



Dynamic Diversity: Variety and Variation Within Countries

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Abstract

National models of social action over-privilege continuity and uniformity. They discount change — which they lack the capacity to explain (other than through exogenous shocks) — and neglect diversity within countries. This paper focuses on the national culture model which it argues requires commitment to illogical arguments and to suppositions which are theoretically and empirically untenable. An evaluation of each, it is argued, points to the existence of, and possibilities for, considerable national diversity and change — not pervasive and enduring national uniformity. Reflecting on the model's rise and fall in anthropology, the paper also provides an outline explanation of its retention within organization studies and speculates about its future within that discipline.

Keywords: action, agency, diversity, incoherent culture, knowledge community, national culture, organizational culture, practice, values

In a range of literature each country is said to be characterized by distinctive, pervasive and enduring patterns of practices. The bedrock source of these patterns is either said to be national institutions (Hall and Soskice 2001, for instance) or national culture (Hofstede 2001, for example). This paper focuses on the claim that there is a national cultural imperative, that identifiable national culture is enduring, pervasive and constitutive — a view described here as the national culture model (hereafter 'the model'). It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the critiques of overly determining and unchanging versions of the institutional model and their limited ability to explain behaviour at the organizational level. For these, the reader is referred to the new wave of neo-institutional literature (Djelic and Quack 2005; Crouch 2005; Streeck and Thelen 2005, for instance; see also Smith et al. 2008).

Although once popular in a number of academic disciplines, the model is now employed almost exclusively within the discipline of organization studies and in a small sub-field of psychology — cross-cultural psychology. The paper seeks to demonstrate that the model is unable to explain organizational diversity and change within any one country. The model, it is argued, requires commitment to illogical arguments and to presuppositions that are theoretically and empirically untenable. Each of these is described and analysed. And the logical conclusion in each case, it is argued, points not to a pervasive uniformity, but to the existence of diversity within countries. An adequate theory of social action needs to be able to explain variations over time as well as continuity and variations

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over space as well as uniformity — the model is compatible with continuity and uniformity but not with variety and variation. Reflecting on the model's rise and fall within the discipline of anthropology, an outline explanation for the model's durability within organization studies is set out. The paper concludes with some speculations about the model's future within organization studies.

Within-Country Diversity

Some national uniformities may be identifiable within a country, for example the requirement to drive on the right or left side of the road, but considerable diversity (heterogeneity, divergence, variety) can also readily be observed (Burrin 2005; Camelo et al. 2004; Crouch 2005; Goold and Cambell 1987; Kondo 1990; Law and Mol 2002; Lenartowicz et al. 2003; MacIntyre 1967; O'Sullivan 2000; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Thompson and Phua 2005; Tsurumi 1988; Weiss and Delbecq 1987; Yanagisako 2002).

In the face of extensive empirical data of variations within countries across social and geographical contexts and also across time, how does the national culturalist literature continue to rely on spatial reductionism: on the 'fallacious assumption of cultural homogeneity within nations' (Tung 2008: 41)? It does so by making the following problematic moves. I: By denying agency. This is achieved by assuming that national culture is: (a) coherent; (b) stable; (c) pure; (d) by excluding any independent role of other cultural influences; and (e) excluding any independent role of non-cultural influences. II: By unwarranted depictions. This is done by: (a) conflating nation and state; (b) making unwarranted generalizations from singular instances and/or treating unrepresentative averages as nationally representative; and (c) confusing statistical averages with causal forces. And, III: By ignoring prior and pertinent intellectual developments elsewhere, it fails to engage with the peripheralization in anthropology and cultural geography (and in other disciplines) of the assumptions of national and other spatial cultural uniformity. These moves are now addressed. Unpacking them points to conditions which make possible within-country change and variation.

I. Denial of Agency

In explaining action, individuals' capacity to exercise agency both in relation to conduct and to the reproduction and transformation of institutions or structures (in their diverse senses) is conceived of as either insignificant or nonexistent. National culture is seen, in Alfred Kroeber's term, as 'superorganic' — as transcendental, as an impersonal deterministic force which survives without any agents (1952 [1917]).

(a): Culture as Coherent

Nationally uniform and enduring 'consequences' (Hofstede 2001) can logically be deduced only if culture (and national culture in particular) is conceptualized not just as determinate but also as coherent, that is, as uniform, integrated, holistic, as having a systematic logic, a perfectly woven web with no internal contradictions, incon-

sistencies, ambivalences, variations, diversity, flexibility, loose ends, loopholes, or gaps.

There is a long-standing debate about whether cultures are coherent or non-coherent (Alvesson 2002; Martin et al. 2006). Carl Ratner (2005: 61), for instance, states that 'individuals ... participate in a common, coherent culture that is structurally integrated at the societal level.' Overwhelmingly the notion of multi-culturalism supposes coherent cultures. Populations are segmented into groups ('ethnic', 'class', 'gender', 'sexuality', 'class-gender' and so forth), each supposedly characterized by a coherent culture (Lomnitz-Adler 1991; McWhiney 1989). Some coherentists acknowledge inconsistencies or deviances but these are deemed to be eradicable or insignificant. An example of viewing culture as non-coherent is Richard Merelman's (1984) description of culture in the US as a 'loosely bounded fabric', as inconsistent and tolerant of ambiguity (in Smelser 1992: 6). Clifford Geertz dismisses the coherence view which he ridicules as a 'seamless superorganic unit within whose collective embrace the individual simply disappears into a cloud of mystic harmony' (1965: 145) and argues that to treat culture as coherent is 'to pretend a science that does not exist and imagine a reality that cannot be found' (1973: 20). Perspectives sceptical of cultural coherence need not entail rejection of some patterns within cultures.

Commitment to coherence is challengeable on many grounds. The list of challenges discussed below is not exhaustive but it is sufficient to indicate that problematic steps must be taken to maintain the assumption that culture is coherent.

