Toto, I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore
Some Footnotes to Cross-Cultural Research

STEPHEN J. MEZIAS
YA-RU CHEN
PATRICE MURPHY
New York University

The title of this article is misleading in at least two ways. First, none of the authors are from Kansas; in fact, none of the authors have ever even been to Kansas, although some of us suspect we may have flown over it. Second, a more likely companion for our travels is a laptop rather than a lapdog. However, this article is about the process of doing cross-cultural research, and we felt that the analogy of Dorothy arriving at Oz was an appropriate one for our experiences in journeying, both physically and mentally, across cultures.

The data that we report here, such as they are, might best be characterized as qualitative, but this might be dressing them up more than they deserve. They actually come from wandering around the globe, visiting 13 countries and 14 sites that are part of a multinational financial services firm based in the United States. They are observations that have been gathered, some intentionally and some quite by accident, in the course of undertaking an extensive study of goal setting, performance evaluation, individual values, and cultural beliefs at the 14 sites. This article in no way attempts to even scratch the surface of any of these topics, and there will be no attempt to report on the results of our research in any systematic way. What we will report are some observations that result from doing interviews, making arrangements to collect quantitative data on goals, conducting focus groups that served as a pretest of a questionnaire on individual beliefs, and visiting multiple sites scattered across the globe. The unifying theme throughout will be to suggest some general "footnotes" (i.e., guidelines and insights for

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conducting cross-cultural research that were derived inductively from these experiences). We will begin by describing how we got started on this enterprise, continue by describing broad footnotes that summarize some of what we think we have learned, and conclude by linking what we have done with the literature of cross-cultural research.

In The Beginning

The project began at one of the headquarters buildings of the company being studied. We visited the office of an executive vice president for human resources in the division that operated the 14 sites that were eventually included in our study. During this meeting, we were told that the collection of data on quantitative goals would be straightforward and simple. According to our senior informant, the vast majority of employees of the division were about to be put on a new, quarterly performance evaluation system. This performance evaluation system would provide explicit, quantitative goals for each employee in five areas, including financial objectives. Once the new system was implemented in the following months, all we would have to do is collect a sufficient number of these forms at each site to provide the requisite number of observations for estimation of our model of the goal-setting process. We were also told that translation of our questionnaire would not be necessary because all staff speak fluent English.

Although we did not realize it at the time, we were learning one of our first valuable lessons in doing cross-cultural research, as both of these statements turned out to be incorrect. At 13 of the 14 sites, most of the people we interviewed did not know about the new performance evaluation system. A few had a vague recollection of having heard some reference to it; however, virtually no one remembered the specific source of this information, and all were anxious to learn something about it from us. Indeed, 5 of the 14 sites had virtually no quantitative goals for individual performance recorded in any form. Second, as we learned upon arrival in a Latin American country where we were to conduct the first site visits and interviews, it was not true that all employees of this U.S.-based firm speak English. In this country, neither the coordinator of our visit nor the majority of the persons we met spoke English well enough to use it in our interviews. Luckily, there was sufficient skill in the local language on our side to proceed without an interpreter.

Footnote 1: Always double check what headquarters tells you about workplaces outside of the home country; they may know little of the reality on the ground in these locations.

Power-Distance and the Cigarette Break

As the interviews in this Latin American country proceeded, it became apparent that no one in the local office spoke about anyone of higher formal rank in the office without stating his or her formal title. A hierarchical superior was always referred to as “title plus last name,” secretaries were referred to by his or her first name, and new hires were often simply called “boy” or “girl.” Our reaction was to immediately classify this as an example of a high power-distance culture, aided by a stereotype of Latin cultures as being high on this widely cited cultural dimension.

A prediction regarding whether patterns of interpersonal interaction would be formal or informal was, therefore, a straightforward corollary: We expected patterns of interpersonal interaction to be highly formalized. In truth, the prediction about interpersonal interaction did not seem salient at the time, and the next 2 days were spent in a conference room doing a tedious and ultimately futile transcription. However, from the point of view of learning about the relationship between preconceptions about cultural beliefs and behavior, the time was invaluable.

Working alone in a glass-enclosed conference room, from where a large open office space could be observed, one thing soon became apparent: The behavior of working by oneself for long periods of time was not typical of this office. No one seemed to work alone at his or her desk for more than a few minutes, and people crowded together at individual desks huddled over old-fashioned paper records. Numerous computers were piled on unused desks, or they were pushed to the corners of desks that were in use; keyboards and power lines were disconnected like rejected symbols of individual work. For these workers, the companionship of others was seemingly an integral part of the daily routine, much more so than at any similar staff function office in the United States. Indeed, the researcher’s solitary work alone in the conference room was an oddity. The level of workplace interaction at this site ultimately exceeded that observed at any of the other sites visited in the course of the research.

