

# **From Cultural Values to Cross-cultural Interfaces: Hofstede Goes to Africa**

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## ***Abstract***

### **Purpose**

Hofstede's theory may be problematic from both a methodological/theoretical, and practical view when applied to the 80 percent of the Globe we term Developing. It is necessary to break out of an epistemic paradigm and a 'view from nowhere' in order to focus on multiple layers of cultural interfaces within power dynamics that influence the nature of hybrid organizations and individual cultural identity.

### **Design/methodology/approach**

Cross-cultural values theory provides a blunt instrument in Africa, does not take into account global dependencies and is not able to analyse local perceptions of reality within a context of these dependencies. A theory of cultural interfaces is developed that incorporates an Aristotelian phronetic approach to social science.

### **Findings**

This moves away from the universals of analytical rationality towards practical value-rationality that considers culture from a context-dependent viewpoint, provides a synthesis for cultural-institutional approaches, and engages researchers beyond merely looking at differences in cultures and the consequences, and towards what should be done about issues that arise.

### **Originality/value**

By providing an example of how cultural interfaces may be researched, and discussing the associated conceptual issues, it is hope that this will help to move forward the debate about cross-cultural management.

### **Key Words**

Cross-cultural management, cultural interfaces, cultural identity, Africa, international development

## ***Introduction***

The aim of this article is to point the direction towards developing a theory of cross-cultural interfaces. While looking to the critical contribution made by Hofstede (1980) in questioning the transferability of management and organizational principles from one country to another, and in effect challenging the hegemony of Anglo-American theory, it points to the obvious shortcomings of Hofstede's theory in terms of providing any indication of what action should be taken, and its inability to deal with a multilayered, multi-influenced and multicultural context. Here I use the example of sub-Saharan Africa for three main reasons: (1) like 'developing' regions in general it is under-researched by cross-cultural management scholars and therefore neglected in the contributions such study could make to developing theory; (2) the cultural and institutional influences on sub-Saharan countries and the different societies and organizations within its many countries are multifaceted, complex and bring into doubt the efficacy of simplistic comparisons between 'cultures'; and, (3) there is a need for theory to inform action, amidst a complex set of international, national and local power dynamics.

This project involves pulling together several thematic strands: (1) the epistemological shortcomings of Hofstede's and other theory within extant social science and its inability to cope with *what should be*, or cross-cultural management theory's ability to inform action; related to this, (2) the power dynamics involved in cross-cultural interactions that influence understanding, alternatives, solutions and actions within those interactions both short and long term, often providing answers to *what should be*; as part of (3) cultural crossvergence processes and outcomes at various intersections or interfaces at international, national, local, organizational and individual levels: particularly how this gives rise to organizational and individual cultural identity.

In exploring and linking these themes, I offer possible directions, rather than definitive solutions: (1) developing a social scientific approach within cross-cultural theory that is more akin to Aristotle's *phronesis* rather than his *episteme*, which might be more suited to

informing action; (2) integrating an understanding and analysis of power relations in cross-cultural management theory; and (3) focusing on cultural interfaces (at organizational and individual levels) as the main unit of analysis, rather than on different ‘cultures’ (national, group or organization) as entities that can be compared.

The latter, cultural interfaces, is really the linchpin:

- it is impossible to analyse a relationship in a global-local context without considering issues of power, yet in studying ‘a culture’ as an entity, and even comparing it with other such entities, power relationships can be safely ignored;
- it is plausible in studying cultural entities to take a relativist/passive approach where understanding the ‘local’ is paramount; while focusing on an interface forces one to consider outcomes, both desirable or otherwise, where universal versus relativist approaches vie with each other, where power relations might determine the outcome, and where it is difficult for the researcher to sit on the fence.

After exploring the various thematic strands in different literatures (management/organization studies, development and international studies, and their component literatures including cross-cultural psychology, anthropology/sociology and in a limited way political and economic theory) and discussing directions for developing cross-cultural management theory that responds to the need to inform action, copes with power dynamics and focuses on interfaces, the question must be asked, how do we do this? In trying to point towards possible directions I have used the example of the international governance structure in relation to organizations fighting HIV/AIDS and TB in Africa. It may have been easier to look at the operations of a single multinational corporation. Yet this example represents the complexities of not only operating at different levels of international, national and local levels, but also between commercial, public and NGO sectors, and among organizations that are not linked by an overall international strategy, but nonetheless interact within power relations that control at lower hierarchical levels.

The starting point of this project is the problem with Hofstede's theory. This can be looked at from two perspectives: a methodological/theoretical one (it shares issues generally within a crisis of the social sciences); and a practical one (the theory does not work, or is too blunt an instrument in a particular context or situation). For the latter, a much neglected area for cross-cultural management studies is the so called Developing World (comprising about 80% of the Globe: Punnett, 2004). For example, in sub-Saharan Africa issues such as power dynamics, which are neglected by extant cross-cultural management theory, are prominent. For the former, Flyvbjerg's (2001) critique of universal predictive theory is pertinent, and it is to this that I first want to turn, borrowing from his conclusion that revisiting 'phronesis', from the Aristotelian tradition, is a way out of our current impasse within the social sciences which enables us to pay more attention to context-specific, value-laden knowledge, and, Flyvbjerg (2001) contends, to also include issues of power.

### ***From Episteme to Phronesis***

Flyvberg (2001) suggests that we still have a problem with positivism and its emulation of the natural sciences, particularly its tendency towards rationalism, reductionism, and propensity towards establishing context free prediction; and its inability to incorporate context, values, power and intuitive action. Flyvbjerg (2001: 166) holds that 'scientism', or 'the tendency to believe that science holds a reliable method of reaching the truth about the nature of things' still continues to dominate thinking in the social sciences

Epistemic science and predictive theory derive from an Aristotelian concept of *episteme*: based on analytical rationality this is universal, context independent knowledge. Aristotle contrasted this with *techne*, or pragmatic, variable and context-dependent know-how. Yet forgotten in the depths of time is Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, or the analysis of values or 'things that are good or bad for man' as a point of departure for action. It is based on praxis, on context, and therefore on specific cases. It is 'practical value-rationality'. Yet it has little to do with comparing nations on the basis of a limited number of universally applied value

dimensions in the modern Hofstedian tradition. Flyvbjerg (2001: 167) contends that ‘the purpose of social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society’s practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests’ and therefore, ‘The goal of the phronetic approach becomes one of contributing to society’s capacity for value-rational deliberation and action’.

The relevance for cross-cultural management theory is the need to incorporate context specific insight in a multicultural and globalized world. Elucidating the capacity for action through a value-rational approach, is more important, intellectually more stimulating, and more likely to progress the subject area than merely comparing nations or ‘cultures’ along reductionist lines, or trying to predict on this same basis. Triandis’s (2001), urging that emic and implicit responses be captured because so much of culture is implicit and non-conscious, reinforces the need to develop not just new methods to replace unreliable projective techniques as he suggests, but to develop new ‘paradigms’ that are able to deal with implicit, intuitive and context specific action.

This also goes further than Hofstede’s (2001: 15) expressed concern, with studies that replicate and extend his study ‘that they are caught up in the straitjacket of my model, and therefore unlikely to make basic new contributions’. His remark that ‘inspired by Karl Popper..., I made an effort to formulate my conclusions in a tentative and falsifiable way’ underlines the attempt to establish universal, predictive theory, no matter how potentially falsifiable in the tradition of a social science trying to live up to the expectations of the natural sciences. The straightjacket becomes not so much Hofstede’s model, but the underlying paradigm of knowledge creation. Hofstede’s (2007) claim that he has established a new ‘paradigm’ may be misleading. Rather, he continues to work within an established and partially discredited social science paradigm. Its status as a ‘theory’ is more plausible, yet in its capacity to describe and compare national ‘cultures’ from the point of view of values, it provides categories within which to describe certain features of ‘symbolic’ culture, and has limited predictive power. For example, it may be regarded as tautological to say that ‘high

power distance' predicts certain organizational features such as steep hierarchies, or ethical aspects such as high levels of inequality being regarded as ethical, as these are simply adding to the description of 'high power distance', with the latter providing a descriptive category for doing so.