First, combinations of cultures will not be coherent. If culture is assumed to be active, then actors do not encounter/are not constituted just by a national culture (if we suppose such exists) but by a host of cultures. Even if each of the cultures is conceived of as internally coherent, why should a similar assumption hold for combinations of cultures? Why should it be supposed that there be no contradictions, gaps, frictions, or ambivalences in the cultural 'interfaces'? To paraphrase Walter Mischel, cultures are not dammed up into neat, separate little ponds (1968).

Secondly, if culture is seen as an object of empirical study rather than, in large part, a construct, the conceptualization of culture as coherent is at odds with the evidence. Any systematic effort to depict a culture within a country (or any other social space) will, unless it is driven by confirmatory bias (Sloman, 2005) or methodological tautology (Martin 2002), find significant incoherence (incompleteness, illogicality, gaps, cracks, hybridity, remixing, contradictions, ambiguity, slippages, conflicts, malleability, incompatibilities).

Thirdly, cultural coherence allows no gaps, no ambiguities for individuals to engage with or exploit. It is a theory of cultural automatons. A non-coherent notion of national culture recognizes cultural incompleteness, is open to the roles of other cultural and non-cultural influences, and is capable of acknowledging the capacity of individuals to exercise agency. While individuals may sustain a prevailing order (Rosaldo 1989) they may also attempt to change it. Individuals, as Wrong (1961: 191) puts it, are 'social but not entirely socialized'.

Fourthly, 'values' are seen, by most, if not all, national culturalists as at the 'core' of culture. There is no consensual definition of values. Within the model, however, values are theorized as static mental constructs, as imperatives that necessarily lead

to certain actions (Trompenaars 1993). But a coherent notion of culture must not only suppose value coherence, which is a contested view with at most limited empirical support and counter-evidence (Cancian 1975; Fernandez 1965; Swidler 1986), it must also suppose that individuals' entire mental states: preferences, desires, goals, needs, norms, traits, aversions, tastes, assumptions and attractions are each coherent internally *and* in relation to each other. Implausible, to say the least, and contradicted by extensive research findings (Hechter 1992; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004).

Culture is not a pre-established monolith. An acknowledgement of internal divisions, gaps and ambiguities inserts an essential element of distance at the heart of tradition and thus the possibility of critical interpretation, action variation and unpredictability within a country.

(b) National Culture as Stable

The idea of culture as coherent contributes to notions of culture as stable, as having no temporal variation. 'National values', Hofstede and Hofstede (2005: 13) state: are 'as hard as a country's geographic position' and 'while change sweeps the surface, the deeper layers remain stable, and the [national] culture rises from its ashes like the phoenix' (p. 36). Kets de Vries states that there is a 'stability to [its] essential nature' that retains its 'significance regardless of place, time or regime' (2001: 597). National culture (and its consequences), it is supposed, gives a nation an enduring distinctiveness.

Acknowledgement of specific legacies (and their interpretations) within countries does not require acceptance of the model's stasis, its bracketing out of history and suppression of the agency of people in creating history. History is not the record of a merely fortuitous sequence of events. Although we may recognize some inner continuity, history also involves the novel formations and new events which cannot be accounted for by unchanging cultural forces. To define culture only as an enduring social heritage of values ignores the significant element of change. National culturalists are not necessarily anti-historical nor deniers of agency in principle; it is simply that they cannot fit historical change and individual innovation into their framework of concepts.

The model is compatible with only two notions of change. Both are unreal. First, it can be supposed that no change occurs because national cultures are robust enough to withstand any attempt to change them. But this characterization of the unfailing capacity of national culture to repel anything new is inconsistent with many local studies (see Gamble 2008, for instance). Or it can be supposed that rare changes can be created through exogenous shock. Endogenous change is inconceivable. As Margaret Archer states: 'The net effect of this insistence on cultural compactness [is to preclude] any theory of cultural development springing from internal dynamics ... internal dynamics are surrendered to external ones' (1988: 6).

(c) National Culture as Pure

The notions of national cultural continuity and country-wide presence imply purity. National culture conveys images of countries both as discrete cultural areas and as isolated from or unchanged by external influences. National culture

is conceived of as a persistent heritage. But like an Apache rock and roll band, cultures are fusions, remixes, recombinants. They are made and remade through exchange, imitation, intersection, incorporation, reshuffling, through travel, trade, subordination. National borders are not cultural borders. Cultural boundaries are diversely permeable. Thus, national culture cannot be a constant nor always nationally pervasive.

Even a moderate familiarity with management textbooks, novels, films, music and cuisine would show how much multi/inter/trans-national influence and borrowing routinely occurs. Tchaikovsky's music is sometimes represented as quintessentially Russian and yet even a basic knowledge of music history allows one to identify multiple non-Russian influences. The paintings by Russian artists selected from Russia's four great galleries and exhibited in 2008 in Düsseldorf and London reveal intense trans-national cross-fertilization. Winslow Homer's paintings, including his majestic marine *Eight Bells*, were described by some contemporary critics as distinctly American, but cross-Atlantic influences can readily be discerned (Faxon 2006). Coleridge was steeped in German philosophy, Carlyle wrote extensively on Goethe and the German Romantics, T. S. Elliot drew on French writers (Kuper 1999: 45–6) and so on.

No university teaches nationally unique management theories. Teaching, and to some extent research, may currently be dominated by ideas which come largely from the United States of America (US) but those ideas do not reflect a uniformity of organizational practice within the US — patterns may be discernible but not a single uniform pattern (O'Sullivan 2000). And the sources of those ideas are not exclusively from within the US. Ideas are imported into, as well as exported from, the US. The undoubted influence of US based institutions, such as Harvard Business School, and US edited journals, in the promotion and reinforcement of organization theories does not make the theories purely and quintessentially American. The genesis of organization theories may not be cosmopolitan, but it is always multinational.

