Culture and teams

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We first review research on culture effects in teams, illustrating that mean levels of team cultural values have main (i.e. direct) effects, indirect effects (i.e. mediated by intervening variables), and moderating influences on team processes and outcomes. Variance in team cultural values or on country of origin (i.e. nationality diversity) also has main effects on team functioning, and we highlight contextual variables that strengthen or weaken these main effects. We next review research examining the effect of variance in team cultural values on global virtual teams, specifically. Finally, we review research on how cultural values shape employees' receptivity to empowering leadership behavior in teams. We conclude by discussing critical areas for future research.

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Global competitive pressures associated with recruiting and retaining employees, suppliers, distributors, and customers have made organizations dependent on transnational teams and virtual teams [1**,2]. These teams' members are typically 'nationally-diverse' or 'culturally-diverse' [3][a] and empowered by their leaders to make a variety of self-managing decisions associated with the complex work that they do. Despite these teams' national and/or cultural diversity, surprisingly little research on understanding team effectiveness has been conducted outside of North American and other Western (i.e., Australian, Western European) contexts [4]. Globalization requires a different approach to understanding how national culture affects the ability of team members to carry out interdependent work. In this *Current Opinion*, we describe recent developments in research on culture and teams, with a special emphasis on: (a) culture effects in teams; (b) culture effects in global virtual teams; and, given these teams' typically high level of autonomy, (c) effects of empowering leader behavior (ELB) on teams across cultures. We conclude with recommendations for future research on culture and teams.

Studying culture effects in teams

There have been two primary approaches to incorporating national culture when examining how team composition influences team effectiveness. The first relies almost exclusively on the use of survey-instruments to assess *mean levels* of individually-held cultural values, such as individualism-collectivism (i.e. beliefs about the importance of aiding individual versus group needs) and power distance (i.e. beliefs about desired power differences between authorities and subordinates) [6]. Mean-levels of cultural values have been linked to team-dynamics as: firstly, main (i.e. direct) effects; secondly, indirect effects (i.e. mediated by intervening variables); and thirdly, as moderators that strengthen or weaken main effects [7**]. For example, scholars have found higher mean levels of team collectivism are associated with higher levels of team cooperation [8–10]. The positive effect of team collectivism on team cooperation (as well as on team empowerment and team productivity) is mediated by the extent of team members' resistance to working in team- (rather than solo-) assignments [11], thereby suggesting that positive main effects of this cultural value depend on employees' desire to work in teams. Additionally, scholars have found that teams' mean-level of collectivism strengthens the tendency for higher team efficacy to be associated with higher team performance [12]. With regard to power distance, scholars have found that higher mean levels of this in teams strengthen the tendency for higher-status members' expressed views to influence a team's collective judgments [13]. Taken together, these findings attest to the fact that team functioning is influenced (in a variety of ways) by the mean-level of teams' cultural values.

The second primary approach to incorporating national culture in examinations of team composition effects on

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[a] 'Nationally-different employees' or 'nationally-diverse teams' (also sometimes called 'multinational teams') refer to employees or team members who come from, or reside in, different nations or countries [1**]. 'Culturally-diverse' employees or team members are those who hold different culturally-guided values, or beliefs, gained from one's upbringing or background, that guide the meaning individuals attach to the world around them, such as how people should act in a society [1**,5]. Distinguishing national-diversity versus cultural-diversity in teams is important because within-country variance in cultural values is possible and gets overlooked when studies use members' nationality as a proxy for cultural variation.

