The Upside of Cultural Differences: Towards a More Balanced Treatment of Culture in Cross-Cultural Management Research

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Introduction to Special Issue of Cross Cultural & Strategic Management

The Upside of Cultural Differences: Towards a More Balanced Treatment of Culture in Cross-Cultural Management Research

Abstract

Purpose – This introductory paper to the Special Issue encourages scholars to look at commonly considered phenomena in international business and cross-cultural research in new ways and to theorize and explore how cultural diversity, distance, and foreignness create value for global organizations. These considerations should result in a more balanced treatment of culture in cross-cultural management research.

Design/methodology/approach – The idea that there are negative consequences associated with cultural differences is pervasive in hypotheses formulation and empirical testing in international business and cross-cultural management literature, as reflected in widely used constructs such as “cultural distance”, “cultural misfit”, “foreignness”, and related concepts. Consistent with a Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) perspective on culture and cultural differences, the authors emphasize the positive role of distance and diversity across national, cultural, institutional, and organizational dimensions. In addition, they provide an overview of the contributions to the Special Issue.

Findings – Examining the positive side of culture is not only beneficial theoretically in terms of filling the existing gaps in the literature, but is also crucial for the practice of international and global business. Accordingly, the contributions to the Special Issue highlight how explicitly considering positive phenomena can help better understand when and how cultural diversity, distance, and foreignness can enhance organizational effectiveness and performance at multiple levels. They include five research papers, a Distinguished Scholar Essay by Kim Cameron, the founder of the POS movement, and an interview piece with Richard Nisbett, a pioneer researcher in culture and cognition.
Originality/value – The overemphasis on adverse outcomes associated with cultural differences in existing research has hindered our understanding of the processes and conditions that help organizations leverage the benefits of cultural differences in a wide range of contexts. This introductory paper together with the contributions included in the Special Issue showcases the positive dynamics and outcomes associated with cultural differences, distance, and diversity in a wide range of international business contexts.

Keywords Cross-Cultural Management, Cultural Diversity, Positive Organizational Scholarship, Positive outcomes

Paper type Research paper
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_Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy._

_Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster._

– Geert Hofstede (www.geert-hofstede.com)

_Cultural differences can be viewed as either a handicap or a powerful seed for something new._

– Carlos Ghosn, President and CEO of Renault and Nissan (cited in Emerson, 2001: 6).

Cultural differences are widely viewed as a source of problems, misunderstandings, and conflict in cross-cultural encounters – succinctly captured by the above quote by Geert Hofstede. The idea that there are negative consequences associated with cultural differences is core to the “cultural distance” construct (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Shenkar, 2001) and its underlying assumption that cultural differences are a source of difficulties, costs, and risks. Accordingly, in the past few decades, theory and research have reflected this theme through constructs such as “cultural distance” (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Shenkar, 2001), “psychic distance” (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2009), “institutional distance” (Kostova 1996; Kostova, 1999), and “liability of foreignness” (Zaheer, 1995; Miller & Parkhe, 2002), and this is a pervasive focus in hypotheses formulation and empirical testing in international business and cross-cultural management literature. Most notably is the overarching idea known as the “cultural distance” hypothesis that argues barriers, and hence difficulties related to working and doing business across national borders, will increase with greater distances between/among the individuals, groups, and organizations involved (Shenkar, 2001; Ward, 2003).

