Using Cultural Archetypes in Cross-cultural Management Studies

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Studies examining the effects of culture on intentions and behaviors within organizations, as well as of related cross-cultural differences, often focus on either the direct or moderating effect of single cultural value dimensions, or on the moderating effect of country as a proxy of culture. However, culture is i) a multidimensional construct that ii) does not necessarily entirely correspond to particular countries. Disregarding these realities means turning a blind eye to the possibility of more complex interrelationships between various cultural dimensions, or to the possibility of cultural diversity within countries. This paper advocates the use of cultural archetypes in cross-cultural management studies. The use of cultural archetypes represents a configuration approach to studying culture that incorporates a holistic pattern of multiple cultural dimensions. We utilize individual-level data from 10 countries and identify six cultural archetypes that are present in all these countries. Drawing on an illustrative example of culture's effect on entrepreneurial intention, we propose that a cultural archetype approach can be more suitable for analyzing cross-cultural effects than conventional approaches.

1. Introduction

A multitude of cultural dimensions is commonly used to describe culture (Taras et al., 2009). However, most studies on culture's influence on intended or actual behaviors in organizations focus on single (independent) cultural dimensions. These studies are therefore limited in that they only address a part of a more comprehensive construct (Earley, 2006). Most studies thus ignore the possibility of more complex interrelationships between different cultural dimensions and their effects on the subject matter in question. Tsui et al. (2007) suggest that using single cultural dimensions to examine how culture influences what individuals do or intend to do does not provide informative insights. Accordingly, these authors recommend a configuration

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approach that captures the potential interrelationships between single cultural dimensions; an idea that has also recently been taken up and applied by Venaik and Midgley (2015).

Another measurement issue concerns the use of a country as a proxy of culture. Many authors assume that cultures develop within countries as an artifact of national patterns of formative experiences (Derr and Laurent, 1989) and that national cultures are the chief predictors of employee intentions and behaviors (Schneider, 1989). However, comparative research shows that cultural differences do not necessarily equate with national differences (Easterby-Smith et al., 1995; Elenkov and Kirova, 2008; Fischer and Schwartz, 2011). Hence, it is vital to clearly distinguish between cross-cultural and cross-national conceptualizations, and to understand the concept of culture when studying its impacts.

This paper advocates and, importantly, illustrates the use of *cultural archetypes* to overcome these measurement issues. In line with Tsui et al. (2007), Tung (2007) and Venaik and Midgley (2015), we argue that cultural archetypes represent specific configurations of multiple cultural dimensions. Such cultural archetypes differ from each other concerning the intensity of and the interactions between different cultural dimensions. Furthermore, we do not argue that a cultural archetype necessarily corresponds to a country. Instead, in line with the above researchers, we contend that various cultural archetypes can be found within a single country as well as across countries. Building on this conceptualization, we suggest that describing individuals and predicting their intentions according to cultural archetypes is qualitatively superior to drawing on single cultural dimensions or using countries as proxies. To support our argumentation, we utilize individual-level data from 10 countries. We consider five cultural value dimensions (power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation) to determine cultural archetypes. By employing connectivity-based (Ward) and centroid-based (k-means) clustering procedures, we identify, for our sample, six cultural archetypes that are present in all 10 countries. Furthermore, to assess whether using cultural archetypes is more appropriate for measuring culture than using single cultural dimensions or nations, we examine the relative suitability of these measurement approaches for ascertaining the impact of cultural effects in an illustrative model of entrepreneurial intention (i.e. cross-cultural differences have been argued to affect entrepreneurial intentions) (e.g., see Mitchell et al., 2000; Hayton et al., 2002; Liñán and Chen, 2009; Schlaegel et al., 2013). Fig. 1 describes the approach taken in this paper.

This paper makes two contributions to the cross-cultural management literature: First, it discusses and applies an alternative, and a potentially more precise, measure for culture: the cultural archetype. Employing archetype-based measures, rather than focusing on independent cultural dimensions, allows us to take into account possible complex interrelationships between the various cultural dimensions. At the same time, this approach challenges a common assumption that individuals are homogenous within countries, and allows for heterogeneity within countries (Tung, 2007). Our approach is therefore in line with, and supports, Au (1999), Dorfman and Howell (1988), Earley (1993, 2006), Markus and Kitayama (1991), Triandis (1995), Tsui et al. (2007), as well as Venaik and Midgley (2015). In line with the latter authors, our study demonstrates that different cultural archetypes comprising detailed descriptions of culture configurations (Roth, 1992) can be found. However, instead of drawing on a selected set of cultural values considered by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 1994) to describe culture archetypes (i.e., Venaik and Midgley, 2015), our operationalization employs the more commonly used values put
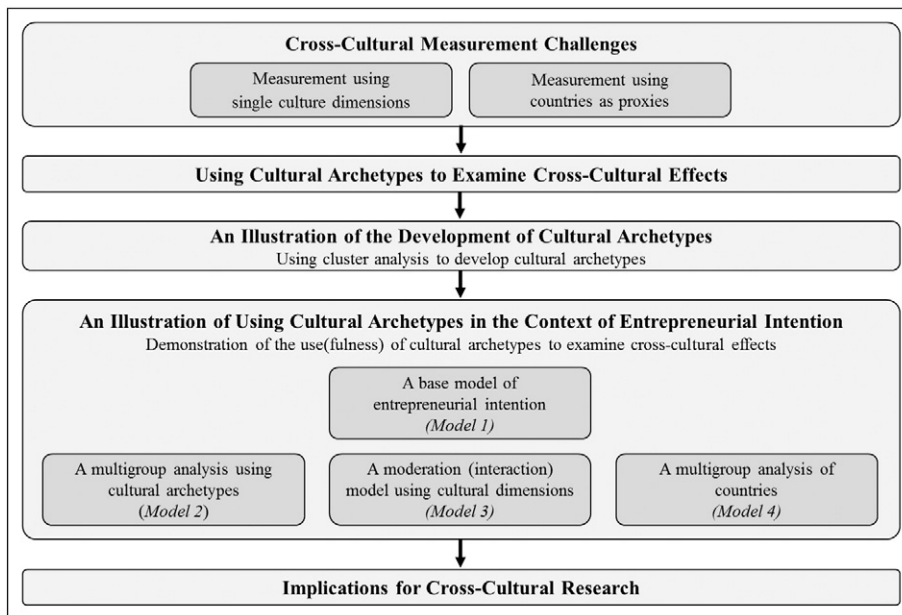

Fig. 1. Using cultural archetypes in cross-cultural management research.