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## TRANSFERRING MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE IN CHINA

## TRANSFERENCIA DE CONOCIMIENTOS DE GESTIÓN Y NEGOCIOS EN CHINA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study of transferring management and business knowledge in China tapped the views and opinions of 43 expert management educators who had participated in the transfer of management knowledge in China from the mid-1990s to the present time. It traces the development of management education in China following the implementation of the 1978 Open Door Policy, demonstrates the impact of China's national culture on knowledge transfer, identifies success factors in the process, and exposes the noncomparability of culture-specific approaches to managing people and organizations. We argue that the management values, attitudes, and practices of Chinese managers are diverging from those in the West, which has significant implications for the curriculum and pedagogy employed in the delivery of management education. Understanding the basis for this divergence will benefit expat and local manager alike as they negotiate their managerial roles in cross-border organizations like international joint ventures (IJVs).*

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## **KEYWORDS**

*China, international joint ventures, management education, knowledge transfer, international management*

## **RESUMEN**

Este estudio sobre la transferencia de conocimientos de gestión y negocios en China aprovechó los puntos de vista y opiniones de 43 educadores expertos en gestión que habían participado en la transferencia de conocimientos de gestión en China desde mediados de la década de 1990 hasta la actualidad. Traza el desarrollo de la educación gerencial en China después de la implementación de la Política de Puertas Abiertas de 1978, demuestra el impacto de la cultura nacional de China en la transferencia de conocimiento, identifica los factores de éxito en el proceso y señala la incompatibilidad de los enfoques específicos de la cultura para administrar personas y organizaciones. Argumentamos que los valores, las actitudes y las prácticas de gestión de los directores chinos son divergentes de los de Occidente, lo que tiene implicaciones importantes para el plan de estudios y la pedagogía empleados en la impartición de la educación en gestión. Comprender la base de esta divergencia beneficiará tanto a los expatriados como a los gerentes locales mientras negocian sus roles gerenciales en organizaciones transfronterizas como las joint ventures internacionales.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

China, joint ventures internacionales, educación en gestión, transferencia de conocimientos, gestión internacional

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The immediate workplace was the ideal learning space in the age of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1915; Wren, 2005) but as the Modern Era unfolded, management and business education evolved from a cottage industry into a cosmopolitan and competitive billion dollar business (Íñiguez, 2016). However, interdependent developments during the latter period added additional levels of complexity to the already difficult process of transferring knowledge (Lenartowicz, Johnson & Konopaske, 2014; Nasierowski & Coleman, 1997; Riege, 2007).

Following two decades of deindustrialization in the US (Bluestone & Harrison, 1984) and the implementation of business-friendly global economic policies in the 1990s (Boughton, 2002), Western-style enterprises extended their footprints deep inside non-Western countries. In this global business environment, developing countries benefitted from massive inflows of investment capital into their emerging markets. Newly-minted countries rapidly transitioning from their Command Economies in the post-Cold War also benefited from this injection of capital.

To enter these markets, companies in the US and Europe quickly established IJVs and other strategic alliances with local companies in an arrangement where one partner is 'local' and the other 'foreign'. Transaction cost theory provided an economic rationale for these cross-border ventures. Problems arose,

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nevertheless when the foreign partner lacked local knowledge in an alliance where the local partner controlled and/or supplied most inputs and throughputs. In addition, technology transfer frequently became a contentious issue if the local partner appeared to act in opportunistic ways (see Almasaad, 2014; Berrell & Wrathall, 2007). In this risky setting, home partners exported managers to oversee the venture.

Although the coupling of resources delivered rewards, risks ensued. For example, a national culture such as China's significantly shapes managerial and organizational behaviour to the extent that local and expat managers found themselves operating in unfamiliar territory. Both held different ideas about the nature of societal relationships, power, control, and trust in work settings, these gaps in knowledge rendered these alliances as potentially unstable (Berrell, 2007; Breslin, 2000; Collins, 2015; Deckers, 2004; Lau & Roffey, 2002; Marković, 2008; Pun 1990; Thornhill, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Shenkar (2001) saw national culture hampering positive performance outcomes while Pothukuchi et al. (2002) identified psychological elements inducing low performance. As a result, performance outcomes became a serious managerial issue.

In the age of globalization, instability in IJVs emerged an ever-present threat to the extent that "misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences presented the greatest obstacle" to productive management and business collaborations in cross-border alliances (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). Even so, the potential for culturally-competent management educators to transfer knowledge that alleviates these disagreements is considerable. But a problem remains. When the cultural distance between partners is large as in China's IJVs, the amount of abstruse knowledge circulating within the enterprise is also large, which impacts the effectiveness of the proposed remedy—the process of transferring knowledge (Simonin, 1999).

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

### **Managing people and organizations**

North American perspectives on management pervaded the literature in the Modern Era (Wren, 2005). Following the reigns of the European "merchant empires" in the "Age of Plenty" (Bernstein, 2004) and two centuries of Western colonization in East and South-East Asia, management techniques and business practices carried a Western hallmark, thus rendering indigenous knowledge as irrelevant (Jones, 1996). By the 1980s, studies in management and business also continued to carry this hallmark.

Studies tended to focus on Western organizations populated with like-minded stakeholders (see Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Conger & Xin, 2000; Noe, 1986; Parker & McEvoy, 1993). This led Adler (1983) to conclude that the parochialism of North American management studies of the 1970s seriously neglected the influence of national culture on organizational behaviour. Hofstede (1980) too had similar concerns, pointing to the insularity of North American management theories a decade earlier. Sourcing relevant knowledge about national culture's influence on managing people and organizations proved difficult at that time. However, by the 1990s, literature began to redress these shortcomings with books concerned with international management, cultural

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diversity in organizations, and knowledge transfer in diverse contexts (Adler & Gundersen, 2008; Chen, 1995; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Hofstede, 1994; Mead & Andrews, 2007; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

### **An abbreviated history of management education in China**

From about 1100 BCE, China's "institutions of higher learning" embedded "classical texts of Confucian teachings" in their curriculum (Min, 2005) and extolled "learning filiality, fraternity, friendliness, and family affection" as organizing principles (Galt in Price, 1970). In a curriculum skewed towards maintaining the Emperor's authority and managing the bureaucracy of a feudal society, competition and examinations became the lifeblood of Chinese management education through the dynasties, which continues to this day (Yu & Suen, 2005). In various guises, a long line of management educators [MEs] in China—beginning with the Scholar-Officials—maintained this course (Price, 1970).

To the mid-1700s, cordial trade-based relationships maintained China's relationship with the West, but as Western economic activity increased, these relationships imploded. Chinese indigenous knowledge quickly lost out to a Western worldview. Relationships deteriorated further as an assortment of Imperial powers jostled for influence and concessions, leading to China's subjugation by the Western powers.

Following successive periods of internal political machinations, civil conflicts, wars, the communist revolution, and the disastrous human toll wrought by Mao's Command Economy, China's economic and administrative system needed repair in the mid-1970s. Following Mao's death in 1976, the country emerged from the economic doldrums with a new playbook, one in which MEs and delivering management and business education programs [MEPs] would play crucial roles.

