

Introduction to the Special Issue: Collaboration in multicultural environments

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The nature of organizational work is changing at an incredible pace. In an era of rapid globalization and advancement of technology, many organizations, civilian and government alike, are turning toward multinational collaborative work arrangements in order to gain an advantage and remain competitive. Rapidly developing technology has broken down geographic boundaries, making multinational corporations and overseas employment the wave of the future in both industry and government. Two decades ago, the use of collaborative work structures within organizations became the norm as organizations strived to remain competitive within an ever-changing environment. Today, the complexity of working within a global marketplace has added a *cultural* layer onto an already complex dynamic. From an organizational standpoint, the globalization of the marketplace has been argued to be one of the most significant changes to work environments within the last decade (Earley & Gibson, 2002). The drive toward globalization has resulted in organizations increasingly expanding to overseas markets where organizational viability is driven by the ability to work collaboratively across and within cultures different than one's own. While cultural diversity often brings with it new perspectives and innovative solutions, differences in culture and viewpoint can also lead to misunderstandings and interaction problems. Therefore, there is a pressing need to understand the processes and influences of intercultural collaboration as well as how to manage the process to result in the most effective outcomes possible.

In this spirit, we set forth in this special issue to feature cutting-edge research on collaboration across cultures. To date, scholarship about this phenomenon has paid little attention to the antecedents, moderators, and outcomes in populations outside of the United States. As this special issue clearly shows, studies of organizational behavior can contribute unique insights about collaboration when it involves representatives from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. The seven articles featured in this special issue illustrate an array of novel theoretical and empirical approaches that comprise the leading edge of research on cross-cultural collaboration.

In putting together this special issue, our editorial goal was to identify novel, creative, and high-quality scholarship that sheds new light on the impact of culture on collaboration. The Call for Papers welcomed theoretical and empirical papers that explored a variety of predictors and moderators of effective interaction between individuals across cultures. More specifically, we sought manuscripts that examined collaboration by drawing upon diverse methodologies, disciplinary perspectives, and theoretical frameworks in various national contexts. The papers in this special issue are rigorous and insightful and push our understanding forward in important ways.

The final seven articles presented in this special issue underwent a review process that is standard for this journal's editorial process. The editorial team and reviewers worked collectively to provide authors with constructive feedback to develop their manuscripts. The works' final manuscripts offered in this volume are the best of those submitted and are diverse in numerous respects. Collectively, they represent a variety of research methodologies, including archival analyses, experiments, participant observation, standardized interviews, field studies, and multiple case studies as well as a breadth of research settings. They rely upon state-of-the-art analysis techniques, from multidimensional scaling to meta-analyses to multilevel modeling and beyond. This set of studies highlights the richness of this growing domain of cross-cultural research focused on the important processes of collaboration.

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Here, we provide brief summaries of these articles. A particular strength of this set of articles is that each one adopts a diverse theoretical or empirical lens through which to study collaborations across cultures. Above all, each article makes a unique contribution to our understanding of collaboration and, in doing so, advances this important area of inquiry. We thank the authors of these articles for providing a strong foundation for future work by scholars who are newly engaged in understanding how organizations can better collaborate and negotiate in a world where interdependence between nations continues to be high.

The first paper in this special issue sheds light on an age-old question on the cultural diversity–performance link that often produces mixed results in the literature. In their manuscript, “Taking the Bite Out of Culture: The Impact of Task Structure and Task Type on Overcoming Impediments to Cross-Cultural Team Performance,” Nouri et al. (2013) examine how the specificity of the task affects performance of culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads. Integrating insights from the literature on situational strength (Mischel, 1977) and task-type theory (McGrath, 1984), the authors advance a more dynamic approach to the impact of cultural diversity and performance. In particular, across two studies, dyads were asked to either perform an “execute”-type (convergent) task or a creative (divergent) task, each of which varied on the degree of task specificity. The research elucidates that the challenges of multicultural collaboration are less when there is high task specificity in execute-type tasks and when there is less task specificity in creative-type tasks. This research provides important insight into the conditions under which the benefits of cultural diversity can be harnessed during intercultural collaborations and challenges us to incorporate the team task context in more complex ways in intercultural collaboration research.

Dribble and Gibson (2013) provide critical insights into barriers and opportunities that arise during multicultural collaboration in the second paper in the special issue. In their manuscript titled “Collaboration for the Common Good: An Examination of Challenges and Adjustment Processes in Multicultural Collaborations,” these authors leverage a qualitative methodology to study multicultural collaborations that aim to accomplish a shared goal yet are both temporary in nature and not embedded in a single organizational context. The paper represents a pioneering effort to capture a more complex reality that often characterizes multicultural collaborations in this era of globalization. In a novel sample of 16 multicultural humanitarian home-building collaborations, the authors discern common challenges that multicultural teams face and how they react to these challenges. Insight is provided about the adjustment processes used in multicultural collaborations and when and how particular adjustment strategies are most effective at enhancing performance. The authors find, for example, that culturally heterogeneous collaborations are even better able to leverage their differences and put aside conflict provoking of heterogeneity when facing very difficult challenges. The findings from this study have implications for theories of team processes and culture and open up exciting new avenues for future empirical studies of multicultural collaboration.

