & Moreland, 1990). Heterogeneous groups have many more of the characteristics that are associated with dissimilar beliefs than homogenous groups such as increased conflict (Pfeffer, 1983), higher turnover (Wagner, Pfeffer, & O’Reilly, 1984), and difficulty reaching consensus (Bettenhausen, 1991). Thus we would expect that in a social group characterized by homogeneity, culture would be a better predictor of individuals’ beliefs than in a more heterogeneous social group.

A work-group level moderator of the relationship between culture and beliefs is group polarization. Group polarization refers to the process by which group judgments tend to be more extreme than the judgments of individual members (Ziller, 1957). Group polarization tends to occur for two reasons: (a) group members alter their initial beliefs to be consistent with the group norm (i.e., the social comparison explanation); and (b) group members modify their beliefs based on the number of nonredundant arguments presented during group discussions (i.e., the persuasive argument explanation) (Bettenhausen, 1991). Regardless of the source of polarization (see Isenberg, 1986, for a meta-analysis demonstrating support for both social comparison and persuasive argument), beliefs of individuals in work groups that are highly polarized are more likely predicted by beliefs in the group than in the culture.

Values. One social-group moderator of the relationship between culture and individual's values is the strength of the sub-culture (i.e., organizational culture) to which the individual belongs. Stronger sub-cultures are those in which more members strongly hold values that are completely consistent with each other. In this respect, it is a special case of the homogeneity variable discussed above. Simply put, individuals who belong to strong sub-cultures will more likely have values consistent with that sub-culture than with their national culture. For example, one of the authors has conducted research in a United States company that has a very strong organizational culture which differs from the national United States culture on some important dimensions. In that organization, individuals' values are predicted better by the company's sub-culture than they are by the national culture.

A work-group moderator of culture's affect on individual values is group cohesion, or the degree to which members of a group are attracted to other members and are motivated to stay in

the group (Organ & Hammer, 1950). When a group member is attracted to a group and motivated to stay, he or she is likely to have bought into the values of the group and accepted what the group believes (Bettenhausen, 1991). In these circumstances, the work group values may be strong predictors than the national cultural values. Cohesiveness has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes such as group performance (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Littlepage, Cowart, & Kerr, 1989; Wolfe & Box, 1988), lower turnover (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; O'Reilley, Cladwell, & Barnett, 1989), and group resistance to disruption (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1988). These outcomes, in turn, will also likely create more adherence to the values of the group.

Behavior. Specific dimensions of the culture itself can moderate the relationship between the cultural configuration and individuals' behavior. For example, in highly individualistic societies, a broader range of behaviors is sanctioned by societal norms than in highly collective societies. Therefore, in individualistic cultures an individual's behavior may not be as well-predicted by other dimensions of the culture, or by the culture as a whole, than it is in collective cultures. Moreover, people, especially in collective cultures, differentiate between: (1) "ingroup members," or groups of individuals with whom they share attributes that contribute to their positive social identity; and (2) "outgroup members," or groups with whom they do not share these attributes (Triandis, 1994; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Within collective cultures, then, behavior towards ingroup members may be more in line with cultural predictions than behavior towards outgroup members.

A work-group variable that will likely affect the relationship between culture and behavior is the group's stage of development. Tuckman (1965) argued that groups experience

four stages: (1) forming, or the joining of members in a group; (2) storming, or the conflict that immediately results from struggles for power and leadership of the group; (3) norming, or the reaching of consensus on how the group will operate and what it will do; and (4) performing, or the actual accomplishment of tasks. In the forming and storming stages, there is likely to be little consensus around how the group shall operate or the types of things the group should do. During these stages, culture will have more of an impact on behavior since it will be used as the “default” set of assumptions from which to begin. However, in the norming and performing stages, the group will have developed some idiosyncratic behavioral norms for carrying out work. Much of what happens in these latter two stages will occur through shared behavior predicted by the group’s characteristics rather than those of the national culture.