### **A new era for management and business education in China**

China's *1978 Open Door Policy* resulted in IJVs proliferating in the designated Special Economic Zones and with Deng Xiaoping's support of foreign trade and investment, the demand for Western management and business knowledge accelerated (Bohm & King 1999; Brown & Porter, 1996; Chen & Martin, 1996; Goodall & Warner, 1997; Frazer, 1999; Kamis, 1996; Thompson & Gui, 2000; Wright, Mitsuhashi & Chua, 1998). As the economy expanded, augmented by China's membership of the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and the *Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement* with Hong Kong in 2003 (Enright, Scott & Chang, 2005), the thirst for management and business knowledge continued.

Western universities quickly developed MEPs with an MBA offered in 1991 (Warner & Goodhall, 2010). These initiatives attracted attention because they differed markedly from similar programs in local universities (Barnett, 2005; Feldman, 2005; Kanter, 2005; Kleiman & Kass, 2007; Kleinrichert, 2005; Lewicki, 2005; Miles, 2005; Tyson, 2005). Western-styled MEPs continued to gain in popularity with 20,000 students studying in MBA programs in 1999.

But demand continued to exceed supply because China required 300,000 formally trained managers just to maintain its stellar economic performance in an era characterized by an "acute shortage of managers" (Yu, 2006). Despite China's unique challenges (Zhou, 2003), this lopsided demand-supply ratio motivated Western providers to continue investing in China's education market.

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In the early 2000s, demand began to decline as Chinese consumers became increasingly cognizant and more demanding about their education purchases (Zhang, 2005). While shrewdness partly explains falling demand, studies emerged that highlighted pitfalls in the pedagogical principles and knowledge underpinning many Western MEPs. It appeared that MEs had neglected the influence of China's cultural architecture on learning styles and managerial practices (Donaldson, 2005; Gapper, 2005; Hambrick, 2005; Pfeffer, 2005).

Notwithstanding these sentiments, other internal factors continued to feed the hunger for Western management knowledge. When the Government responded to the knowledge challenge, typical responses included allowing the "wholesale importation of the textbooks used in America's premier institutions" (Shenkar, 2005). Although these imports increased access to Western management knowledge, neophyte Chinese managers found it difficult to meld their Chinese ways of managing with ideas imported directly from a foreign culture (Newman & Nollen, 1996).

As IJVs struggled to secure competent local managers schooled in international business, this knowledge problem intensified. With little experience of Western management practices, local managers who came up through the State-owned Enterprises [SOEs] paid scant attention to integrating management functions across their divisions causing many new ventures to falter.

Concurrent to IJVs struggling to move Western management and business knowledge forward and on par with local knowledge, the Chinese government mandated the rapid development of "world class" companies to become China's National Champions by 2010 (Nolan, 2001). To achieve this goal, Chinese business leaders suggested blending "East and West" and mapping a "new middle way" as prerequisites for business success (Geldart & Roth, 2013). This pragmatism set the scene for new types of MEPs in China.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Successful knowledge transfer in China's IJVs depended on several factors, which include the influence of national cultures, curriculum design, the choice of content, pedagogical strategies, and the competencies and skills of MEs (that is the Program Facilitators) (see Ford & Chan, 2002). The extent to which the Chinese management culture is moving closer to or away from a Western management culture is also relevant.

### **National culture and its axial principles**

Although organizations are replete with surface-level information about how to behave like policies, procedures, guidelines, and regulations, other motivating factors reside at a deeper level. Here, axial principles or self-evident truths reign unchallenged. These truths also seep to the surface to govern behaviour in subtle, yet powerful and enigmatic ways (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and motivate individuals and groups to behave in distinctive ways. Hofstede alludes to this process as a "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). A holistic view sees the axial principles bracing Chinese and Western worldviews opposed, as plotted in the table below.

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**Table 1.** Cardinal dimension and axial principles and orientations

<b>Cardinal dimension of social life</b>	<b>Axial principles Western vs Eastern</b>
Macro-level relationships	Dominance vs Harmony
Micro-level relationships	Individual vs Collective
Mode of activity	Action vs Being
Temporal focus	Future vs Past
Physical space	Private (personal) vs Public (common)
Resource use	Mine vs Ours
Problem-solving	Making things happen vs Allowing things to happen
Flow of time	Linear vs Circular
	Finite vs Infinite

(Source: Hall, 1976)

Whereas functional frameworks in organizational studies interpret national culture as external phenomena following Durkheim (1964) and Parsons (1951, 1968), recent studies in neoinstitutionalism offers more insightful perspectives. Although national culture exists independently of any organizational culture, once incorporated inside, it takes on a life of its own, creating and legitimizing its own internal ways of knowing and doing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

### **Cross-cultural management and the analysis of cultural differences**

National culture imprints on patterns of organizational behaviour such that few stakeholders suspect the scope of its influence (Triandis, 1982) and just like an “invisible jet stream”, it registers as unconscious motivation (Hall, 1976) by tapping into deeper understandings about what is or what should be.

The axial principles bracing China’s national culture have endured for millennia, allowing it to assimilate diverse groups within its boundaries. Confucianism, a significant pillar in the Chinese worldview, also casts its influence over management practices and ideas about leadership, social interaction, attitudes, and values. However, this omnipresent influence presents as a stumbling block to transferring foreign knowledge in IJVs because Chinese and Western managers operate according to different mindsets. These cognitive imprints prime managerial behaviour.

Studies in management, sociology, and social anthropology point to these subtle but enduring connections. Huang and Bond (2012) show how the Confucian traditions of *mianzi* (face) and filial piety influence work practices while Tsai, Young and Cheng (2011) posit a causal relationship between firm competitiveness and Confucian traditions. Kim, Fu and Duan (2017) probe similar influences in human resource management [HRM] in East Asia while Cohen (1979) suggests ancestor worship contains political symbolism that impacts organizational behaviour. Anecdotal evidence too suggests the speed of strategic business decisions decelerates in periods leading up to and during the Hungry Ghost month and similar auspicious occasions (Backman, 2005). Child and Warner (2003) concluded that Chinese management practices have their cultural roots deep in history, which emerge independently of the economic system operating at the surface. Westerners without this knowledge face a difficult task in managing the goings-on inside their IJV.

Because a national culture is exceedingly ethnocentric and parochial, cultural discourses collide rather than converge. Axial principles seeping to the surface

trigger unique approaches to managing people and organizations, which are observable in practice. The key words in the table below capture the nature of these differences.