Even more surprising than the level of interaction was the disregard for formal rank that characterized
the interaction. Secretaries would stop at the cubicles of mid-level managers, no knocking, no deferential greeting, no apparent recognition of hierarchy whatsoever. Higher level managers, such as vice presidents, so seemingly revered by the preservation of their titles in everyday conversation, sat with their doors open, and virtually anyone would enter. The real revelation came, however, when some consultation with the secretary to the head of human resources for the entire country was required. The secretary was not at her desk, a result that might be anticipated given the proclivity of people in the office to work together rather than alone. Just beyond her desk, the door to the office of the head of human resources, whom everyone referred to in conversation as the Chief, was open. Through the open door, the secretary could be seen chatting away with her boss, slouched in the high-backed, overstuffed chair reserved for honored guests, and smoking a cigarette. This certainly was not behavior in keeping with the notion of high power distance suggested by the use of titles in everyday conversation and reinforced by stereotypes of Latin cultures.

What we realized following this revelation was that we were guilty of several leaps of faith that are especially dangerous for cross-cultural researchers. As a result, we would emphasize that the relationship between abstract value frameworks or popular stereotypes and actual behaviors should be established empirically rather than assumed. This requires that the researcher gather direct evidence about specific behaviors as part of any cross-cultural study of organizational outcomes. To the extent that cultural values are to be incorporated into a study, they should be measured at the workplaces where behaviors are observed.

Footnote 2: Avoid leaps of faith linking imputed cultural values with putatively representative behaviors.

From a Room of One's Own to the Nursing Home

Part of the research project involved questionnaire items to measure individual beliefs about various things, including many of the cultural dimensions discussed in previous research. Rather than simply do a pretest, the project included a focus group at each site. Five or six employees of the organization met with the primary researchers and, when necessary, a facilitator fluent in the language of local education. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, answer some open-ended questions about cultural similarities and differences, and then discuss all of the questionnaire items with the researcher. We found that these focus groups supplied much richer data than a pretest, often including unexpected revelations. Two examples of these unexpected insights illustrate how culture provides cues for people in managing interdependence and independence in their relations with others, including those in the workplace. These cues are interpreted to derive a third footnote for persons contemplating cross-cultural research.

The discussion phase of the focus groups began with each individual reporting his or her answers to three open-ended questions about similarities and differences between themselves and persons from other cultures. During the focus group in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, one of the respondents declared that Americans had to be the people most different from her. The yawning gulf she perceived between herself and Americans was based on her recent reading of the famous American treatise on child rearing by Dr. Benjamin Spock. Keen for advice on rearing her newborn child, she read the book avidly until she came to the advice that children should be removed from the parents' room to a room of their own by about age 6 months. At that point, she said, she had thrown the book away because she believed this to be one of the cruelest suggestions she had ever heard with regard to child rearing.

This comment was a bit baffling to an American who is accustomed to the idea that children should have their own rooms. In fact, failure to help the child establish an independent identity in this way might even be regarded as poor parenting or a cause of subsequent personality problems in American culture. However, discussions with Indian managers in AmbankCo confirmed that the process of parent-child separation is viewed very differently in the two countries. The researcher was informed that in India, children frequently stay in the parents' bed until they begin school. It is also normal practice for children to continue nursing, at least in the evening, until a much more advanced age than is common in the United States. The Indian perception of the American practice as a cruel banishment makes the view of the woman in the focus group—that Americans had to be the most different from Indians—not so far-fetched after all.

The child-rearing story illustrates how discussion of open-ended questions provided some insight into the cross-cultural research process; however, the discussion of the survey instrument to measure individual cultural beliefs proved useful as well. Many of the more informative moments in the focus groups came
as a result of participants having great difficulty in responding to particular questionnaire items. One example of such an item is the following: Children should keep their aging parents at home. For Americans and, to some extent, Europeans, this item was the cause of great angst. As they spoke, their faces and body language would reveal a great deal of discomfort with the issue of what was appropriate care for their aging parents. Participants from these areas would describe how much they would like to keep their parents at home, but that, under some circumstances, this could become simply impossible.

