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The deep roots of cross-cultural differences in organizational behavior: Do human resource management education has to respect them?

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the deep-rooted factors causing cross-cultural differences and their subsequent impact on the effectiveness of human resource practices in organizations. Drawing from a thematic review of findings from diverse fields such as developmental economics, anthropology, and linguistics, the study explores how historical events, language, geography, and biology influence individual ethics, preferences, and decision-making styles. Multiple conceptual frameworks are introduced to guide the integration of these deep-rooted factors into cross-cultural management education. The article suggests several research directions to enhance human resource management and cross-cultural management education. The emphasis is placed on the importance for researchers and educators in the field to employ constructs and methodologies from various disciplines to comprehend the origins and enduring nature of cross-cultural organizational behavior differences. Without understanding the underlying reasons for cross-cultural differences, intercultural management cannot be practiced effectively. Despite the insights provided, it's crucial to acknowledge the currently limited research connecting historical, biological, or linguistic factors to modern organizational outcomes. This limitation makes the provided recommendations largely conjectural.

1. Introduction

Intercultural management is an increasingly relevant field for management education as businesses become more globalized and diverse. Understanding the complex relationship between culture and work motivation, team dynamics, gender roles, leadership, and business ethics is essential for effective intercultural interactions and diversity management training (e.g., Bregenzer, Felfe, Bergner, & Jiménez, 2019; Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Liu, Lin, & Chou, 2021; Remhof, Gunkel, & Schlägel, 2013; Sageder & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2019; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). Also, there is a cornucopia of research examining, on the one hand, a lack of cross-cultural competence and intercultural human resource management failures by many organizations and, on the other hand, how they (try to) train and develop employees' skills and knowledge for effective intercultural interactions, cultural intelligence, and diversity management training; or what are the components and the causes for an effective cross-cultural education or training respectively (e.g., Azevedo & Shane, 2019; Chang, 2017; Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 2006; Nam, Cho, & Lee, 2014; Ran & Huang, 2019).

However, these lines of research in the education of human resource management (HRM) and cross-cultural organizational

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behavior often focus on intercultural or inter-organizational comparisons without analyzing *the reasons* for the emergence of the differences (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). A minority of studies try to find out why and how cross-cultural differences emerge, and if they do, they focus almost exclusively on cultural value differences (Gelfand et al., 2007). This limitation may account for why there are still a lot of failures of international management practices and why many cross-cultural education programs fail, as Chang puts it: “In practice, many intercultural training programs are often perceived as ineffective; sometimes, they are even suspected of increasing the barriers between groups from varied cultural backgrounds ... A growing number of empirical examinations have documented how people’s backgrounds, practices, and beliefs have shaped the psychological and neurobiological processes underlying a wide range of behaviors” (2017; p. 160, inner references omitted).

The oversight of research into the causes of cross-cultural differences is surprising because several theoretical approaches in the organizational sciences emphasize the importance of the initial, historical, or background conditions for the subsequent decision-making and sense-making of managers or organizations’ functioning in the long run (e.g. stressed by Klüppel, Pierce, & Snyder, 2018).

In particular, the path dependence theory emphasizes how small historical events can become magnified by positive feedback; thus, organizations tend to lock themselves in a specific state that is neither guaranteed to be efficient nor easily changeable. An unpredictable historical event or solitary action of individual gains more prominence as the future unfolds (Powell, 1991; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011; Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). Similarly, the resource dependence theory suggests that organizations adapt their strategies based on their dependence on external resources and the environment in which they operate. The theory shows how unique historical events, such as technological changes or governmental actions, produce persisting management models and influence companies’ long-run strategies (Bodrožić & Adler, 2017; Christensen & Bower, 1996). The imprinting theory focuses on the strong influence of environmental conditions during sensitive periods. The theory posits that early experiences or exposures can have a lasting impact on an organization’s or individual’s behavior and characteristics. The theory describes how organizations incorporate elements of their founding environment, how individuals take on attributes of their early-career jobs, and how elements developed during this formative period persist over time (Houdek, 2016; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Finally, the person-environment fit theory states that the nature of the company culture selects the individuals who will best thrive in it, thereby cementing the initial conditions in the long run (Houdek, Bahník, Hudík, & Vranka, 2021; Vleugels, Verbruggen, De Cooman, & Billsberry, 2023). These theories serve as foundational pillars in organizational behavior and management, offering structured perspectives to decode complex influences of the past in the present.