**Table 2.**Observable differences in management behaviors (key words)

Functional areas	Low-context Western management culture	High-context East-Asian management culture
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short term, decentralized, open, systematic, classification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long term, centralized, closed, reactive, adaption</li> </ul>
HRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participative, defined, performance management, explicit, merit, initiative, stakeholder, concrete rewards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-participative, vague, 'face', <i>guanxi</i>, seniority, implicit, follower, assimilated</li> </ul>
HRD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-going, formal, structured, external providers, needs driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-the-job, informal, unstructured, internal providers, providers undervalued, management drives</li> </ul>
Managing people and organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegate, professionals, universalistic management philosophies, unambiguous, private, entrenched, direct, particularism, specialized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands-on, family, insiders, relaxed, ambiguous, holistic, civic, paternal, compromise, flexible, intermittent, infinite, indirect, non-specialized</li> </ul>
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparency, independent managerial and financial auditing, accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opaque, in-house managerial, and financial auditing</li> </ul>
Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactive, restructure, individual relationships, mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reactive, accepting, group relationships, stability</li> </ul>

(Sources: Adler & Gundersen, 2008; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Waters, 1991)

### Convergence, divergence, and crossvergence of management cultures

Although axial principles are powerful influences, recent studies canvass the prospect of the convergence, divergence, and/or crossvergence [CDC] of management cultures (see Foster & Minkes, 1999; McGaughey & De Cieri, 1999; Paik, Chow & Vance, 2011). Guo (2015) suggests convergence requires a way of thinking imbued with the "common logic of industrialism (and the) capitalist Western countries". This motivates MEs to populate their MEPs with Western management ideas, presaging a convergence of management cultures, but one still subjugated by Western worldviews. Divergence suggests management thinking deviates from a common set of Western-infused ideas towards indigenous thinking because of national culture's formidable effect. Motivated by this viewpoint, MEs produce MEPs imbued with the values and attitudes prevalent in the host country. These programs accounted for the managerial, human resource, technological, political, social, cultural, and economic worldviews of Chinese managers, especially those managing IJVs (e.g. Berrell, Wrathall & Wright, 2001; Braine, 2005; Deng & Wang, 1992; Hout & Michael, 2014; Ju, 2018; Liang & Lin, 2008; Tang & Ward, 2003; Wang & Sun, 2018;

Warner, 1991, 2005; Warner & Rowley, 2014). This recognition required MEs to make tangible concessions and refit the curriculum and treat China's economy as akin to "capitalism with Chinese characteristics" (Huang, 2008).

But a pertinent question remains: just how significant is the influence of China's national culture on its managerial practices when compared to other environmental factors? Miroshnik (2002) argues the extent is debatable. In a similar vein, determining the interplay of a national culture and a country's economic ideology is problematic, as demonstrated by Ralston (2008), Ralston et al. (1997), and Shenkar and Ronen (1987). Even so, the march of globalization comes with the potential for Western ideas about economy, politics, and society to clash with those of non-Western host countries (Doz & Prahalad 1991; Huntington 1996; Li & Madsen, 2010; Mackinnon, 2008; Warner et al., 2005), which gives some weight to the divergence thesis.

A comparative study on how national culture and economic ideology shapes managerial work values identified "the synergistic interaction of sociocultural and economic ideological influences within a society that results in a unique value system" (Ralston, 2008). These values differed from those supported by either a country's socio-cultural values or its economic ideology—Ralston subsequently expanded the latter to account for a "business ideology paradigm", fashioned by country-specific economic, political, ideological, and technological factors. Thus, Ralston and his research colleagues, believed that 'business ideology propels a country's management culture toward convergence while social and cultural forces push it toward divergence'. Crossvergence is the nexus between these two conflicting forces and because business ideology influences business practices and shapes the management culture, the prospect for crossvergence is strong in times of rapid economic change. However, as the pace of change varies across industry sectors, crossvergence might occur over months, decades, or perhaps never (see McDonald & Burton, 2002). So too, determining the pace of change in social values is a highly problematic exercise (Webber, 1969; see Gentry & Sparks, 2012; Hoorn, 2019).

A crossvergence thesis raises thorny questions—specifically, can MEs design MEPs that blends diverging (Chinese) and converging (Western) management cultures into a crossvergence culture that makes sense of opposed or competing ideas? From a psychological standpoint, crossvergence conceals dangerous presuppositions. Hinojosa et al. (2017) agrees that internalizing opposed ideas has significant behavioural consequences. Moreover, can managers ever hold competing ideas and believe two things simultaneously and still function effectively? A study of Chinese students learning from an international curriculum demonstrates the difficulties in internalizing opposed ideas. According to Yuan, Li and Yu (2019), these students continually struggled to negotiate three contradictory positions concerning their identity: Were they committed learners or bewildered participants? Should they adhere to a global or Chinese worldview? Should they behave cooperatively or be fiercely independent?

Thinking globally but acting locally is a "glocal" strategy for seeking workable local solutions to environmental problems (May 1997; Svensson, 2001). This outlook supports sense-making in a crossvergence perspective. Although its advocates see "glocal" strategies embracing their viewpoint, others are not convinced, suggesting "genuine" global strategies are idealistic, if not impossible to achieve in practice (in Warner, 2014). Perhaps this view sounds the death knell for any crossvergence of management cultures? Furthermore, at what point do



Western and Chinese management cultures merge as a compatible and unified without creating ambiguous or double-bind situations for Western and Chinese managers alike?

The concept of cognitive dissonance too has implications for a crossvergence of management cultures in China. For example, misunderstandings and confusion occurs when managers and employees in IJVs hold contradictory thoughts and/or competing attitudes about risk management and/or occupational health and safety, both scary propositions in high reliability organizations. Nevertheless, for Chinese managers to make sense of imported management ideas, this knowledge needs to mesh somehow with traditional ideas. The concepts of Etic-Emic in the social sciences, applied to transferring knowledge, help structure this problem.

### **Etic and Emic perspectives in cross-cultural management education**

Etic-Emic delineations are the basis for developing “typologies for cross-cultural comparison derived from field data” in the social sciences (Lu, 2012; see Pike, 1954; Sanday, 1979). Extending this notion to MEPs in China, Etic-flavoured approaches draw from Western ideas in an attempt “to identify universal aspects of human behaviour and find universal processes that transcend cultural differences” (Lu, 2012). This view forecasts a convergence in the Chinese management culture. Consciously or unconsciously, MEs assume that components of the Chinese management culture have their equivalences in a Western one. These are grounds to support an assimilation of management ideas.

In contrast, Emic approaches affirm that “culture-specific” values and attributes “cannot be comparable across all cultures” (Lu, 2012). This disparity suggests deep level cultural rationales are immutable and “integrated” into in a national culture. Hence, Western ideas about management ultimately clash with those of a Chinese manager’s and *vice versa*, making assimilation difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

While a mixture of Etic and Emic content alludes to crossvergence, whether this blend is a genuine universal type of management culture is questionable. We believe that the case for crossvergence is doubtful because it depends on one national culture deferring to another’s. History suggests this scenario is unlikely because national culture’s influence is just too powerful for meaningful crossvergence to emerge. In addition, in an age of identity politics, one needs to tread carefully inside cross-culture enterprises.

