Debunking Key Assumptions About Teams: The Role of Culture

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Scholars have argued that if psychologists are to gain a true understanding of human behavior, culture should be central to research and theory. The research on teams is an area where better integration between the mainstream and cross-cultural literatures is critically needed, given the increasing prevalence of multicultural teams. The purpose of this article is therefore to demonstrate how research focused on culture's influence on teams advances current mainstream theoretical understanding of team effectiveness. Guided by widely accepted frameworks of team effectiveness (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005) and culture (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015), we extract several key assumptions from the mainstream literature that have also been examined within the cross-cultural literature. Through a process of comparing and contrasting, we determined which components of current models are upheld and debunked when seeking to generalize these models to other cultural contexts outside of North America. Although we found some consistent results across the two literatures, most of our analyses reveal there are important boundary conditions surrounding common team effectiveness assumptions when culture is considered. By anchoring our analyses around fundamental aspects of teams, including how they form, function, and finish, we then revised these assumptions according to the integration of the teams and cross-cultural literatures. Taken together, we provide a rich foundation for future research, and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of human behavior within the team context.

Keywords: teams, team dynamics, groups, culture, cross-cultural

[. . .] "Culture" and all that it implies with respect to human development, thought, and behavior should be central, not peripheral, in psychological theory and research. To keep culture peripheral, or, worse, to avoid it altogether lest it challenge one's own view of reality is myopic and a disservice to psychological inquiry.
—(Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998, p. 1108)

This statement was made to the readership of *American Psychologist*, calling for better integration between cross-cultural psychology and the broader field of psychology. Nearly 20 years later, cross-cultural research has exploded, but Segall and colleagues' vision has not yet come to fruition—much of this work remains largely separate from what can be considered mainstream psychological research. One area where this integration and synthesis is sorely needed is research on teams. In a time when globalization, technological advances, and immigration/expatriation are growing, teamwork—across various contexts (e.g., organizational work teams, research collaborations, integrative medical and psychological treatment, foreign relation negotiations, etc.)—is increasingly multicultural. Although working in teams with members from diverse national and cultural backgrounds can provide a wealth of new perspectives and knowledge, cultural differences can also lead to misunderstandings and performance challenges. Therefore, the need to understand the processes and influences of culture on teams working within and across cultural boundaries has never been more pressing.

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Much is known about how to support team effectiveness, but this research primarily derives from what we refer to as mainstream team research, which is largely conducted in North America and other Western contexts (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008; Salas & Gelfand, 2013), where most psychological and organizational research has been situated (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). This mainstream Western-based work elucidates several key findings (see reviews by Ilgen et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008) that can now be considered general "assumptions" of team effectiveness, such as the influential roles of team composition (e.g., high levels of collective orientation among team members) and team emergent states (e.g., team trust) for facilitating effective teamwork. However, the degree to which these findings universally apply, particularly when culture is taken into account, warrants further exploration (Bond & Smith, 1996). For example, what findings are emic, or general, versus etic, or culture-specific? Fortunately, various review articles published in recent years highlight growing pockets of scholarship where team research is being conducted from a cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Kirkman, Shapiro, Lu, & McGurrin, 2016; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). This perspective examines similarities and differences in organizational, team, and individual behaviors either in multicultural domestic and/or international contexts (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007). Scholars are increasingly focused on culture's influence on team process and outcomes specifically (see Gibson & McDaniel, 2010; Kirkman et al., 2016; Salazar & Salas, 2013; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2009; Tsui et al., 2007; Zhou & Shi, 2011).

What is missing, however, is an explicit attempt to integrate findings from these largely disparate research streams. Despite the growing body of literature relevant to both fields, no review has sought to identify how findings from research on cross-cultural teaming advance insights from the mainstream team literature or vice versa. Without a theoretical feedback loop connecting conclusions drawn from work conducted with a cross-cultural lens to mainstream knowledge and theory of teams, we limit opportunities for identifying the boundaries of current models and frameworks (Whetten, 1989). In other words, when we test the generalizability of Western findings or assumptions about teams in other cultural contexts and find that results are not consistent, differences in norms, values, and beliefs may be the reason for the discrepancy. Current models and team effectiveness assumptions generally do not account for these cultural differences, therefore cannot necessarily be applied beyond mainstream settings, and should be updated if they are to become more broadly applicable. Moreover, we risk susceptibility to what Antonakis (2017) termed *disjunctivitis*—the tendency to produce vast amounts of papers that provide trivial and incoherent insights without the concern of common assumptions in the broad literature, limiting scientific progress on team effectiveness.