Extant cross-cultural management studies therefore are mostly contained within the straightjacket of universalistic, predictive and potentially falsifiable concepts of social science, which reduce the concept of values to epistemic context-free analytical categories. If this reflects Aristotle's episteme, it is just as problematic that other cross-cultural studies presented in the literature (Harris and Moran, 2000) mirror the Aristotelian concept of *techne*, or pragmatic, variable and context-dependent know-how. More important is to develop scholarship that can handle context-dependent, pragmatic action-oriented diversity on its own terms, based on practical value-rationality. Certainly a large part of this is an ability for such scholarship to take on board a consideration of power, in both what we study as cross-cultural scholars and the way we study it (as well as who does the studying, and why).

One of the necessities of cross-cultural management as a field of study is that scholars should be able to reflect on themselves and on their theory as a product of an international dynamic. Concepts of (geopolitical) power are rarely addressed in cross-cultural management studies, least of all from the standpoint of constituting theory as a product of international power relations. Whilst a distinction is made between *emic* and *etic* world views or knowledge (Peterson and Pike, 2002)), the universalistic *etic* of cultural values theory is an implicit disparaging of indigenous knowledge and logic. However, perhaps ironically, Hofstede (1980b) provided a means of incorporating a consideration of power relations within international management studies.

## ***Transferability and Appropriateness: Cross-cultural Management as Critique***

One of Hofstede's (1980b) main contributions to management scholarship has been to introduce a cross-cultural critique of the transferability of Western (American) management principles to non-Western (non-American) countries. From this, not only should we ask if management is effective, but also we should be asking if it is appropriate within a particular cultural context? Yet for whom it should be appropriate implies relationships of power. This is a question Hofstede (1980b) did not take up. For examples, what is appropriate for foreign shareholders of a multinational corporation operating in an African country, might not be appropriate for local employees or the local community within which the subsidiary is located ('effectiveness' for a Western firm operating in Africa implies that it is operating appropriately for its shareholders in making profits). Not only should power relations within international organizations be considered however, but geopolitical issues also. This was not really taken up in the management literature until over ten years later in another landmark publication.

## ***The Parochial Dinosaur – a Hint at Power Dynamics***

This landmark article, Boyacigiller and Adler (1991), outlines the ascendancy of American management thought, principles and practices around the world due to the economic dominance of the United States after World War II. In the end these two authors ascribe this to parochialism on the part of American managers, rather than anything more sinister. They hint at power relations, yet this is not developed, and has not been taken up generally in the ensuing cross-cultural literature. Concepts of leadership and participatory management, for which Hofstede (1980b) provided the basis for a critique of transferability, have been propagated through MBA programmes and management textbook throughout the world. This has only attracted any degree of derision among scholars working in developing country contexts. For example, a leading book on management in Africa of the 1990s states:

Current theories of leadership....in the West place high value...on teamwork, empowerment ..... The problem is that the amount of hype surrounding such putative

features implies it is a hard sell, even in its place of origin.... Transformational leadership in the West... is more a construct of the rhetoric of management consultants than it is the reality of management practice. It seems likely that – as with Coca-Cola – the less the worth of the product to the consumer the more one needs to envelop it in a promotional mystique... and this helps to disguise its discordance with most of the cultures in which its tenets are applied’ (Blunt and Jones, 1997: 11).

More recent international events have brought the same type of geopolitical forces in operation here into even sharper relief, where Western concepts of ‘democracy’ have been enforced through military intervention (for example Chomsky’s, 2003, critique is illuminating on this subject). Normally within the confines of academia, international power relations are carried out in a far more subtle way, yet reflecting what many commentators have regarded as neo-colonialism in the practices of multinational corporations including those in the not-for-profit sector. For example, Cooke and Kothari’s (2002) provide a useful critique of the imposition of participatory management mainly in the NGO sector. Within the same edited volume, the following harsh critique is delivered:

‘...participatory discourse and practices are part of a wider attempt to obscure the relations of power and influence between elite interests and less powerful groups... (p.122). ....I would argue, however, that participatory discourses are utilized in both the development and managerial contexts because they serve essentially the same purpose of giving the “sense” and warm emotional pull of participation without its substance, and are thus an attempt to placate those without power and obscure the real levers of power inherent in the social relations of global capitalism (p.125).’ (Taylor, 2002)

Postcolonial Theory has provided an elaboration and critique of these more subtle power dynamics within literary studies (Said’s, 1978, *Orientalism* is the landmark study), in development studies (e.g. Mohan, 2002, provides an outline) and more recently in organization studies (Prasad, 2003). Mohan (2002: 157) for example, puts it rather sharply

when saying ‘Postcolonial studies alerts us to the epistemic violence of Eurocentric discourses of the non-West and the possibilities of recovering the voices of the marginalized’. Yet he warns that ‘much of this abstracts cultural processes away from material conditions and is unable to stand outside (or suggest alternatives to) the dominant epistemological frameworks against which they argue.’

It seems that this debate has largely passed by the field of cross-cultural management. Since initiating a critique of Western management hegemony in 1991, Boyacigiller and Adler’s articles has been much quoted, but little has been done to expand on this and to take it on board. International world events, in contributing to cross-cultural dynamics and contextualizing the study of cross-cultural management, seem also to pass us by.

Before moving on to theory construction within the context of developing countries, there are three other important aspects in considering the limitations of Hofstede’s theory, and where we go from here: crossvergence and cultural interfaces, and cultural identities.

### ***Crossvergence and Cultural Interfaces***

Hofstede’s theory appears to remain firmly within the ‘divergence’ camp. That is, there is an assumption that country cultures remain distinct from each other. Hence, there are fundamental differences assumed between French and Italian managers, or American and Japanese managers, and one assumes, British and ‘African’ managers. However, the difficulties in identifying the ‘culture’ of a location such as Hong Kong, at a confluence of Western and Chinese influence, suggest that things might be more complicated than supposed.

Hong Kong represents a complex interface of Western and Chinese culture, business practices and management processes. It is perhaps no accident that theories of cultural crossvergence have been developed by management academics focusing on Hong Kong (Ralston et al, 1994;

Priem et al, 2000). This concept brings together opposing views of globalization, namely convergence and divergence theories.

*Convergence* is based on an assumption that all societies are following the same trajectory. As societies industrialize they embrace capitalism and technology and evolve towards the (Western) industrialized societies (from Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers, 1960). Contained within this must also be noted the influence of television, Hollywood, the global reach of multinational companies, global brands such as Coca Cola and McDonald's, conditional financial aid, structural adjustment programmes, American/Western management education programmes, migration, cosmopolitanization, and so on. These all influence a tendency towards cultural convergence.

*Divergence* argues that national cultures continue to be a primary influence on values, beliefs and attitudes despite globalizing forces and industrialization, and that culture is a long-lived rather than a transient phenomenon. Successive studies that focus on comparing national cultures have sought to demonstrate this (i.e. wider societal values, e.g. Inglehart et al 199b, and Schwartz, 1999; and work related values, e.g. Hofstede, 1980/2003, Trompenaars, 1991, House et al, 2004).

Yet both concepts, of convergence or divergence, do not appear to consider the process of what goes on during cross-cultural interactions. Rather than trying to identify the nature of a cultural entity, such as a country, it would seem more legitimate to discover the nature of intercultural interactions at different levels of analysis, and (to borrow from a phrase from Hofstede, 1980/2003) their consequences.

A third perspective (Beals, 1953; Ralston et al 1994; Priem et al, 2000), that of cultural *crossvergence*, suggests that culture and industrialization will interact to produce a new value system, such as in the case of Hong Kong. It is possible to go further than this in asserting, for example in relation to the way people are managed in organizations, that:

‘Although there may be hegemonic influences from stronger and more successful economies such as the United States that propel transitional and emerging countries to adopt inappropriate solutions, crossvergence or the interaction of different cultural influences in cultures such as South Korea and Hong Kong (Ralston, Gustafson, Terpstra, & Holt, 1993; Priem, Love and Shaffer, 2000) have given rise to successful hybrid management systems. The level of industrial development of a country, its cultural values and the level and nature of cultural interactions may all play a part in the nature of people management systems and their appropriateness to the economic and cultural context within which they operate. The extent to which they prioritize stakeholders’ interests and balance, for example, the potential conflicts between work and home/community life may be a function of cultural values as much as the level of industrial development of a country.’ (Jackson, 2002a: 456)

Crossvergence theory, when stressing the importance of interaction at different levels, may well be the key to understanding not culture as a product or characteristic of a discrete cultural entity such as a nation, but as an *interface* between or interfaces among different cultural influences; between attitudes, beliefs and values, and institutions as cultural manifestations; and within relationships containing power dynamics.

