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Fringe Voices in Cross-Cultural Management Research: Silenced and Neglected?

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Abstract: This introductory article asks if there are silenced and neglected voices in current cross-cultural management research, and if so, what we can learn from them. Taking departure in the six articles selected for this guest issue we argue that there are indeed valuable fringe voices and that some are neglected while others are instead silenced. From there we proceed to propose new avenues for future research that allow fringe exploration to compete for the attention so far mainly held by the dominant mainstream cross-cultural management literature. We argue that in moving across paradigms cross-cultural management research should confront and oppose excessively simplified notions on culture, nations and individuals. Moreover, we maintain a need for cross-cultural management researchers to question, ourselves and the literature we read, if knowledge produced actually challenges preconceptions or rather comforts the readers.

INTRODUCTION

If the notion of 'mainstream research' implies that a field of study, such as Cross-Cultural Management (CCM), equates to orthodox theories practiced or instituted by the said field's elites – then, it should be expected that there are also voices located in the fringes of CCM

research. Fringe voices often harbour an additional breadth of research questions and issues to be explored. Furthermore, fringe voices sometimes encompass additional methodological approaches, philosophical qualms and transdisciplinary bridges, which for whatever reason are yet to have anchored their presence within the mainstream (see Buckley and Chapman 1998). Fringe voices also involve studying well-trodden research problems from alternative angles which might add to, or provide strengthened, explanatory sources of the phenomena being investigated. In some instances, *not* being placed in the mainstream might advantageously accommodate for research issues beyond the horizon of the mainstream.

This Guest Issue of *International Studies of Management & Organization* showcases that there are, indeed, silenced and/or neglected voices in CCM research (Primecz, Mahadevan, and Romani 2016). These voices are advanced and theorised by 13 different cross-cultural and international management scholars amid six articles. The articles challenge the status-quo in CCM research and its underlying assumptions. However, all the articles move beyond simple characterisations of key issues and descriptive accounts of the status-quo. Conversely, the articles make it their quest to problematise and theorise about alternative ways of advancing cross-cultural analysis through proposing new theoretical contributions and exploring alternative explanatory-sources in a non-prescriptive manner including the nature of multi-paradigmatic research (especially, the critical, postmodern and constructivist theoretical lenses); reflexive epistemological and ontological stances beyond 'nation-state' thinking; intersectionality and categorisation; Otherness and Othering in identity construction; and exchanges between the academe and practitioners.

As Guest Editors, we are in this preface offering a theoretical contribution by depicting the dynamics of interrelationships between the mainstream and the fringes within an

intellectual field (aka CCM) in addition to the said field's interrelationships with other research fields and those external to academic research as a whole, such as the government (see Figure 1).

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Insert Figure 1 around here
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As seen above, some fringe voices (Fringe 1) might be more aligned with the orthodox research practices in the mainstream hence positioned closer in the figure, than others (e.g. F2). Other fringe voices (F3), however, might not exclusively belong to one discipline (in this case CCM) – and these voices might in some cases exercise a mainstream position in another discipline. Some fringes (F3) might have weakened agency (reflected with narrower arrows) to penetrate the mainstream, hence remaining marginalised. While others (F1) might exhibit stronger agency (hence, thicker arrows) with a larger chance to become adopted and/or accepted by the orthodox paradigm. Furthermore, it can also be the case that some fringe voices exist because they prefer being located there or perhaps have been unsuccessful in penetrating the mainstream due to own strategising in the intellectual field. In an ever increasing 'publish or perish' internationalised academe, being positioned as mainstream or in the fringes might also be the result of external (to the intellectual field) forces (such as, promotion requirements within university organisations) or macro forces (for example, governmental schemes for rewarding research outputs). However, it should be acknowledged that pinpointing a disciplinary boundary of CCM is difficult, and perhaps not even purposeful, as cross-cultural analysis has travelled across different intellectual trajectories within a wide range of business school disciplines. A consequence, though, is that the intra-field perceptions of CCM regarding what constitutes the mainstream and the fringes are therefore dynamic and often depend on a

researcher's intellectual position within that field and various power relations (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Few would disagree that the mainstream of CCM research is a product of its historic development; its intellectual heritage emanating from North-American research traditions coupled with the emergence of predominantly American business schools and Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) in the post-war economy (e.g. Adler 1983; Hofstede 1993). Subsequently, the mainstream CCM research agenda became populated by positivistic and functionalist quantitative research through Social Psychology and Behaviourism leading to etic models of culture (Chapman 1997). Therefore, it is imperative that scholars reflexively challenge the knowledge-production in any research area– just in the same way it should if CCM had been dominated for decades by, for example, European social anthropologists.

We suggest that the notions of silencing and neglecting are not interchangeable, but come with an important nuance. We submit that *silencing* entails the active and conscious action of marginalising particular research questions or approaches to the fringes of the intellectual field. *Neglecting*, however, is a more modest consequence of either unconscious actions by the field's elites or marginalised voices simply being overlooked on the horizon of mainstream orthodoxy. Furthermore, the two concepts are by no means typologies. Thus, gauging scholars' behaviours in isolation does not provide a fertile ground for analysis. For example, there are many CCM researchers who are trained and sympathise with non-orthodox epistemologies and methodologies but who conduct research aligned with the expectations of the mainstream and/or external forces, in order to increase chances of publication success.