Rather than conduct a comprehensive review of research relating to culture's influence on teams, which has already been done (Gibson & McDaniel, 2010; Kirkman et al., 2016; Salazar & Salas, 2013; Stahl et al., 2009; Tsui et al., 2007; Zhou & Shi, 2011), we have opted to compare and contrast prominent sets of findings from mainstream and cross-cultural team scholarship around several focal assumptions in the team literature. Our purpose is to reorient the readership of *American Psychologist* to the early advice of Segall and colleagues' (1998), and to act on their call to "take culture seriously into account when attempting to study [human behavior]." In taking this approach, we identify which mainstream findings about teams are generalizable in other cultural contexts across important domains (e.g., virtuality, leadership). Guided by widely accepted frameworks of team effectiveness (Ilgen et al., 2005) and culture (Giorgi et al., 2015), we conducted in-depth comparisons of findings from the broader teams and cross-cultural literatures, and took initial steps to aid their integration by proposing revised assumptions that can be built into future cross-cultural team effectiveness models. In doing so, we not only crystallize our understanding of the boundary conditions of current mainstream models of team effectiveness, but also provide fresh insight into knowledge of teams from research conducted in other cultural settings. Notably, this comparison of findings from disparate streams of literature enables us to not only revise established assumptions, but also propose areas for further theoretical development.

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Methodology

In these sections, we briefly summarize our theoretical and methodological approaches. Specifically, we define the scope of team effectiveness and culture and describe the inclusion criteria and conceptual coding we used to inform the assumptions and their proposed revisions.

Theoretical Approach

Team effectiveness. Broadly speaking, teamwork is defined by interdependent actions individuals engage in to accomplish a shared objective (Mathieu et al., 2008). Although effective teamwork is often thought to be captured through objective measures of team performance and productivity (e.g., Shea & Guzzo, 1987), there is general consensus that team effectiveness is multidimensional and can also be evident through other indicators (Hackman & Morris, 1975). For instance, attitudinal outcomes (e.g., commitment, trust) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., participation, turnover) are other major dimensions of effectiveness (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Thus, we take a broad approach to exploring the role of culture in team effectiveness. Guided by the availability of evidence in the current literature (as further explained below), we examine six major aspects of effective teamwork to determine whether various processes and outcomes that occur in the mainstream literature are also evident cross-culturally. Furthermore, we anchor this exploration to a prominent team model—wherein teaming involves forming, functioning, and finishing (Ilgen et al., 2005)—to better understand where modification to mainstream frameworks is needed. Forming involves early

stages of team development and socialization processes, while functioning reflects more advanced team compilation and taskwork processes, and finishing relates to performance outcomes.

Culture. Culture is generally defined as a "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1993, p. 89). Scholars drawing on this and other constructivist definitions tend to conceptualize culture in terms of value-orientations or cognitive schemas (Hofstede, 2001a; Schwartz, 1999). Departing from the view that cultural differences are grounded primarily in either values or cognitions, Giorgi et al. (2015) proposed an integrated cultural framework which defines culture both in terms of the *values* that define preferences and desires, but also as a *toolkit* or means of action for solving practical problems and for navigating one's environment (Swidler, 1986). These authors also define culture as *frames* that filter what we pay attention to, *stories* or narratives that link sequences of events, and *categories* that help people to classify, define, and structure objects, people, and practices.

In this article, we utilized Giorgi and colleagues' (2015) more comprehensive characterization of culture as a guiding framework for determining the scope of the literature to be included in our analysis of current findings, as well as the theoretical lens through which differences that emerged across the teams and cross-cultural research streams could be interpreted. Specifically, we identified empirical papers that drew upon one of these five conceptualizations of culture (i.e., value, frames, stories, categories, toolkit), and when team effectiveness assumptions were either upheld or challenged, sought to connect our conclusions to these different aspects of culture as explanatory mechanisms. Consistent with our broad approach to both team effectiveness and culture, we included both cross-cultural studies of teams (e.g., comparison of teams from two or more cultures), as well as multicultural team studies (e.g., teams with representation from various cultures) despite differences in their approaches, because they each reveal unique insights about how culture influences team dynamics and outcomes.

Methodological Approach

Literature searches and inclusion criteria. To identify relevant studies on culture in a team context, we began by conducting literature searches to locate articles examining both culture and teams. We followed a number of steps to generate a targeted collection of findings from the culture and teams' literature. First, we downloaded all articles referenced in Stahl and colleagues' (2009) meta-analysis of culturally diverse teams (i.e., 45 articles). Second, we conducted a manual search for references cited (i.e., backward search) in other review articles focused on cross-cultural psychology and team effectiveness (Gelfand et al., 2007;

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Kirkman et al., 2016; Zhou & Shi, 2011), yielding a total of 224 articles, including the articles from Step 1. Third, we conducted a computerized search of the PsycINFO database to obtain more recent articles. Because the aforementioned meta-analysis completed searches in 2006, we searched for the terms "culture" and "team" in abstracts of articles published within the following decade, yielding a total of 1,143 articles. In combination, our searches and cross-referencing produced a total of 1,367 articles for review.

Studies were included only if a relevant team construct (e.g., team composition, team conflict, team performance) was assessed in combination with a cross-cultural psychology approach (e.g., cross-cultural comparison, measurement of cultural orientation of team members, or perceptions of shared values). Studies were not included if they were purely theoretical, because our goal was to provide support or debunk the teams assumptions with empirical findings. Upon applying these inclusion criteria and removing clearly irrelevant articles (e.g., studies on organizational culture), 337 articles remained for further analysis.