‘Interaction’ as a term is normally applied at the social psychological level of interpersonal relations (Adler and Graham, 1989; Fink, Neyer & Kolling, 2006). Hence the term ‘interfaces’ implies a broader conceptual framework whereby geopolitical dynamics at the macro level are considered, through to the meso levels of inter-organizational interactions, and micro level of interpersonal interactions; and, whereby these different levels further interact to produce diverse hybrid social forms of organization, and multiple forms of individual cultural identity.

Before considering this in more detail, it is necessary to discuss the relationship (in international management and organization studies) between what is considered ‘cultural’ and what is considered ‘institutional’. This is a particularly important issue when it comes to looking at cultural interfaces within developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa.

## ***Interfaces and the Cultural-Institutional Debate***

Within a continuing debate between ‘culturalists’ and ‘institutionalists’, differences across nations are either attributed to institutional arrangements, which are seen as fundamental (e.g. Hickson and McMillan, 1981); or, differences are attributed to cultural factors or, in Hofstede’s parlance, to differences in the ‘software of the mind’ (Hofstede, 1991). Sorge (2004) believes that the two approaches should be complementary. He cites Giddens (1986) in saying that individual behaviour and social structure are reciprocally constituted, that is normative customs that are instituted to be binding are kept in place by acting individuals. Yet on the other hand, individuals do not make behavioural choices without regard to such norms. If individuals make a habit of breaking norms, this is for a specific reason, for example a reaction of an individual in a specific situation. Thence, the challenging of existing norms may become itself institutionalized. An example could be laws enacted in the United States regarding payment of bribes abroad being circumvented by paying a local consultant to handle all the details of a business deal. It may be necessary to do this to compete effectively, and may become an institutional way of dealing with such situations.

Sorge (2004) believes that such an integrative approach will consider both the construction of actors, that is people with values, preferences and knowledge, and the construction of social and societal systems as reciprocally related to an extent that they cannot be separated from each other. However, to see culturalist approaches as focusing ‘on the mind of the individual as the place where differences reside’, and institutionalist approaches focusing ‘on wider norms and standards supported or enforced by institutional machineries’ (p.119) may in itself be seeing the issue from an institutionalist perspective.

Harré, Clarke and de Carlo (1985) for example see an intimate connection between what they term the ‘social order’ (at the macro level) and ‘deep structure of the mind’ (at the micro level). They present this as a hierarchical structure of control of human action. They suggest that structure of mind and the social order have developed hand in hand, mostly through the facility of language. The implied rules by which this top level controls the two lower levels (conscious awareness, and behavioural routines) are discoverable. This has implications for

the way we might view institutions and culture as being parts of the same phenomenon. This view can be traced back to the work of the sociologist Durkheim (1915/1971) on totemism among the indigenous societies of Australia and North America. The members of each clan worshipped a particular animal (e.g. crow), which was also the name of the clan. He argued that the origins of the religious beliefs by which the lives of the people in each clan were governed were derived from the identification with the society (clan). The clan was seen to be greater and more powerful than the individual people within the clan. Ritual (associated, for example, with dancing round the totem pole) reinforced and drove these beliefs home. Thus the deep-seated beliefs that were acted upon unconsciously were no more than a set of implicit rules derived from the society in which the individual lived.

To a certain extent this ‘deep structure’ can be discerned through institutional manifestations. From this point of view the concept of culture should take in ‘that complex whole which involves knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’ (Tylor, 1871), or indeed the ‘human-made part of the environment’ (Herskovits, 1948). In other words, institutions as part of ‘culture’ are created by sentient human beings in interaction interpersonally, inter-organizationally, and inter-nationally. Their rules reflect societal values, and the societal values reflect institutional rules.

Jack Goody (1994), a prominent British social anthropologist, points to the dichotomy in the American tradition of *cultural* anthropology between ‘cultural studies’ concerned with symbols and meaning, and the social (social structures, organizations etc). He maintains that in the European tradition, of *social* anthropology this dichotomy is not readily accepted, and has tended to treat these two categories as virtually synonymous. Certainly this is reflected in Tylor’s classic definition (above), and for example Firth’s (1951) view where culture is seen as the content of social relations, not as some distinct entity. Hence the institutional context both shapes meaning, and is shaped by it. Both are what can be described as culture. Institutions are cultural constructs with rules that are applied in society, and they also shape and are shaped by values, which are part of the meaning systems of society. This is different, for example, from the conceptualization of the American cultural anthropologist Geertz

(1973:89) who sees culture as ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means which men communicate’, and distinguishes between cultural symbols as ‘vehicles of thought’ and social structure as ‘forms of human association’ with a ‘reciprocal interplay’ occurring between them. Goody (1994: 252) therefore maintains that ‘..attempts to differentiate the cultural from the social, or the symbolic from other forms of human interaction, seem open to question. The terms may serve as general signposts to areas of interest within a wider field of social action..’ In terms of this debate Hofstede seems to be firmly in the American camp, distinguishing ‘the software of the mind’ as meaning/value systems and juxtaposing himself to the institutionalists.

However, just when this debate, at least in the European tradition, appears to be redundant, things start to get complicated in Africa. Dia (1996) takes the view that institutions were imposed on African societies during the colonial period. They have largely remained and evolved through the post-colonial period, and mostly are seen as still inappropriate to African societies and their context. Here, rules seem to be at odds with values; institutions appear to be at odds with symbolic culture. The split between (local) culture and ‘global’ or ‘Western’ institutions in Africa and other post-colonial countries can only be explained by geopolitical power relations.

The introduction of colonial institutions into Africa, no doubt, involved a number of elements: firstly the (cultural) background of the colonizing countries; secondly the interaction of colonizers with colonized societies and institutions (for example African institutions such as chiefdoms were integrated into colonial administrations to enlist the help of local chiefs to keep law and order and to collect taxes: Gluckman, 1956/1970); and thirdly the wielding of (economic, military and then ideological) power by the colonizers within the interactions with local communities. There is no doubt also that these institutions have an influence on African communities today, and that they have helped to shape modern and urban African cultures. Through interactions these institutions have also been shaped by African cultural influences which include African institutions (Ayitter, 1991).

The interaction effects among ‘rules’ (institutions), ‘values’ (culture), and ‘control’ (power), may therefore be the way forward in understanding culture as a dynamic, rather than a static entity. In other words, culture is created/recreated at the point of intersection – the interface. Central to this is ‘power’, in Foucault’s (1979: 194) terms, for example: ‘power produces, it makes reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth’. He contends that power relations do not stand apart from other relations, but power is inherent in all relations and is the effect of divisions, inequalities and imbalances found in these relations, and at the same time are preconditions for these differentiations. Dominance in a power relationship has a legitimizing effect. Yet, for Foucault power also infers the possibility of resistance, and that resistance is always part of a power relationship. Hence values (culture) come into conflict with rules (institutions).

So, it is in Africa (and perhaps other post-colonial societies) where a ‘culture’ (as a concrete noun) starts to get fuzzy. When a Hofstede (1980), or a Trompenaars (1993), or a Schwartz (1999), or a House (House et al, 2004) comes along with their questionnaire to ask questions about the values of a representative of the ‘culture’ of South Africa, they are in trouble. Their individual ‘subject’ represents not a ‘culture’, but the confluence of a complex and multi-layered interface that can only be accessed through the agency of individuals’ cultural identity, but can only really be understood through an analysis of the cultural interfaces involved.

It is at this point that I now want to start to develop theory in order to understand the relationships between the different factors described above: namely, multilayered cultural interfaces involving power relations that give rise to different hybrid organizational forms and affect individual’s cultural identities. I now wish to do this by considering the context of a developing region (specifically sub-Saharan Africa) in order to also take on board Flyvbjerg’s (2001: 167) urging to construct a phronetic social science that will contribute ‘to society’s capacity for value-rational deliberation and action’.