In line with this “problem-focused view” of differences and diversity (Stevens, Plaut & Sanchez-Burks, 2008) and the underlying assumption of “discordance” (Shenkar, 200: 524), many issues that arise in international and global business contexts have been explained in terms such as “foreignness”, “unfamiliarity costs”, “institutional gaps”, “organizational misfit”, among many. Differences, distances, and diversity have been viewed as causing incompatibility, friction, and conflict. These concepts have been proposed – and often found – to have a negative impact on
choice of foreign entry mode and perceived ability to manage foreign operations (e.g., Tihanyi, Griffith & Russell, 2005), post-acquisition integration outcomes (e.g., Björkman et al., 2007), and longevity of global strategic alliances (e.g., Parkhe, 1991). Inside and outside the organization, issues such as cross-border transfer of organizational practices (e.g., Kostova, 1999), legitimacy of MNCs and their subunits (e.g., Kostova & Zaheer, 1999), organizational learning across national borders (e.g., Barkema, Bell, & Pennings, 1996), dynamics and performance of diverse teams (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2010), adjustment of international assignees (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005) have been analyzed primarily through a perspective of disparities and discrepancies. Reflecting on this past trend, Cameron (this issue) asserts that “The bias toward emphasizing negative phenomena in research, of course, is not limited to international and cross-cultural studies. It permeates organizational science and management research as well.”

There is ample evidence to show that the international business and cross-cultural management literature has over-emphasized the difficulties, obstacles and conflicts caused by cultural differences rather than the positive dynamics and outcomes that stem from such differences. For example, researchers have expended less effort on developing new theoretical perspectives highlighting the positive characteristics of multicultural teams than explaining the liabilities associated with team diversity. In their review of the team diversity literature, Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander and Maznevski (2010) uncovered that all but one of the dominant theoretical perspectives on cultural diversity in teams are consistent with the problem-focused view of diversity, emphasizing the adverse dynamics of cultural diversity in teams. The “pessimistic” perspective categorizes diversity as a liability. Research from this ontological perspective focuses on issues such as the process losses resulting from reduced perceptions of similarity-attraction among team members, as well as negative biases and attributions associated with social categorization processes. Further, research on diversity as a liability finds that feelings of mistrust, dislike and resentment stem from variance across values and that communication barriers result from divergences in language and communication. On the other hand, the “optimistic” perspective categorizes diversity as an asset. Research from this perspective focuses on issues such as the information processing advantages resulting from team members’ different perspectives, knowledge bases, and decision-making styles. These, if properly harnessed, can enhance creativity and
lead to superior decision-making quality. With the exception of this latter theory, the dominant theoretical perspectives and explanatory frameworks in diversity research all focus on the negative dynamics and consequences of diversity, rather than capturing its upside.

Although the problem-focused approach contributes to our understanding of the role of cultural differences in cross-cultural management, it is our view that this emphasis gives little attention to the positive effects and outcomes associated with cultural differences. In a recent content analysis of articles on culture in international business, Stahl and Tung (2015), compared research published over a 24-year time period (1989-2012) in the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS), and published over a 19-year period (1994-2012) in Cross Cultural & Strategic Management (CCSM) (formerly Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal). The results were compelling. It revealed a substantial 17:1 imbalance of negative over positive theoretical assumptions when exploring the role of culture in international business published in JIBS. Thus, there is a tendency among these scholars to focus their theory building on the adverse dynamics associated with cultural differences, while scholars of empirical studies examining the impact of cultural differences displayed more complex and mixed picture findings. Comparatively, among the articles published in CCSM it was revealed that a large proportion of the studies, both theoretical and empirical, had mixed assumptions and findings regarding culture and the effects of cultural differences. Together these findings suggest that cultural differences appear to be a mixed blessing in cross-cultural management – they can be both an asset and a liability, contingent on contextual influences and management-related factors, such as interventions to manage cultural distance and diversity. Further, some practitioners, more so than academics, are acutely aware of the double-edged sword nature of culture and keenly realize that under some circumstances cultural differences can be a source of synergy, innovation and learning. As Carlos Ghosn, the CEO and President of both Renault and Nissan, repeatedly stressed: “Cultural differences can be viewed as either a handicap or a powerful seed for something new” (Emerson, 2001:6).

Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of Culture in Cross-Cultural Management Research
Recent research has drawn attention to the potentially positive role of distance and diversity across national, cultural, institutional and organizational dimensions. Advocating the study of how diversity, foreignness and distance creates value for global organizations is gaining nascent appreciation (e.g., Brannen, 2004; Edman, 2009; Mezias, 2002; Stahl, Tung, Kostova & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2016; Tung & Verbeke, 2010; Zaheer, Schomaker, & Nachum, 2012). These scholars argue that the overemphasis on adverse outcomes associated with cultural differences in existing international business research hinders our understanding of the processes and conditions that help organizations leverage the benefits of diversity in a wide range of contexts. These benefits may be exhibited through the development of strategic capabilities, decisions on foreign direct investment, synergy creation in cross-border mergers and acquisitions, learning through cross-border knowledge-sharing, unleashing of creative potential in diverse teams, and designing and implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that meet the needs and demands of a diverse set of stakeholders spread across the globe.

Although there is little doubt that distance and foreignness can be disadvantageous, both anecdotal and research evidence suggest that this is only one part of the story. As Edman (2009) noted, being a stranger in a distant land may result in uncertainty and bewilderment, yet locals are not blind to foreignness. Indeed, they incorporate it into their assumptions and attitudes, often adjusting their behavior and reactions, then formulating different expectations of foreigners than of their domestic counterparts. While this may at times have negative consequences, e.g., in the form of chauvinism and xenophobia, it can also result in greater tolerance of otherness and freedom of action, more development of opportunities and exploration of ideas, and expanded perceptions of attractiveness, sympathy and trustworthiness of others.

Consistent with these observations, enlightened MNEs have found that accentuating rather than deemphasizing their “otherness” can give them a viable edge over local competitors in the countries where they operate (see Brannen’s 2004 study of Tokyo Disneyland that asserts that foreignness can be an asset). For example, since Chinese high-potentials often prefer to work for Western companies in their own country, as opposed to domestic Chinese firms, many developed market MNEs operating in China have made deliberate attempts to integrate their foreign identity into their employer brand strategy. Highlighting the value of the “American style”, merit-driven
systems that open up the doors to promotion and career advancement, these MNE’s can position themselves as an employer of choice in the Chinese market (Stahl et al., 2012). At the same time, MNEs operating in an emerging-market context have found that when host-country institutions are deficient or weak, adapting to local standards and imitating the practices of their emerging market competitors may not be advisable to gain legitimacy and stakeholder trust (Doh, Littell & Quigley, 2015). By focusing on issues such as higher safety standards, more stringent environmental protection, more focused human rights dialogue, and more authentic engagement in CSR activities and sustainable practices, relevant MNEs may emphasize their foreignness. This signals to investors, customers, and other stakeholders that the MNEs are trustworthy partners, which is especially important in the absence of strong governmental controls. Furthermore, in addition to operating in an unstable political context, being foreign can provide a source of competitive advantage for MNE subsidiaries vis-a-vis local firms (Reade & Lee, 2012).

These examples illustrate that both greater distances and diversity – be they geographic, institutional, cultural, linguistic or psychic – can actually help individuals and organizations become better prepared for the challenges involved in international and global business. Conversely, perceived similarity between psychically or culturally close countries may hide unexpected and unforeseen barriers – a phenomenon known as “psychic distance paradox” (O’Grady & Lane, 1996). Consistent with this line of reasoning, studies suggest that cultural differences, which tend to be more salient in business transactions across greater distances, may lead the individuals, groups and organizations involved in these transactions to pay greater attention to cultural sensitivities and be better prepared to navigate the cultural challenges of working internationally. For example, in the context of cross-border mergers and acquisitions (Björkman et al., 2007; Reus & Lamont, 2009; Stahl & Voigt, 2008), it has been observed that the presence of more obvious national cultural differences may increase the awareness of the significance of such cultural factors in the integration process. In turn, this may lead the managers involved in these transactions to pay greater attention to the softer, less tangible, but more critical human resource aspects that are often overlooked in mergers involving companies from the same country (Pucik and Evans, 2004). Also, acquiring companies that have previous international M&A experience learn from their mistakes and implement processes that enable them to execute cross-border deals more effectively. Consistent with these observations, Larsson and Risberg
(1998) found higher degrees of acculturation (defined as the development of jointly shared meanings that foster cooperation between the merging firms) lowers levels of employee resistance and increases synergy realization in cross-border acquisitions compared to domestic acquisitions. They conclude that “cross-border M&A may not only be ‘cursed’ with additional culture clashes but also be ‘blessed’ with a higher propensity for culturally aware selection and integration management” (1998: 40).