Conceptual coding and linking to the mainstream literature. Remaining articles were then conceptually coded with the goal of extracting information about the studies' samples, designs, and findings to help us discern the nature of the tested relationships between team and cultural variables. Five articles were first coded and discussed as a team, and the remaining articles were then divided among the authors and coded independently. When coding was completed, the research team engaged in a series of discussions to qualitatively identify frequently studied topics and common themes. Once these key relationships

were identified, we were able to group cross-cultural studies together by their dominant team topic area (e.g., trust).

Our next step was to link the identified areas of study to the mainstream team literature to determine which primary findings from the broader team science have also been investigated from a cross-cultural angle. To do so, we drew from prominent reviews of the team literature (e.g., Ilgen et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008) and compared common topics in the mainstream literature to the focal topics from the culture literature that we had previously identified to determine where fruitful comparisons could be made. Specifically, because our goal was to gain a high-level understanding of the role of culture in team effectiveness, we honed in on dominant topics from the teams literature (e.g., team trust, leadership), and used them as a starting point for determining potential avenues for cross-cultural comparisons. Based on the rationale that sufficient research examining team and cultural variables in combination is necessary to be able to gain an understanding of how teamwork assumptions might be challenged when culture is taken into account, we only generated team assumptions when at least five articles from a cross-cultural perspective were available for making comparisons. This cut-off was based on previous meta-analytic correlations that considered five independent samples to be a sufficient number for comparisons (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006; Martocchio, Harrison, & Berkson, 2000). Other topics were eliminated if they did not represent dominant areas of teams research or if we could not identify at least five cross-cultural studies that could be triangulated to the teams assumptions. Thus, our search culminates in six in-depth comparisons of the mainstream assumptions and cross-cultural findings in the following areas: trust, virtuality, team orientation, conflict, leadership, and performance.

Assumptions of Team Effectiveness

In the sections that follow, we not only compare these disparate sets of literature, but also identify where there are significant contradictions and consistencies, with the goal of shaping future research directions. In Table 1, we summarize our six main assumptions and when appropriate, propose a revision in light of the cross-cultural scholarship on teams. Assumptions are presented in the context of Ilgen et al.'s (2005) categories of forming, functioning, and finishing.

Forming

Assumption 1: Trust among team members is critical for effective collaboration. During the formative phases of teaming, Ilgen and colleagues (2005) describe a category of variables referred to as "trusting," or beliefs in the team's competence and integrity that are expressed through shared

Table 1
Teamwork Assumptions and Proposed Revisions for Incorporating a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Variable	Assumption	Revised assumption	Approaches to fostering team effectiveness
Forming	Trust among team members is critical for effective collaboration.	There are cross-cultural differences in how likely team members are to trust and the mechanisms through which such trust is derived, making the emergence of team-level trusting even more critical for collaboration in multicultural teams.	Implement interventions that can highlight both relational links and a shared identity among team members to increase team trust across cultures
	Individuals with a team orientation are more willing to participate and contribute to teams.	All individuals, regardless of cultural orientation, can be willing to participate and contribute to teams under trait-activating conditions.	Foster collaborative conditions, such as group norms and reward structures, to optimize team effectiveness regardless of individuals' cultural orientation
Functioning	Virtual teams face more interpersonal challenges than traditional teams.	When variability in virtuality and culture intersect, the detriments of virtuality can turn into an asset for making differences less salient.	Draw on virtual tools to sustain norms that de-emphasize differences across team members and promote team effectiveness
	Conflict should always be managed with collective processes for a team to be effective.	Conflict discourse is not necessarily the proper conflict management strategy when dealing with conflict in culturally diverse teams.	Assess the extent to which conflict types are intertwined and team members' cultural orientations prior to adopting collective conflict strategies
	Empowering leadership behaviors make teams more effective.	Empowering leadership is most effective in teams with low power distance and individualistic individuals.	Utilize empowering leadership techniques with caution, especially when team members are collectivistic in nature
Finishing	Using teams is the optimal approach to tackling complex problems.	Culturally diverse teams may struggle to be effective but can overcome these challenges when given time to develop cultural intelligence.	Consider the initial challenges that cultural differences may produce, while instilling team cultural intelligence to boost their effectiveness

team trust, team confidence, and psychological safety. While in some instances too much trust can be detrimental (Langfred, 2004), it is widely accepted within the team literature that trust is beneficial, if not critical, for effective teamwork (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Mathieu et al., 2008). Trust facilitates collaboration by enabling team members to focus on the task at hand rather than scrutinizing others, influencing the way they interpret each other's behavior and promoting effort and persistence toward task accomplishment.

When examining this team assumption within the cross-cultural literature, we see that trust remains critical for team functioning, but that it develops differently and often less easily in particular cultural situations. One study, for example, found that affective-based and cognitive-based trust—grounded in perceived interpersonal integrity and task-relevant competence, respectively—emerges through different mechanisms in Chinese versus American cultures (Chua, Morris, & Ingram, 2009). Whereas Chinese executives' affective trust was related to economic dependencies and closely intertwined with cognitive trust, Americans derived affective trust through friendship ties, and developed it more distinctly from cognitive-based trust. This difference in *frames* is also consistent with other work showing cross-cultural differences in the role of socioemotional elements in the workplace. Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett,

and Ybarra (2000) found that Latinos generally had different schemas about the role of social relations in team functioning compared with Anglo Americans, who did not consider them as relevant to task performance.