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Figure 1 about here

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## ***Cultural Interfaces and Global Dependencies***

Globalization (and imperialism) provides a scenario where ‘developing’ countries are such because of the existence of ‘developed’ countries. This can be conceptualized in two fundamental ways. Dependency theory (Frank, 1969) suggests that today’s Third World underdevelopment is the underside of the same globalizing conditions that led to the First World being developed. The latter’s development is dependent on the former’s underdevelopment. The prime mover in this is capital seeking profits, and this is easiest in countries where labour and resources are cheap and governments are weak. The structural consequence of this is to reproduce the process, and to block local initiatives pursuing their own development paths (Schech and Haggis, 2000). This represents an economic or institutional theory, originally based on Marxist critique of Modernity Theory. Modernity theorists saw the Third World as originally underdeveloped or untouched, and whose trajectory, and the aim of international development, was to modernize in the same direction as the First World.

The second way this can be conceptualized is through postcolonial theory (Said, 1978/1995; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1996). Here the ‘developing’ world is represented in the eyes of the ‘developed’ world. Western imperialism, through Western culture has developed a systematic ‘body of theory and practice’ that constructs or represents the ‘Orient’ (in Said’s, 1978/1995: 49, terms). In colonial times, this has portrayed images of the ‘noble savage’, the ‘wily oriental’, where Westerners are regarded as ‘rational, peaceful, liberal, logical...without natural suspicion and Easterners as irrational, degenerate, primitive, mystical, suspicious, sexually deprived...’. These representations are carried over to Western intellectual and cultural production including research, and management studies (Kanugo and Jaeger, 1990). The acceptance and internalization of such representations by the developing world itself can mean two things. Firstly, there is both an acceptance and challenging of these representations that constitute hybrid forms of presentation of the nature of people of the Third World; and secondly, because this challenging itself grows out of the cultural and intellectual representations of Western discourse, that this ‘contamination’ of the colonized means that

they can never refer back to an 'authentic' identity in pre-colonial times. Any conceptualization of this identity would be by definition seen through the eyes of the colonizer's representations (Kapoor's, 2002). This is similar to the dependency theory critique of modernity theory: that the 'developing' world was created by imperialism (as a form of globalization) and does not exist apart from a developing-developed world dependency. The culturalist view, represented in this case by Postcolonial Theory, brings us to the same point: a concept of purity of local or indigenous thought or practice does not exist.

Briggs and Sharp (2004) examines the resurgence in interest of indigenous knowledge in international development in this light. They view this interest as a result of the failure of Western-centred development approaches, and an unquestioning confidence in the validity of science and Western knowledge, and the denigration of local approaches. Indeed, the Western rational approach was seen as the norm, and local actors face development issues simply as a result of deviating from that norm. Development therefore involves bringing them into line with the universal knowledge of scientific truths. Briggs and Sharp (2004) assert that this was the position whether it applied to management of the soil or management of people. Hence Escobar (1995) sees the dominance of Western knowledge not through a privileged proximity to the truth but as a result of historical and geographic conditions coupled with the geopolitics of power. Following this critique, indigenous knowledge is then seen just as valid as Western knowledge, if not greater in value for addressing local issues. The recognition of indigenous knowledge also provides alternatives by which to challenge conventional international development (and management) praxis, and ways of empowering neglected communities (Briggs and Sharpe, 2004).

However, there is debate about whether the West wants to hear indigenous voices. For example hooks (1990: spelt with a small h), from an autobiographic position in the third world (cited in Briggs and Sharpe, 2004) asserts that Western researchers want only to know about her experiences. They do not want to hear her explanations. This would require them to relinquish their position as experts. There is also a debate about whether 'the subaltern' (in the

language of postcolonial theory) can ever really speak in terms of a true 'indigenous' knowledge (Spivak, 1988).

The first issue is whether that voice will be heard, unless it is expressed in the language, and within the experience, of the West. That is, it may be dismissed as unscientific, unless it can be expressed in the language of formal science. The World Bank's (1998:8) emphasis on incorporating indigenous knowledge (which it quaintly refers to as IK) into development initiatives appears to reflect this view when they state 'IK should complement, rather than compete with global knowledge systems in the implementation of projects' (quoted in Briggs and Sharpe, 2004:667), indicating an incorporation of limited indigenous approaches to the wider scientific approach of development practices, rather than indigenous knowledge presenting any challenge to existing value systems of Western scientific approaches. There appears to be a lack of tolerance of indigenous knowledge and value systems challenging dominant world views or criticizing existing terms of debate and proposing different agendas. The aim appears to be simply adding to the existing ways of doing things (Briggs and Sharpe, 2004).

The second issue is whether an indigenous voice can ever truly be indigenous, and know itself as such in a globalized world where the perceptions of the Third World by the West have been adopted and internalized by 'indigenous' people in the Third World. An example is the extent to which indigenous management practices (such as *Ubuntu* in South Africa: Mbigi, 1997) can be articulated and used given the dominance of Western management practices through universalized management training and education.

So, we can ask again. What happens when a Hofstede (1980), or a Trompenaars (1993), or a Schwartz (1999), or a House (House et al, 2004) comes along with their questionnaire to ask questions about the values of a representative of the 'culture' of South Africa (or any other post-colonial society for that matter)? To what extent can such a respondent give a true representation of 'indigenous values'? Global dependencies/geopolitical interfaces influence

fundamentally the cultural identity of a person in South Africa, Nigeria, India, China, and Eastern and Central Europe. Yet this is looking at cultural interfaces at one level of cross-cultural analysis only: an *intercontinental* (North-South, West-East or Global-Local) level, where post-colonial/neo-colonial historical and current international dynamics are played out through military, political and economic power relations (creating mainly economic dependencies and analysed predominantly through Dependency Theory); and where ideological dependencies are created and recreated through education, TV, Hollywood, and many other forms of communication (analysed predominantly through Postcolonial Theory). I now turn to multiple levels of cross-cultural interfaces, power, and outcomes in terms of cultural identities.

### ***Levels of Cultural Interface, Power and Cultural Identity***

I have tried to capture those relationships between power and multiple levels of cross-cultural interaction that comprise the concept of cultural interfaces explicated in the current article in Figure 1, and applied to previous work that focuses on sub-Saharan Africa.

Power relations at the interface of local-global interactions provide different perception of ‘the local’ by both ‘global’ or Western players, and local players (‘subalterns’ in Spivak’s, 1988, terms). Views propagated within this power relationship, according to postcolonial theory are accepted by both sets of players. Hence this view of Africa, perpetrated by many of the media in the West, might be termed:

*‘Oh dear, look at those poor Africans!’ View, as typified in:*

‘Africa was weak before the Europeans touched its coasts. Nature is not kind to it. This may be the birthplace of mankind, but it is hardly surprising that humans sought other continents to live in’. (*The Economist*, May 11th 2000).

This view has created, and perpetuates, the \$60 billion international aid business (Dichter, 1999; Rimmer, 1991). This view can also be linked with Jaeger and Kanungo's (1990) and other management theorists' pejorative view of management in developing countries: what Jackson (2004) has termed a *post-colonial* management system employing (in Etzioni's, 1975, terms) 'coercive' management control. This follows a belief that Africans are basically lazy (Abudu, 1986) and need authoritarian leadership (Choudury, 1986).

Given that this is the way Africa and 'African' management may be seen, the 'solution', under Modernity Theory in development studies, is to provide Western instrumental views of how Africa should be perceived, and to reflect this in results-oriented organizational management. Hence, a second view:

*Instrumental View: Africa as a Business Opportunity*, as typified in:

'We look at Africa as the last emerging market ..... People who invested in Japan after World War II when it was in ruins were viewed as quite radical, but they made a lot of money. That's the same argument we're making with Africa today'. (*Fortune*, February 19th, 1996).