A strongly contrasting reaction to this item manifested itself throughout Asia. During these focus groups, participants also noted this item; as the overhead on which it was listed would go up and participants spotted it, baffled looks would cross their faces and hands would go in the air. Their comments and questions revealed that they absolutely did not understand how this item could be open for disagreement. To most of them, it was so manifestly obvious that children should (and do) keep their aging parents at home, that they could not understand how such an item could be the least bit informative in a survey. Surely there could be no variance on the answer? Whether aging parents should be kept at home was not a question that children needed to resolve; rather, the issue was how to live with aging parents in a way that provided for their comfort, preserved the family, and was acceptable for all involved.

The point that we really want to make here concerns not merely the fact that cultures differ, but that the differences are rooted in assumptions about actors and their relations. In terms of real differences in the behavior of people, the effect of different cultures is not just that they give one set of values to one set of people, let us call them Americans, and another set of values to a different group of people, let us call them Indians. What culture gives people in all of these places is a definition of actors: parents, children, boss, and employee. It also tells them how these actors should relate. Is it appropriate for a 3-year-old child to sleep with her parents? Should aging parents be kept in the family home or placed in a nursing home? Should the relationship between boss and employee be like that of coach and athlete or like cop and criminal? The answers to these questions and many others come from culture.

Our experiences suggest that the differences between Indians and Americans (or between any two persons from different cultures) might not be captured completely by differences in values held by individuals (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism). We believe that differences between cultures are also related to the different definitions of actors and their relations that characterize different cultures. That people understand culture in this way is revealed by the inability of persons from one culture to understand the definitions of actors and prescriptions for relations among them that prevail in another culture. The Indian woman did not lament the individualism of Americans; she simply did not understand how another culture could encourage separation of a baby or toddler from its parents. Similar to this, participants from multiple Asian cultures did not praise the virtues of collectivism; they simply could not understand how the separation of aging parents from their (extended) families could even be considered an option.

In our view, culture is much more than the programming of abstract values in people’s heads. Culture provides the categories by which we understand the world, and the scripts and schemas we use to guide behavior. It tells one group of people that they should not sleep with their children lest they crush them to death when they roll over in their sleep, or that they must put their children in their own rooms at an early age so that they can develop an individual identity. It tells another group of people that to force a child of less than 2 or 3 years to sleep alone is cruel and that the only place for aging parents is at home. From these observations, we draw our third footnote to cross-cultural research.

Footnote 3: Culture does more than program the values that individual actors bring to particular situations; it defines the identity of actors and provides behavioral scripts for managing relations between them.

Honor Thy Father and Mother

The discovery of another difference among cultures was the result of a coincidental juxtaposition of an American media report with a focus group discussion. On a flight to Singapore, the airline was showing clips from one of the numerous newsmagazines that populate the airwaves of the United States. One of the clips addressed a psychological problem stalking children in Greenwich, Connecticut, an extremely wealthy suburb of New York City. The thrust of the report was that the extreme material and professional success of par-
ents in this town created stress and pressure on their children, who feared they might never achieve as much as their parents. A group of students at the local high school sat in a circle and revealed the pain, frustrations, and psychological duress that had resulted from the extreme success of their parents. The newscaster was sympathetic, signaling a wider cultural acceptance of the legitimacy of their complaint.

Interestingly, the next day, during the phase of the focus group where questionnaire items were reviewed with the participants, an item that frequently gave pause to respondents in Asia caught their attention as well. The item was the following: Children should feel honor when their parents win a prize. As with the item about keeping aging parents at home, the reaction to this item among focus group participants that day was one of puzzlement. They simply did not understand how children could feel anything other than honored if their parents won a prize. Their reaction was in sharp relief to the still fresh images of the put-upon children of wealthy Americans who suffered under the burden of their parents’ success.

Of course, their lack of understanding is a further illustration of how culture defines actors and actions, as suggested by Footnote 3. However, there is a further lesson to be drawn from the contrast in the reactions of these Americans and Singaporeans to parental success. In both cases, the cue for eliciting reports of a behavioral response was parental success. For the Greenwich High School students, this cue was framed as a burden, a standard of comparison against which most children were doomed to failure. The Singaporeans by contrast framed parental success quite positively, viewing it as an honor to both parent and child. This suggests the important of framing and the fact that different cultures will provide different frames for interpreting social cues.

Footnote 4: Culture provides the frames for understanding social cues; therefore, the same social cue can be interpreted very differently in different cultures.