There is also a growing body of evidence that differences and distance can help firms engaged in cross-border business to overcome rigidities and inertia, develop unique and potentially valuable capabilities, and foster learning and innovation (e.g., Morosini, Shane & Singh, 1998; Vermeulen & Barkema, 2001). In one such study of cross-border acquisitions, Morosini et al. (1998) found that national cultural distance enhanced post-acquisition performance by providing access to the target’s and/or the acquirer’s diverse set of routines and repertoires embedded in national culture. This is very much in line with extant research on cultural diversity in teams and organizations. At the core of the “value-in-diversity” hypothesis is the idea that diversity brings net-added value to organizational processes (Cox & Blake, 1991: 46); indeed, diversity scholars have highlighted a number of potentially beneficial outcomes of diversity, such as heightened levels of creativity, greater adaptability, higher quality of problem-solving, and better learning outcomes at the individual, group and organizational levels (e.g., Adler, 2003; DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000; Ng & Tung, 1998).

The examples provided above illustrate that research in international business and cross-cultural management can benefit from adopting a more “positive approach” by highlighting the circumstances and mechanisms whereby the positive aspects of cultural diversity, foreignness and distance can outweigh the costs associated with them. Nevertheless, we are not suggesting that the traditional, problem-focused perspective on cultural differences, distance and diversity does not have merits; nor are we claiming that the idea that diversity creates opportunities rather than problems is a new one. Positive aspects of foreignness, diversity and distance have been studied for decades, with international business and cross-cultural management scholars having highlighted a number of potentially beneficial outcomes of these differences, be they psychic-, cultural-, institutional- or otherwise. This is illustrated through research within the resource-based
view of the firm (e.g., Barney, 1991; Fiol, 1991) and organizational learning theories (e.g., Levinthal & March, 1993), both of which propose that differences in knowledge structures can be a source of synergistic benefits for global organizations. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that diversity, while often hindering exploitation - defined by activities such as refinement, efficiency, selection, and implementation - may be beneficial for exploration - defined by activities such as search, variation, experimentation, and discovery (e.g., Cantwell & Mudambi, 2005; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Stahl & Tung, 2015).

Examining the positive side of differences is not only beneficial theoretically in terms of filling this gap in the literature, but is also crucial for the practice of international and global business. In light of the increased international business activities and transactions across nations, the growing mobility of the workforce across national boundaries, the dramatic rise in immigration over the past decade, and growing intra-national heterogeneity in many countries, the time is ripe to study more systematically the positive aspects associated with cross-cultural contact and the factors that could enhance the likelihood of their occurrence. Accordingly, the goal of this special issue of CCSM is to showcase research that sheds light on the positive dynamics and outcomes associated with cultural differences, distance and diversity in a wide range of international business contexts. This is in line with a Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) perspective, which seeks “to develop rigorous, systematic, and theory-based foundations for positive phenomena..., [drawing] from the full spectrum of organizational theories to understand, explain, and predict the occurrence, causes, and consequences of positivity” (Cameron et al., 2003: 5-6).