We do not promulgate, of course, that fringe voices are always more credible and trustworthy. However, if we are serious about 'phenomenon-based' research (see Doh 2015)– and we would like to be– then, we argue that explanatory-sources can be meaningfully strengthened as follows. Phenomenon-based research requires us to design research investigations around comprehending and conceptualising a phenomenon in its own right. This stance promulgates avoiding inquiring into lived out phenomena through a pre-selected theoretical lens which might "prevent the reporting of rich details about interesting phenomena for which no theory yet exists" (Hambrick 2007, 1346). We therefore encourage a juxtaposing of mainstream explanations with other ideas located in the fringes– with a primacy to accumulate understanding based on studying cross-cultural phenomena as they are played out and experienced enmeshed in the tapestry and complexities of international work-life– and vice versa.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The six papers feature authors from six different countries and each paper was reviewed by three reviewers representing 15 different nationalities. Collectively, the articles take a critical stance compared to mainstream orthodoxy and pose challenges in terms of incorporating fringe voices (or at least assessing their utility) in order to achieve more comprehensive, nuanced and richer comprehension of cross-cultural phenomena.

As Guest Editors, we are tremendously grateful for the valuable time and international expertise offered by the reviewers. The reviews were highly constructive, rigorous and developmental in nature, and several authors expressed gratitude towards the opportunity to improve their work.

In our first paper, Romani, Barmeyer, Primecz and Pilhofer survey the state of the art in three competing, but complementing, research paradigms: interpretivism as well as the overlooked postmodern and critical paradigms– against that of the dominating positivist tradition in CCM research. The authors encourage a meta-theoretical positioning whereby researchers can draw upon insight and contributions across the different paradigms. This is aimed for in order to enrich our understanding of the interplay between culture and management across the national, organisational, interpersonal and individual levels.

Lauring, Bjerregaard and Klitmøller continue, in the second article, to debate how international management research has been approached from different theoretical orientations. The authors problematise the dominant stream of studying culture framed as the functionalist perspective, and elucidate the less-focused upon approach, i.e., constructivism. The article advances CCM paradigms by offering an alternative, integrative perspective which incorporates central insights from both research orientations. This is achieved through a Bourdieu-inspired practice theory as a means to avoid the inherent analytical pitfalls associated with the more radical functionalist and constructivist perspectives.

The third article takes the form of an essay which presents personal reflections on relevance, reflexivity and challenges in advancing our epistemological and ontological thinking in CCM. The article– nominated for the prestigious 'That's Interesting' award at the Academy of International Business 2016 Annual Meeting– challenges the notion if researchers question and debate enough *how* to research culture and *why* we seek to manage it in the first place. The author calls for ending static nation-state thinking and argues for a move towards a multidisciplinary outlook where researchers are subjective thinkers. Objective categorisation based on thin universal aspects– which etic cultural models are premised on– are contested.

In the fourth article, Lücke, Engstrand and Zander follow suit in the problematisation of essential categorisation and the use of national culture as the parameter of differentiation in cross-cultural research. The authors seek to establish a more comprehensive framework for understanding complex sociocultural life and cross-cultural management phenomena. This is achieved through deploying intersectionality (how multiple categories are experienced by the individual) coupled with relationality (where the dynamic patterns of relations and cultural meanings govern conceptualisation of people, organisations and their actions). The authors advance the concepts of boundary work and boundary shifting against apriori determination of categories as well as singularity and fixed nature of typologised categories as empirically unreliable. The authors repeat their claim in terms of appreciating identity-formation based on multiple categories.

Guttormsen, in the fifth article, progresses the aforesaid focus on identity construction at the individual level. Within the context of intercultural encounters, the author advances CCM research through theorising about Otherness and Othering of the cultural Other as missing interrelationships to the Self. The article expands on his earlier work on identity (Guttormsen 2015) as a means to move beyond the overt focus on 'cultural differences, values and broad-stroke dimensions of fixed 'national cultures'. Several examples of performativity of aforesaid concepts are illustrated across corporate and social realms. Theorising also relate to understanding why identities are constructed and new aspects of the cultural and social processes underlying Othering are unveiled by drawing upon intellectual developments in Social Anthropology and Sociology.

