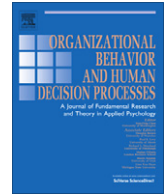




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Collaborating across cultures: Cultural metacognition and affect-based trust in creative collaboration

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ABSTRACT

We propose that managers adept at thinking about their cultural assumptions (cultural metacognition) are more likely than others to develop affect-based trust in their relationships with people from different cultures, enabling creative collaboration. Study 1, a multi-rater assessment of managerial performance, found that managers higher in metacognitive cultural intelligence (CQ) were rated as more effective in intercultural creative collaboration by managers from other cultures. Study 2, a social network survey, found that managers lower in metacognitive CQ engaged in less sharing of new ideas in their intercultural ties but not intracultural ties. Study 3 required participants to work collaboratively with a non-acquaintance from another culture and found that higher metacognitive CQ engendered greater idea sharing and creative performance, so long as they were allowed a personal conversation prior to the task. The effects of metacognitive CQ in enhancing creative collaboration were mediated by affect-based trust in Studies 2 and 3.

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Introduction

Research in management and organizational behavior has increasingly focused on individual differences that enable managers to succeed in intercultural interactions (e.g., Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003; Imai & Gelfand, 2010; Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Shapiro, Ozanne, & Saaticioglu, 2008; Thomas, 2006). One long standing theme is that intercultural success accrues from being mindful of one's own and others' assumptions when interacting with individuals from different cultures (Johnson, Cullen, Sakano, & Takenouchi, 1996; LaBahn & Harich, 1997). This skill in reflecting on cultural assumptions in order to prepare for, adapt to, and learn from intercultural interactions is increasingly referred as cultural metacognition (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006; Klafehn, Banerjee, & Chiu, 2008; Thomas, 2006; Van Dyne, Ang, Ng, & Koh, 2008). Under the rubric of cultural intelligence or CQ, instruments have been developed to measure individual variations in cultural metacognition, assessed in terms of self-reported awareness of one's cultural assumptions, planning for upcoming intercultural activities, checking the applicability of and adjusting one's assumptions during a given interaction, and updating assumptions after each experience (Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2011; Earley & Ang, 2003).

In this research, we explore the role of cultural metacognition in intercultural creative collaboration. Although collaboration can occur in larger groups, we focus for the sake of clarity on dyadic collaboration. Just like scientists, businesspeople often share ideas and brainstorm solutions to a problem with others in their professional network. Innovative products and deals are developed when such conversations bring together disparate ideas that have never previously been connected, for example using alloys developed by bicycle racers to design lighter wheelchairs, or finding a market for South Pacific coconut juice among American urban professionals (Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Accordingly, creative potential in a collaborative dyad comes from the differences between the two people—surface demographic differences such as nationality or ethnic background correspond to deeper differences in people's knowledge of the world, their capabilities, and connections. Interactions with people from different cultures can expose one to ideas that are not redundant with one's own; the exchange of ideas in the conversation could result in a novel combination of ideas.

The creative potential in cross-cultural relationships, however, often goes unrealized. Sharing one's knowledge and insights with another person, an inherent aspect of creative collaboration, entails making oneself vulnerable to the other. Hence, sharing new ideas requires trust, which can be defined as confidence in relying on another person (Luhmann, 1979; McAllister, 1995). New ideas that one shares could be stolen if they are good or ridiculed if they are bad (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987; Diehl & Stroebe, 1991). Sharing new ideas depends a lot on feelings for the other and on the other's concern for oneself. This set of sentiments is called affect-based

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trust (McAllister, 1995) and has been long been studied by researchers interested in trust as a feeling (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). While collaboration on a mundane task simply requires sharing the labor, creative collaboration involves the exchange of ideas to develop a novel solution that neither person in the dyad would have crafted on their own. Affect-based trust lubricates the exchange of new ideas that propels creative collaboration. In sum, the creative potential of cross-cultural interaction flows through affect-based trust.

We propose that individuals higher in cultural metacognition are more likely to develop affect-based trust in their intercultural interactions and relationships. When getting to know a person from a different culture, the other may misunderstand comments, misconstrue jokes, and decline invitations because of cultural differences. Reflective thinking about cultural differences enables one to interpret these awkward moments for what they are and not let them be impediments to closeness. The habit and skill of thinking about one's own and other's culturally based assumptions presumably enables individuals to communicate better, to put people at ease, and to avoid misunderstandings and tensions. Affect-based trust is distinguished from cognition-based trust, defined as the perception of the other's reliability and competence (Butler, 1991; Cook & Wall, 1980; Zucker, 1986). Cognition-based trust is founded on rational evidence-based assessments of the other's ability and track record. Both kinds of trust may be more difficult to develop in intercultural relationships (Branzei, Vertinsky, & Camp, 2007; Jiang, Chua, Kotabe, & Murray, 2011; Rockstuhl & Ng, 2008). Cognitive processes such as stereotyping can undermine positive judgments about competence, whereas affective processes such as anxiety can hinder emotional openness and sharing (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Mackie & Hamilton, 1993). For reasons that we shall elaborate, we contend that affect-based trust, rather than cognition-based trust, is pivotal in the link between individual differences in cultural metacognition and creative collaboration.