Overview of the Special Issue

Our call for papers generated 35 submissions representing authors from 15 countries– an indication that our invitation to explore “The Upside of Cultural Differences: Towards a More Balanced Treatment of Culture in Cross-Cultural Management Research” struck a chord with international business and cross-cultural management scholars. Out of this set of submissions, we accepted five for publication in this Special Issue. These five papers address a wide range of issues, ranging from the exceptionally micro to the exceedingly macro, as well as cross-level phenomena, and they include both theoretical and empirical papers employing quantitative,
In the first article, Cameron introspectively applies the POS perspective to cross-cultural research. The author proposes that inherent inclinations of human systems toward the negative undoubtedly exists, but at the same time inherent tendencies toward the positive, paradoxically, also exist. These arguments provide an optimistic stance that the bias toward the negative is not necessarily a destiny. Demonstrating that an emphasis on positive can produce extraordinarily beneficial outcomes for individuals and organizations, Cameron argues that often the positive is ignored as an important source of flourishing in cross-cultural contexts. To illustrate this point, he highlights that "virtuousness", a particular example of a positive concept that produces universally-valued outcomes such as cultural congruence and synergy, deserves more attention in cross-cultural research.

Pesch and Bouncken’s paper (this issue), entitled “The Double-Edged Sword of Cultural Distance in International Alliances—How Perceived Cultural Distance Influences Trust and Task Discourse to Drive New Product Development Performance” presents a clear example of how international business and cross-cultural management research can benefit from changing the lens – from focusing primarily on problems and difficulties associated with cultural distance to examining positive outcomes of cross-border interactions. Their paper makes several important contributions to the topic of the Special Issue and the literature on international alliances. The authors propose that perceived cultural distance can be a double-edged sword in cross-border alliances – it may have positive effects on some outcomes and adverse effects on others. Their confirmed findings suggest that although perceived distance seems to make trust building more challenging, the beneficial effects of cultural differences on task discourse and knowledge combination seem to outweigh the negative ones on trust. In turn, this leads to overall positive effects on joint product development and innovation in cross-border alliances. The authors, however, caution that the overall positive effect on alliance performance is likely to emerge only if the interdependencies between partners are relatively low and the collaborating firms’ degree
of autonomy remains high, as is the case in non-equity alliances. They argue that the potential for cross-cultural conflict may be significantly higher in collaborative ventures characterized by higher levels of operational integration and more intensive face-to-face interaction, such as joint ventures or M&As, due to social categorization processes and communication problems. By directing attention to the role of context in research on cross-border alliances, Pesch and Bouncken’s paper makes a strong case for the need to consider moderators, including process-oriented and management-related variables, in research on the role of culture in international business.

In their paper entitled “Creating the Asset of Foreignness: Schrödinger’s Cat and Lessons from the Nissan Revival”, the authors Ikegami, Maznevski and Ota (this issue) challenge the assumption in cross-cultural research of Liability of Foreignness (LOF). Arguing that LOF comes from pressures for isomorphism, the authors contend that Asset of Foreignness (AOF) derives from the active process of taking up permission to break norms, which can enhance productivity and efficiency. The field study explores how leaders can initiate and sustain AOF. The paper analyzes the Nissan Revival led by Carlos Ghosn and is based on published interviews and assessments, as well as the authors’ interviews and discussions with Ghosn and his senior leaders at Nissan and Renault. In their analysis, the authors confirmed the potential for AOF by resisting pressure for normative isomorphism and creating opportunities for normative isomorphism. They uncovered four patterns of behavior that created AOF virtuous cycles among Nissan leaders: initiating trust; shaping identity; anchoring and transcending common language; and acting positively on ignorance. These virtuous cycles were sustainable and transformed into new global strategic perspectives. From their interviews, the authors tried to identify specific variations that were important in the context of being foreign and which created virtuous cycles. For example, shaping collective identity that values component identities and transcending common language are specific to cross-cultural contexts. Additionally, the interviews suggest among other things that initiating trust and acting on ignorance were even more important in a foreign context than they would be in domestic one. The authors cleverly conclude that foreignness can be represented as Schrödinger’s cat of quantum physics: in a dual state of both asset and liability, until leaders and top management teams act to drive it into a cycle towards net liability or asset.
Bresciani and Comi (this issue) in their article “Facilitating Culturally Diverse Groups with Visual Templates in Collaborative Systems: Increasing Structuration to Improve Precision” present an experimental study based on 229 managers from 49 countries and in 56 groups. The authors investigate how structuration through visual templates – graphic structures and illustrations that help map knowledge in the form of text and images – can improve groups’ task precision. The experimental task simulates a group meeting between strategic-alliance partners and requires them to identify opportunities for collaborative innovation. Within this context, the authors propose that higher structuration imposed by visual templates improves groups’ task precision. The findings confirm that facilitating group interactions with visual support embedded in computer-supported collaborative systems significantly increases task precision. Drawing on POS literature, Bresciani and Comi additionally hypothesize and find support for a moderating effect of group cultural diversity on the effect of structuration on task precision. Their study integrates approaches from information-systems research and structuration theory with cross-cultural management and with regard to sustaining the effectiveness of culturally diverse groups. The study thus shows how cultural diversity can be managed, as well as how it can be leveraged to help organizations benefit from the potential of culturally diverse groups.