### **Generic success factors for knowledge transfer in IJVs**

The successful transfer of management knowledge depends on the convergence of a range of interdependent factors and approaches (Biggs, 1996; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Gudykunst, 2003; Hativa, Barak & Simhi, 2001; Kember & McNaught, 2007; Kreber, 2002; Mor, Morris & Joh, 2013; Smith, Peterson & Thomas, 2008). This is especially the case in cross-cultural contexts (see Thompson, 2002; Thompson & Gui, 2000). We reviewed and précised the principal recurring factors in the literature and placed them unordered under the headings of Curriculum, Pedagogy, Culture, and Program Facilitator.

#### **Curriculum**

- Ensure a tight fit between content, assessment, and Learning Objectives
  - Include hard and soft employability skills
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- Provide practical activities as steppingstones to theory
- Use authentic assessment tasks
- Use at least one site visit

#### Pedagogy

- Match transfer methods to the audience and organizational context
- Use a 'common language'
- Monitor and adjust the "velocity" of knowledge transfer (speed of delivery) and the "viscosity" of knowledge (its richness and appropriateness to the Learning Objectives)
- Including opportunities for critical and reflective thinking, teamwork, and cross-cultural communication
- Move gradually from a facilitator-centric to participant-centric pedagogy.

#### Culture

- Establish mutual trust between facilitators and participants
- Be genuinely empathetic with a manager's worldview (a prerequisite of cementing trust)
- Be enthusiastic, thought-provoking, and entertaining (managers must warm to the facilitator)
- Challenge a manager's worldview without devaluing that viewpoint.

#### Program Facilitator

- Must be authorities in their field
- Determine if participants have the work experience necessary to absorb the transferred knowledge
- Regularly assessing whether participants have internalized the transferred knowledge
- Deliver the "foundation concepts" even if this means covering less general content
- Use a variety of technologies, delivery strategies, and learning spaces, and
- Be flexible to incorporate on-the-run changes based on in-session feedback.

### **The need for instructional scaffolding**

The literature (see Berk, 2002; Merrill, 2002; Verenikina, 2008) also mandated using instructional scaffolding to support participant learning. However, the amount of support provided depends on a participant's level of comprehension. With this estimation, MEs mix the amount of guidance, assistance, and resources provided, taking into consideration the viscosity of knowledge, the velocity of its transfer, the Volume of Learning required, and the complexity of specific Learning Objectives.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research questions, design, and data collection**

The following research questions [RQs] anchored the study:

1. What changes have occurred since the 1990s in the approach to MEPs in China's IJVs?
  2. Since the 1990s, has the Chinese management culture moved closer to or away from a Western management culture?
-

3. Is it feasible that a crossvergence of Chinese and Western management cultures will produce a genuine “new” management culture sometimes in the future?
4. What are the main success factors for MEPs in China?

A qualitative research methodology supported the research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). A case study approach allowed for in-depth and multi-layered investigations of the complex issues implied in the RQs (Yin, 2014).

Data collection methods included a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, a Linear Rating Scale [LRS], and feedback from Chinese managers who participated in a series of MEPs conducted for one IVJ over several years (with some sessions conducted in Australia). Two groups of MEs completed the same questionnaire: one in 2014 (n=13) and another in 2017 (n=30). We combined these data as Group 1 [G1] (n=43). Subsequent in-depth interviews with most of G1 (n=36) occurred during 2017 and part of 2018 using Skype, Zoom, and similar technologies; 12 proceeded face-to-face. Sadly, four G1 MEs were deceased; three were uncontactable at the time.

### Sample characteristic

The sample consisted of highly experienced MEs who had experienced the gamut of approaches to MEPs from at least the early-1990s. A purposive sampling technique identified MEs with this profile. All MEs understood the study’s terminology and possessed academic knowledge about management and transferring knowledge. They were mature-aged and by December 2017, almost three in four had retired. Nationalities represented in G1: Australia (16), New Zealand (8), Hong Kong (5), Canada (5), the USA (4), Singapore (2), Malaysia (2) and South Africa (1).

**Table 3.** Characteristics of facilitators

Characteristics	n=	≈ %
Western-trained	43	100%
15+ yrs. tertiary teaching	43	100%
8+ yrs. West. managerial exp.	43	100%
Consult/work in Chinese-owned enterprises	26	60%
Consult/work in IJVs	43	100%
Under Grad award	43	100%
Post Grad award	34	80%
Fluent in English	43	100%
Mandarin/Cantonese language skills	17	40%
Chinese diaspora	11	25%
Male	31	72%
Female	12	28%

We determined the sample met the criteria for membership of an Expert Panel. Thomas Saaty (1988) suggests expert opinion convergences in the consensus view of a small number of people (eight to ten) who possess acknowledged expertise in a professional field. In this expert setting, we further conjectured that most MEs would:

1. Favour the divergence perspective in the Chinese management culture
2. Discount the possibility of a crossvergence of management cultures
3. Reach a consensus about the main success factors of MEPs in China

### Analytical procedures

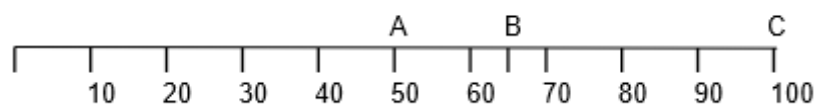
The questionnaire contained 14 propositions. MEs ranked their responses as either agreeing or disagreeing with the general tenor of each proposition, recorded on a 5-point scale where 1=*strongly disagree* and 5=*strongly agree*.

Methods of analysing the interview data included pattern building techniques (Yin, 2014), semiotic analysis (Fiske & Hartley, 1979), and identifying structural oppositions (Kronenfeld & Decker, 1979). We developed a template with the umbrella categories of Etic [ET], Emic [EM], Divergence [DIV], Convergence [CON], Crossvergence [CRO], Curriculum Design [CUR], and Pedagogy [PED] to record dominant words and/or phrases that explicitly or implicitly told us something about their views. Simultaneously, we noted responses that indicated links between surface level management behaviour and deeply embedded axial principles (see Table 1). For individual MEs, we estimated the intensity of these links as being slight (-), medium (=), strong (+), or extremely strong (++) within their discourse.

Concerning RQ4, we amalgamated success factors identified by the MEs with other factors identified in studies on knowledge transfer in diverse settings, including China (e.g. Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Kayes, Kayes & Yamazaki, 2005; Khamakorn, Kurul & Tah, 2016; Thompson, 2002). To delineate the nature of each factor, we placed them under six categories related to: Curriculum and Pedagogy [C&P], Faculty Profile [FP], Infrastructure [INF], National Culture [NC] Audience [AUD], and Administration [ADMIN] (see Table 5).

The first ten MEs on the interview schedule accepted an invitation to prioritize success factors (all accepted) using the LRS. As explained below, we partitioned off C&P and FP for this rating activity. Choosing the first 10 MEs seemed defensible given the arbitrary scheduling of the interviews. They each received the LRS template via email with instructions and examples and proceeded to rate the relative importance of the success factors using a 100-point scale.