Mainstream research elucidates that team members' social categorization of each other as ingroup rather than outgroup members affects the formation of trust, whereas cross-cultural findings show that preexisting relational links are stronger predictors of team trust in other cultures. Americans, for instance, were less trusting of outgroup members versus ingroup members—those belonging to the same social category as themselves (Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005). Japanese participants, in contrast, developed trust based on direct and indirect interpersonal relationships, and less so on social categorization. Thus, Americans tend to derive trust through ingroup membership, perhaps because membership provides heuristic information about others' competence, whereas relational links alone are sufficient for trust development in Japanese cultures. Other evidence suggests that collectivists may simply be more trusting in general. Mach and Baruch (2015), for example, found a positive link between collectivistic orientation and team trust, though mean levels were not sufficient. Rather, when the collectivist orientation of each member was high, the relationship with trust was positive, but when there was less agreement among members, the relationship was

weaker. This aligns with other findings that differences between individuals, including ethnocultural differences, can reduce trust (Koopmans & Veit, 2014).

Taken together, trust remains a critical driver of team effectiveness across both mainstream and cross-cultural contexts, but differences in trust formation emerge when culture is take into account; culture shapes the social construction of the extent to which trust is valued in the work group, and which team behaviors individuals classify as trustworthy. Thus, to truly understand trust's role in team effectiveness, efforts to consider culture, largely in terms of *categories*, *values*, and *frames* (Giorgi et al., 2015), must be carefully accounted for. This means that theoretical development surrounding team trust should incorporate differences in trust antecedents (e.g., social categorization vs. relational links) depending on culture, that can then inform the generation of corresponding empirical investigation, and ultimately, culture-specific interventions for team trust enhancement. For example, in multicultural teams, efforts to both highlight common relational links and develop a shared team identity would arguably be the most effective and culturally sensitive approach to facilitating team trust.

Assumption 2: Individuals with a team orientation are more willing to participate and contribute to teams. Research has converged on the notion that the willingness and enthusiasm of individuals working on teams can positively impact team processes and outcomes (Blackburn & Rosen, 1996). A strong focus has been on individuals with a team orientation, those who value working in teams and are more willing to subordinate their personal goals for the group aims, for a variety of reasons. Involvement in a team can create tension between contributing one's inputs while also coordinating with and responding to others in the group. There is general agreement that members with a "team value orientation" will be more productive if selected to work on a team than those with a more "individual orientation" (Driskell, Salas, & Hughes, 2010; Mathieu et al., 2008; Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005).

While several factors are relevant in predicting one's willingness to participate in teams, a dominant focus in the cross-cultural literature has been on a parallel construct, team orientation, comprising the cultural *values* individualism and collectivism. Collectivism reflects a general orientation toward group goals and cooperating in group endeavors (Hofstede, 1984); collectively oriented individuals define themselves by their group membership (Earley, 1993). Accordingly, these collectivists are more likely to subordinate their interests to the goals of the group to which they belong (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). In contrast, those from individualistic cultures place an emphasis on self-sufficiency and control, as well as the pursuit of their own goals that do not necessarily align with those of their team. Indeed, research finds a positive association

between collectivistic orientation and effort toward the team (Earley, 1993).

However, the cross-cultural literature shows that even individuals from more collectivist cultures can exhibit social loafing or reduced effort, depending on the collaborative context. Chen, Wasti, and Triandis (2007) find that allocentric persons, those who have a collaborative orientation, engage in fewer team-focused behaviors when norms for cooperation are weak. Similarly, Chatman and Barsade (1995) found that those with a cooperative tendency, which indicated a greater orientation toward collectivism, were more attuned and responsive to the norms of their organizations than less collectivistic individuals. Although cooperative behaviors of collectivistic individuals increased in organizations with more collectivistic norms, findings also show a significant decrease of cooperative behaviors among collectivists in organizations with more individualistic norms (Chatman & Barsade, 1995). To argue that team-oriented or collectivistic individuals always behave in more group-oriented ways is therefore, a false assumption. Rather, collectivists are generally more attuned to social cues in the environment, and will be more likely to contribute to and participate in the group according to standards of normatively acceptable conduct. Culture functions, therefore, as a *frame* that delimits where attention is focused and how one should behave (Giorgi et al., 2015), depending on group standards.

Several studies demonstrate that the type of group—not a group context, per se—is relevant to the performance of collectivistic individuals (Earley, 1993). For those with a collectivist orientation, the type of group influences the motivation to work hard depending on whether they perceive it as an "ingroup" or not. Research shows that collectivists exert greater effort toward a group when it is composed of members who share similar traits and background characteristics (Yamagishi, 2003). Distinctions between when collaboration is perceived as necessary, therefore, are influenced by culture (i.e., *values*) and can guide how much effort will be exerted toward particular teams (Giorgi et al., 2015). Essentially, when team performance has implications for their in-group or when cooperative norms are in place, a collectivistic individual will work hard, but otherwise, such effort may not be exerted.