(d): Excluding the Independent Influence of Other Cultures

If cultures additional to, or other than, national culture are acknowledged, then the treatment of national culture as the independent variable is possible only by illogically attributing causal power to one category of culture (the national) but effectively denying it to others. Mere acknowledgement of other cultures without incorporating them in a theory of action is an empty gesture. We can take culture very seriously without accepting the determinate singularity of the model. We can insist on recognition of the influence of context(s) without reducing context to the singular and the determinate.

Thus, even *within* a wholly culturalist explanation of social action attributing causality to just one type of culture, 'national' or whatever, is ridiculously deterministic. Even if we momentarily suppose that each organization has just one organizational culture, and one which is coherent rather than an 'evanescent bricolage' of cultures (Batteau 2000: 726), action in an organization would be influenced not just by 'national' culture but also by the organizational culture which would not be nationally uniform — as it would vary between organiza-

tions. Even if a common national culture is supposed to be somehow causally present at every site of practice, there will also be at each site a different organizational culture and thus the inevitability of uniform national practices cannot logically be deduced (Scheuch 1967). If, furthermore, we recognize that each organization does not have a culture, but cultures, and if we attribute causality to culture, not just to national culture, even more diversity of practice is the only logical conclusion we can draw.

(e): Excluding the Independent Role of Non-Cultural Influences

The model not only supposes cultural coherence, continuity and purity, and neglects the possible effects of cultures other than the 'national', but it also excludes the possible independent effects of *non*-cultural features.

Social action has many ingredients. Laws, institutions, monarchs, the invisible hand, rituals, coercion and social contracts are among the explanations for uniform social practices. It is empirically incontestable that under certain conditions it is possible to detect common social action without reference to a unified and commonly accepted cultural system (Dahrendorf 1958; Fernandez 1965; Stromberg 1981).

Take the example of the comparatively small island of Ireland. It is composed of two states — the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland — each has a separate national soccer team and nationally separate darts teams. But one rugby team and one hockey team represents the entire island. That difference is inexplicable on the basis of national culture, but while the sporting division and uniformity has a complex history, class explains much. In the island, the players of soccer and darts are largely working-class, while rugby and hockey are overwhelmingly middle-class activities. In the same island two quite different sign languages are used by deaf persons. In the Republic of Ireland, Irish Sign Language (Teanga Chomhartaíochta na hÉireann)(ISL) — which has French origins — is primarily used. In Northern Ireland, British Sign Language is largely used by deaf Protestants while ISL is mainly used by deaf Catholics. Like the sporting variations discussed above, these differences cannot be explained by national culture — or indeed by class. Their genesis is much more complex. An obvious case of social conformity through coercive control is that of fascism in Germany where considerable behavioural uniformity co-existed with both substantial doctrinal inconsistencies within Hitler's entourage and significant reservations among the population of Germany (Archer 1988; Burrin 2005; Gellner 1987).

Even if we suppose that within each country is an influential national culture, we do not also have to suppose that it alone — or culture in general — is the only cause of actions within that country. Why should cultural causality be privileged over administrative, coercive, or other means of social integration/control? An over-reliance on the national cultural model has contributed to an aversion to multi-level and multi-factor inquiries, an emphasis on supposed universals at the expense of situated influences. Organizational actions rely on complex forms of interdependency which we do not always see, desire, or understand. It is because of diversity of influences and the possibility of agency that individual and collective actions can have unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences.

II. Unwarranted Depictions

Claims to have measured national cultures, or differences between national cultures, have been the object of many criticisms including the problem of inferring culture (or values) from answers to questionnaires (Kahn 1989; McSweeney 2002a; Smelser 1992; Tayeb 1994, for instance)(for a defence of the use of surveys as measures of values see Fischhoff 1993; Hofstede 2001). But rather than overviewing those critiques, this section focuses on some measurement moves employed in seeking to empirically depict national cultures which when unpacked point to national diversity not uniformity.

(a): The Data Unit: Conflating Nation and State

One would reasonably suppose that a 'national culture' is represented as the culture of a 'nation'. Yet, a striking feature of the model is the conflation of the word 'nation' with that of 'country' or 'state' (in the sense of a territorial juridical unit) (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2005). The model relies on state definitions of uniformities and distinctiveness: a kind of methodological nationalism with the territory of the state as the terminal unit and boundary conditions for the demarcation of causal influences (Martins 1974).

Were all states nation-states — in the sense of each nation having a state — the distinction between 'nation' and 'state' (or country) would not be important, but many states include multiple nations (e.g. the United Kingdom) — they are therefore not nation-states in the sense of one nation per state — or a nation may extend beyond the borders of a single state (e.g. the Kurds). Gellner (1983) estimated that there were about 8,000 nations, yet only 159 states. The territories supposed in the model to be each characterized by a uniform, enduring, causal culture are overwhelmingly not single nations but clusters of nations within a single state and yet each country is treated in the model as having one, not multiple, national cultures. What its devotees call 'national' culture is, in effect, an assertion that there is uniform *state-level* culture.

A state is a political unit. It is inappropriate to use citizenship as a proxy for sampling an unwarrantedly supposed cultural unity (Fiske 2002; Pandey 1999). A *data unit* — that is, the category used in the data collection and analysis — should not be confused with an *explanatory unit* — that is, the unit which can account for patterns of results (observed practices or whatever)(Ragin 1987; Stannard 1971).