Therefore, it is sensible to combine these traditions of organizational sciences with new quantitative studies on the border of developmental economics, cognitive psychology, anthropology, cliometrics (the quantitative studies of economic history), and linguistics, which have moved beyond testing whether there are cross-cultural differences and attempt to identify exactly why they exist. The interdisciplinary studies came up with multiple causes for cultural differences and give context into why the path-dependence of institutions and cultural norms are sometimes so intense, and sometimes they adapt malleably to a new environment.

For management education, it cannot be stressed enough that the context cannot be understood if we don’t know why it is the way it is. In reality, however, cross-cultural management education often relies on simplified, stereotypical views of cultures (Barmeyer & Franklin, 2017), focuses on Western-centric management theories and practices (Tung, 2016), overemphasizes culture of nations, or makes rigid categorizations of cultural dimensions; eventually sees cross-cultural diversity as a source of problems, not as an asset in helping individuals and organizations to succeed (Adler & Aycan, 2018). Indeed, sometimes, it works. More generally, if a training T leads to a somehow accurate outcome of O , the approach can be considered valuable ($T \rightarrow O$). However, with false, partial, or unrealistic assumptions behind the training, it is necessary to assume the existence of hidden assumptions H , that make this implication possible ($\neg T \wedge H \rightarrow O$). Abstracting from H makes it challenging to understand the phenomena and formulate more effective training. So, I can only agree with the conclusion of Earley and Singh (1995, p. 338) that international management education should proceed with an emphasis: “The key to conducting quality international or intercultural management research is to understand the contexts in which firms and individuals function and operate.”

As emphasized by many (Cornelissen, Höllerer, & Seidl, 2021; Weick, 1995), there is growing importance of integrating diverse insights to build robust theoretical frameworks in management. The methodology of this article is thus based on a thematic review of factors that influence decision-making in intercultural management and are relevant for inclusion in management education; or as Filatotchev et al., 2022 recently put it: “... management scholars [should] draw not only on established theories ..., but also on theories from organizational sociology, psychology, political science, cultural anthropology, and other disciplines, to help understand management-related phenomena in a particular context. This approach requires multi-disciplinarity, epistemological openness, and methodological pluralism.” (2022, p. 1052). After reviewing the findings, I formulate and discuss general frameworks for understanding how historical, biological, or linguistic conditions, i.e., deep-rooted factors of cultural differences, should influence contemporary education in international management. The article provides a comprehensive overview of these topics by integrating diverse sources of findings. It focuses on the deep-rooted causes of cultural differences in human resource management, starting with historical events (Klüppel et al., 2018; Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2013), then the language (Ginsburgh & Weber, 2020; Mavisakalyan & Weber, 2018), and finally, the influence of geography and biology (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014; Laitin, Moortgat, & Robinson, 2012).

Moreover, this paper, as there are few studies discussing the deep roots of behavior in HRM education literature, speculates about (in)efficiency of human resource practices (not) influenced by these factors’ complexity and depth. Each section of this paper then offers broad but useable future directions that draw on the influence of the deep roots of cross-cultural differences on HRM practices.

For example, consider how participative or directive leadership styles can be taught using situational or cross-cultural theories (Javidan, Dorfman, Luque, & House, 2006; Vroom & Jago, 2007). From the situational perspective, a leadership style responds to the specifics of organizational complexity, a degree of conflicts of interest, or other contextual conditions. On the other hand, cross-cultural theories explain leadership styles as a consequence of national culture. This way, situational theories cannot explain why either form of leadership has stabilized. Similarly, cross-cultural differences cannot explain the specific adaptive value of a leadership style.

Combining several fields' methods and findings, Lonati (2020) found that organizational leadership is currently less participative among societies that had used intensive forms of agriculture (e.g., irrigation) in the distant past. The reliance on the intensive structure of traditional agriculture required strong in-group cooperation and cohesion, i.e., it favored group conformity and repression of novel behaviors and deviant ideas. Lonati's study shows that the leadership style of contemporary leaders in a specific geographical area arises from cumulative cultural transmission via a pervasive transformation of the institutions and the persistence of social norms. As the study exemplifies, if management education wants to help its students to understand the cross-cultural behavior of employees and managers, it is necessary to use constructs and methods from various fields to identify causes of differences in cross-cultural organizational behavior and their long-term persistence (see Fig. 1).