This view is no stranger to Africa, which has for centuries been regarded as a business opportunity, first through the slave trade, and then through colonialism, and in more recent years from neo-colonial exploitation (Barratt-Brown, 1995). This view is reflected increasingly in the management literature: a results-oriented Western or instrumental management system is required in Africa (Jackson, 2004), and in Etzioni's (1975) terms requires 'remunerative' management control.

Although for Foucault, dominance in a power relationship has a legitimizing effect, power also infers the possibility of resistance, as we saw above. This is also reflected in Postcolonial Theory. So, although these two views of Africa outlined above are represented in the management literature emanating from Africans (in Western academia): the *Oh dear, look at*

*those poor Africans!*’ or *post-colonial* view can be seen in Kiggundu’s (a Ugandan) writing (e.g. Kiggundu, 1988), and more recently, the alternative ‘Western’ view can be found in Kamoche’s (a Kenyan) writing (e.g. Kamoche, 2000). Resistance to these views are mainly articulated in the South African popular management press, through *Ubuntu* management (e.g. Mbigi, 1997). This resistance can be traced back to a wider view of Africa, as follows:

*Humanistic or African Renaissance View*, as typified in:

‘Our vision of an African renaissance must have as one of its central aims the provision of a better life for these masses of the people whom we say must enjoy and exercise the right to determine their future. That renaissance must therefore address the critical question of sustainable development which impacts positively on the standard of living and the quality of life of the masses of our people.’ (Thabo Mbeki, Africa Renaissance Conference, September 1998).

Ayittey (1991) contends that traditional African institutions did not foster authoritarian leadership. Chiefs ruled by consensus, contrary to perceptions in the management literature (Kiggundu, 1988). Pre-colonial institutions may have reflected a more humanistic view where people were valued for their intrinsic worth (what they are), rather than their instrumental worth (what they can do) (Jackson, 2004). In management theory, this view may represent an example of what Etzioni (1975) has termed ‘normative’ control.

These three ‘ideal type’ management systems (Jackson, 2004) reflect perceptions, and actual realities, of the way organizations are, or may be managed, within an inter-continental power relationship, and form the basis of an analysis of cultural interfaces that examines cultural influences. These, and other ‘management systems’, may be discerned in different hybrid management/organization forms, although what Jackson (2004) terms ‘post-instrumental’ management (a carrot-and-stick form of remunerative control reflecting mature ‘contingency’ Western management systems) is likely to be dominant because of existing power relations. Indeed, in a 15 sub-Saharan country study, African managers expressed a view that they

would like to see both a higher level of result-oriented management, with a higher level of humanistic, people-centred management in their organizations, with a lower level of coercive-oriented management (Jackson, 2004). In the ensuing qualitative study of some ten organizations in each of four African countries (Jackson, 2004), there was evidence of what Dia (1996) has referred to as the disconnect thesis, which I represented above as a split between (African) culture and (Western) institutions: African staff reflected that when they went into work in the morning they were stepping outside their culture, and when they returned home at night they were stepping back into their own culture. If this type of split cultural identity is required, then again it would be interesting to ponder on what a Hofstede or a GLOBE study might be tapping into. The point being that simply describing ‘a culture’ gives us no understanding of the influences at work at the interface of different cultural/institutional systems, no understanding of the power relations involved, and therefore no way that understanding can inform action.

So far I have concentrated on the inter-continental (West-East or North-South) cultural level of analysis. While this type of interface is fundamental to Postcolonial Theory (and indeed Dependency Theory), it is not the only level at which cultural interfaces can be analysed (Figure 1). Historically, colonial powers discouraged interactions between African states, as evidenced now with transport lines going from towns to port within each country, rather than there being any significant transnational highways and railways. Trade was between colonized and colonizers (Barratt Brown, 1995). This tradition is perpetuated in many management comparative studies which include African countries, where the main comparator is between African countries (as a bloc) and Western countries (Noordeharven and Tidjani, 2001). This is perhaps an example of where historical power relation have influenced the actual possibilities of current nation to nation interfaces, not simply the nature of interfaces.

What we know from the recent history of Africa is that the colonial powers (originally, Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain at the Berlin Conference in 1884) divided

up sub-Saharan Africa among themselves (Reader, 1998). We also know that there was, and is, huge amounts of informal interactions across borders, not least through the informal sector of the economy which is substantial in Africa (Barratt Brown, 1995: this level of informal enterprise in Africa belies the myth of the 'lazy African', and rather supports an assumption of the alienated African in Western style work organizations). If the national borders of Africa are artificial, and relatively recent colonial inventions; and, if there are inter-ethnic bonds, and trade and familial interactions across borders, one would expect to find significant differences among ethnic groups, and little or no significant differences among neighbouring nations.

Jackson (2004) found the opposite. The study that sampled managers from 15 sub-Saharan countries, and ethnic groups within each country found more significant differences among countries than among cultural/ethnic groups within each country. That African nations have stayed intact since independence, despite internal rifts, such as in Nigeria, provides some explanations: countries have forged a national identity that has been enduring. Another explanation is from the nature of 'tribes' and ethnic identity in many African countries today, as being both colonial inventions, and transient.

For example, Thomson (2000) argues that current ethnic groups in Nigeria are a creation of colonialism, taking the example of the Yoruba. Previous to colonial rule the term Yoruba did not exist. People of the region identified themselves as Oyo, Ketu, Egba, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ekiti, Ondo or members of other smaller groupings, although they were aware of each other and had links through trade, social contacts or war. They had a common language, but with different dialects that were not always mutually understandable. The colonial authorities wanted larger communities to deal with, as did the missionaries who consequently invented a standard Yoruba vernacular based on the Oyo dialect, and printed a Yoruba bible. If people wanted access to Western education they had to adopt this common language. Similar stories, Thomson (2000) claims, can be told for other groups in Nigeria, and other African countries.

A further explanation is what Jackson and Nana Nzepa (2004) have called phagocytosis to describe the tendency, noted in Cameroon, as follows.

‘...formal power through the administrative influences of HRM systems (e.g. formal selection, appraisal and promotion procedures) is weak in terms of challenging the interests of the dominant group. This ‘tribalization’ of the managerial workforce appears not to relate to any inherent ethnic antagonisms, but simply to political polarization along apparent ethnic lines. ....The process of ethnic phagocytosis (smaller groups being swallowed up by dominant groups) that this stimulates may actually be having an effect on the apparent ethnic composition of the country. It is therefore not unusual in the private sector of the economy, for a Bakoko or Yabassi (both minority ethnic groupings) to present themselves as the more prestigious and influential Douala in the commercial city and port of the same name. Similarly, within the public sector, members of the various small minority groups around the Central Province may present themselves as the politically dominant Beti.’ (Jackson and Nana Nzepa, 2004: 217-8).

This therefore also reflects a pattern of informal ‘tribal’ power within the public and private sectors in Cameroon. This process, at least in part, explains Jackson’s (2004) finding that more significant differences exist among nations than among ethno-linguistic groups. The colonial creation of tribes, reflect relationships of power, and indeed an interrelationship among the levels of cultural interfaces depicted in Figure 1.

It is simply not possible to describe fully the intricacies of these interrelationship within the word limits of this journal, other than to commend this aspect to more rigorous investigations within cross-cultural management/organization studies of Africa, and other developing regions, and to feed this into ‘mainstream’ cross-cultural theory. I now want to draw together the points made in this article, and suggest ways forward for theory development and empirical research.

## ***Breaking Out of the Paradigm: Towards a Phronetic Approach***

I started this article by considering the concept of *phronesis*, as presented by Flyvbjerg (2001), as a means of breaking out of the paradigm within which Hofstede (1980), and others undertaking similar cultural values research, appear to be working. Epistemic science presents a view ‘from nowhere’. That is, it assumes a unified ‘we’ which simply is impossible to conceive from a cross-cultural perspective. On the one hand *Culture’s Consequences* provides an explication and support of this, Hofstede extols this, yet the nature of the study presents just this view from nowhere (as a universal etc). Flyvbjerg (2001: 61) asserts that phronetic researchers ‘can see no neutral ground, no “view from nowhere” for their work’.