(b): Conflating Levels of Analysis

For organizational researchers, organizations are where the action of interest largely lies. Many national culturalists try to explain or predict behaviour at levels 'lower' than the national (individual, organizational, and so forth) on the basis of their (or other's) depictions of national culture/national cultural differences. But making direct translations of properties or relations at one level to another — for the model, by projecting from a higher level to a lower (from the national to organizational or individual) — is unwarranted even if we suppose that the depiction of the national level is accurate. Robinson (1950) originally described the

attribution of views about the characteristics of one level to other levels also as the 'ecological fallacy' (1950), Wagner (1964) called it the 'displacement of scope', and Galtung 'the fallacy of the wrong level' (1967)(see also Hofstede 2001: 16, 463). Drawing inferences about higher levels from individual-level data is sometimes called the 'atomistic fallacy' (Tsui et al. 2007: 466). Studies using individual-level data (typically from groups of students) from more than one country are commonly, but inaccurately described as cross-national studies (Oyserman et al. 2002a). And erring in the opposite direction, many cross-cultural courses, training programmes and multiple publications wrongly suppose that national averages also describe individuals and groups. In the latter, a spurious elegant and scientific-based appearance is given to an account of individuals which in terms of substance is groundless. As Leung et al. (2005: 368) observe 'research examining relationships between culture and individual outcomes has not captured enough variance to make specific recommendations that managers need with confidence' and Gelfand et al. (2007: 496) point out that 'level of analysis confusion also continues to abound in the cross-cultural OB [organizational behaviour] literature ... research continues to blindly apply culture-level theory to the individual level and vice versa'. Relationships identified at one level of analysis may be stronger or weaker at a different level of analysis, or may even reverse direction (Klein and Kozlowski 2000; Ostroff 1993).

Hofstede states that the four dimensions he employed (masculinity–femininity, and so forth) 'together account for 49% of the variance in country mean scores' of answers to an IBM employee survey — his primary data source (Hofstede et al. 1990: 288). Even if we accept the accuracy of his calculations (cf. Kitayama 2002; McSweeney 2002a,b; Triandis 1994), 51% of national variance in mean scores of respondents' answers is unexplained. And of itself the 49% explains nothing about national behaviour. The analysis was of questionnaire answers — not of behaviour, actions, or practices. But even more significantly, in terms of level of analysis, the pattern of correlation found in national averages is *not* replicated at the individual level (Bond 2002; Miller 2002; Schwartz 1994). Gerhart and Fang (2005: 977) estimate, based on Hofstede's data, that only 'somewhere between 2 and 4 percent' of the variance at the level of individuals' answers is explained by national differences — a tiny portion. Hofstede's own estimate of 4.2% is only marginally higher (1980: 71; 2001: 50). Furthermore, two of the four (later five) dimensions employed by Hofstede to depict national cultures — 'power distance' and 'individualism and collectivism' were statistically identified by him *only* in nationally averaged data. At the level of individuals, they had near-zero intercorrelations (Bond 2002; Schwartz 1994) for those dimensions and thus no explanatory power at that level.

Oyserman et al.'s (2002a) analysis of all cross-national empirical research studies published in English on individualism and/or collectivism (the 'dimension' of national culture which has received the most empirical attention) found that country explains only 1.2% of the variance in individual-level individualism — implying that 98.8% of variance in individualism is unexplained by country. Similarly, based also on the meta-analysis, they found that country explains only 4.4% of the variance in individual-level collectivism — implying that 95.6% of the variance in individual-level collectivism is unexplained by country (in

Gerhart and Fang 2005: 978). Thus, a miniscule share of variation at the level of the individual was explained by the individual's nationality. The massive gap between the ability of national-level data to describe or predict micro-level behaviour (above) is also consistent with the personality psychology literature which has long found that hypothesized global trait dispositions like friendliness, power-distance and dominance typically account for no more than 9% to 15% of diversity of individual differences over naturally occurring situations (Shweder 1979).

The twin errors of confusing the level of analysis and unwarranted conflation of attitudes and behaviour is widespread within the national cultural community (Adler 2002, for instance). Consequences are events in specific situations (McSweeney 1995). The characteristics, said to have been identified at the national level, are not those of lower levels and yet those are the levels of practices of primary interest to organization studies.

(c) Invalid Generalizations

The characterization of a culture's internal qualities (coherent or incoherent, and so forth) is distinguishable from its degree of sharedness. National culture is largely represented as nationally common in two ways in the national cultural literature (sometimes in the same work). First, as individually carried by everyone in a nation (Hofstede 2001: xix, 378, 381, 385, 394; Funakawa 1997: 15). Secondly, as a national 'average' (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2005: 24), as a 'normal distribution' (Trompenaars, 1993: 25), as a national 'central tendency' (Hofstede 2001: 49; 1991: 253). Sharedness is discussed first at the level of the individual.

(c)(i) Making Unwarranted Generalizations from the Singular or the Local

By theorizing national culture as common to all national individuals, generalizations from data obtained from one or a small number of individuals or organizations are deemed to be valid. By definition, what is true of one is true of all. Then, in principle, a national culture can be identified through everything and anything and anywhere in a country. And indeed, a wide variety of supposedly national culture-laden manifestations — what Trompenaars calls 'artefacts and products' (1993: 23), including views and practices — have been used as the evidence-base to identify or confirm the existence of specific features of national cultures and some of the consequences. The core assumptions employed are: (i) that the chosen items are manifestation(s) of national culture; and (ii) that the characteristics and consequences of that culture can be discerned from analysis of them.

Manfred Kets de Vries (2001), for instance, claims to be able to discern national character largely from just one character in one novel. His generalizations about Russian culture are largely based on reading of Ivan Goncharov's novel, *Oblomov* (2005 [1859]). His logic is that as Goncharov was Russian his novel is the product of 'the' Russian character or culture and that this can be discerned from the novel.

Novels are not discrete entities, *sui generis*. They have links with the social world. But the reductionist idea that they are mere reflections of a national

cultural singularity discernible to the expert analyst ignores the immense creativity of writers and the vast complexity of the social. But the idea that Russian (or any other) national character/psyche/culture (terms used interchangeably by Kets de Vries) can be discerned by selecting any one character (or aspects of one character)(Bakhtin 1984 [1929]) from just one novel is consistent with, indeed a logical consequence of, defining national culture as nationally common (Draguns et al. 2000). However, it is a shallow deduction.