**Figure 1.** Example of a Linear Rating Scale with three factors



MEs placed at least one factor deemed to be most important at the 100-point. They then placed other factors relative to the paramount factor(s). To avoid order bias, we rotated factors in sets of three for each ME. Dividing the total of each individual placement of a factor by the total of all placements across all factors produced a relative weighting of each factor. A process akin to Cattell's scree test (Cattell, 1966) identified points of discontinuity in the success factors of the two umbrella categories.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Questionnaire

All questionnaires were useable.

**Table 4.** Responses to the propositions in the questionnaire

	<b>Propositions [P]</b>	<b>n=43 x̄</b>
1	Since the 1990s, teaching strategies in MEPs have developed to accommodate Chinese learning styles	3.9
2	Curriculum design today recognizes that distinct cultures have different ideas about managing people and organizations	3.9
3	The influence of North American ideas about how to manage people in IJVs has declined since the 1990s	4.2
4	It is quite difficult for Chinese managers to assimilate North American and Chinese management cultures in their management practices	4.1
5	In IJVs today, North American, and Chinese management cultures are converging	2.4
6	Today, Chinese managers are moving away from North America ideas about managing people and organizations to practicing a management culture that has a decidedly "Chinese" flavor	4.1
7	Most conflicts between expat and local managers and stakeholders in IJVs and strategic alliances arise because each group has different ideas about how to manage staff, allocate resources, and make business decisions	4.2
8	A mix of case studies and examples that demonstrate how North American and Chinese managers approach managing people and organizations helps Chinese managers understand how different management styles produce different outcomes	4.2
9	North Americans managers view <i>guanxi</i> as an unethical business practice because of its potential to lead to conflicts of interest and/or corruption	4
10	Chinese managers view <i>quanxi</i> as a necessary component of their management practice and a natural way of doing business in China	4.5
11	Chinese managers believe employing and/or appointing trusted colleagues and friends to responsible positions in an organization is a sensible business practice	3.6
12	Today, one can identify a crossvergence of management cultures in IJVs	2.5
13	Irrespective of nationality, managers who recognize the influence of national culture on one's management practices are valuable assets in IJVs	4.3
14	Increasingly, in their approach to management, Chinese managers are using a mixture of North American and Chinese management cultures, adjusting this mix to suit the setting and the issue at hand	3.9

Concerning CDC, (Ps 5, 6, and 14), the bulk of opinion suggests a distinct Chinese management culture is now evident. The waning influence of Western approaches (P3) since the 1990s reinforces the majority view, which discounts the crossvergence perspective (P12). National culture's influence is very apparent in responses to propositions testing the nature of Chinese social networks, social relations, and familial values (Ps 4, 7, 9, 10, and 11).

Deeply embedded worldviews continue to shape both Chinese and Western ideas about business ethics and morality. Western managers embedded in Chinese IJVs need to constantly incorporate Chinese values into their own cognitive maps to survive in a convoluted environment and in turn, placate any negative concerns their home-based senior managers might harbour. However, in most cases, home-based managers had neither the knowledge nor first-hand experience of anything Chinese.

Nevertheless, accommodating Chinese learning styles and contextualizing the curriculum (Ps 1, 2, and 8) reinforces the need for Western managers to understand the enduring influence of the axial principles driving Chinese managers. Responses to P13 also suggests Chinese managers are prone to adopt pragmatic strategies to suit the circumstances and this is a positive step. Since John Dewey's visit in 1919, pragmatism has subtly encroached upon traditional Chinese thinking and despite periods of popularity and decline, his philosophy of pragmatism has experienced a "rehabilitation" since the 1980s, with Chinese adaptations made along the way (Youzhong, 1999). With ideas about pragmatism coming full-cycle in China, its potential to shape a uniquely Chinese management culture is significant.

### Interview data

For the sake of brevity, the main findings appear in narrative form. Most likely, Chinese managers will increasingly adopt pragmatic approaches to using Western management techniques depending on the situations they confront. Ultimately though, Chinese ways will endure. As experienced China-hands know, there are always more than one set of financials and/or management reports at hand. Which one appears depends on the audience.

Concerning Emic undertones underpinning curriculum and pedagogy, 75% (rounded upward to the nearest whole number) of the MEs used language that signified this connection. Almost 85% consistently used words and phrases that explicitly or implicitly recognized the need to include Emic principles in MEPs. Language signifying this prerequisite includes words and phrases such as "contextualize", "alter", "add local examples", "adjust", "practical activities", "interactive sessions", "not too much talk and chalk", "adapt content", "don't get into debates about *guanxi*, integrity, or morality", and "Chinese values are apart from (Western) ones". No ME thought increasing the amount of Western knowledge in any MEP was a sensible idea; however, increasing Chinese knowledge was.

During the interviews, we used three stem questions [SQs] related to the RQs to keep the discussions on track. Slightly over 80% used words or phrases that signalled their "strong" or "very strong" agreement with the explicit and implicit sentiments implied in the following SQ: *Do you think the sway of Chinese values is such that Chinese and Western management practices are not readily compatible?*

In a similar vein, 72% either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the following SQ: *Do you think the Chinese management culture has developed with a distinct Chinese flavour and has moved away from the wholesale adoption and/or adaptation of Western management techniques?* These views run parallel with 85% of the MEs who agreed with the sentiments implied in the SQ: *Do you think the Chinese management culture is now clearly diverging away from a typical Western management culture?* (which braced most MEPs in the 1980s and well into the early 1990s).

One SQ drew the MEs' attention to critical and reflective thinking skills of Chinese managers. All MEs supported the view that developing a cadre of Chinese managers with these skills was a priority goal (Qi, 2017). One ME captured this view in a nutshell: MEs must ... *sow seeds in the minds of our managers ... so they can think more deeply (critically and reflectively) about their roles and activities.*

We also noted interview data that confirmed the cultural predispositions set out in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Intensity of observed behaviours due to cultural predispositions

++	+	=	-
Accept top-down management	Approach private and public spaces holistically	Low priority of managerial auditing	Timelines intermittent and infinite constructs
Comfortable in non-participative structures	Assimilate rather than solicit rewards	Career paths are ill-defined	Allow work to happen rather than make work happen
Maintaining "face"	Focus on the long term	Accept imprecise Job Descriptions*	
View <i>guanxi</i> as a normal	View <i>guanxi</i> as a legitimate fringe benefit	Incorporate family and insiders	
Accept the status quo	Accept hands-on management by seniors	Devalue transparency of accounts	
	Accept particularistic thinking	Uncritical of management decisions	

\* alternatively, Position Descriptions

The views of the MEs about axial principles were unequivocal—"China's (national) culture regulates all management behaviour". However, incorporating foreign cultural principles into the minds of people from another culture is difficult because it involves assimilating contradictory knowledge, a genuinely Wicked Problem (see Churchman, 1967; Rittel & Webber, 1973). For example, Western managers in China still struggle with accepting *guanxi* as a routine business practice and fail to comprehend why Chinese managers prefer to employ or promote trusted relatives and/or close in-group colleagues to management positions. The case for nepotism is strong in China and a logical consequence of its axial principles—why wouldn't you employ someone you know and trust over a stranger? Moreover, trust cements all social and business relations. Without mutual trust, business and management relationships quickly derail. For MEs, plotting a path that avoids the problems produced by cognitive dissonance and resolves the expectations of international partners is a difficult but essential goal. MEs highlighted the capacity for all stakeholders to compromise is a highly desirable attribute, which helps address the issue.