Situational Moderators

Two situational frameworks will be invoked here for articulating the moderating effects of culture on individual outcomes. First is the set of environmental dimensions identified in the strategy and organizational design literature as having a contingent effect on the level of performance associated with a particular strategy or design. These dimensions include uncertainty, complexity, munificence, and volatility (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Downey, Hellriegel & Slocum, 1975; Hickson et al., 1988; Kotha & Nair, 1995; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The second framework is the standard typology for categorizing types of environmental influences, including Political/ Legal, Economic, Social, and Technological (PEST). While all of these variables have potential to moderate the relationship between culture and each of the dependent variables, the discussion here is intended to illustrate the basic patterns.

Perception. As described earlier, one of the main purposes for cognitive schemata is to filter stimuli: individuals tend to pay attention to stimuli that are identified as important by their schemata and to interpret the stimuli in ways consistent with the schemata (Lord & Foti, 1986). Schemata play a particularly influential role in the initial sorting out of highly uncertain situations – those in which many elements are simultaneously present and changing – since it is in these situations that the individual is exposed to a large amount of stimuli. After the uncertainty has been present for a while, though, the individual will refine his or her schema to incorporate the new stimuli and relationships (Feldman, 1986). Since culture provides an important basis for initial schema development, we would expect culture to be a better predictor of perception at the onset of high uncertainty than in relative certainty or long into a period of uncertainty.

For example, in the economic sphere immediately after the recent Korean currency crisis, Korean cultural leaders and the media identified the problem as individual consumers' overspending, and encouraged individual Koreans to do their part in turning the situation around. They implored people to stop spending money (especially on imports), to save electricity, to work for less pay, and, in sum, to "do your part in reducing the strain on the economy" (Jordan, 1997; Pollack, 1997). These perceptions and subsequent recommendations are consistent with a collective culture orientation, in which each person sacrifices his or her own interests for those of the whole group. Unfortunately, some experts believe they are more likely to lead to economic stagnation than to growth (Pollack, 1997). We would expect that once the initial crisis is over and the new economic plan is in place, culture would be a less strong predictor of perception and interpretation regarding the economy than it is now.

Beliefs. People exposed to a richer, or more munificent, environment develop greater cognitive complexity, or a more complex belief structure (Triandis, 1994; Trompenaars, 1993). When there are more stimuli and more relationships among stimuli in an environment that is not threatening, more beliefs can be developed. Therefore, beliefs of individuals who have been exposed to a munificent and varied environment are less likely to be associated with culture than those of individuals who live in a more restricted environment.

This relationship can be seen perhaps most vividly with respect to the social environment. For example, many people who live in urban areas of multinational cities such as London, Toronto, and Hong Kong are exposed to cultural manifestations – including food, theatre, languages, and practices – originating from many parts of the world. These individuals often incorporate beliefs from other cultures into their own belief system in ways that differ from any of the original cultures. However, individuals from the same national cultures but more isolated areas of their countries do not have the opportunity to sample such exotic fare, and are more likely to maintain a belief structure more consistent with their national culture (Triandis, 1994).

Values. The relationship between an individual's culture and his or her values can also be moderated by uncertainty in the environment, particularly by uncertainty related to volatility. Large changes in an individual's environment can affect values, especially if the changes threaten the stability of the individual's (or culture's) habitual way of life (Earley & Erez, 1997). In a society undergoing great changes, then, culture may be a weaker predictor of individual values than it is in societies undergoing less change.

This relationship can be seen in Russia, with respect to the political environment. Since the fall of Communism in 1991, individual Russians have embraced a wide variety of values.

While some still value the hierarchy and traditions of Russia of the 18th century, others value a more Western-style individualism and entrepreneurship. The same phenomenon has occurred in the Czech Republic, formerly part of Czechoslovakia, which was a member of the general alliance of communist countries. In 1989, Czechoslovakia underwent the "Velvet Revolution" after which the country split itself into two semiautonomous republics, Czech and Slovakia, and created separate legislatures (Machann, 1991; McGregor, 1991). The Czech Republic is now a rapidly emerging capitalist system. As the new political and economic systems have unfolded, individual's values appear to be gradually evolving as well (Earley, Gibson & Chen, 1998; McGregor, 1991).