In the next article, Hyun-Jung Lee interviewed Richard Nisbett, a renowned cognitive social psychologist and the author of the widely influential book "The Geography of Thought" about his perspective on cross-cultural differences in thinking style. Nisbett contrasts two dominant ways in thinking style across cultures - the analytical and holistic thinking, and highlights the advantages and disadvantages of each. He cautions that the analytic thinking, while tremendously advantageous in giving rise to science, has a tendency towards 'hyper'-logicizing, and this may result in disconnection from the phenomenon itself, particularly in social science including psychology and economics. The holistic way of thinking, on the other hand, has the advantage to enable people to notice much more about the physical world and context, and to help accept contradictions, but it is vulnerable to possible abuse due to a lack of universalistic rules. He indicates that the best way probably lies somewhere in-between, rather than an ‘either-or’ resolution. He convincingly demonstrates how the efforts to understand different cognitive and intellectual styles can help reduce limitations of one’s own way of reasoning.
Matthiesen and Salzmann (this issue) in their article entitled, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Firms’ Cost of Equity: Does Culture Matter?”, examine the relation between CSR and cost of equity – the required return a firm must offer its shareholders to compensate them for owning its stock and bearing the risk involved – based on a sample of 3,439 firms in 42 countries. First, the authors substantiate previous research and show that CSR is significantly negatively related to cost of equity. Thus, the more companies engage in CSR activities, the lower the cost of equity will be. Second, adopting a POS lens, Matthiesen and Salzmann identify three GLOBE culture dimensions that moderate this relationship in such a way that they decrease cost of equity further. Thus, they find that countries characterized by lower levels of assertiveness as well as higher levels of humane orientation and institutional collectivism provide more favorable environments for companies to engage in CSR. The study links CSR-related and finance-oriented research with cross-cultural studies and advances our understanding of how national culture can be regarded in a more positive way in promoting socially and environmentally responsible behavior.