Complementing these findings, other work in the cross-cultural literature reveals that individualists can also exhibit a willingness to contribute to teams under certain conditions (e.g., Chen, Wasti et al., 2007). First, it is critical to motivate team participation among people with an individualistic orientation by ensuring that they have a choice whether or not to participate (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). It is also important to frame the team as a viable means through which a person can develop their skills and social network (Erez & Somech, 1996; Gundlach, Zivnuska, & Stoner, 2006). Finally, team tasks that are highly interdependent can

also boost the effort of individualists because achieving high performance is dependent on information, resources, and support from other members, which can reduce tendencies to be disengaged (Nouri, Erez, Rockstuhl, Ang, Leshem-Calif, & Rafaeli, 2013).

Thus, the assumption that having teams comprised of collectivists will facilitate more effective teamwork is challenged when we take into account cross-cultural scholarship. It is important to not only consider cultural orientations when seeking to foster members' contribution to teams, but the important influence of collaborative conditions (e.g., group norms, rewards, and task type) of the groups to which they belong. Without considering both differences in collectivistic orientation and the interaction with collaborating conditions, scholars and practitioners alike will not be able to accurately predict and facilitate cooperative team behaviors.

Functioning

Assumption 3: Virtual teams face more interpersonal challenges than traditional teams. Virtual teams are those that share a common goal, but do not entirely overlap in terms of physical, organizational, and other boundaries, thus rely on technological communication tools to some degree (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004). While such teams are fast becoming a primary way for organizations to maintain their competitive advantage, they also pose some challenges. In particular, interpersonal processes can be hindered when virtual tools are utilized, as they provide fewer social cues and opportunities for spontaneous communication compared with face-to-face interactions (Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007). Generally speaking, virtuality refers to the extent to which teams' communication practices rely on technology, occur in real time, and contain information relevant to team effectiveness.

From a cross-cultural perspective, some studies suggest that interpersonal communication processes do indeed suffer when virtual teams are multicultural (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Nam, Lyons, Hwang, and Kim (2009), for instance, showed that culturally heterogeneous teams engaged in less communication than homogenous teams, and these differences were magnified when teams worked virtually. Different expectations of communication practices are one reason why culturally heterogeneous teams struggle to collaborate virtually (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003). Effectiveness is also reduced because the salience of different national groups present in the virtual team fosters the formation of subgroups, which reduce identification with the broader team in virtual contexts (Sohrabi, Gholipour, & Amiri, 2011).

However, it is the work that goes against the mainstream assumption that virtuality is an added obstacle for teams that comes to light in some cross-cultural studies. For instance, other studies showed no differences in culturally homoge-

nous and heterogeneous teams when comparing those who worked virtually versus face-to-face (Lowry, Zhang, Zhou, & Fu, 2010; Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006). Another set of studies suggest that virtual tools can actually prove beneficial when teams are comprised of multicultural members. These studies reveal that culturally heterogeneous teams performed better when they worked through virtual, versus colocated mediums, perhaps because cultural differences became less salient (Staples & Zhao, 2006; Takeuchi, Kass, Schneider, & VanWormer, 2013). When cultural differences are less salient, the *frame* that individuals use to understand the team situation may be more focused on task demands than on the cultural heterogeneity between members. Moreover, individuals may feel less normatively bound to their culture-specific ways of collaborating, which could facilitate the generation of a hybrid team culture (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). The results from this synthesis suggest that virtual teaming may actually be less detrimental to team effectiveness when *categories* of sameness or distinctiveness are not fostered.

The effectiveness of culturally heterogeneous teams when collaborating virtually has been shown to be attributed to a number of factors. Norms for setting and monitoring performance (Crisp & Jarvenpaa, 2013), as well as formal coordinating and scheduling mechanisms (Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001), for example, have both been found to support virtual teaming in multicultural teams. In conjunction with research showing that trust can reduce the negative effect of member diversity on performance in virtual teams (Garrison, Wakefield, Xu, & Kim, 2010), several studies also indicate the value of forming trust early in global virtual teams (Crisp & Jarvenpaa, 2013; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). Finally, research suggests that when virtual global teams develop temporal rhythms to support times when task performance requires greater interdependence, their performance improves (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). Thus, what can generally be considered an assumption in the broader teams literature is challenged when culture is taken into account. Current cross-cultural literature reveals that when certain conditions are in place (e.g., formal norms, emphasis on similarities and deemphasis of differences), interpersonal processes can actually be facilitated rather than hindered when teams communicate through virtual mediums.

Assumption 4: Conflict should always be managed with collective processes for a team to be effective. Although there are instances in which conflict may yield positive team outcomes (e.g., Jehn, 1995, 1997), conflict is most often found to be detrimental to outcomes (O'Neill, Allen, & Hastings, 2013), especially when different types of conflict (i.e., task, social) are intertwined (de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). With that in mind, North American scholars and practitioners alike consistently invest time and effort in finding ways to mitigate the detriments of team conflict.

Honing in on which conflict management strategies are most effective, a meta-analysis on conflict states and processes in teams concluded that management of conflict that is characterized by collectivistic processes (i.e., openness, collaborating) is preferred to strategies described as individualistic processes (i.e., avoiding, competing), which yielded negative results (DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus, & Doty, 2013). Thus, actively dealing with team conflicts as they emerge while utilizing these collectivistic processes is the standard recommendation from the mainstream team literature.