Behavior. The moderating relationship of situation on the role of culture in behavior can best be seen by classifying situations as "strong" or "weak" (Mischel, 1973; Shoda, Mischel, & Wright 1993). Strong situations are those in which environmental and social cues to behavior are clear, while weak situations do not present such unambiguous guides to behavior. An individual must interpret the events in weak situations with a more deliberate series of judgments to structure their own actions. Mischel (1973) and Shoda et al. (1993) suggest that individual differences (personality) influence action in weak situations, but that in strong situations individual differences are minimized. A parallel argument can be made for the influence of culture: in strong situations, cultural configuration will not predict behavior as much as it will in weak situations (Maznevski & Peterson, 1997).

This relationship can be illustrated with an example from the technological environment. In an organization, there may be very specific procedures and equipment for completing a task, such as tools for manufacturing and assembly, rules and computer programs for quality

assessment and control, and software packages for components design. In other parts of the organization, a strategy design team may be given the ambiguous task to “develop a global go-to-market strategy for this new product line.” Specific behavior is much more prescribed in the former situations than in the latter. In the stronger situations culture would be expected to play less of a role in behavior than it would in the weaker situations.

DISCUSSION

We have presented a model which explicates numerous potential moderators of the relationship between culture and the perceptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors of the people that belong to that culture (Table 1 provides a summary of the proposed moderators).

Insert Table 1 about here

With so many moderators discussed, one begins to wonder whether culture ever matters at all. We reiterate, however, that our model does *not* imply that culture will have no influence on perceptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors. What argue that culture will have *less* of an impact on these individual outcomes when the influence of the moderators is pervasive. For example, a person who is low on Conscientiousness may still exhibit behaviors that are consistent with his or her culture. It is the *degree* to which the person exhibits the behaviors that is in question. Consequently, we believe that culture always matters to some extent, but there are certain circumstances in which culture matters more, and circumstances in which culture matters less. We have attempted to present moderators that should help researchers and managers determine

when culture does matter. We now turn to a discussion of implications for theory, research, and practice.

Implications for Theory

Our paper highlights the importance of building and testing more complex relationships regarding the impact of culture on individual outcomes. Much of the previous work on the impact of culture isolates one aspect of culture, such as individualism-collectivism, and examines its impact on people's behavior (i.e., Bochner, 1994; Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Earley, 1989; Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Triandis et al., 1988; Wagner, 1995). People's perceptions, beliefs, values, and behavior are likely to be influenced by more than one aspect of culture and more than one moderator of the relationship between culture and individual outcomes (Adler, 1997). Furthermore, aspects of culture are likely to work in concert (rather than singly) to form a more dynamic and complex explanation for individual outcomes (Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997). To be certain, the inclusion of multiple aspects of culture and multiple moderators must be balanced with pragmatic concerns such as survey lengths and the duration of interviews. However, to the extent that these limitations can be overcome, the inclusion of more variables will only ensure a more complete and relevant understanding of the complexity of culture.

Implications for Research

First, our literature review of cross-cultural studies revealed very few studies in which moderators of the relationship between culture and individual outcomes were measured (Earley, 1993, is an exception). We have pointed to a number of moderators that may affect the relationships between culture and individual outcomes. Consequently, we believe that in order to advance the field of international management, it is incumbent upon future researchers to begin

to include measures of moderators in their studies. We have provided direction for future research delineating which moderators may be of utmost importance depending upon whether investigators are examining perceptions, beliefs, values, or behavior.

Second, we would like to emphasize our model necessitates changes in research design, particularly with regard to sampling. Investigating the moderating effects we propose will require large, diverse samples. These samples are necessary in order to perform statistical analyses with moderated relationships. Such analyses require larger sample sizes to sufficiently account for additional variables and lower degrees of freedom (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Implications for Practice

First, as more and more managers become involved in the globalization of business, more fine-grained assistance is needed to help those managers take into account the important role of culture in affecting their employees' perceptions, beliefs, values, and behavior. This type of approach has been advocated at a general level by authors such as Adler (1997) and Earley and Erez (1997). However, managers have a need for more specific guidance. Once researchers have investigated the moderators we have discussed, we will be better able to make generalizations for managers about which of the moderators seem to be strongest, and subsequently make recommendations about the degree to which managers should include cultural considerations when designing organizations or policies.