2. Culture as a persistence of historic environment and events

In the 21st century, it seems there are more technological, organizational, and cultural changes than ever before and that these changes establish new ways in which countries, organizations, and individuals thrive. However, the changes evoke emotions and attract attention; therefore, people overestimate their long-term impact and believe many are groundbreaking (Risi, Sharma, Shah, Connelly, & Watts, 2019). In many areas, they are not. For example, despite apparent changes in the nature of work (e.g., fewer manufacturing jobs, more cognitive-heavy jobs, the emergence of publicly available AI tools such as ChatGPT), current jobs are in no way more satisfying to employees than they were in the 1970s (Wegman, Hoffman, Carter, Twenge, & Guenole, 2018). The wealthiest families in Florence, Italy, in 1427, are still the most affluent families in Florence today (Barone & Mocetti, 2021). To obtain a proper perspective on thriving determinants, consider Roman roads' routes and contemporary maps of European highways or commercially essential cities' locations – they all overlap almost entirely (Dalgaard, Kaarsen, Olsson, & Selaya, 2022). An even stronger argument for historical persistence is comparing the world's wealthiest parts in the sixteenth century and today. Indeed, there are reversals of national fortune (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002), the emergence of economic tigers like South Korea or Singapore, and fallen states in the Middle East, but the general dependence is evident — if the country was rich in the past, it remains rich today (Olsson & Paik, 2020; Voigtländer & Voth, 2013).

Historical events and the nature of environments are essential determinants of today's economic development and organizational forms because history permanently affects culture, institutions, and social norms. Culture is defined as a specific way in which a group of people pays attention, what they attach importance to, and how they make decisions and behave (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2006, 2016; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Richerson & Boyd, 2006). This set of conscious and unconscious rules of thumb has evolved because it has historically proven to be a good enough way to prosper in a given environment (Henrich, 2015; Muthukrishna, Henrich, &

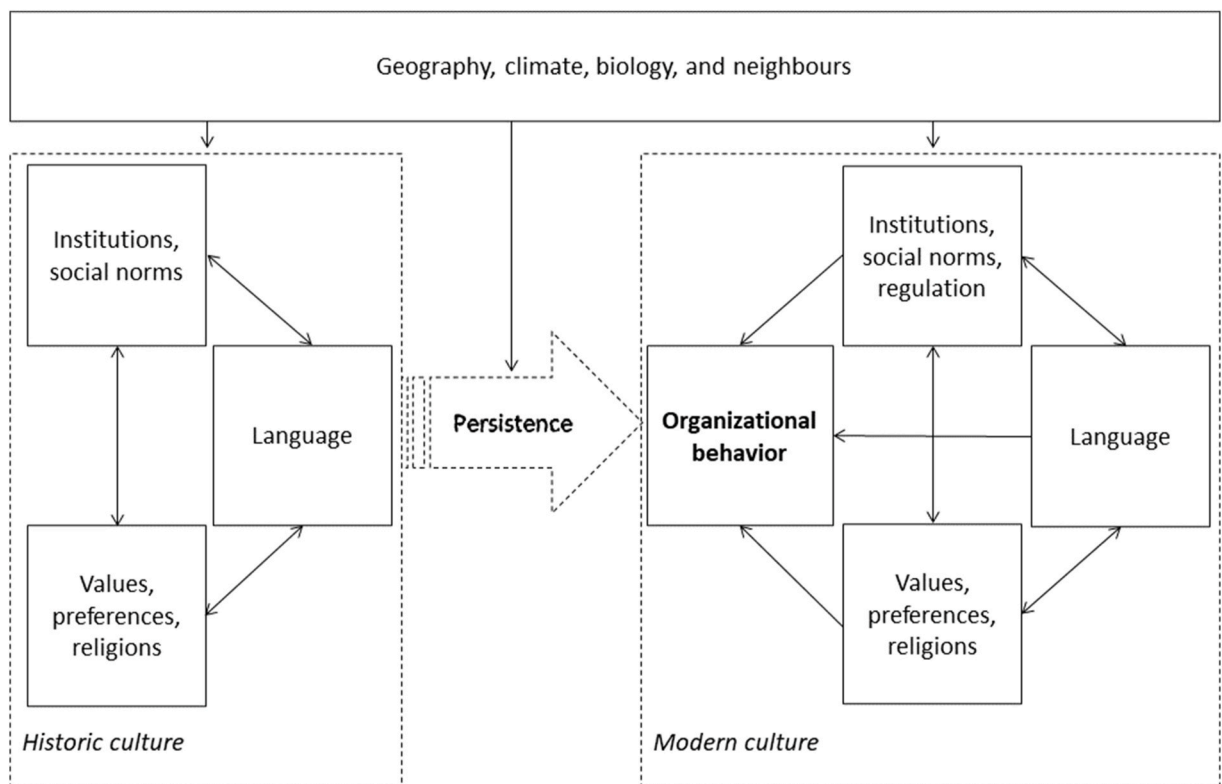


Fig. 1. A simple framework for the causes of differences in cross-cultural organizational behavior and their long-term persistence.