Oblomov is a satirical portrait of what Goncharov regarded as an idle and decaying 19th-century Russian aristocracy, *not* of all Russians. The aristocrat Oblomov avoids work and postpones change. But that attitude is not true even of all characters in that novel. Attributing values even to just one character in a novel is also not a straightforward process of ‘reading’ in the sense of extraction or identification, but as interpretation. The novels of Russian writers such as: Bunin, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Goncharov, Gorky, Lermontov, Nabokov, Pasternak, Pushkin, Sholokhov, Tolstoy and Turgenev, as well as a multitude of different literary responses to living under the totalitarian Stalinist regime, contain an immense variety of characters. On what basis is or could the depiction of just one of those characters be held to be nationally representative? Not on any valid basis. Various writers such as Leslie Fielder and Ann Douglas have sought to identify the quintessential American character in novels. As the variety of characters in that (and any other national) literature is immense, each relied on a self-fulfilling selection of novels and each reached very different conclusions (Griswold 1981). The approach is tautological. The posited prime cause (national culture/character) which cannot be observed is inferred from what is defined as its manifestation, product, consequence, dependent variable (constant), or other notions of outcome; the inference, in turn, becomes the explanation of the outcome; a perfect circle, however freehand (Service 1968), has been drawn.

Which of Hogarth’s etchings — the repulsive violence and poverty depicted in *Gin Lane* or the prosperous contentment of *Beer Street* — is a window to British national culture? When John Wayne was asked how he liked his steak and he replied ‘Just knock its horns off, wipe its ass, and chuck it on the plate’, was he reflecting also the values of American vegetarians and carnivorous gourmards? The diversity of films being produced even from quite centrally controlled countries such as Iran is indicative of heterogeneity within countries. David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) is often cited as a description of ‘the’ American national character or culture, but as Riesman himself states: his book does not ‘attempt to deal with national character as such, but to suggest a hypothesis about changes in upper middle-class social character in the twentieth century’ (1967). Each of these works and events point to diversity within countries — neither to a globalized uniformity nor to a national uniformity.

(c)(ii): Making Unwarranted Generalizations from Averages

In response to critique of generalizations based on small numbers (unrepresentative samples) about entire populations, some national culturalists argue that they do not identify, or compare, the national cultures of the *individuals* in a nation but rather that they identify, or compare, the culture of *nations* (Søndergaard 2002, for an overview). This is conceived as an average (variously defined) of the values of

the national population. Attempting to calculate a national norm is an acknowledgement of cultural diversity within a country (Takano and Osaka 1999).

Generalization to the national level on the basis of averages calculated from studies of groups of nationals (students, organizational employees, and so on) might seem more sophisticated than treating one respondent as representative of all. But there is little difference. The numbers studied are always miniscule proportions of their national populations. Instead of each individual being defined as carrying a national culture, the national culture is held to be present and identifiable within the group which is studied — it could be any group sharing the same nationality or stratified into national sub-groups, for example, students in a classroom. Each chosen group is treated as, and often described as, a national ‘sample’ (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2005: 224, for instance) but this is an inappropriate use of the term ‘sample’ in the sense of a representative sample, that is, a relatively small quantity of individuals or material from which the quality of the population, mass, or species as a whole may be inferred. Those in the chosen groups are merely a conveniently available or accessible assembly of individuals who can only be held to be a representative sample of the national population by presupposing their representativeness. The logic is circular (for an overview, see Oyserman et al. 2002a).

Geertz rejects the notion of modal character or culture stating that ‘it leads to a drowning of living detail in dead stereotypes and ultimately obscures more than it reveals’ (1970: 62–3). As Oyserman et al. observe based on a meta-analysis of studies of individualism and collectivism: ‘[o]ur ability to make generalizations on the basis of the current body of empirical research is limited by significant within-group heterogeneity in regional, country, and ethnic group comparisons’ (2002a: 30) (see also Fiske 2002; Lenartowicz et al. 2003; Allport 1924; Sen 2006).

(d) Treating Statistical Averages (or Other Reifications) as Having Substance (i.e. Independent Existence) and Causal Efficacy

Even if it is heroically assumed that a national cultural norm can be calculated — does it have ‘consequences’ (Hofstede 2001), does it ‘direct actions’ (Trompenaars 1993: 24)? Treating *statistical* averages as a social force is an early 19th-century notion. The Belgian astronomer Adolphe Quetelet, on the basis of statistical averages, sought to identify social forces or ‘penchants’ which he believed acted like physical forces such as gravity. His work was widely satirized — as early as 1859 by the novelist Charles Dickens (Kern 2004). The term *Quetelism* was coined for such spurious theorizing. Ian Hacking calls contemporary examples ‘statistical fatalism’ (1990). An average is not a causal force. To attribute constitutive power to an average is to commit the metaphysical fallacy of ‘misplaced concreteness’ (Whitehead 1929). Some averages may have predictive power (Friedman 1953) — but that is a different type of claim. Averages are not causes. We do not meet, compete, negotiate or form friendships with averages (Bidney 1944; Duncan 1980). Actuarial studies of large databases do not attribute causality to their probabilities — only predictions.

III. Ignoring the Abandonment of its Bedrock Suppositions in its Parent Disciplines

Within the academy, organization studies was not the first discipline to develop or employ the model. It has a long genealogy — as has rejection of it. For periods it dominated a number of academic disciplines. Historiography and anthropology were its pioneering employers within the academy. But within these disciplines, and others such as cultural geography, the model, once dominant, has long been discarded or peripheralized (Bock 1999, 2000; Kuper 1999; Duncan 1980; Stannard 1971). Economics and sociology have long given up the mission of developing a substantive theory of values since around the mid-1960s (Etzioni 1968; Hechtner 1992). It is within parts of organization studies alone — and a very marginal part of psychology — that the model now retains a following (Bond 1988).

This section of the paper provides an overview of the demise of the model in anthropology. Ironically, this occurred well before the model had developed a significant following in organization studies.