Second, we believe that managers should *always* take culture into account when developing and implementing strategies or human resources practices in other cultures. Our experience in working with managers in these situations has suggested time and time again that there are very few instances, if any, that culture simply does not matter at all. What we have

tried to show is that there are particular times when an ignorance of culture will be highly detrimental to the success or failure of management initiatives in foreign cultures. Managerial responsibilities are often divided and focused on many different concerns simultaneously. We hope that future research will provide an effective template for alerting managers to situations when they must focus their energy and take responsibility for the role of culture in their organizations' performance.

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FIGURE 1

**General Model of Causation:
Moderators of the Impact of Culture**

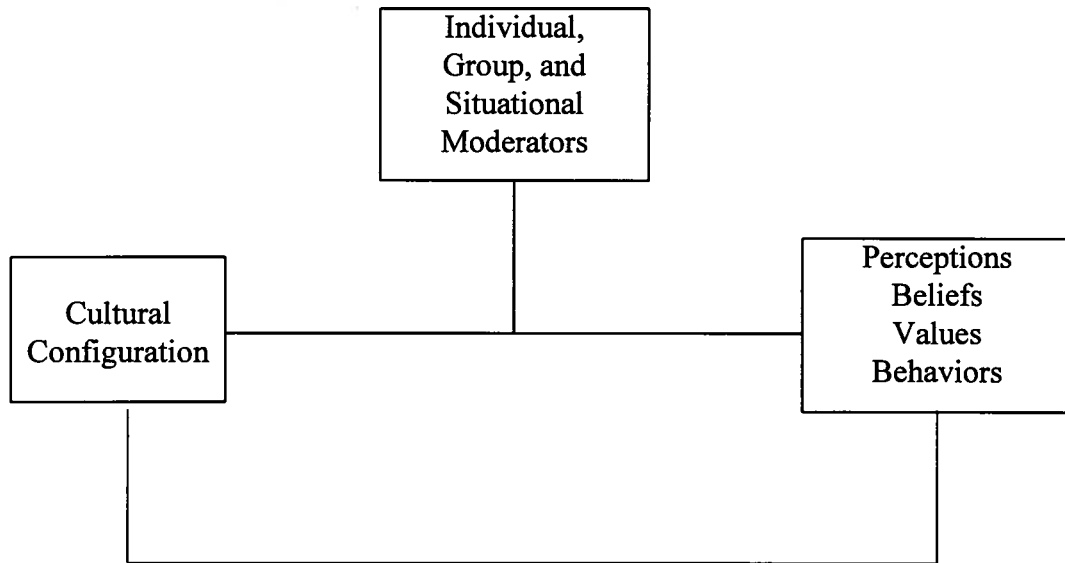


TABLE 1
Moderators of the Impact of Culture

Level of Moderator	Outcome	Example Of Moderator Variable	Proposed Relationship: Culture Is A Stronger Predictor When
<u>Individual</u>	<u>Perception</u>	Personality trait: <i>Openness</i>	...Openness is low.
		Experience: <i>Exposure to Other Cultures</i>	...Exposure to other cultures is low.
	<u>Beliefs</u>	Personality trait: <i>Conformity</i>	...Conformity is high.
		Experience: <i>Lineal Descent</i>	...Native or first generation emigrant status, rather than later generation emigrant status.
	<u>Values</u>	Personality trait: <i>Social Adaptability</i>	...Social Adaptability is low.
		Self-Identity: <i>Identification with Culture</i>	...Identification with culture is high.
	<u>Behavior</u>	Personality trait: <i>Conscientiousness</i>	...Conscientiousness is high.
		Self-Identity: <i>Self-efficacy</i>	...Self-efficacy is low.
<u>Group</u>	<u>Perception</u>	Social Group: <i>Group Identification</i>	...Group identification is high.
		Work Group: <i>Social Reality Construction</i>	...Group's social reality construction is shared.
	<u>Beliefs</u>	Social Group: <i>Group Homogeneity</i>	...Group homogeneity is high.
		Work Group: <i>Group Polarization</i>	...Group polarization is low.
	<u>Values</u>	Social Group: <i>Strength of Organizational Culture</i>	...Organizational culture is strong.
		Work Group: <i>Group Cohesion</i>	...Group cohesion is high.