If the Shoe Doesn’t Fit, Wear It Anyway

Among the more notable findings of the literature on cultural differences are examples of organizational strategies or policies that have worked in one context but have not worked in others. For example, in our work, we were told the story of the attempt to import the American informal, open workspace to the offices of AmBankCo in one European country. All of the walls separating the offices in the headquarters office building were torn down and replaced with cubicles. The staff, however, could not become accustomed to working in such a setting and it was eventually decided that the walls would go back up. As a concession to the open-space idea, however, the new walls would be made of glass. By the time of the first site visit by someone from our team of researchers, all of the occupants of the glass-walled offices had purchased floor to ceiling blinds that remained permanently drawn.

We do not imply that these problems arise solely because arrogant parent-country managers try to impose on subsidiaries practices from the dominant culture in their home country. Even native managers may underestimate the difficulty of transplanting organizational practices into their own culture. Another example, also from Europe, illustrates this point. The top management of the consumer division in the organization of one European country was dissatisfied with performance in their unit and began looking around at other European countries in hope of finding some sources of success that might be borrowed. In the country that had the most successful AmBankCo operations in Europe, they found the following: Instead of telling managers of retail units their performance goals for the coming period, the district managers who supervised these managers asked them to specify the goals they thought achievable. The only weakness in this system, so it seemed, was that managers of the retail units would sometimes be too optimistic; the district managers would lower such optimistic goals in consultation with the managers of respective retail units in order to avoid setting them up for failure.

Inspired by the success of this system, the managers in the country with the less successful operations decided to try this bottom-up process in their own operation. That year, rather than telling the managers of the retail units what their goals would be, they asked them to specify their own goals. The result was an unmitigated disaster: The retail unit managers sent in goals that the district managers regarded as far too low. The entire set of goals produced by this bottom-up system had to be scrapped, and the district managers began all over and several weeks late with the top-down system that they had always used in the past.

These examples show that both foreign and native managers can sometimes fail to appreciate that a practice that works in one cultural context might not work in another. This leads us to question the normal con-
clusion drawn from these examples of failed cultural transfer (i.e., that they are due to a failure to appreciate differences in culture). If this were the correct explanation, then why would native managers make such a mistake as well?

In thinking further about the source of such errors of cross-cultural importation of practices, we have begun to consider the possibility that views of culture have been too atomistic, focusing on individual values and little else. As an alternative, we would suggest that research on culture might usefully consider broader packets of social information, rather than merely dimensionalizing culture as putatively typical scores on single-value dimensions. In other words, the explanation for why members of one European organization can succeed with a bottom-up process while the other European organization cannot may not be reducible to a single dimension, such as individualism and collectivism. Rather, the differential success of managerial intervention in different cultural contexts may be due to differences in the definition of actors and the theories of appropriate action that operate in various settings. Where the relationship between supervisor and employee is deemed to be like that between coach and team, individual shirking and the gaming of goals for advantage would likely be deemed inappropriate. By contrast, in a setting where the relationship between supervisor and employee is deemed to be like that between cop and criminal, it is likely that opportunism and gaming of goals or budgets is likely to be deemed appropriate, at least by the managers of the retail units.

With respect to the failure of the open office space, the sets of actors and relationships involved is even more complex. Consideration of two possible explanations for the failure illustrates the point. One source of the problem may have been the way people use privacy and private space to define their status within the organization. Another possible source may have been a perceived need for privacy among the workers as they proceed with their work and manage their workplace affairs. Our point here is simple: Without a sustained attempt by managers to address both of these factors, and quite possibly some others as well, the open-space office idea was not likely to succeed. We believe it is important to emphasize complexity of actors and behavioral interactions, rather than some narrow notion of fit. It is not our belief that the open-space office or bottom-up goals failed simply because they did not fit (and presumably, would never fit) within

the culture of the workplaces where their adoption was attempted. Our view is that there is considerably more equifinality in cultural possibilities than would allow unqualified predictions such as these. As we see the problem, it was a failure to recognize how the particular changes being proposed would affect and be affected by the complex nexus of relationships among culturally defined actors in their networks of culturally appropriate interactions.

Footnote 5: Understanding behavior in the multinational, multicultural workplace requires taking into account the large network of actors and complex patterns of relations among them.