Anthropology

By around the mid-1920s a view of culture as undifferentiated by class or other principles of social division became dominant in anthropology in the United States (Kroeber 1952) but by the beginning of the 1940s support had waned considerably (Chapple and Coon 1942). It was reinvigorated during a period from World War II and into the early Cold War (Benedict 1946; Mead 1974; Bock 1999; Shannon 1995; Marsella et al. 2000). Unique national cultures were assumed to neatly map onto political boundaries. Cultural anthropology promised practical pay-offs. Profiling the supposed quintessential national character of Germans and Japanese was the main focus of the co-opted anthropologists' analysis (Marsella et al. 2000).

National cultural homogeneity was taken as a given. But the model did not weather well. Whatever the wartime contribution of depicting the German and Japanese national cultures as authoritarian, the postwar implication that their enduring values prevented both countries from becoming functioning democracies was politically unattractive. Not only did the context of demand change but also the model was increasingly 'discredited' (Marsella et al. 2000: 43), having been subjected to 'devastating attack' (Duncan 1980: 182), both empirical and theoretical. As Philip Bock, formerly President of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, states: by the 1960s the national cultural (or national character) assumption was 'pretty well discredited' in anthropology (1999: 104) (see also Kuper 1999; Brightman 1995; Yengoyan 1986).

Belief in national cultural uniqueness and in individuals as passive recipients has long ceased to have a following in disciplines in which it once was the dominant view. And yet, the devotees of national culture in management unquestioningly suppose it. That dogged commitment is not based on engagement with and rejection of the pertinent debates and conclusions in the disciplines which have jettisoned national culture. Thirty years and more of developments are ignored. They are not even acknowledged. This separation is not very surprising

nor is it unique. Detachment from intellectual debates and developments in non-management social science disciplines (with the exception of economics) characterize much of organization studies (Augier et al. 2005). Nonetheless it is undesirable and as a result, instead of standing on the shoulders of ‘giants’, the model’s devotees are standing on ‘graves’.

Conclusions and Discussion

So far, this paper has unpacked the logic of the model and overviewed its rise and fall in anthropology. It argued that the model’s notion of culture — unrealistically — excludes the influence of other cultural and non-cultural factors; conflates the unit of data (the ‘nation’) with the unit of explanation (the sources of action *within* a ‘nation’); erases intra-national diversity; and debars it from engaging with endogenous change (Kaufman 2004). Society and organizations are so diverse, the influences so multiple, the boundaries so porous, the problems so numerous, the responses potentially so various that no single explanation is possibly valid. The notion of national culture includes too much. We need many complex interactional models rather than a single simplistic uni-causal mentalist one.

The study of culture, its intertwining (conceivable in multiple ways) with the non-cultural, and its possible consequences has considerable potential for understanding continuity and change in organizational and wider social practices, but only if culture is treated not as wholly autonomous and coherent but as containing diverse and conflicting elements and as a result is contestable, elastic and situated. The politics of societies and organizations are not empty spaces dominated by national culture (Wilkinson 1996).

An intriguing part of the history of the model is why it re-emerged and flourished in organization studies despite its earlier abandonment in almost every other social science discipline. Its durability is not unique, but explaining its persistence is challenging, as organization studies is an arena in which numerous theories have relatively short-term popularity or are re-spun as new theories. Without attempting to be comprehensive, this paper considers three contexts which enabled the rise and persistence of the model within management schools despite its demise almost everywhere else. Comparisons are drawn between the circumstances which led to the fall of the model in anthropology and its rise and persistence in organization studies. That discussion is followed by some speculation about the model’s future.

Long-Established and Reinforced

Geographical determinism has a long history. In the popular media and elsewhere — the idea of national uniqueness, of the existence of unique national culture or character or personality, or psyche, or spirit, is widely taken as self-evident — as common sense.

Through what Annette Ching calls the ‘social construction of primordality’ (in Yelvington 1991: 165) the notion of the enduring distinctiveness of countries is continuously perpetuated in multiple explicit and symbolic ways including through: passports, stamps, flags, anthems, civil services, police forces, taxes,

maps, elections, state funerals, nationally regulated examinations, aggregate statistics, and in routines of international comparisons, in international sporting events, and in notions such as 'national competitiveness' (Tooze 1998; Firth 1973). These features of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995) contribute to the construction and maintenance of belief in national uniqueness.

Thus the proponents and users of the model did not, and do not, have to create support for the model — it already existed. But the rise and fall of the model in anthropology (above) and its demise in other disciplines also indicates — given the strength of the popular notion of national distinctiveness — that an explanation of the continuing popularity within sections of organization studies must identify additional influences.

The Social Context

External demands on a discipline may be inconsistent and some sources of change within a discipline are autonomous, or unaware of, or indifferent to such demands. Nonetheless external forces are influential on academic concerns, albeit not deterministically. Pertinent to explaining the model's persistence has been the huge expansion in inter/trans-national business activities — a global political economic restructuring — and the intellectual challenges which that posed and continues to pose. As we have seen (above), the height of popularity of the model in anthropology was during the Second World War when the claimed possibility of depicting the national cultural characteristics of Axis countries and their leaders seemed to have the potential to provide valuable insights. The model later came to be seen not as a help but a hindrance to post-War democratization and re-construction.

The internationalization of organizational activities — widely labelled with the usually underspecified term: 'globalization' — has unleashed discursive struggles over its social, economic and cultural impacts and influenced expectations and priorities of funding organizations, organizational audiences and students aspiring to be managers. Demand for explanations and for context effective 'solutions' often far exceed what is humanly knowable by one person about a complex, diverse, multicontinental and multilingual world. The pressure on many organization studies teachers and researchers to provide simple models of complex worlds is considerable. There may not be an incompatibility between the expectations that organization studies faculty provide simple 'solutions' to, and sweeping generalizations about, organizational performance in multiple countries and the lengthy and demanding processes required to discover valid knowledge, but there is considerable tension between the two demands (March and Sutton 1997). It is thus not overly surprising, given these expectations, that the claimed identification(s) of the key features of the causal national cultures of multiple countries find a ready audience among some academics and consultants. The depiction of multiple countries in hierarchalized tables allows anyone — even a unilingual person without a passport or study of other societies — to authoritatively pronounce — teach, research, or consult — on the supposed management characteristics of multiple countries. It enables what Elman Service critically calls the use of a 'single magical formula' (1968: 406).