Interestingly, about 70% of the MEs perceived significant value differences between Chinese managers trained since the early 2000s, and their more mature 'grey-haired' counterparts who came up through the old SOEs in one area—the influence of traditional ideas about the nature of social relationships on HRM policies and practices. A similar percentage believed familial relationships also shaped responses to HRM issues while 55% made indirect references to detecting similar value differences.

In the early 1990s, open discussion of sensitive issues, especially in IJV-sponsored programs, fell well out-of-bounds. We found this to be the case when

a senior manager of the sponsoring IJV participated in MEPs for lower level managers (a common practice in the early days). However, since the early 2000s, MEs noted several sensitive HR areas emerging as “hot topics” among participants during workshop activities, which included open discussion about:

- HRM processes that continued to use seniority as the main criteria for promotion
- Senior managers who devalued displays of initiative by their subordinates
- IJVs that offered *ad-hoc* MEPs and unstructured training
- Senior managers who devalued the input of “experts” external to their in-group and/or their IJV
- The lack of attention to accountability in management decisions

Recent studies noted the preference of many Chinese employees for traditional moral leadership with a mix of transformational leadership thrown in. The least preferred style was authoritarian leadership. Since the mid-2000s, all MEs observed managers discussing these preferences related to tricky topics such as leadership/headship and promotion criteria. In a setting where seniority still packs a punch, such preferences fuel spirited debate. Nevertheless, studies also highlight the emergence of a hybrid style, which combines Western ways with traditional Chinese ways of maintaining harmony and balance (see Ju, 2018; Lau, 2012; Ma, 2020). Whether open discussions about these topics constitute evidence of some degree of convergence in the Chinese management culture or merely the pragmatic responses of younger managers, based on self-interest and seeking increasing one’s career prospects, is uncertain at this time.

Concerning the increasing interest in hot topics, MEs said they progressively plotted a ‘middle way’, which recognized not only the predispositions of Chinese manager but also offered a platform for change consistent with Chinese ways of doing things. But this course involves compromise on the part of all stakeholders, especially from Western managers comfortable in their Western ways.

### Success factors for knowledge transfer

Based on ME feedback, the elements of a General Success Framework for MEPs in China appear in Table 6.

**Table 6.** General Success Framework for MEPs in China

<b>CURRICULUM &amp; PEDAGOGY</b>	<b>FACULTY PROFILE (Facilitators)</b>
<p><i>Curriculum principles</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use the facilitator’s fieldwork in China</li> <li>▪ Use current Chinese examples</li> <li>▪ Incorporate Chinese and Western approaches in decision-making</li> <li>▪ Develop content for the target industry</li> <li>▪ Fit content tightly with Learning Objectives</li> <li>▪ Use a constructivist framework</li> </ul>	<p><i>Experience and background</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lived and worked in China</li> <li>▪ Ideally have a working knowledge of Mandarin and/or Cantonese</li> <li>▪ Existing relationship networks in China</li> <li>▪ Relevant industry expertise</li> <li>▪ Highly experienced “expert” with “seniority”</li> </ul>
<p><i>Pedagogical principles</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case analysis begins with specific examples</li> <li>▪ Move slowly to theories, intangibles, and organizing principles</li> </ul>	<p><i>Skills and cognitive abilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expert knowledge of managing people and organizations</li> </ul>



- 
- Use the 'language' of a participant's industry
  - Constantly adjust instructional scaffolding
  - Begin with facilitator-centred instruction
  - Move gradually to participant-centred learning
  - Always more from practice to theory

- Focused – don't tell irrelevant "War Stories"
- Knowledgeable – tell personal stories that fit the Learning Objectives
- Judge and adjust the velocity of knowledge transfer and its viscosity based on participant learning
- Use euphemisms accessible to Chinese managers

#### *Affective traits*

- Value the work experience of participants
- High levels of cultural and emotional intelligence
- Unfazed by ambiguity
- Highly personable
- Understand the roles of trust and *guanxi* in China
- Appreciates the nature of Chinese values

#### **ADMINISTRATION**

- Include industry visit
- Mandatory pre-MEP conference with client
- Client supplies profiles of participants
- Client reviews how post-program management practices reflect MEP objectives and provide feedback

#### **AUDIENCE**

- Must have the capacity (work experience) necessary to internalize transferred knowledge
- Some exposure to Western ideas highly desirable
- MEPs should be part of participant's career goals and self-improvement strategy

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Learning space starts in traditional (formal, status-bound, and hierarchical) settings, moving gradually to less formal (interactive, non-status, and decentralized) spaces
- Incorporate mobile technology into the delivery strategy, especially the use of participant's mobile phones and other devices
- Develop an App to support all aspects of the program (delivery, resources, pre- and post-program activities, and follow-up activities)
- Venue capable of using multi-media delivery platforms and significant broadband capacity
- Wi-Fi connection for participants at multiple locations
- Supply hard and soft copies of all materials

#### **NATIONAL CULTURE**

##### *Recognizing lived experience*

- Rewards via Chinese strategic business relationships, networks, and alliances are "normal" practices
  - Confucian heritage and axial principles subtly impel behaviour across various contexts and settings
  - Chinese managers have different ideas about ethics and morality
-

Given the capacity of the MEs to control and/or strongly influence outcomes through their personal knowledge and experience in the category of C&P and their individual expert FP, we partitioned these two categories and provided a succinct description of each success factor [SF] in Table 6. However, this partitioning does not diminish the importance of the other categories. Over 90% of MEs suggested these SFs were also “essential” and/or “desirable” for achieving positive outcomes. Arguably, external agencies control these resource-related factors, creating a situation that requires unambiguous communication between clients and MEs in areas like IT infrastructure, learning spaces, and the work experience of participants.

Concerning NC, for example, one ME captured the unanimous view of G1: *To be successful, (MEs) must have a good relationship network in China ... and considerable experience operating in ‘China business’.* This view implicitly highlighted the fundamental roles of trust and *guanxi* play when navigating a way through China’s dense social and business networks.