In the sixth, and final, article Kittler draws our attention away from theorising on culture and advances CCM research by taking a step back towards the exchanges, and the divides,

between the researchers habiting the field and the practitioners whom we want to communicate with. From a novel cross-cultural communication perspective, the author explains the (mis)communication during exchanges between practitioners and academics which create a divide, and how researchers draw upon knowledge within our own research communities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

We propose five avenues for future research, based on the investigatory scopes of the articles appearing in this Guest Issue. The first avenue relates to the contribution put forward in this Preface. The mechanisms, power relations and underlying assumptions of the ways in which CCM research as an intellectual field produces knowledge, should be investigated. Future studies could be designed as an ethnography of the field as well as the researchers/organisations as social actors within said field. Furthermore, interview-based studies could elucidate why researchers strategise in the ways they do in terms of their knowledge-production, and the perspectives of relevant organisations could inform the analysis regarding impinging factors concerning why perhaps certain bodies of knowledge more easily become mainstream. Such a reflexive deliberation would make researchers more aware of silenced and/or neglected voices, with the potential to consult alternative explanatory sources in order to achieve a richer picture of the cross-cultural phenomenon being examined (see Cunliffe 2003). We uphold that it would be an advantage for CCM research to embrace subjectivity integral to the knowledge-production itself– also as an additional methods for identifying more findings emerging from the data through contesting our own analysis and interpretations of it (Lauring 2013; see Zhang and Guttormsen 2016). Reflexivity is not only about our relationships with our research subjects as well as the data we analyse, but about our knowledge-production regarding those we are studying and the social scientific claim we make about them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Jonsen et al. 2012). Reflexivity should therefore become a natural activity integral to all

research endeavours. This includes avoiding disciplinary isolationism, and CCM researchers should seek to couple our inquiries and developments with those of cognate fields through transdisciplinary research, for example language and culture (Klitmøller and Lauring 2013; Lauring and Klitmøller 2015; see Beeler et al. 2017).

Our second suggested avenue links the above to investigating the ontological and epistemological mainstream (and its relevance) in how researchers as educators teach CCM to students and on executive MBA programmes. Comparative and mixed-methods research designs are well-placed to investigate the above by selecting case studies of CCM teaching in classrooms/business schools representing different corners of the world. Such endeavour could facilitate to answer the following question: do we produce, teach and communicate the cross-cultural knowledge and know-how needed for tomorrow's leaders and current international business practitioners? Including the perspectives of the latter would advantageously lead to challenging our notions of what we believe is relevant and needed to teach our students.

Third, researchers should increase the number of studies designed for meeting the requirements of phenomenon-based research (see Doh 2015). Instead of pre-deciding the theoretical lens to study the research problem within, the actual phenomenon in question should be studied based on what element from what paradigms would be the most relevant to employ in order to produce rich analysis. Thus, we encourage research which demonstrates how multi-paradigmatic studies can, in a non-prescriptive manner, contrast and challenge taken-for-granted knowledge about culture. Especially, we encourage studies exploring the relevance of the critical, postmodern and constructivist lenses for additional and/or alternative explanatory-sources.

Fourth, several of the papers in this Guest Issue direct attention away from the ontological and epistemological tools of the mainstream. These tools encompass differences, distance, values and the nation, when it comes to categorising and identity construction and essentially how we make sense of the structures and meanings associated with sociocultural life, which are (re)constructed and (re)negotiated (Lauring 2008; Jonasson and Lauring 2012). We encourage intersectionality and the concepts of Otherness and Othering as fruitful ways of exploring relationality between multiple categories and identity construction at the individual level (Lauring 2011). We would like to see more elaborate discussions about not only in what ways we are different, but why – and perhaps question the research philosophical foundation of differences. Thus, theoretical frameworks which examine actual intercultural encounters and the lived experiences derived from them, could greatly add to our cross-cultural knowledge beyond utilising culture as antecedents, moderating or mediating effects, or relationships with particular outcomes.

As a final avenue of future research, fringe voices also exist in our choices of organisations and the geographical areas we study. Access needs to be secured to the new largest growth markets, many of which have received none or very limited treatment by CCM researchers (e.g., Ethiopia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Namibia, Nigeria and Peru) (Meyer and Thein 2014; see Lerpold and Zander 2016). Indigenous research has taught us about the challenges in accessing constructed meanings in cultures we are not familiar with (Fjellström and Guttormsen 2016). We also should look didactically at corporate organisations' interrelationships with a wider range of non-corporate organisations, such as lobby groups, think tanks, international governmental organisations and higher education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

So yes, to answer the question mark in this Preface's title: there are silenced and neglected voices in the fringes of CCM research. As scholars, we are all in the business of knowledge, and our quest as Guest Editors is not to compete with the orthodox but to be pathfinders for new avenues of exploration and discovery. Indeed, we see this as the thrust of what is argued to constitute theory development by Whetten (1989) as well as Corley and Gioia (2011). The articles in this Guest Issue have identified some of these paths of theoretical advancements on epistemological, ontological, paradigmatic and theoretical grounds.

We are purposefully not proposing specific topics as future research avenues as this Guest Issue is about *how* we study cross-cultural phenomena, and the enclosed articles can be employed as research designs for any type of endeavour which includes challenging mainstream but uncontested ideas. Therefore, the infamous phrase 'pushing the frontier' should in our opinions not only be a question about advancing orthodox theories, but equally, if not more, about *how* we research mainstream and non-mainstream cross-cultural challenges as experienced by those actually living and managing them.

Happy hunting!

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Figure 1 – Dynamics of interrelationships of an intellectual field (IF)