The dramatic rise and continuation in direct foreign investment and more recently the enormous growth in the economic power of Asian countries including Japan

and subsequently China, India, South Korea and other 'emerging economies' have provided a range of challenges for organizations studies. The immense and on-going internationalization of organizations and their activities, particularly over approximately the last quarter of a century, has greatly intensified the demand for answers about doing business in different countries and with organizations from other countries: modes of entry, forms of partnership, styles of management, and so forth. Even for those committed to one universal best way, the existence of national differences, even if dismissed as irrationalities, needed to be and needs to be understood.

Many explanations of the comparatively greater productivity of well-known Japanese companies attributed much of that capability to management practices said to be expressive of a unique Japanese culture (Ouchi 1981; Pascale and Athos 1981, for instance). The characterization in anthropology of Japanese national culture as inevitably leading to war (Benedict 1946) came to be understood within the disciplines of organization studies, and some wider political arenas, as the foundation of its production capabilities and economic success. And if Japan had a unique culture so too must other countries, an understanding particularly pertinent if the practices were to be adopted in 'host' countries (Barlett and Goshal 1998). Doubts about the uniformity of management practices within Japanese companies and the attribution of causality to a total Japanese culture were raised, but got limited attention (Pilkington 2008; Ryang 2004).

China's phenomenal economic growth and its growing influence in other countries have greatly intensified interest in the managerial and political characteristics and prospects of that country (Fang et al. 2008; March 2004). Its vastness, huge population (approximately one-quarter of the world's population), disputed boundaries, complex history and diversity of landscapes, climates, languages and religions might cast doubts on the explanatory adequacy of the model (Gjerde and Onishi 2000; Tung 2008). Even more so when various field studies have observed a variety of organizational practices and structures within China (Gamble 2008, for instance). However, the rise of China seems instead to have increased the belief in the utility of the model through reliance on the totalizing notion of Chinese national culture.

Research Context

The study of organizations might have fallen within the ambit of anthropology (or other established disciplines) but instead over time the discipline of organization studies was created (Augier et al. 2005). Increasingly it differentiated itself from other social science disciplines and has a strong tendency to claim novelty (Pfeffer 1993). Although the organizational studies literature contains references to journals from other disciplines — a practice which varies between subspecialties — this is a limited and declining practice (Augier et al. 2005). Thus, there is no expectation that champions of the model should engage with the earlier debates about and the demise of the model in other social science disciplines. The extensive fragmentation of organization studies also facilitates this disregard as it tends to short-circuit wider intellectual curiosity.

In real world organizational settings a complex array of heterogeneous and interactive causal factors operate. Thus in-depth studies of the complex societal

influences on specific organizations are difficult and there are disincentives which discourage such research. In addition to the time required for such studies and the complex research challenges, the output may face criticism as 'mere' case-studies, unless somehow generalizations can be made. Employing the model is one way to 'solve' these problems. Using the model often allows research to be completed more rapidly and readily as causality can be supposed or identified through employment of the prefabricated depictions of causal national culture; and generalizations to national populations from small-Ns is given legitimacy as the circumstances studied in one organization can be assumed to be typical of all in the same country (cf. Whitley 2008).

The 1970s and early 1980s were broadly characterized by caution about the potential progress of national cultural research (Sekaran 1983). A favouring of social-structural factors as explanations over and against cultural ones was reinforced by the former being seen as amenable to quantification and formal treatment while the latter were not. However, the model was given an immense boost in organization studies by Geert Hofstede's statistical analysis of an exceptionally extensive data base. Parsimonious and readily accessible depictions of countries were provided (Sackman 1997). His typologies or mappings or 'overarching patterns' (Oyserman et al. 2002a: 3) 'met a growing academic hunger for structure concerning culture' (Bond 2002: 74). An empirical justification and 'map' (Bond 1994: 68) was provided for small-scale cross-national comparative studies. Michael Harris Bond states that many were 'mesmerized' by the 'fearful symmetry' of Hofstede's mappings and 'all too willingly ignored anomalies and fine print' (Bond 2002: 75). At a time of dominance of quantitative studies his employment of what, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were unusually sophisticated statistical techniques added further to the model's legitimacy (Oyserman et al. 2002a, for an overview). He appeared to combine parsimony, validity and usefulness.

The immense impact of his work was not immediate and early responses were mixed (see Cooper (1982) and Roberts and Boyacigiller (1984) for critical reviews and Eysenck (1981) and Sorge (1983) for laudatory reviews). But as Bond says of Hofstede's subsequent influence, his 'Herculean achievement was to provide the social sciences with an empirical mapping of 40 of the world's major nations . . . Social scientists were galvanized, and in the ensuing years Hofstede has become one of the most widely cited social scientists of all time . . .' (Bond 2002: 73).

The increasing popularity in organization studies of 'post-modern', 'social constructivist', 'interpretative views' — in part a reaction against an imperious positivism and influenced by a rehabilitation of subjectivity in the wider social sciences — reinforced the significance of sense making and meaning attribution in organizational actions. Given the legitimacy provided to the model by Hofstede's (and others) depictions of national cultures mainly through quantitative analysis, the 'interpretative turn' might be thought to have been a countervailing influence as the model's notion of a single system of meaning runs counter to the characterizations of individuals, organizations and societies by the primary articulators of that perspective, particularly notions of radical contingency of meanings and the fluidity of subjectivity. However, while criticism of

the model was generated by the 'interpretative turn', conversely the model drew and continues to draw support from this development. While behavioural and rational choice theory treats internal states as exogenous to its explanations, such states (conscious or unconscious) could now more legitimately be treated as endogenous. A consequence was a resurgence of interest in culture such that the term 'cultural turn' was also widely employed (Magala 2005). Employment of the notion of 'culture' as a causal force became more acceptable in the academy at large, as did a more general ensemble of modes of subjectivity. Within organization studies, claims about cultural multiplicity in organizations grew, as did assertions of cultural uniformity (Martin 1992, 2002; Young 1989). What matters for the model has been the embedding within organization studies of the concept of culture as causal.