We examined these hypotheses using multiple research methods. Study 1 used a multi-rater survey to assess managers' intercultural collaboration from the perspective of work colleagues from different cultures. We tested whether managers with high (vs. low) cultural metacognition achieve more creative collaboration in their intercultural relationships. In Study 2, we surveyed managers about their professional networks, assessing creative collaboration in terms of their creativity-related communication (sharing of new ideas) in all their key professional relationships. An important feature of Study 2 is that we explicitly compare the effects of cultural metacognition on trust and creative collaboration between intracultural relationships (with someone of the same cultural background) and intercultural relationships (with someone of different cultural background). This approach allows us to examine whether cultural metacognition taps mental habits specific to bridging cultural differences or perspective taking habits that help relationships in general. Study 3 used a laboratory experiment to manipulate the conditions that facilitate the development of the mediating mechanism—*affect-based trust*. Our objective is to show that the effects of cultural metacognition depend on conditions that enable affect-based trust; even if individuals have this important strength they will not develop creative collaboration if the conditions do not facilitate affect-based trust.

Taken together, these studies make several contributions. First, we present evidence that individuals' cultural metacognition is linked to success in intercultural creative collaborations. This basic finding contributes to the growing literature on cultural intelligence, showing how specific aspects of intercultural competence foster managerial performance needed in a global workplace. Second, we explicate a key psychological mechanism that underlies the relationship between cultural metacognition and creative

collaboration—*intercultural affect-based trust*. This finding pushes theoretical boundaries in creativity research through focusing on intercultural creative collaboration at a dyadic level of analysis. Organizational behavior scholars have called for more in-depth theorizing on how individuals leverage interpersonal interactions for creativity (George, 2007). Yet little extant research has examined creativity at the dyadic level, especially across cultural lines. Our research fills this gap, introducing three complementary methods for studying creativity at the dyadic level. Third, the present research expands on emerging theory that connects cultural diversity with creativity (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008) by investigating the conditions that allow people from different cultures to collaborate creatively. We elaborate on these and other contributions in the discussion section.

Cultural metacognition and intercultural collaboration

Scholars have long studied factors that foster intercultural interactions and collaborations (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011; Irani & Doulish, 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; LaBahn & Harich, 1997). One strategy has been to look for individual characteristics that predict the success of expatriate managers or international students, such as personality (Caligiuri, 2000), values (Kagan & Cohen, 1990), self-efficacy (Palthe, 2004), and interpersonal skills (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). Earley and Ang (2003) integrated many of these ideas in positing multiple dimensions of CQ, including knowledge, motivation, behavioral flexibility, and metacognitive awareness. Although there is now evidence that each of these dimensions affects some kinds of intercultural interactions (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Imai & Gelfand, 2010), theory about which dimensions are critical for which kinds of interactions is still developing. Furthermore, it is still unclear how these different dimensions of CQ interact with one another or combine into an aggregate construct (Thomas, 2010). Hence, rather than studying all CQ dimensions simultaneously, we focused our investigation on a single dimension—*cultural metacognition*—which Thomas and colleagues (2008) proposed to be a central linking mechanism among the various dimensions of CQ as it regulates cognition and behavior.

Metacognition may be the least obvious dimension of CQ, yet it follows a tradition of research emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and sensitivity toward others when adjusting to new environments (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Cognitive psychologists typically characterize metacognition as thinking about thinking, comprising the processes of monitoring and adjusting one's thoughts and strategies as one learns new skills (Langer, 1989; Winn & Snyder, 1996). Expanding this line of theorizing, Ang et al. (2007) defined cultural metacognition as mental processes directed at acquiring, comprehending, and calibrating cultural knowledge. According to these researchers, cultural metacognition increases intercultural effectiveness by promoting (a) contextualized thinking (i.e., heightened sensitivity to the fact that individuals' motivations and behaviors are invariably shaped by the cultural contexts in which they are embedded) and (b) cognitive flexibility (i.e., discriminative use of mental schemas and behavioral scripts when interacting across cultures). Other scholars have also invoked ideas related to cultural metacognition in intercultural collaboration. For example, Johnson et al. (1996) emphasized the importance of self-awareness and awareness of others' responses in managing international collaborative alliances. Similarly, LaBahn and Harich (1997) emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in international collaborative ventures.

Cultural metacognition may be especially critical to collaborative relationships because of its effects on communication quality and ultimately intercultural trust. Individuals from different cultures are likely to interpret and represent the same problem in

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