A ‘view from somewhere’ stems from the concept of interfaces in cross-cultural research. In the section above, different views of Africa, and African management and organization, were explored. These views come from somewhere, can be understood by Postcolonial analysis (or, for example Marxian concepts of false consciousness), but exist in various forms at various cross-cultural interfaces. Put another way, if our focus of research is now directed towards where and how cultural influences intersect (interface) we are interested in the nature of value-rationality that operates at that interface, the reasons why that value rationality exists, including the different influences that have shaped that value-rationality and processes of power involved, and the consequences, such as the solutions that are provided to questions posed by Flyvbjerg (2001) as representing the essence of phronetic research: (1) Where are we going? (2) Is this desirable? (3) What should be done?

Now, taking this approach could simply result in relativism. The contrast made between episteme and phronesis could simply be equated with a contrast between universalism and relativism, the latter being dependent on context and the former on establishing a universal instrumental rationalism. As Nonaka and Toyama (2007, who also cite Flyvbjerg) point out, the relativist view that everything is subjective with no universality is of little practical use. Indeed, they site the interactions of different subjectivities within the realm of knowledge creation: ‘What is “truth” depends on who we are (values) and from where we look at it

(context). And it is the differences in our values and contexts that create new knowledge’ (Nonaka and Toyama, 2007: 374). This is the view I take here. The objective of studying cultural interfaces is not merely to learn about the influences (antecedents) of hybrid cultural forms. It is also about studying what knowledge is created from this and how; and, what use is this, and to whom (the appropriateness of the knowledge created to the context in which it is applied: e.g. management principles and practices that are created through interaction between powerful Western organizations and weak African organizations or individual managers, and their appropriateness to Africa staff).

Yet bound up with this is the analysis of power within each interface: who/what wields power in what form and how? What are the results of power in this relationship? Although an interface can be conceptualized as an intersection of various relationships, in the original meaning of the term is ‘a common point or boundary between two things, subjects, etc’ (Collins English Dictionary, 1986). This assumes a bilateral relationship, rather than a multilateral one. An organizational or individual at any one time may relate to many different other organizations or individuals. Yet the point of analysis (interface) is the relationship between one organization/individual, and one other organization/individual. These relationships will affect all other relationships. This may be better understood in the visualization in Figure 2

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Let us take the relationship between E and J. Knowledge is created at this interface (EJ). Yet E is more powerful than J. E may be a head office of a MNC, with J as a subsidiary. Or E may be USAID and J an African national government department, a recipient of development aid. Both E and J may each be the centre of a whole network of interactions and relationships, but each of these interfaces must be studied separately, yet in connection with all other relationships that E might have, or J may have. F, as a more powerful entity than E may have

tremendous influence on the way E conducts its business with J. This may then have a bearing on the way J conducts its business with N. N may be a community level NGO, with very little or no influence on the policies made by F (perhaps in this example the World Bank). Yet in each of these interfaces (the subject of analysis) knowledge is produced through interaction within a power relationship, and organizations at each hierarchical level influence and/or are influenced by this knowledge creation.

The relativist nature of this model is purely abstract. Each organization/individual A to O may have their own set of values and perceive reality within the various relationships in a specific way. In an abstract way each of these 'world views' may be equal in value to any other. But as we have seen above, power legitimizes (Foucault, 1979). This legitimization takes two forms: the legitimization of the view of the most powerful in the relationship; and, the legitimization of the researcher (not forgetting that in most cases this will be undertaken from a Western perspective, with indigenous interpretations/explanations struggling for legitimization) with the relationship between researcher and researched constituting another interface.

This then brings us back to Flyvbjerg's (2001) three phronetic questions which I believe are so important to researching interfaces, and to which he adds a fourth: (4) Who gains and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?

An important issue in cross-cultural management research is not so much that nations or cultural groups are different, and have different world views, but what do we do with this information when looking at the consequences in the interface between two of those 'entities'? If Hofstede's theory suggests that it may be inappropriate to transpose participatory management from a low power culture to a high one, what do we do about it. More importantly, in the global scheme of things, if a superpower believes that it is more appropriate to implement 'democracy' in an authoritarian society, what should it do about it. This implies: (1) where is it actually going with this? (2) is this desirable or not? (3) who

stands to gain or lose by going in this direction? (the ‘power’ question is now at number 3), and (4) what should now be done about this? These are simply questions that are not necessary to ask within existing comparative approaches to cross-cultural study, but are fundamental when focusing on the interface as a unit of analysis.

These, of course, constitute political questions. Yet to what extent is Hofstede’s (and other’s) work politically neutral and value free? Within a phronetic approach, the researcher is responsible for informing action, which includes answering the question ‘What should be done about this?’.

Flyvbjerg (2001) points out that within a dominant concept of theoretical, basic science (episteme) on the one hand, and applied science (techne – or what many social science funding bodies are calling ‘knowledge transfer’) there is no real link between the two. As an example, Hofstede’s theory might suggest that participatory management might not work in high power distance cultures. Through ‘knowledge transfer’ (techne) programmes we might advise policy makers/business leaders and managers that this is the case, and why. But this epistemic (universalistic, rational) knowledge does not say anything about what should be done in any specific case (it does not translate into ‘techne’ very well). This will only come as a result of looking at contexts or cases within the different levels of cultural interfaces, within a power dynamic (Figure 1), and employing value-rational questions.

Connected with this, which Flyvbjerg also discusses, is the ‘importance’ or relevance of research. I would take the view that much cross-cultural management research is not important, does not address real issues, and has no particular value-rationality. We appear to be slow in moving away from cross-cultural research that simply compares nations on different value dimensions (see Smith’s, 2001, critique) for often no apparent reason other than the researcher has access to samples in particular countries.

Given these comments above, and the need to research issues that have some kind of social consequences (bearing in mind as social scientists, we are addressing social issues that often do not respond to rational-universalistic approaches), and a need to incorporate factors that involve power and relationships at multiple levels, in sum what should an approach that focuses on interfaces look like, and specifically how do we research this?

### ***Researching Cultural Interfaces***

What we are aiming at is to look at the nature of the interface, as it converges on the organization, or on the individual. I want to illustrate this with reference to an ongoing research project that focuses on managing health project delivery in Southern Africa in the area of HIV/AIDS and TB (Author self cite, in press). This research involves a premise that there is a gap between the billions of dollars spent on, and results achieved in, combating HIV/AIDS and the related disease TB. Interventions at any level seem not to make an impact on the progress of the pandemic, nor its implications for economic and social development. Both cultural and institutional reasons may exist in African countries for a disparity between resources and achievements in tackling HIV/AIDS and TB. Differences between Western policies and practices, and expectations of different stakeholders and communities in African countries may contribute to this disparity. Governments, supra-government agencies, and increasingly private sector organizations drive policies and practices in such service delivery, with very weak feedback loops at local level.

The first stage, is to map out the relationships involved at different levels (Figure 3), so that we can analyse the interface at the level of the organization and (depending on our subject matter but assuming that we obtain our data from individuals, rather than ‘an organization’) at the level of the individual.

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Figure 3 about here

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In the context of the HIV/AIDS and TB project, we have called this the ‘international governance structure’ (Figure 3). We can pinpoint any organization in this structure at different interface of culture, institutions and power (all three are inseparably connected). This involves the way all this comes together: different perceptions about the values, the way things are done, the reason for doing them, the rules that pertain to what should be done; different rules about what should be done and how managers should conduct themselves for example, and the power relationships that can enforce one over the other.

To focus on one organization within the international governance structure (e.g. a local NGO implementing a particular project) assumes that we have to obtain information on the perceptions of those interfaces at various locations within the ‘governance structure’. That is, managers of that particular local NGO will have views on the relationship with donors, government departments, local communities, and so, in terms of the way that impinges on their objectives, what they do, how they do it, and how they evaluate what they do. Donors may have another perception, government departments may have another, and their local community ‘clients’ may have another.