The Context of Critique

The demise of the model in anthropology was, apparently, due not just to changed circumstances — the disappearance of governmental patrons — but also because it had been 'discredited' (Bock 1999: 104). It is impossible to quantify the respective contribution of each of these factors. But critique alone seems to have been insufficient, as even prior to its rise the model had been subjected to many criticisms. As we have seen, the 'demand' context for its employment in organization studies — the internationalization of organizational activities — remains and the context of criticism is also different in management from that in anthropology. The consequences of this have been that criticisms have had less impact.

Within organization studies, a knowledge community has been built around the model. It has achieved a scholarly identity, being employed in papers across a wide range of peer-reviewed journals. The consensus on fundamentals within the community and the embeddedness it has achieved within areas of organization studies have created defences against the impact of critiques. It is rare for users of the model to acknowledge critiques — far less to engage with them.

Two characteristics of organization studies which enable the advocates of the model to avoid engagement with critique are described here. First, disregard is facilitated by the fragmentation of organization studies into many relatively autonomous communities with a high degree of internal consensus and self-referentiality (March 2004; Whitley 2000). The balkanization of organization studies is arguably greater than in many other disciplines (Pfeffer 1993) and is certainly far in excess of the degree of separateness which existed in anthropology at the time of the model's demise in that discipline. Secondly, while it is, of course, not possible to examine a situation uninfluenced by categories, theories and hunches, a tendency to build one-sided stories has been a powerful factor. Such bias is a deleterious tendency to search for or interpret new information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions and avoid information and interpretations which contradict them (Nickerson 1998). It is widely tolerated in organization studies (Miles and Huberman 1984). Within the national cultural community this bias includes a tendency not to consider alternative explanations and a widespread readiness to cite, or to generally refer to, studies which support the model but neglect contradictory studies.

What of the future? Making forecasts should be done with caution and trepidation. Against the model there has been a growth in situated studies which, while

not disregarding the influence on sites of research of wider contexts, recognize the possibility of local autonomy and do not restrict context to the national or even more narrowly to the national cultural (Smith et al. 2008). It is likely that there will be a growth in situated studies which seek to engage with multi-levels of influence on organizations and an expansion in transnational studies which compare the actualities rather than excessively relying on *a priori* acceptance of the model. We may see greater recognition that structural approaches and cultural ones are not mutually exclusive and acknowledgement that neither has to be defined as dependent on the other. Getting a balance between the two can be precarious but many problems of analysis arise from deviation from this perspective in one extreme direction or the other (Archer 1988).

For reasons discussed above, extensive use of the model is likely to continue. But it is possible there will be some variations, albeit ones that do not threaten the model. Three possible developments are briefly described.

First, there are some indications of a de-emphasis on the specific contribution of Hofstede. Overwhelmingly critiques of the national cultural model have focused on his research, largely because of his pre-eminent position as the most cited advocate, his pioneering role, the access he has provided to his data, and the openness of his analytical processes. This has allowed scholarly appraisal. But in so far as the critiques have had an impact it may be on the reputation of Hofstede's specific contribution rather than on the generic model. According to Tsui et al., 'the culture frameworks of scholars such as Singelis, Triandis, and Schwartz are beginning to supplement the Hofstede conceptualization' (2007: 434). Given the general self-referentiality of the national culture research community, its disregard largely of critique, and the almost paradigmatic status of Hofstede's framework (Hofstede and Fink 2007), the extent to which his framework will be supplemented is, however, a very open question. Interestingly, all three authors of the frameworks named in Tsui et al. are psychology, not organization studies, professors. By the 1990s 'cultural psychology' had begun to re-emerge as a disciplinary sub-field (Shweder and Sullivan 1993), although within that sub-field there developed only limited support for the notion of national culture.

Secondly, the rise of China, and especially its impact on the US, may lead to a greater questioning of the universal, the one-best-way, view of management. But while a national model is not the only possible counter to a universalist one and the immense diversity of China (above) cannot be captured in a totalizing notion of culture, it is possible to anticipate a re-nationalization of research, or rather a growth of analysis of China which relies on the model. As in the past, epistemic humility will often been discarded for *a priori* generalizations. Searches for, and claims to have found or fine-tuned knowledge of 'differences [between] Chinese and American [and other] minds' (Oyserman et al. 2002b: 114) or cultures are likely to grow. Probably, we will see increasing instances of the nationality of a researcher being the spurious basis on which to claim privileged knowledge of the uniform national culture of their country of origin. Knowledge of the dominant local language, or the locally used language, can enable unique access to specific contexts, but it is not a means of access to a mystical national culture.

Thirdly, in response to the proliferation of cultural frameworks (typologies/templates) there are likely to be further attempts to derive a common cultural

framework to facilitate cross-cultural comparison studies and comparisons of the studies themselves (Tsui et al. 2007). But the immense methodological differences between the various dimensional typologies make consolidation extremely unlikely and the project relies on the contested positivistic view that cultures are objects with distinctive describable general characteristics (Smelser 1992). In any event, what would the gain in real knowledge be? For years personality psychologists have searched for a general framework without achieving consensus. Why should researchers in organization studies be any more successful? The arguments in this paper (and elsewhere) suggest that the model is so hopelessly flawed that it requires abandonment not refinement. Looking for a definitive description is equivalent to the futile search for the philosopher's stone. However, the search for the perfect model and the use of existing versions will no doubt go on.

Note

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