**Table 7.** Features of C&P and FP success factors

SF	C&P	SF	FP
A.	Use Chinese, Western and other non-Western case studies	A.	Facilitators who match the velocity of transfer with the capacity of audience to internalise disseminated knowledge
B.	Refer to current issues in Chinese economy/business	B.	Facilitators with current relationship and/or business networks in China
C.	Use everyday situations as springboards to discussing abstract concepts/ideas	C.	Facilitators who are experts in their field(s)
D.	Anchor group discussions in observed management practices before moving to theory-based explanations	D.	Facilitators who convey their work experience in stories, but only include personal War Stories that tightly fit with specific Learning Objectives
E.	Frame business problems/issues from both Chinese and Western perspectives	E.	Facilitators who have lived and/or worked in China (even if only for a short time); participants generally relate strongly to facilitators with this profile
F.	Use industry-relevant content drawn from participants’ workplaces	F.	Facilitators who can match the viscosity of knowledge to the Learning Objectives
G.	Deliver content using the style of the business language used by Chinese managers	G.	Facilitators capable of performing formal and informal on-going assessments of Learning Objectives during the MEP
H.	Move from facilitator-centred to participant-centred learning	H.	Facilitators who demonstrate they are interested in and genuinely value the work experience of participants
I.	Fit content tightly with Learning Objectives	I.	Facilitators who use a common language accessible to the participants and avoid Western euphemisms
J.	Design a flexible program to cope with adjustments to the viscosity and velocity of knowledge bases on feedback	J.	Ideally, facilitators with a working knowledge of Mandarin/Cantonese; even a rudimentary knowledge of the language is a positive attribute

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>K. Establish a robust instructional scaffolding</p> <p>L. Use a facilitator's field work in China</p> <p>M. Use incidental examples of similarities and differences in Western and Chinese approaches to management</p> <p>N. Treat deep-seated Chinese axial principles in an objective and non-judgemental manner</p> | <p>K. Facilitators who avoid framing the benefits derived from <i>guanxi</i> and Chinese business networks in a Western ethical framework</p> |
|--|---|

Following the LRS, the raw and weighted scores for each SF in C&P and FP appear in Tables 8 to 11.

**Table 8.** Unordered raw scores in Curriculum and Pedagogy using LRS

Person	SFs														Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	
1	100	40	85	70	80	50	50	60	40	70	85	80	90	80	980
c	60	60	100	65	70	45	70	70	45	35	100	65	60	70	915
3	55	85	85	100	75	75	60	80	60	60	50	70	40	40	935
4	100	75	90	65	55	45	45	30	35	65	70	100	50	65	890
5	100	70	80	50	65	60	65	55	65	100	75	100	30	40	955
6	70	55	75	100	60	50	60	70	70	60	50	65	75	90	950
7	90	65	70	80	70	85	55	50	50	60	100	75	70	45	965
8	100	60	75	100	80	60	40	100	60	40	65	80	55	100	1015
9	90	55	75	75	45	65	30	90	75	45	70	45	55	55	870
10	80	50	60	85	35	60	70	85	60	55	50	65	45	95	895
	845	615	795	790	635	595	545	690	560	590	715	745	570	680	9370

Note: Facilitators could add additional factors (O ...) in hindsight (none added additional factors); the total for each SF divided by the total for all factors produced the relative weight in the total opinion of the experts (for example, for factor G:  $545/9370 = 0.0582$ )

**Table 9.** Ordered raw scores in Curriculum and Pedagogy

A	845 / 9370	=	0.0902
C	795 / 9370	=	0.0848
D	790 / 9370	=	0.0843
L	745 / 9370	=	0.0795
K	715 / 9370	=	0.0763
H	690 / 9370	=	0.0736
N	680 / 9370	=	0.0726
E	635 / 9370	=	0.0678
B	615 / 9370	=	0.0656
F	595 / 9370	=	0.0635
J	590 / 9370	=	0.0630
M	570 / 9370	=	0.0608
I	560 / 9370	=	0.0598
G	545 / 9370	=	0.0582

quasi scree plot at 4 decimal places

Relative weights sum to 1.0

Applying a quasi-Scree test to further prioritise the SFs, the following imperatives emerged:

1. Use Chinese, Western, and non-Western business cases
2. Use concrete Chinese examples when discussing abstract concepts

3. Commence discussions with observed Chinese management practices and move gradually to theory-based explanations
4. Use cases developed from the facilitator's own fieldwork
5. Use appropriate instructional scaffolding
6. Move from facilitator-centred to participant-centred learning
7. Represented deep-seated Chinese axial principles in an objective and non-judgemental manner

**Table 10.** Unordered raw scores in Faculty Profile using LRS

Person	SFs											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	
1	80	100	70	40	80	75	50	55	60	25	60	695
2	70	75	80	45	95	100	50	50	50	60	60	735
3	90	85	75	100	75	60	60	65	55	65	55	785
4	100	90	85	45	100	70	65	45	65	70	65	800
5	70	70	100	50	70	100	45	70	45	55	55	730
6	85	100	80	50	80	75	55	55	70	45	70	765
7	80	85	75	70	100	85	60	45	50	55	80	785
8	75	90	75	30	100	90	50	70	50	40	65	735
9	90	75	85	20	100	90	35	50	50	60	60	715
10	100	90	90	50	90	85	70	55	45	60	55	790
	840	860	815	500	890	830	540	560	540	535	625	7535

**Table 11.** Ordered raw scores in Faculty Profile

E	890 / 7535	=	0.12
B	860 / 7535	=	0.11
A	840 / 7535	=	0.11
F	830 / 7535	=	0.11
K	825 / 7535	=	0.11
C	815 / 7535	=	0.11
H	560 / 7535	=	0.07
G	540 / 7535	=	0.07
I	540 / 7535	=	0.07
J	535 / 7535	=	0.07
D	500 / 7535	=	0.07

quasi scree plot at 2 decimal places

The quasi-Scree test prioritised the SFs. Accordingly, the JD for a Program Facilitator might read as follows:

*We are seeking a ME who has lived and worked in China and has current business and relationships there. Sound knowledge of constructivist approach to curriculum design and the ability to show the similarities and differences in Western and Chinese approaches to problem solving are essential. The person should have expert skills in all aspects of knowledge transfer in IJVs, hold seniority within their institution/company, have an international reputation as an expert in managing people and organizations, and developed case studies in Chinese business environments. A strong knowledge of China's national culture and an appreciation of how Chinese approach business ethics and morality are mandatory. Chinese language skills an advantage.*

### **Feedback from Chinese participants**

Feedback from 15 cohorts of individual Chinese managers who participated in an on-going MEP we designed and delivered for Xian Janssen Ltd (Johnson&Johnson China) and two allied organizations was remarkably similar over a decade. We collected end-of-program feedback from each cohort using a Chinese language survey designed by an English-fluent Chinese college. Xian Janssen managers also collected post-program feedback and supplied us with evaluations. Participants included doctors, hospital administrators, pharmacists, salespeople, para-medical staff, technical staff, chemists, warehouse managers, and a host of administrators overseeing activities across the IJV and up and down the IVJ's supply chain.

Participants consistently indicated they enjoyed practical activities over theoretical sessions, and interactive and participatory sessions over traditional ME-centric presentations. Industry visits and planned social activities were "highlights". However, the extent to which they found those sessions useful depended on the skill and cultural competencies of the Western ME. They needed to "like" the ME. Participants also provided incidental and disparaging feedback about other MEs in MEPs conducted for their IJV; they just "talked to their English-language PowerPoint slides" was a typical comment.