By doing this we are actually investigating multiple interfaces. That is, at each point of investigation we encounter a different set of interactions and confluences that provide other interfaces. So, if we now focus on the view from the Gates Foundation in the United States, the view that we obtain (even though the investigation may be about the specific local NGO in, say, South Africa) we are getting a view from an organization at the point of another interface: an organization within the private sector that is providing major finance for projects in Africa, at a local level, and having the power to decide who gets funding and who does not. Officers of this organization will have particular (cultural) views of how this money should be spent, what type of NGOs should be supported and what type of actions should be taken to address HIV/AIDS and TB, what kind of management structures and systems it should have in place and how it should evaluate what it does. Such an organization will have a strong policy formulation role, with national level interpretation of policy (departments of health, for

example) with local NGOs having an implementation role with very weak feedback capacity (Figure 3). ‘Local’ or ‘indigenous’ methodologies may be ignored or debunked by policy makers, policy interpreters and policy implementers alike: because (from a Dependency Theory viewpoint) policy interpreters/policy implementers will not get the funding if they do otherwise; and (from a Postcolonial Theory viewpoint) the ‘global’ view will be adopted (internalized) by the national policy interpreters and local implementers (‘Western’ methodologies will be ideologically favoured over more ‘backward’ local ones: allowing for ‘resistance’ and some element of crossvergence and hybridization)

If the purpose of the research is to understand why there is a gap between inputs of resources and outcomes within this governance structure generally, then we have to look at multiple interfaces within this structure. An *interface* is really a point of investigation from a cross-cultural perspectives; whereas, cross-cultural *interaction* is the dynamic itself.

If the starting point of research is to locate the organization within the international governance structure, it is then possible to ask, how is the success of the organization (whether it is an NGO project, or a local subsidiary of a MNC) influenced and judged by its position within the governance structure? It is then important, from this, to flag up possible types of questions/hypotheses that may be appropriate in building a phronetic cross-cultural perspective. It is not sufficient to say (from Hofstede) that inappropriate management methods are being used, and imposed on projects at local level. From Postcolonial Theory, perceptions of ‘Oh, those poor Africans!’ may prejudice research as well as the way projects are managed North to South. Similarly, perceptions of Western solutions in terms of instrumental human resource management (the extent to which a human is a ‘resource’ is open to question from a humanistic perspective: Jackson, 2002) may also prejudice the nature and outcomes of the research (this is much in evidence in the literature discussed above: Kiggundu, 1988, Jaeger and Kunungo, 1990, Kamoche, 2000), as well as the nature of the management of international projects itself.

Any representation of reality, and indeed any investigation, has to be undertaken through the agency of individual cultural identity, and individual knowledge as I noted above. At the organizational level it is possible to speak about *hybrid organizational forms* that have varying degrees of appropriateness to their local context, at the interfaces of cultural influences. At the individual level, it is necessary to talk about *cultural identity*. Again, this identity has to be considered at a cultural interface.

Through considering how people understand their identity and understand knowledge about their world through a Postcolonial conceptualization, one is reminded of Marx's theory of false consciousness. Hence Larrain (1979: 39) contends that 'What men (sic) think is necessarily referred to and conditioned by the historical reality of society.' In the case of Postcolonial analysis, this is the historic and present day context of a post-colonial world. Hence, any conceptualization about self or a person's existence that is articulated by an individual, for example in an interview, has to be interpreted within that context. Yet each individual is affected differently by their context. A theory of cultural influence, such as Chao and Moon's (2005) idea of a cultural mosaic through their meta-analysis of theories that cover this area, is useful. It includes within the mosaic different factors such as demographic, geographic and associative aspects that are likely to comprise the total of cultural identity. Yet it fails to place this within the dynamics of power. Marxist theory does this by a concept of false consciousness related to one's relationship to the means of production. Postcolonial theory does this by its concept of Western (dominant) views of 'the orient' being projected onto and accepted by 'subalterns' who cannot then articulate their identity in any terms other than through the eyes of the 'colonizers' (Said, 1978/1995; Spivak, 1996.). However, the Foucaultian proposition that power infers the possibility of resistance suggests cultural crossvergence and hybridity, rather than cultural convergence. Dia's (1996) disconnect thesis discussed above suggests a continuing disconnection (whether complete or incomplete) between post-colonial institutions and African culture. The different perceptions of Africa and of management systems within Africa (Figure 1) discussed above suggests that there may be, perhaps, varying degrees of 'false consciousness'. Or, if this is assuming that the *post-*

*colonial* view is false, and the *humanistic/African renaissance* view is true (see Figure 1), then we might conclude that these are just varying cultural/historical perceptions that different people/stakeholders have, and that we should not make value judgement about one or the other. The researcher has to unravel this. Yet I would suggest that this is virtually impossible using an epistemic paradigm. It simply means that we can make no sense of responses from a Hofstede-type questionnaire. This is where a phronetic framework might be useful.

In sum, a research approach that focuses on interfaces as a unit of research should consider the following steps:

1. Outline the key socially/organizationally/individually significant issues being addressed (e.g. the block between inputs and outputs in development health funding)
2. Map the international governance structure within which the organizations of interest operate (e.g. see Figure 3), in order to identify the possible combinations of interfaces that the organization(s) (your case studies) are involved in, and those that are likely to influence and affect the issue(s) being investigated.
3. Identify and analyse the major power dynamics within the governance structure (inter-continental or north-south, east-west; inter-national; inter-ethnic; etc: see Figure 1) and their likely influences on more specific interactions that are directly pertinent to the issues and cases in which you are interested. For example, I have been interested in this article on Postcolonial analysis of power relationships in Africa and the way these effect the interpretation of Where are we going?, What is desirable? And What should be done?
4. Identify the specific organization(s) in which you are interested, and their relevant interfaces (links with other organizations). Identify the key individuals whom you wish to interview who are likely to provide perceptions of the nature of their organization, the links with other organizations and influences on the way they work and how these influence other organization. For example, I have been interested in the way donor organizations (e.g. Oxfam, Department for International Development) have influenced the way NGOs are managed in South Africa. Perceptions of key

individuals from each organization within each interface provide valuable insights into this relationship, and can shed light on the problems of cultural misunderstandings that influence inefficiencies in the way money is distributed and used, within a relationship of power.

5. As our way of understanding organizations can only be through the agency of individuals, as much information must also be obtained about the interfaces that influence or have influenced those key individuals (e.g. the MBA course attended at the local US university; family, outside institutions) but also this must be understood in the general context of north-south geopolitical interaction, inter-ethnic interactions and other processes such as phagocytosis (in fact those interactions and processes in Figure 1), in order to understand as much as possible about the cultural identity of the key individual, and the bearing that this has on the story being told. This does often involve sensitivities (e.g. ethnicity in South Africa) which may require experience, or a 'cultural informant', to negotiate.
6. Once the data has been collected, the researcher could just simply collate it, compare the accounts, focus on differences in these accounts, flag these up as potential problem areas with each interface (e.g. the blocks in cultural understanding that render development aid inefficient in these cases in fighting HIV/AIDS), and write a report or journal article including the researcher's recommendations for action. Yet I would recommend first the following.
7. Feed back the information; get the project participants together in a workshop; discuss the results; discuss differences such as indigenous versus global interpretations and the difficulties in expressing and gaining acceptance of the former; discuss the power relations identified; address the issues; arrive at solution. Often informants/participants are not brought together in a research project to share and discuss results, and often in organizational problem solving the different 'stakeholders' are not brought together in one forum. Much can be gained through bringing together, for example, policy makers in international donor organizations, national government officials, and regional and local levels NGO managers and staff.

## ***Some Conclusions***

In many ways the phronetic approach suggests an entry into political debate. Using a value-rationality, it is difficult for social scientists to stand outside the social implications of the phenomenon they are studying. If we see Power Distance as an obstacle to implementing participatory management in a particular African country, what do we do? First we have to make sure that, as researchers, we have got it right. From a post-colonial/coercive management perspective (Figure 1), this high Power Distance may be an appropriate assumption, but from a humanistic/African renaissance management perspective (Figure 1) it may not be. We have to be aware of cultural/power influences on our own work. If an organization does indeed have a high Power Distance culture, is it best to change it, or leave it as it is? Is it appropriate to the local cultural context? Is it effective for whom: shareholders, employees, etc? In whose interest is it to change this culture? Where are we going with this? For what reason?