Ritual Agreement on Ceremony, Divergence on Substance

One focus of our larger project is formal goal setting in organizations; consequently, this was one of the topics we asked about during more than 40 interviews. When asked about what characteristics of a formal goal-setting process were desirable, there was an amazing uniformity of response across sites, across levels of the respondents, and across nationalities. Virtually all respondents reported that goals should be measurable, should be challenging but achievable, that feedback about performance relative to goals should be timely, and that the process of goal setting should be participative.

Had we concluded the study with just these questions, we likely would have concluded that there was a high degree of convergence across a diverse range of national and local cultures. Our main questions would have been whether this was attributable to some larger globalization process or an effect of the organization. As we proceeded further, however, we began to gain a rather different perspective on the degree of convergence in goal-setting practices across sites. For example, in our secondary source data from these sites, the amazing uniformity suggested by responses to interview questions about normative models of goal setting all but disappeared. Of the 14 sites included in the study, no 2, not a single pair, used the same evaluation form or even the same content to do performance evaluations. An additional surprise, especially given the American parent company's preoccupation with quantitative measures of performance, was that several sites did not use quantitative goals at all in doing individual performance appraisal.
We incidentally discovered another interesting finding, that the people at the sites seemed to cluster into distinct groups with respect to two differences. The first of these concerned whether goals were set for individuals or for positions. The norm at AmBankCo is for goals to be set for each individual; for example, two people with the same job title, similar experience, and education could be sitting side by side selling the same product yet have different targets for total sales of that product. Because part of our project concerns quantitative models of goals, we were interested in collecting observations on such goals for individuals over time at each of the sites. At one Asian site, we were stymied in our search; during the phone interviews that preceded the visit to get this data, we initially attributed the interviewee’s inability to supply this information to secretiveness or stonewalling. However, upon arrival, willingness to cooperate from the person with whom we were dealing was apparent, and our initial explanations seemed wrong. After 15 minutes of conversation, the cause of our inability to get quantitative data on individual goals became apparent: It simply did not exist. At this Asian site, the sales people are in one of three categories, and all persons in a category must work toward the same sales target. We had not considered this possibility as we looked over the data; to us, the fact that many people had the same target had made the data appear to be fake, contrived just to give us what we wanted. Similarly, the AmBankCo person who arranged the site visit had completely overlooked the possibility of individualized goals for sales persons. In fact, when a member of our research team explained to her that other AmBankCo locations computed targets for individuals in this way, she blurted out that this was “unfair.” Subsequent to this, we discovered two other sites, one in Europe and one in the United States where goals were also set for positions rather than for persons.

A second set of sites was defined by the nature of employee participation in the goal-setting process. At AmBankCo, this process was typically a very top-down process. A supervisor would get the numbers for the division from her next-level manager and devise goals for her employees accordingly. Employee participation and buy-in were supposed to occur during the face-to-face meeting when the supervisor presented the employee with his or her goals and offered a perfunctory opportunity for reaction.

Discussion of the goal-setting process with the manager of the of the retail units in one Asian country revealed a very different approach. At first, he did not seem to understand why anyone would ask how the goal-setting process was initiated, as the answer was immediately apparent to him. It began with his discussions with employees about what performance targets they believed were reasonable for the coming year. When asked for further information about this, he explained that it was necessary to proceed in this way because the employees themselves were the best source of information about what achievements were possible during the coming year. In a European country, where goal-setting also proceeded in this bottom-up fashion, the regional manager stated that the only changes he had made to goals suggested by employees was actually to lower them. He said that he did this because some of the managers of the retail units were overly ambitious and set goals that were unrealistic.

Interestingly, the contrast between agreement on vague normative statements and divergence in substantive practices related to goal setting illustrates one way of managing cultural differences. As long as communications are suitably vague, various parties can end the discussion believing themselves to be in agreement; this is what we would term ceremonial agreement. At the various sites in multiple cultural contexts, managers and employees can proceed with goal setting in ways that seem to work in those locations. Some can set goals by position while others assign goals to individuals. Some can determine quantitative targets via a bottom up process while most other sites follow the model that prevails in the U.S. corporate headquarters: a top-down process.

Our observations suggest that it is important for cross-cultural researchers to be aware of these possibilities and ensure that they do not affect the accuracy of the findings. It would be misleading indeed for someone to conclude on the basis of normative statements about goal setting that there is high cross-cultural convergence on goal setting at AmBankCo. Indeed, we would suggest that cultural researchers must be wary of the detachment from context, persons, and behaviors that has been characteristic of survey-based research. One alternative to this approach is revealed in the way that Honda, the Japanese motor company, describes its marketing process. In contrast to the scientific model used by most American companies, Honda sees its marketing process as consisting of sengan, or three actuals: real product, real person, and real situation (Nonaka & Johansson, 1996). Thus, Honda managers regard unobtrusive ob-
servation of consumers actually using a product as the ideal form of marketing research. We would urge researchers on cultural similarities and differences to consider how to develop data sources that have more organizational relevance and greater external validity.