This assumption is debatable when conflict is encountered within culturally diverse teams, however. Research shows that there are significant differences in how people from various cultures define and engage in conflict. For example, conflict resolution approaches can differ across countries. Tashchian, Forrester, and Kalamas (2014) found that extraversion was related to a dominating resolution style in the United States, but related to compromising and avoiding styles in the Republic of Armenia. In other work comparing teams across countries, satisfaction of Brazilians was more negatively influenced by conflict than among Dutch employees, while the level of relationship conflict was higher in The Netherlands than in Brazil (Bisseling & Sobral, 2011). This is a clear example of different *frames*, because some cultures define the experience more negatively because of the occurrence of conflict during interaction (Giorgi et al., 2015). Differences were also found when comparing Mexican and American teams, in which the former showed more relationship conflict than the latter (Watson, Cooper, Torres, & Boyd, 2008). This result contradicts the notion that collectivistic cultures have less conflict than individualistic cultures (Oetzel, 1998), but does support the need to manage conflict differently as cultures vary in their social construction of it. In particular, it suggests that culture shapes the intensity and variety of practices that individuals draw upon (Giorgi et al., 2015) when engaging in conflict, such that some cultures draw on techniques that are more relational than task-oriented.

There are times that strategies drawn from individualistic processes (e.g., avoiding) may be more effective, depending on the cultural composition of the team. Only some team members will feel comfortable voicing their divergent opinions, especially under the context of unequal power distribution, while others may default to more conflict avoidant approaches (Earley & Gibson, 1998). Similarly, individuals who come from a value system where concern for face is high will likely prefer face-saving strategies such as humor, minimization, explanations, and denial (Nureddeen, 2008). In Eastern countries, findings reveal the importance of harmony (e.g., Chen, Ünal, Leung, & Xin, 2016), including in conflict management. More cooperative conflict management strategies were associated with a number of positive team outcomes (Tjosvold, Poon, & Yu, 2005). In contrast,

another study showed that individualistic cultures were more likely to use dominating rather than avoiding or integrating styles to manage conflict (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). These findings provide further evidence that different cultures draw from unique *toolkits*, or means of action that they can rely upon for approaching conflict.

Linking these findings to the broader team literature, when the role of culture is taken into account, the general belief that individuals should address their conflict before moving on with their task is called into question. Although collectivistic management strategies have shown to yield productive conflict, generally speaking, interruptions and communication dysfunctions have led to destructive conflict in the context of culturally diverse teams (Ayoko, Hartel, Hartel, & Callan, 2002). Furthermore, individuals can actually value a conflict-free environment in which uncomfortable conversations are avoided. Because diverse teams are bound to encounter conflict (Stahl et al., 2009), conflict management should be at the forefront of priorities when the intercultural collaboration is a target. Despite consensus in the mainstream team literature that collective conflict processes can enhance team effectiveness, the cross-cultural findings indicate that the practice of conflict management requires insight into the conflict strategies that are leveraged by the various cultures involved. This means that the emergence of conflict does not automatically require a response with strategies involving collectivistic processes. Instead, the type and meaning of conflict should first be assessed, to then inform whether conflict management processes are required, and ultimately, a consideration of whether the individualistic versus collectivistic approach should be implemented to enhance team effectiveness.

Assumption 5: Empowering leadership behaviors make teams more effective. Team effectiveness is a function of influences at multiple levels, including team leadership (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). One form is empowering leadership, in which leaders enhance the autonomy, self-management, and confidence in their teams (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007). Empowering actions of leaders can include sharing power with subordinates by involving them in decision making, delegating authority, holding them accountable, and conveying confidence in their capabilities (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000). Leadership of this type has been shown to have a positive impact on team members' psychological empowerment and to enhance the affective commitment to the team and organization (e.g., Chen, Kirkman et al., 2007; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999: Mathieu et al., 2008). Although some argue that empowering leaders consistently enhance team effectiveness (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), others question whether leadership approaches, including empowerment, will always have the same effect across cultures (Dorfman et al., 1997).

The evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of a leader's behaviors tends to be dependent on whether the behavior is congruent with the norms of the culture in which the leader is operating (House & Aditya, 1997). In more individualistic societies, for instance, empowering forms of leadership are more common and valued (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003), whereas it is not as likely or desirable in more collectivist contexts (Hofstede, 2001a). Relatedly, empowering behaviors are less prevalent among leaders from collectivist societies, as they provide less support for employee initiative than leaders from individualistic societies (Hofstede, 2001b). Wendt, Euwema, and van Emmerik (2009), found that the positive impact of more empowering forms of leadership on team cohesion is not as high in collectivist societies as it is in more individualistic ones. Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, and Farh (2011) also found that individuals from a less collectivist society (e.g., United States) were more likely to feel psychological empowerment when led by an empowering leader than individuals from a collectivist society (e.g., China).