In other words, it is not the job of a social scientist merely to point out that organizations/managers/people in a particular country have a different culture to those in another country, and therefore our management practices might not work there. There may be both a flaw in the way we derive/perceive local culture, and in the assumptions we make about the implications of those differences: whose values/interests are we protecting or ignoring? These are all variations of Flyvbjerg's (2001) four basic value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? Who stands to gain or lose? What should be done? For many published cross-cultural management studies, these questions are completely irrelevant. Yet I would question the social relevance of such research.

This article has presented an exploration of the direction that cross-cultural management and organization research could take. It has been necessary to explore widely, yet the aim has been to continue the critical contribution that cross-cultural management research has made

through the efforts of Hofstede and others by constructing an approach that focuses on cultural interfaces. The seminal contribution of Hofstede was to critique the universal nature of Western management and organizational principles and practices. It is unfortunate that much of the critique of Hofstede's contribution has not led to any significant new direction. Focusing on cultural interfaces may present a possible direction.

Clearly much work still has to be done on the nature of cultural interfaces at the organizational level and individual level, and the nature of cultural hybridity and organizational effectiveness and appropriateness, and how we research this, ultimately through the agency of individual identity. There is a growing literature on cultural identity, of which little has been explored in the current article, and which needs to be carefully examined and integrated into cross-cultural management studies. There is no doubt that epistemic social sciences is at a dead-end: it appears to be going no further. That is not to say that studies such as Hofstede's have no value. It simply means that they are not asking appropriate questions in a post-colonial world where 80 percent of the Globe are mostly marginalized through power relations that keep them at a distance in material and ideological terms, and keep them rather like a quaint addition to mainstream cross-cultural management studies.

As social scientists we cannot stand back with 'a view from nowhere'. There is increasingly a need for cross-cultural management studies to address real issues and from this to progress theory in a way that reflects a cross-cultural view. That is, if 'cultures' vary on values, and if we are products of particular cultural influences, how does that place us as observers of cultural phenomenon? This goes beyond the emic/etic debate, into the realm of power relations and ultimately the political realm of: What should be done about it?

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Figure 1 Cross-cultural Analysis in Africa

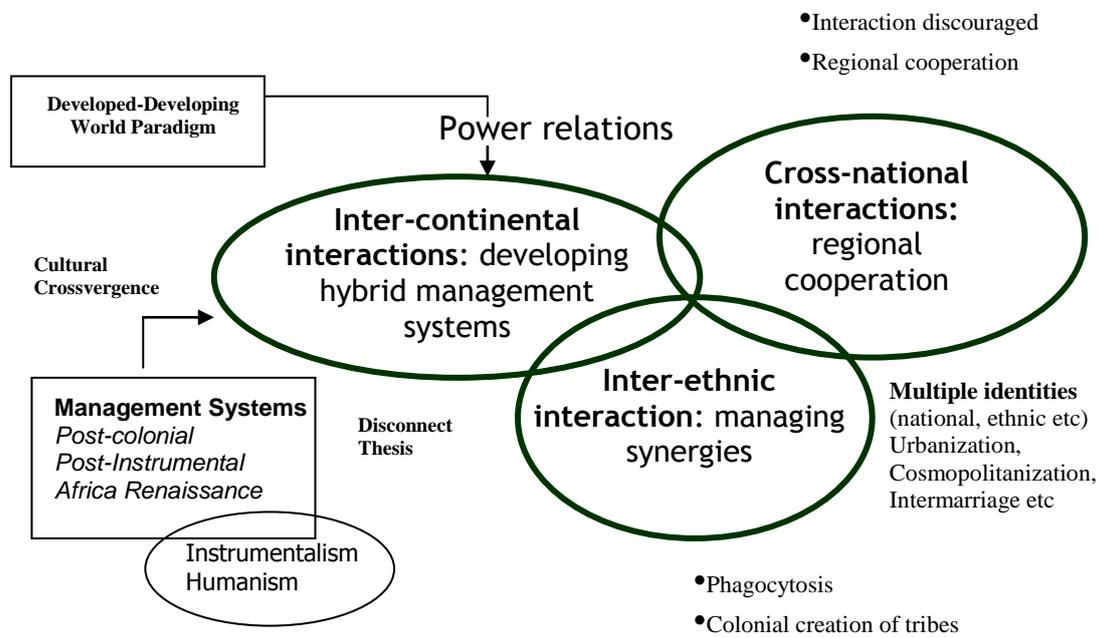


Figure 3 International governance structure in health project delivery

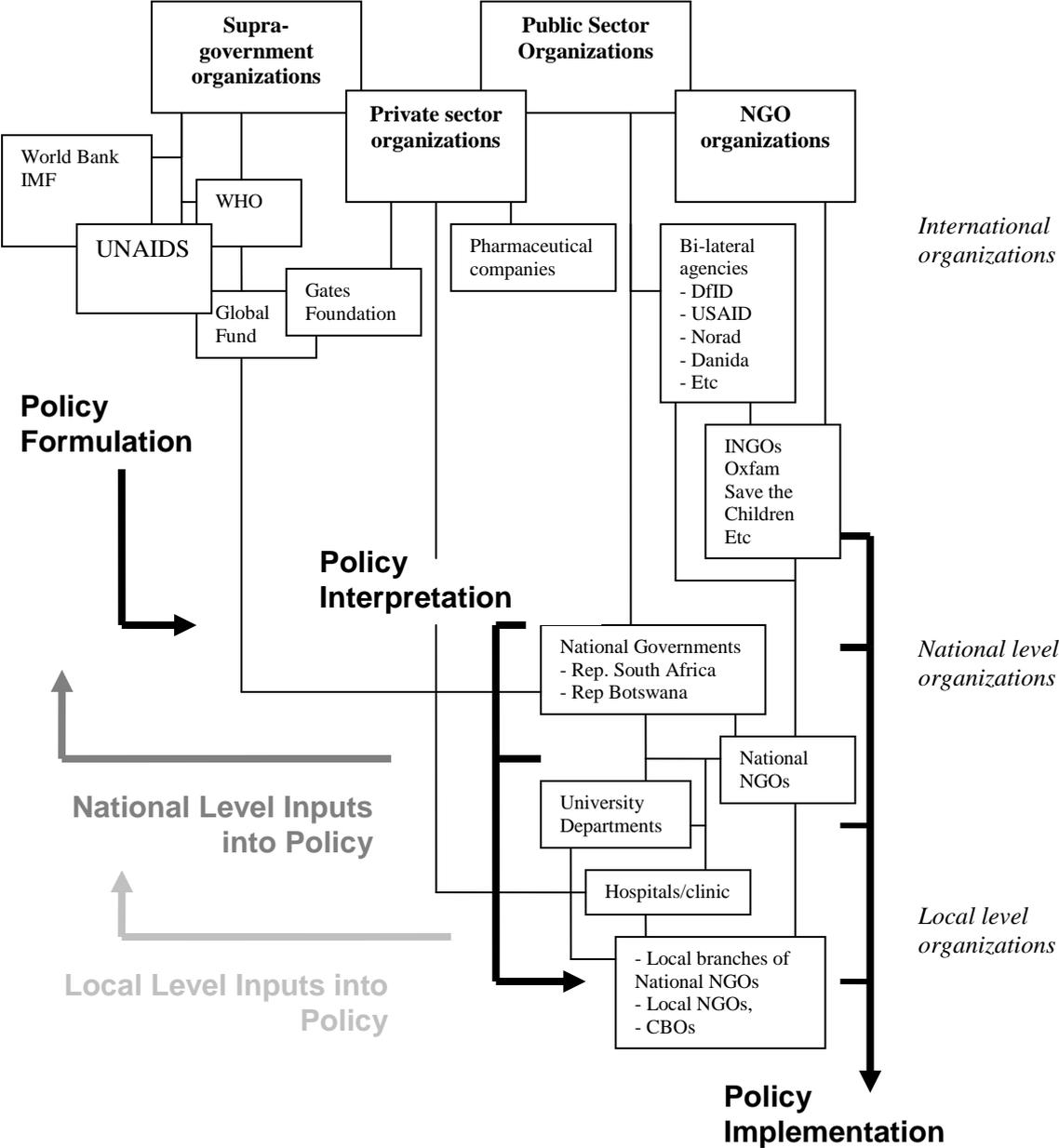


Figure 2. Bilateral and hierarchical nature of interfaces