In the final article entitled, “Cross-cultural Management Education Reboot: Creating Positive Value Through Scientific Mindfulness”, the talented team of scholars Fitzsimmons, Dietz, Francesco, Aycan, Boyacigiller, Jonsen, Lee, Sackmann, & Osland, argue that cross-cultural management education has traditionally directed its attention to topics such as cross-cultural communication, values, and conflicts. Further, they posit that this curriculum has been useful in educating students on cultural differences by offering key knowledge aimed at handling global issues; however tackling these global matters through solely a CCM perspective is insufficient. The authors suggest that the demands of today’s complex global issues are multifaceted and complex, requiring an enhanced and expanded version of cross-cultural management (CCM) education, to include a larger range of perspectives (i.e. micro and macro level) and a more mindful appreciation of the positive value created across stakeholders interactions. It is through the use of CCM scientific mindfulness action principles that are designed for and taught in a new type of CCM course that the authors believe our discipline will move beyond focusing on cultural differences and their pejorative associations. In the article, the authors systematically outline the construction of this new type of CCM course and its requirements, which include the careful design and implementation of program content, program materials, the learning assessment, and
instructional methods. Further, the authors paint a compelling portrait of the practice of mindfulness and scientific thinking, which they argue is comprised of perspective taking (applied through stakeholder involvement, holism, contextualization, and cross-or multi-disciplinarity) and reflexivity. Through the accompanying use of actual case studies for developing mindfulness and scientific thinking, the authors advocate the adoption of the action principles explained in this paper. With the purpose of creating positive value, scientific mindfulness lets students to see both the positive and negative sides of cross-cultural differences, offering suggested principles for settling cross-cultural dilemmas.

CONCLUSION

With the advent of culture clashes and the focus on the downside of culture in international business, often the positive aspects related to cross-cultural management are neglected. This Special Issue seeks to highlight the emergent topic of the upside of culture research and its application in business and education. Based on our review of 35 submitted and five accepted papers, we were able to draw some compelling conclusions. The breadth and depth of the papers received were affirming that a broad interest on the topic of the upside of culture is emerging across many fields and disciplines. The boundaries of a Special Issue dictate that the main ideas need to focus on the intended topic and that the papers must be developed within the timeframe for publication. As such, some papers were found to be outside of the perimeters of the Special Issue and other papers simply needed more time to develop than our Special Issue allowed. The remaining group of papers were high in quality and wide-ranging in scope. This signaled to the editorial team that investigating the upside of cross-cultural management was both warranted and well-timed. Working with expert reviewers is an important element of any successful manuscript review process and we found this to be exceptionally true for this Special Issue. We would like to thank all our manuscript reviewers, as their feedback and expediency were crucial for the authors.

The five papers that made it through the rigorous review process demonstrate the types of theory and application that will move this line of positive-focused research forward. From the four patterns of behavior that created AOF (Asset of Foreignness) virtuous cycles among Nissan leaders presented in the article by Ikegami et al, to the double-edged sword effect of cultural distance in cross-border alliances highlighted in Pesch and Bouncken’s paper, to Bresciani and
Comi’s ideas about how cultural diversity can be leveraged through visual templates, to the evidence provided in Matthiesen and Salzmann’s paper on how national cultural orientations may facilitate or hinder the implementation of CSR strategies and the adoption of socially and environmentally responsible practices in MNCs, to the scientific mindfulness model of teaching cross-cultural management proposed through the article by Fitzsimmons and her colleagues, this Special Issue emphasizes the notion of the positive results and consequences of cross-border business interaction. The two additional articles – one from the seminal scholar on POS and the other an interview from a premier thought leader on cross-cultural cognitive psychology – add a richness and depth to the discussion in this Special Issue. The insights gleaned from the original POS idea through the Cameron article, coupled with the diverse ‘thinking’ perspective presented in the Nisbett interview, challenges the reader to develop deeper theoretical explanations of existing theories. Together, these seven Special Issue papers seek to generate the growth of new ideas in the arena of the upside of cross-cultural management.

By advancing the framing of the upside of cultural differences to achieve a more balanced treatment of culture in cross-cultural management research, we are heeding the recent call by Stahl and colleagues (2016: 628) who hoped to “encourage IB scholars to explore and take on some of these concepts to further develop positive aspects of IB”. We view this volume as a prime opportunity to feature the positive interactions and possible outcomes resulting from cross-cultural business exchanges, and explicating these through management frameworks that feature the uniqueness of the international setting. It is our expectation that this Special Issue will be seen as a move toward encouraging scholars and practitioners alike to further explore these relevant topics.

REFERENCES


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