Slingerland, 2021; Nunn, 2009).

For a long time, culture persists through spontaneously formed informal social norms, values, and beliefs; and deliberately created formal institutions such as law, regulations, or state organizations, and religious and civil communities or NGOs (Hayek, 1978; North, 1990); logically, culture also differs between states, nations, or ethnicities (Gelfand, 2018; Gelfand et al., 2007). In sum, the evolution of societal functions and forms are characterized by slowness and long-time persistence (Comin, Easterly, & Gong, 2010; Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2016; Olsson & Paik, 2020).

Studying historical events can help understand how specific institutional or cultural elements are responsible for the observed heterogeneity of cross-cultural organizations' and individuals' behavior. Moreover, focusing on why and how institutional or cultural elements came into being could help find discrete channels of how they affect organizations' functions and peoples' behavior.

One of the leading causes of the country's wealth is human capital, innovativeness, and entrepreneurship (Rosenbloom, Gudić, Parkes, & Kronbach, 2017); however, these significantly differ even within a country. As Valencia Caicedo, (2018) found in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, these inequalities have very deep roots. The areas where Jesuit missions operated from 1609 to 1767 prosper much more than their neighbors. In addition to promoting Christianity, the Jesuits fostered craftsmanship and general and technical education. They exported printing technology to the Spanish and Portuguese dominions and taught arithmetic, botany, art, and primitive medicine. Unlike Franciscan missions, which focused exclusively on Christian indoctrination, they introduced the natives to the fruits of knowledge and technology. Even today, two and a half centuries after the expulsion of the last Jesuits, the values and habits enforced by their missions lead to higher literacy, longer average time spent in schools, higher income, and increased innovation, such as the willingness to plant genetically modified crops.

Viewed from the opposite side, one may ask what has led the neighboring natives not to long for education and instead live in poverty. The answer seems to be the Spanish crown (Dell, 2010). Between 1573 and 1812, the slave system known as "Mita" operated in Peru and Bolivia. The colonizers deployed as many as a tenth of the men from the selected tribes into mines. The enslavement of the most productive members of a tribe led to more inadequate infrastructure, weak production capacities, and an overall more fragile society that lost confidence in the future. The areas did not recover from this shock even after two centuries. Similar conclusions on the long-term negative consequences of colonial rule or a slave trade on institutions' quality, companies' prosperity, credit access, or interpersonal trust are drawn by several studies (Nunn, 2008; Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011; Pierce & Snyder, 2017).

The conquered countries' domination did not always negatively affect the natives. The citizens of several Central and Eastern European countries living within the former borders of the Habsburg Empire have higher levels of trust in courts and police. They are also less likely to pay bribes for local public services. The empire's well-respected administration increases citizens' trust in local public services nearly a century after its demise (Becker, Boeckh, Hainz, & Woessmann, 2016). A similar effect had British colonial land tenure systems in India. The districts in India where the collection of land revenue from the cultivators was assigned to a class of native landlords have significantly lower agricultural investments and productivity in the post-independence period than areas under direct colonial rule. These areas also have significantly lower investments in health and education (Banerjee & Iyer, 2005). The reason is that cultivators' property was insecure in the landlord areas making investments in their land risky. In contrast, cultivators' proprietary rights were based on an explicit contract, which the British were committed to honoring under direct colonial rule.

The deep roots of the past certainly shape interpersonal relationships and mutual trust or hostility (Algan & Cahuc, 2010). When the Black Death arrived in Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, Jews across the continent faced accusations of spreading the plague. In many cities, the entire Jewish population was murdered. Almost six hundred years later, Germany saw a nationwide rise in anti-Semitism after its World War I defeat. Voigtländer and Voth (2012) found that the relative level of anti-Semitic attitudes and behavior in selected cities had hardly varied for more than half a millennium. The localities where the Jews were burned between 1348 and 1350 showed a significantly higher level of anti-Semitism in the interwar period as well. In these cities, attacks were six times more frequent, the Nazi party gained more votes, and the more zealous transport of Jews to concentration camps occurred.