The next paper entitled “Making Sense of Cultural Distance for Military Expatriate Operating in an Extreme Context” by Fisher and Hutchings examines the dynamics of intercultural collaboration in extreme, nonroutine environments. They look at sense-making and how expatriates are boundary spanners. They use qualitative methods to provide insights as to how these collaborate and negotiate under extreme conditions.

Providing additional breadth of methodology to this special issue, the study of Marcus et al. (2013) entitled “Interactive Effects of Levels of Individualism–Collectivism (I–C) on Cooperation: A Meta-analysis” provides a better comprehension of the moderating influences of individualism and collectivism at varying levels of analysis on workgroup collaboration. This research fills a critical void in the cross-cultural literature by utilizing this multilevel perspective. Correlations between individual-level I–C were found to be stronger in individualist countries, whereas correlations between organizational-level I–C were found to be stronger in collectivist countries. Results also suggest that societal-level I–C has less of an influence on workgroup processes and outcomes than either individual-level or organizational-level I–C. Stronger effects were found when conducting analysis where I–C and performance outcomes were all measured at the same level of analysis. These results provide a new understanding to the I–C construct and also elucidate the importance of carefully considering multilevel influences when studying cultural effects on cooperation.

The fifth article by Severance et al., entitled “The Psychological Structure of Aggression Across Cultures,” focuses on cultural influences on aggression. Collaborations can invariably involve aggressive episodes, yet research on aggression has largely been developed in the West. The authors propose that while universal dimensions of

aggression exist, they can be nuanced in culture-specific ways, causing identical behaviors to be construed in highly different ways. Moving beyond traditional reliance on Hofstede's cultural values, this research draws on the cultural logics of honor, dignity, and face (Leung & Cohen, 2011) to examine construals of aggression in the United States, Israel, Japan, and Pakistan. Universal dimensions of aggression were identified using multidimensional scaling and included damage to self-worth and direct versus indirect aggressions. Other dimensions of aggression were found to be specific to subsets of countries, suggesting that certain features of aggression are more or less salient depending on the cultural context. The insight that dimensions of aggression are both similar and different across countries has implications for the management of disagreements that arise in intercultural collaborations. Above all, it illustrates how individuals from different cultures might perceive the exact same behavior according to their own cultural frames, which can cause further conflict escalation, and thus highlights the importance of understanding others' mental models when responding to potentially aggressive situations that can arise in collaborations.

In the sixth article in this special issue entitled "Acting Professional: An Exploration of Culturally Bounded Norms Against Non-Work Role Referencing," Sanchez-Burks et al. (2013) also illustrate how culture differentially affects perceptions of identical workplace behaviors. Through three carefully executed field and experimental studies, they show that how professional behavior is defined varies across cultures and that these differences can have implications for interactions in the workplace. For instance, a norm limiting the reference of nonwork roles in the workplace is found to be stronger among individuals who have lived in the United States for a longer time. They also provide evidence that suggests that the endorsement of nonwork roles negatively influences the evaluation of job candidates more for Americans as compared with Indians. This finding is pronounced among those individuals who are most familiar for norms of professionalism as a function of prior recruitment experience. Overall, this research contributes to the cross-cultural literature by studying culture embedded in the norms that guide behavior and by proposing that lack of awareness of acceptable norms may negatively influence intercultural interactions of those who violate culturally agreed upon ways of interacting in the workplace.

The final article in this special issue, titled "Cultural Contingencies of Mediation: Effectiveness of Mediator Styles in Intercultural Disputes," examines the factors that facilitate the successful resolution of intercultural disputes. Collaboration and conflict are often inextricably linked; conflicts may arise during collaborative ventures because of disagreements over substantive issues as well as more intangible incompatibilities, and the successful resolution of conflicts may in turn facilitate future collaborative efforts. Salmon et al. address these issues by exploring the mediation styles that are most effective in intercultural disputes. This research takes a dynamic approach to understand how different dimensions of disputant difficulty interact with mediation styles to predict economic and subjective outcomes. For example, Salmon et al. found that manipulative mediators, or those who suggest agreements to disputants and use threats and punishments to push the disputants to agreements, were particularly effective in conflicts with dyads of difficult disputants (low openness to mediation, low motivational CQ, low trust, and lower willingness to concede). In contrast, the same manipulative mediation style was actually counterproductive in conflicts with easier disputants. This dynamic approach provides an important theoretical extension of the prior literatures on mediation and cross-cultural conflict. A particular novel aspect of this research is the use of a virtual lab that enabled participants from the United States and Turkey to dispute in real time from their perspective countries with the assistance of a computer mediator. This research also provides practical guidance regarding when particular mediation tactics will be most impactful during intercultural disputes.

We also include, as the final piece, a brief commentary by Salazar and Salas. They offer a few insights as to the state of the science of collaboration in multicultural environments. We hope these reflections motivate more research in this area.

In conclusion, we thank the authors of these seven outstanding articles and the commentary, while also acknowledging the work of all the other authors who submitted their research for consideration and possible publication in this special issue. Editing this volume of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* has revealed to us a wonderful set of papers about impact of culture on collaboration, and we look forward to the new insights that such research will stimulate within the academic community.

We also want to express our gratitude to the many reviewers who served on the board for this special issue, including the following:

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