Footnote 6: Research on cultural similarities and differences should focus on real people engaged in real behavior in real or at least realistic situations.

Putting It All in Perspective

We have suggested six footnotes to cross-cultural research that we hope will be of use to those contemplating studies that cross cultural boundaries. Of course, those familiar with French culture will know that adage that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In this vein, we regard these footnotes as useful reminders that we need to avoid the common pitfall of occasionally forgetting what we already know. To this end, we will use the conclusion to link our footnotes with the existing literature on cultural differences and similarities, especially the work that has elaborated the special challenges and methodological difficulties faced when research crosses cultural boundaries.

Consider Footnote 1, warning researchers about potential problems with the accuracy of top managers at parent headquarters as informants about overseas operations. Given what we already know about cultural differences in management practices and views of organization (e.g., Laurent, 1986), problems with headquarters management as informants about overseas locations are not surprising. In fact, many organizations adopt strategies such as cultural segregation or regional approaches that institutionalize differences among units of the multinational firm (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997, pp. 216-218). Thus, it might be wise to recommend that researchers adopt the default assumption that managers in the home country of a multinational will not evince great knowledge of what is happening in their overseas operations. In terms of research focused on workplaces that are part of a multinational organization and outside of the home country of that company, our first footnote suggests the importance of verifying actual practices at each site.

Two clarifications regarding this suggestion are in order. First, it is worth stating explicitly that it is not our contention that management at the headquarters of the parent firm is out to purposely mislead researchers. In fact, our experience suggests that contacts with foreign sites may often be filtered to the point where the information is unreliable. For example, we found that in one non-English speaking subsidiary of AmBankCo, a mid-level manager in the human resources group was one of the principal liaisons between the local office and the American headquarters. Her ascension to this position had much more to do with her excellent English language skills, having been educated in North America for several years, than with her special expertise in human resources or the influence of her position. When the principal contact between a multinational workplace and the parent organization is chosen on the basis of language rather than task-related skills or local influence, the quality of the information that the parent organization may have about day-to-day operations may be compromised. The quality of information that top management itself gleaned during overseas travel may be similarly biased. Visits to overseas sites may frequently be for ceremonial purposes, such as the opening of a new outlet, and may be accompanied by arrangements that reflect the beliefs of foreigners about a country, rather than the daily reality of business there.

Second, we do not intend to imply in any way that these “failures” of information-flow from overseas operations to headquarters are necessarily dysfunctional for the organization. In terms of organization theory, Weick (1976), along with the institutional theorists (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977) have detailed the many purposes that loose coupling may serve. An additional functional aspect of information differences is suggested by taking a cross-cultural perspective. If there are cross-cultural differences in what types and quantity of information are deemed useful, then we would expect that persons in different cultural locations of the same company use different information. For example, Schneider and Barsoux (1997, p. 95) report the stated belief of one French manager that information that is widely distributed is obviously useless. It is likely that someone holding such a belief will transmit very different information to other parts of the organization than someone who believes that information is the lifeblood of an organization (Galbraith, 1973, 1977).

Footnote 2 warned researchers about leaps of faith, especially those that link assumed cultural values with supposedly representative behaviors. For international researchers from Western cultures, there may be a natural predisposition to view differences between people as resulting from the inculcation of dif-
different values in the minds of people from different cultures (Hall, 1976; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). However, there are at least two problems with this assumption. First, it fosters an ethnocentric view of culture. Not only does the researcher impose the assumption that individual values are the best way to conceptualize culture, but the value dimensions that researchers are culturally predisposed to view as most consistent with their own experiences are most likely to dominate their characterizations of a culture. A second limitation is suggested by the situation versus person controversy in the organization behavior literature (Chatman, Schu, & Spataro, 1997; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). As this article demonstrates, it is not at all clear that a predisposition to view behavior as driven by individual attitudes, in the guise of cultural values or any other form, is always useful in studying organizational outcomes. It would seem that the validity of this predisposition would be even more questionable in examining organizational outcomes in cultures where individual values are subordinated to the requirements of particular situations (Hall, 1976; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

This alerts us to the dangers of leaps of faith that presume a link between abstract value frameworks or widely held stereotypes and actual behaviors in particular cultural contexts. To avoid the temptation to make these links, researchers must be very careful to ensure that the design of cross-cultural studies of workplace outcomes allows them to obtain direct evidence about behavior in the settings being studied. Furthermore, if cultural values are to be incorporated into a study, they should be measured in the same setting in which behaviors are observed.