Thus, although there is consensus regarding the generally positive effect of empowering forms of leadership on team processes and outcomes, work coming out of the cross-cultural literature illustrates that empowering leaders do not uniformly and positively influence teams. Rather, the positive effects of empowering leadership are contingent on the cultural orientation of team members. Thus, efforts to select for and train team leaders should go beyond and perhaps even exclude a focus on empowering leadership when teams are characterized by multi- or cross-cultural membership.

Finishing

Assumption 6: Using teams is the optimal approach to tackling complex problems. The increasing attention on teams can largely be attributed to the idea that teams can achieve outcomes of greater value than what could be accomplished by individuals alone, particularly when dealing with complex tasks (Cannon-Bowers & Bowers, 2011). A variety of studies have supported this claim empirically. For example, early laboratory work revealed that teams performed better than individuals on a learning task (Wegner & Zeaman, 1956), while more recent research shows that teams are better at producing knowledge (Wuchty, Jones, & Uzzi, 2007), and that organizations who utilize teams tend to be more sophisticated and more financially successful (Devine, Clayton, Philips, Dunford, & Melner, 1999). Thus, it is widely accepted that teamwork is an optimal approach to tackling complex problems.

The benefits of teams are less straightforward when we consider the cross-cultural literature, however. Culture influences a range of psychological and behavioral processes, including those relevant to teamwork (Stahl et al., 2009), often resulting in a struggle to produce effective outcomes.

Thomas (1999), for example, found that culturally heterogeneous teams underperformed homogeneous teams because they experienced process losses they were unable to overcome. Illuminating what underlies these process losses, a meta-analysis showed the cascading effect from members' cultural backgrounds, to less similarity in values, to less identification with the team (Luijters, van der Zee, & Otten, 2008). Team members' diversity influenced the extent to which they identified with each other, which negatively influenced both performance and member satisfaction (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). Differences in cultural *values* and *categories*, therefore, can slow teams down and detract from their effectiveness.

Fortunately, other cross-cultural research is more optimistic. Cultural intelligence (CQ), a form of cultural competence (Earley & Gardner, 2005), has emerged as a predictor of multicultural team effectiveness. Components of CQ include behavioral flexibility, cultural knowledge, motivation to adapt in cross-cultural settings and cultural metacognition, such as understanding of one's own and others' cultural assumptions and knowledge (Earley & Ang, 2003). Team-level CQ is essential for leveraging cultural diversity, as it works to improve the performance of multicultural teams over time. Metacognitive CQ, which promotes awareness of how others think within the context of the culturally heterogeneous team, predicts the development of shared team *values* (Adair, Hideg, & Spence, 2013), thus may help teams overcome some of the process loss described above. Crotty and Brett (2012) find that CQ supports creativity in multicultural teams over time. Moon (2013) further illustrates how CQ interacts with temporal elements of teamwork—culturally diverse teams can steadily increase their rate of performance such that differences between these and more culturally homogeneous teams are nondistinguishable in later stages of performance. Finally, Erez et al. (2013) show how CQ can be developed through team interaction and how it continuously enhances multicultural team interaction and performance over a 17-week period.

The assumption that complex problems can best be tackled through teamwork is challenged when we incorporate the cross-cultural perspective. Yet, this line of research also reveals that multicultural teams can catch up to more homogenous teams with sufficient time to develop CQ. In spite of a trade-off between effectiveness and efficiency in multicultural teams, these teams have the breadth of expertise to tackle even more complex problems with time. Building cross-cultural scholarship into models of teamwork therefore requires revision to theories of team development that incorporates the emergence of CQ in multicultural contexts over time. In practice, this means that assembling culturally diverse teams is an optimal approach to managing complex tasks, but that the need for additional time should be accounted for.

Discussion

Over the past several decades, the study of teams has matured and evolved (Mathieu et al., 2008), leading to what some have come to refer to as the "golden era" of team scholarship (Salas, Cooke, & Rosen, 2008). While the development of over 130 team models demonstrates impressive progress, theoretical understanding of teams remains stifled because scant effort has been made to synthesize what has been learned from tests of these models in other cultural contexts. In this paper, we gained several important insights by comparing and contrasting results from mainstream and cross-cultural studies in a few focal areas of team research. Below, we discuss what we learned and the implications of this insight for future research.

Theoretical Contribution

By anchoring our article around a prominent team model (i.e., forming, functioning, and finishing; Ilgen et al., 2005), we identify specific areas in mainstream theory where modification is needed, providing a clear path forward for better integration of the broader team and cross-cultural literatures. Even in instances where the literatures largely align, our work highlights certain nuances that should be built into team effectiveness models to account for culture. We found, for example, that trust is essential for effective collaboration regardless of cultural context (i.e., Assumption 1), but cross-cultural research illustrates that team trust formation is contingent on culture-specific factors and shaped by the collective in which individuals are embedded. If integration is to be achieved, it is no longer sufficient to simply model the importance of trust for team effectiveness, but the various paths to trust formation across different cultural settings should now be considered.