Their study shows how local anti-Semitism has been reinforced in people's minds for centuries by daily activities and notorious symbols: anti-Semitic slogans, paintings, and sculptures in churches and households. The Passions portrayed the Jews as God's murderers; in plays, the Jew was synonymous with crooked and greedy. Although industrialization led to massive migration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of the population remained where generations of their ancestors lived. Anti-Semitic attitudes have been passed down in families and communities for centuries, although – or perhaps because of this – many of these people have never met a Jew. According to Voigtländer and Voth, only in cities that experienced an influx of migrants did anti-Jewish tendencies disappear. The immigrants brought different traditions and different opinions.

Based on this review, I can conclude that historical events shape specific norms and attitudes that persist today and continue to influence how individuals work, although the environment has changed significantly.

Proposition 1a. *Deep historical events creating both trauma and/or flourishing lead to culturally specific norms, preferences, or behaviors. These norms specifically influence constructs relevant to HR management, such as trust or hostility, learning, motivation, creativity, or compliance.*

2.1. History matters: implications for HRM education

Without understanding deep-history reasons for cultural elements and beliefs, it is impossible to teach appropriate human resource practices to scale back archaic cultural habits or, conversely, to implement reasonable and more specific practices respecting traditions (Nunn, 2020). For example, the trust in the family or other in-group members is inversely related to companies' growth because company owners do not trust people outside their inner circle, limiting development and proper human resources management beyond

what can be managed by the family (Bloom, Eifert, Mahajan, McKenzie, & Roberts, 2013; Klüppel et al., 2018). Trust is an essential organizational factor since it leads to increased employee specialization because workers trust each other to do their jobs well – and higher performance follows (Meier, Stephenson, & Perkowski, 2019). Nevertheless, why is there a gradual shift to more trusting communities in some places but not others? The degree of trust in society has been linked to several past as well as recent phenomena such as the slave trade (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011), mismanaged vaccination campaigns (Lowes & Montero, 2020), or a war (Conzo & Salustri, 2019). If the organizational goal is to eliminate mistrust, it is necessary to understand how deep its roots go. An excellent illustration is a study by Li, Hernandez, and Gwon (2019) showing that Korean banks are more likely to open branches in Chinese provinces with ethnic Korean diaspora; however, only if the region has weak and unstable formal institutions. Li et al.'s evidence shows that the in-group bias has a significantly more potent influence on location choice only in places with unreliable formal institutions than in areas with reliable formal institutions.

Due to historical injustice, people may resent programs or institutions that could currently be able to help them. This suboptimal equilibrium leads to long-term stagnation or lower well-being, as shown by the consequences of the U.S. government's infamous Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male. Physicians recruited four hundred African Americans with syphilis in the 1930s and observed the disease's natural progression for 40 years. The patients were not informed about their condition and were not actively treated, although the cure was known and available at the time. Alsan and Wanamaker (2017) found that the Tuskegee study and its subsequent publication still lead to a greater distrust of African Americans of the medical system. Moreover, the closer they live to the experiment's original place, the greater distrust they show. Even after two to four generations, the aversion to physicians results in significantly higher mortality and lower life expectancy.

Realizing that long-standing attitudes influence people's decisions can help set up the right policies, Alsan tried to eradicate the Tuskegee study's dismal historical heritage. Together with colleagues (Alsan, Garrick, & Graziani, 2019), they opened a mobile clinic providing free services in areas marked by distrust. They assumed that African Americans would have less confidence in the white physicians (as collectively responsible for the Tuskegee study). The clinic tested this assumption — an African American or a white individual randomly treated a patient. The experiment confirmed that African American physicians had a significant positive effect on their willingness to use medical care. This simple intervention led to the future ceasing to copy the past.

These studies illustrate the main message of this section that it is not enough to study and teach social or cultural norms (in this case, "do not trust the medical sector"), but it is necessary to know the historical *reasons* for their emergence (i.e., the trauma caused by white physicians) to design effective human resource programs.