Finally, care must be taken to ensure that our models of the link between cultural beliefs or values and workplace behaviors reflect the complex reality of this linkage. At a minimum, research must allow for the possibility that a multidimensional set of culturally derived values may affect sets or patterns of behaviors; models that link single values with single behaviors are likely to be too simple to map the complexity of how behaviors and culture are linked. Furthermore, in linking sets of values and behaviors, alternative sources of both the behaviors and the beliefs would have to be controlled (Lytle, Brett, Barsness, Tinsley, & Janssens, 1994). Of course, these admonitions reflect many old lessons: Thurstone (1929), Doob (1947), and Campbell (1963) recognized long ago that attitudes should be related to global patterns of behavior rather than to any single action or behavior. In addition, if work linking cultural values and behaviors is to continue, there is a great need for better theories of how specific values or sets of values affect behavior.

Footnote 3 suggested that one important role of culture is to define the identity and role of particular actors in specific situations; the meaning of this footnote is best understood in contrast with the way culture is viewed in much of the existing research. Whereas the traditional view has been that culture programs the values that individual actors bring to particular situations (Hofstede, 1980), we interpret the results of our study so far to suggest that culture plays a much broader role.

Consider again the role of supervisor and the ways in which a person in this role is supposed to relate to the persons who are being supervised. At AmBankCo, we found two distinct ways in which the role is defined along with related views of how a supervisor is expected to relate to subordinates. In some workplaces, the role of a supervisor is to closely monitor subordinates, with supervisory control revolving around the administration of rewards and punishments. One behavior symptomatic of this type of supervision and the related view of employees is a top-down goal-setting process; such a system reinforces the notion that employees must be told what to do. Another behavior symptomatic of this definition of supervision as cop is an individualized reward system, which allows for close control of individuals using a system of customized rewards and sanctions. This approach is typical of the American parent company's approach to goal-setting and performance evaluation.

In other workplaces, the role of a supervisor is to facilitate and coach subordinates, implying that those being supervised are part of a team and that their participation and buy-in are crucial to organizational success. One behavior symptomatic of this definition of supervision and the related view of employees is a bottom-up goal-setting process; under this system, employees and supervisors together determine what can and should be achieved. Another behavior symptomatic of this view of supervision is to set goals for groups of employees who occupy the same organizational position. This process for setting goals focuses attention on employees as members of a group, rather than as individuals, and rewards them relative to a performance standard for their category rather than individualized goals.

As can be seen in these two schemes of supervisor-subordinate relationships, culture does more than program specific values. It defines the identity of ac-
tors and provides behavioral scripts for managing relations between them (Fiske, 1992). This suggests that investigating cultural differences is much more complex than simply examining differences across cultures in average scores or the distribution of variance on value questionnaires. As Malpass (1977) has indicated, mean differences of the values measured in cross-cultural research are not necessarily meaningful. He points out that there are many potential sources of differences (or lack of differences) in values measured in distinct cultural settings. Any variable correlated with the value being measured could potentially create mean differences of the value between two cultural settings or prevent a true difference from being observed. To avoid these methodological problems, he suggested that comparisons of cultures should be based on the pattern of relations among multiple variables measured in each culture. As he argued, this is subject to considerably fewer alternative explanations than comparisons of means on single dimensions. Other researchers have amplified this point (Lytle et al., 1994; Ragin, 1987), and Earley and Singh (1995, p. 330) discussed it in terms of a gestalt form of research.

A related point, as we suggested in Footnote 4, is that the same social cue can elicit very different reactions in disparate cultural contexts. As we argued previously, the meaning of the position of supervisor can vary across cultures. Similar to this, the meaning of goals, performance evaluations, and even organizational structures and routines can vary across settings. The view that the only thing necessary to change culture is to program new values for organizational members or the labels on positions and programs has been largely discredited. In the 1980s, the failure of attempts to import quality circles or just-in-time inventory techniques without understanding the way these techniques were supported by the whole social system of the Japanese workplace led to some recognition of the need for a more comprehensive approach to transferring practices across cultures. Despite this recognition, the simplistic approach to understanding culture implied by this thinking persists. For example, one view of current efforts toward total quality management or putting people first is that they are taking a similarly narrow view of how organizational practices fit into a broader pattern of culturally defined social relations. The point for cross-cultural research is that these relations are defined by culture and need to be taken into account when studying organizational outcomes in different cultures. This was why we suggested in Footnote 5 that understanding in the multinational, multicultural workplace must take account of a large network of actors and the complex patterns of relations among them.