In the initial stages of our MEPs, we drew from Western case studies, although we focused on 'who did what' and 'where did those activities occur'. Through discussing surface-level activities and structures, the formation of generalizations became the conduit to theory building, which explained the management and organizational behaviors depicted in the case. The final activity in the case analysis was the ME's; this synthesis offered Western theories relevant to sense-making concerning the observed activities and structures in each case. Participants warmed to this approach over time. Importantly, drawing out links between these Western explications and traditional Chinese ways of knowing and doing anchored the Western approaches firmly in the Chinese cultural architecture. Participants liked this explicit linking and in the latter stages of our MEPs, we included Chinese cases based on our field work in China. This addition was a watershed moment. Other non-Western cases also enriched the learning resources.

Participants consistently commented that this approach was "most useful for learning about international management" and "very memorable" because it encouraged and allowed for the "free flow of ideas between the teachers and us". This type of exchange offered participants opportunities to "choose which Western (or international) management ideas fitted with "our Chinese values" and which ideas "realistically worked in my workplace", while still providing a solid understanding of Western management techniques.

Participants were unequivocal in their views about the nexus between theory and practice. Highly theoretical sessions that ignored the Chinese cultural architecture were of little value because the approach treated two bodies of knowledge as comparable. It reinforced the Etic approach to MEPs. Participants also pointed to the problematic nature of management knowledge when bundled and presented in an Etic framework. While participants believed they gained Western management knowledge in such circumstances, their application to Chinese workplaces was mostly ineffectual. They strongly conjectured that the differences between Western and Chinese approaches to managing people and organizations result from cultural and contextual factors. One response captures

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this view, “I understand about Western management, but it does not work smoothly in my division”. Another wrote, “I could pass an exam on Western management—I have in my MBA—but using it in practice is a different story”.

Feedback suggests that four areas where these magnitudes of difference create challenges for managing IJVs:

1. Relationship networks – understanding how business, social, and work relationships are all developed and maintained
2. Leadership – finding styles that fit Chinese sensibilities
3. Motivation – finding strategies that motivate Chinese workers and managers
4. Decision-making – finding problem-solving techniques that complement the Chinese ways of knowing and doing

These areas are at the heart of any management culture. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the Chinese management culture is still diverging, and significantly so.

## TOWARDS DIVERGENCE

Prior to the mid-1990s, the possibility of either a convergence or even a crossvergence of the Chinese management culture seemed a distinct possibility. However, by the early 2000s, the signs of divergence became apparent, according to the MEs in this study. Within this short timeframe, we had discounted the likelihood of convergence.

In early MEPs, Western management theories and values, viewed as the norms of international business, motivated Chinese enterprises to seek out “Western” MEs and adopt Western management practices, at least on the surface. This was an expedient and practical choice to placate their Western stakeholders. Deep down, Chinese ways of doing and knowing, various social networks still ruled, especially in IJVs (Clegg, Wang & Berrell, 2007). At the time, MEPs adopted a Western methodology to transfer knowledge, which implicitly legitimized Western-style market capitalism. Western-bound concepts guided C&P, which implicitly suited low-context learners. Designers tended to tailor content to accommodate the needs and demands of Western business clients, who normally sponsored the programs. Western clients adhered to a philosophy that saw the ‘invisible hand of the market’ influence economic and business decisions and assembled content accordingly. For the Western manager, business first and relationships second was the order of the day.

In response, those sensitive to a diverging Chinese management culture adjusted their approach to suit the emerging culture, given the caveat of the MEs that first-hand knowledge of things Chinese is *the* prerequisite success factor to operate successfully at any level of Chinese business and society. This mindset motivated MEs to infuse their curricula with content that complemented a diverging Chinese management culture. Over time, this upgraded content provided Chinese managers with opportunities to not only gain Western knowledge but also evaluate their own traditional approach to managing people and organizations. A diverging Chinese management culture also diminished the negative effects of cognitive dissonance.

Concerning Learning Objectives, in a module like *Strategies for Human Resource Management*, demonstrating that Western and Chinese ways act to

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achieve similar ends bolstered learning outcomes. The internalization of knowledge became evident to us when participants openly discussed and dissected the similarities and differences in these approaches. Accepting there are different ways of achieving the same goal is a subtle and pragmatic element in the Chinese culture. We often told the story of the Eight Immortals in Chinese mythology when they needed to cross the sea; they each did so in their own way using different resources and skills.

Discussing Western and Chinese ways of managing in a curriculum braced by constructivist approaches fits with the idea of a discrete Chinese management culture. Cognitively mature Chinese managers are also willing to openly study 'market capitalism with Chinese characteristics' and objectively analyzing how the (not so) invisible hand of the Chinese central government guides the economy.

However, recognizing *guanxi* and a tendency toward nepotism are normal and rational' components of a divergent Chinese management culture is a giant step forward for many Westerners in the age of equal opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

We conclude with the following propositions:

- MEPs that embrace a diverging Chinese management culture are more successful than those that do not
- Participants favour learning from MEs who worked/lived and undertaken fieldwork in China compared to those who have not
- MEPs designed with Emic and constructivist principles are more successful than those that are not
- Culturally-competent expert MEs achieve more positive outcomes in MEPs compared to MEs who may be experts but lack cultural sensitivity
- Striking an appropriate balance between viscosity and velocity, and testing whether participants have internalized content are essential components of successful cross-cultural knowledge transfer

In addition, we note that the MEs concurred with our view that the Chinese management culture is diverging, lessening the possibility of crossvergence. The MEs also reached a consensus about SFs in MEPs. Further testing of the strength of the above propositions may add the claims we make in this paper.

However, even though the literature canvasses a variety of models for cross-cultural MEPs and offers theories and practices in support, the actions of a single individual might mitigate the potential of any innovation in MEPs. Despite appeals to modify MEPs to suit Chinese contexts from at least the 1990s onwards, not all education providers with the capacity to do so heeded this call. Some made minimal changes to their curriculum and pedagogy, others made none.

Elitist views about academia often shape the responses of some academics to change. For example, the legitimacy of fully contextualising an accredited English language curriculum to suit a foreign culture remains a contentious issue. This became evident when academics at one leading global university proposed an innovative and ground-breaking way to deliver a MEP in China. This initiative included offering an approved *Graduate Certificate in Management* in China in Mandarin, with Learning Outcomes, content, and assessment items identical to

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the Certificate delivered in English in Australia (see report in *Monash Memo*, 2001). While market intelligence at the time estimated the potential income from this MEP as upward of AUD6m and the institution acknowledged the benefits accruing to Chinese managers, the innovation stagnated.

Rear-guard action derailed the initiative and the university balked at the point of delivery. One senior academic, a 'dean for international activities', apparently actively campaigned against the initiative despite the financial and international education rewards it offered all stakeholders. The university had previously broadcast the MEP as its "first course in another language" and recommended the initiative for a grant from a prestigious national Strategic Innovations Fund. For at least one senior university manager, building the managerial capabilities of Chinese managers and increasing their knowledge of Western business practices via their own language was still an alien notion.

Until the bias in Western management knowledge is fully interrogated and expunged, the efficacy of MEPs in China may still fail to reach their full potential, which will slow the pace of divergence within the Chinese management culture.

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