In other cases, models of teams did not generalize at all. In mainstream literature, it is assumed that collectively oriented individuals are more willing to join teams and to exert effort toward team tasks (i.e., Assumption 2). However, when tested across cultures, this is found to be false under some contextual conditions (e.g., outgroup team members), whereas individualist-oriented people were found to exert just as much, if not more effort toward the team when certain circumstances are in place (e.g., high interdependence). Longstanding assumptions about the difficulties associated with teaming in virtual contexts (i.e., Assumption 3), optimal approaches to managing team conflict (i.e., Assumption 4), and how teams can best be led (i.e., Assumption 5) as they progress through the functioning phase were also challenged when considered in combination with the cross-cultural literature. Finally, cross-cultural research reveals contingencies surrounding the widespread belief that teamwork is always the best approach to tackling complex issues (i.e., Assumption 6). Taken together, our initial integration reveals that basic

knowledge about forming teams, who should be a part of them, how they should be managed, and what they are capable of achieving does not necessarily hold true when we incorporate non-Western perspectives.

Future Research

One major insight that can be drawn from our synthesis is the notion that integrating mainstream perspectives of teams, which are often focused exclusively on Western samples, and cross-cultural perspectives may be better served by more systematically considering the role of contextual variables. When examining these two streams of research, we see that less effort has been made to adopt an interactional approach that takes into account both cultural differences in team members' attitudes, beliefs and *values*, and facets of the team's context. Our review finds an overwhelming reliance on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, particularly individualism and collectivism, that are operationalized to be individually held by team members. Less focus has been on understanding cultural factors "outside of the mind" or on the influence of the broader team performance context. Lack of specificity of the situational context, where cultural value orientations of team members are posited to affect team effectiveness, limits the possibility of actually identifying boundary conditions for our models across cultures. Despite the difficulty of attaining agreement about how to define and measure situations in a standardized manner (Hogan, 2009), some conceptual and methodological framework is necessary for advancing our understanding of teams.

One approach may be to draw from theories of situation strength and trait activation to characterize more specific aspects of a team environment. Situational strength represents the extent to which contextual constraints are present in the environment (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). In strong situations, behavior is heavily influenced by rules, structures and cues, and variation in expression of individual differences tends to be low. A focus on strong situations may be particularly timely given recent research demonstrating that societies can be classified as tight or lose, with tighter countries having stronger societal norms and greater sanctioning for deviating from norms (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006). Western societies are generally characterized as being looser, and there may be a spillover effect in that weak team situations may be more prevalent in North American contexts. Thus, we argue that variation in why models of team effectiveness do or do not generalize across cultures may be influenced by the extent to which a team context allows for variability. Systematically including situational strength as a contextual variable in studies of teams would enable more robust comparisons across cultures.

Relatedly, Tett and Burnett (2003) argued that the situation matters when it is trait-relevant. This perspective is

critical for considering why team models do or do not generalize across cultures. Individualism and uncertainty avoidance, for instance, may be stronger predictors of team effectiveness when they are activated by the nature of the task (e.g., interdependence, ill-structured task). Collectivism and high-power distance may be more predictive in settings where these traits are both activated and relevant to team performance (e.g., ingroup salience, directive leader). Some research on teams across cultures has begun to adopt this approach, illustrating how facets of the team task interacts with culture to affect performance (Nouri et al., 2013). We advocate that team scholars begin to incorporate trait activating features into their research designs and explore the interaction of these traits with their particular samples.

Although self-report measures provide insights into the ways that group members interact, analyses about why some teams are more effective than others both within and across cultures fundamentally require qualitative approaches to research design. More emic approaches of studying team interaction across cultures—capturing culture-dependent cognitions and behaviors of teams—can provide new insights that can inform our theoretical models. For instance, studies of team conflict management styles conducted in Asia illustrate various approaches to dealing with group conflict as a consequence of distinct concerns during interpersonal interaction (Oetzel et al., 2003). Only through a qualitative approach to studying group interaction would such insights into the conflict management *toolkit* of individuals from the East have been revealed (Giorgi et al., 2015).

Related, if we want to understand further how cultural influences affect team effectiveness, proper measurement techniques within and across cultures are needed. Although the field has made great strides, it is wearisome that many studies continue to use country of origin as a proxy for deep cultural differences or to compare cultures. In addition, we found several studies do not verify whether a construct is viewed similarly across cultures, yet cross-cultural comparisons should not be made without measure equivalence knowledge (Schaffer & Riordan, 2003). The next era of cross-cultural research should be cautious of these methodological pitfalls if we are to confidently put together all of the pieces of the puzzle regarding culture's influence on team effectiveness.

Conclusions

For psychology to truly become a science of human behavior, Segall and colleagues (1998) argued that cross-cultural psychology as a separate entity should eventually cease to exist, as intercultural perspectives should be woven into research efforts across the various psychological disciplines. In this article, we have taken steps to address this

scientific gap that remains 20 years later, as it relates to integration between mainstream and cross-cultural team literatures. By focusing on the fundamental aspects of teams, including how they form, function, and finish in both research streams, we took stock of and worked to integrate accumulated knowledge, with the goal of identifying which existing team assumptions require modification to account for the role of culture, and which can be used to further reinforce fundamental assumptions of team effectiveness, overall providing a foundation for future research, and allowing for a more nuanced and advanced understanding of human behavior within the team context.

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