Our final footnote to cross-cultural research is a fitting note on which to close the general theme of our paper. In Footnote 6, we argued that research on cultural similarities and differences should focus on real people engaged in real behavior in real or at least realistic situations. We found great uniformity of response among interviewees when they were asked for their normative judgments about performance evaluation. Had we been interested in examining variance in interview responses as a dependent variable, we would have concluded that there was very little variation among the many sites of AmBankCo with respect to performance evaluation. Because our study also included some data on actual behaviors that were part of the performance evaluation process, however, we discovered that the uniformity of normative judgements did not translate into uniformity of actual behavior.

All in all, we believe that both the external validity and replicability of studies of organizational outcomes in different cultural milieu could be improved upon by more careful attention to the setting of the research. Who are the actors involved? How do they define the situation? How do they define the relations that exist between them? How do they see their role in the organization? What do they see as the role of the organization? We believe that by addressing these questions, at least in terms of the design of cross-cultural studies if not as part of the studies themselves, cross-cultural studies of organizational outcomes could be improved. In the process, researchers may immerse themselves more completely in the cross-culturally diverse settings that affect organizational outcomes. Like Dorothy travelling to Oz, they may return home finding that they have also learned something important about themselves.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JANICE M. BEYER is the Harkins and Company chair of business administration and a professor of sociology and communication studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her current research interests center on the cultural aspects of organizations.

YA-RU CHEN is assistant professor of international business and management at the Stern School of Business, New York University. She received her Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University in 1996. Her research endeavors aim at understanding both between- and within-culture differences and similarities. Her main research areas include cross-cultural differences in intra- versus intergroup dynamics, negotiation behaviors, and conflict resolution phenomena. Her research has appeared in the International Journal of Conflict Management and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

ROBERT B. FRENCH is senior lecturer in organizational behavior at Bristol Business School at the University of the West of England, United Kingdom. He has a master's degree in educational management from the University of Bristol. After having worked for two decades teaching German and French in secondary schools in London and Bristol, his work now centers on issues of teaching and learning both generally and specifically in the context of management and organization, and on the impact of friendship on learning, management, and processes of organizing. He has co-edited two recent volumes: Rethinking Management Education, with Christopher Grey (Sage, 1996) and Group Relations, Management, and Organization, with Russ Vince (Oxford University Press, 1999).

STEPHEN J. MEZIAS is an associate professor in the Department of Management at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business of New York University, 44 West 4th Street, New York, NY 10012-1126; phone: (212) 998-0229, fax: (212) 995-4234, e-mail: smezias@stern.nyu.edu. His current research focuses on institutional processes, especially as they apply to public policy regarding financial reporting standards, simulation of organizational learning processes, and cultural differences and similarities in multinational corporations. His recent work has appeared or will appear in Accounting, Organizations, and Society, Administrative Science Quarterly, The Proceedings of the 1998 Meetings of the Academy of Management, Organization Science, Social Science Research, and Strategic Management Journal. He received his M.S. in statistics in 1985 and his Ph.D. in organizational behavior in 1987 from Stanford University.

PATRICE MURPHY is a doctoral candidate in management and organizational behavior at New York University. She holds a bachelor's degree and master's of business administration from the University of Melbourne and an MLLR from the University of Sydney. Her research interests include learning in organizations and cross-cultural issues in organizational behavior, particularly relating to workforce diversity and performance management. Her most recent publication has appeared in The Proceedings of the 1998 Academy of Management Meetings.

DAVID NIÑO is a doctoral student in the Management Department at the University of Texas at Austin. His current research focuses on conflict in global virtual teams and issues related to managing knowledge in organizations. Prior to entering the doctoral program, he held appointments on the Ethics Commission and the Environment Board in Austin, Texas. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in philosophy, finance, and Latin American studies from the University of Texas at Austin, where he was also an international fellow.

JOHN R. SCHERMERHORN, JR. is the O'Bleness professor of management in the College of Business and director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University. He received his Ph.D. at North-