team effectiveness relies on two methods for assessing the *diversity* of team cultural values. The first method uses a measure of variance on nation of origin (i.e. nationality diversity), or what is referred to as a type of surface-level diversity. The second approach uses a measure of variance on actual cultural values (i.e. cultural value diversity), or a type of deep-level diversity. A meta-analysis including both methods of assessing cultural diversity in teams (including 108 empirical studies and over 10 000 teams) shows that cultural diversity could have both positive and negative effects on teams depending on the specific criterion of interest [14**]. For example, cultural diversity is associated with team process losses through its effects on increased task conflict [15] and decreased social integration [16]. Yet, cultural diversity is associated with process gains through its effects on increased creativity [17] and team satisfaction [18]. Even though these findings might suggest that cultural diversity is a double-edged sword, research has shown that when team members recognize and respect cultural differences, which is more likely in teams with high levels of cultural intelligence, 'fusion teamwork' [19] can occur that is associated with positive team outcomes [20]. The meta-analysis also shows that the criterion variable of team communication effectiveness is helped (versus harmed) by cultural variation in teams, depending on how cultural variation gets assessed: variation in team members' cultural values generally aids this and members' national diversity generally harms this [14**]. Thus, scholars need to assess mediating variables, such as the extent of fusion teamwork, and assess cultural variation in teams via both methods reviewed here, not just one. Team members' nationality and cultural values are *not* substitutes for each other.

Importantly, many of the main effect findings examined in the meta-analysis are relatively small, suggesting moderators [14**]. Specifically, culturally diverse teams encounter more task conflict when tasks are complex, members are face-to-face rather than virtual, and in teams with longer tenure. These teams also have less effective communication if they are larger and when members spend more time together. Members are also less satisfied in larger teams. Finally, there is lower social integration in face-to-face, versus virtual, teams. Importantly, in North American contexts, even though there is no relationship between cultural diversity and conflict, the relationship is significantly positive in non-North American contexts, underscoring the importance of conducting more studies outside North America and in non-Western countries.

Studying culture effects in global virtual teams
Despite the fact that research on global virtual teams has been accumulating for over 20 years, there is still a lack of attention to the role that cultural values play in virtual team effectiveness [1**,21]. For example, one important question would be how could virtual teams effectively function with members who prefer to build strong interpersonal relationships with their fellow team members using face-to-face interaction? If virtual teams members rarely (or never) meet face-to-face, the key component of effective teamwork — high quality relationships — will be lacking or, at best, more difficult to build for collectivists.

The small amount of research that does exist on culture and virtual teaming consistently examines cultural value diversity. For example, U.S.–Turkish virtual dyads are much less effective the greater the differences in cultural values; and, extending this to teams, team cultural composition is the most important predictor of team performance [22]. Conversely, another study finds that culturally heterogeneous virtual teams perform better than culturally heterogeneous face-to-face teams, suggesting that leaner technologies might reduce the potentially negative effects of cultural biases, particularly early in a team's lifespan [23]. And, yet another set of studies finds no relationship between cultural value diversity and virtual team outcomes such as learning, satisfaction, conflict, trust, and performance [24,25]. Clearly, the effect of culture on virtual team functioning is complex, and research has yet to identify how this relationship is influenced by important contingency variables [1**].

Reactions to empowering leadership across cultures
Given the decision-complexity of their tasks, global and/or virtual teams are usually self-managing [11] or, similarly, empowered by leaders to make managerial decisions associated with goal setting, performance-assessing, and more [26]. Surprisingly, we know little about how national or cultural value-differences influence employees' receptivity to empowering leader behavior (ELB) (see, also, the review on culture and leadership by Hanges, Aikan, Park & Su, this issue). One study did theorize and find that employees who are more receptive to teamwork (rather than solo-work) tend to be more collectivistic; and, that employees who are more receptive to self-management (rather than being directed or highly supervised) tend to be those whose cultural values are lower in power distance and determinism, and higher in doing orientation; and, employees' resistance to self-management and teamwork mediates the effect that cultural values have on team effectiveness as measured by cooperation, empowerment, and productivity [11].

Cumulatively, these findings suggest that employees' receptivity (or conversely, their resistance) to teamwork involving ELBs differs across employees with differing cultural values, hence across nationally-different employees. Future research is needed to test this, however, since the measure that has been used to assess ELBs, including the measure's name, has varied across studies, making knowledge-accumulation difficult. Specifically, the first