Intercultural management education needs to recognize that any practice applicable in cross-cultural collaboration or intercultural training cannot be picked off the shelf as a finished product but must reflect the specific reasons why a particular cultural norm or belief arose and how it is woven into individuals' perceptions and decision-making. At the same time, practitioners must reflect that culture is not defined at the level of the state or nation but as a shared mindset of vaguely defined populations facing specific conditions or shocks in the past (Lenartowicz, Johnson, & White, 2003).

Proposition 1b. *Historical events shaping cultural patterns (norms, preferences, behaviors) influence what organizational processes evolve and how employee relations, interpersonal conflict management, compliance, and other HR practices are managed.*

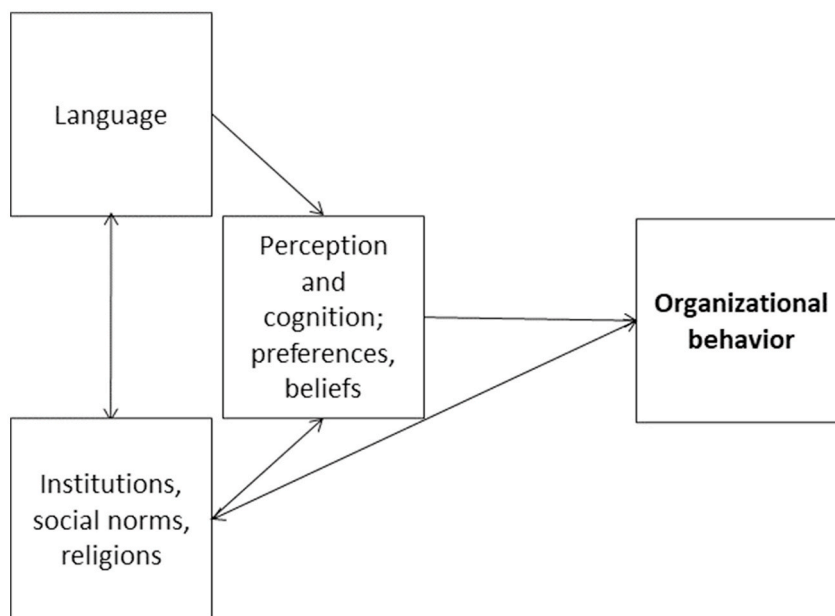


Fig. 2. A simple framework of how language and culture influence organizational behavior; adapted from (Mavisakalyan & Weber, 2018).

Proposition 1c. *The influence of historical events on culture has a different impact on the same management practices in different cultures. Incorporating the knowledge into (intercultural) human resource management or intercultural training will lead to more effective practices.*

3. Languages: speaking a different language means perceiving a somewhat different (organizational) world

Language is a key element of culture, and culture is manifested through language. Language is also more resistant to change than culture-specific institutions, norms, or values. Therefore, intercultural differences are intensely apparent in language differences, and they manifest in many variable linguistic features such as syntax, semantics, and phonology. For this article's argument on the causes of cross-cultural differences in human resource management, it is helpful to stress that the influence of the culture or language on behavior is usually not direct; their effects are instead mediated through people's perceptive and cognitive systems (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014); see Fig. 2.

An illustrative example of the influence of language on cognition and subsequent decision-making is a study by Keysar, Hayakawa, and An (2012), which found that using a foreign language reduces decision-making biases. Speaking a foreign language allows the speaker to attenuate the emotional loadings associated with words (Dewaele, 2008) and thus make decisions more rationally, i.e., not subjected to the framing effects, loss aversion, and other behavioral biases. This effect is also pronounced in the moral realm, as the intensity of moral feelings is an essential determinant of the tendency to punish people who do not follow the norms. Woumans, Van der Cruyssen, and Duyck (2020) experimentally demonstrated that people systematically evaluate crimes described in a foreign language as less severe than the same cases described in their native language. Particularly in the environment of multinational companies, this phenomenon may manifest itself in the fact that employees of local branches (communicating in a non-native language) may perceive ethically questionable business as not so unethical. Thinking in a foreign language can be detrimental in other ways when emotions or intuitions are helpful. Foreign language reasoners are less able to detect belief-logic conflict due to weakened intuition (Bialek, Muda, Stewart, Niszczota, & Pieńkosz, 2020).

In linguistics (Boroditsky, 2003), there is a long tradition of research in the relativity hypothesis (based on the works of the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf). It states that different languages manifest themselves through specific linguistic structures. These differences systematically influence the perception and cognition of their speakers, as is also indicated by Ludwig Wittgenstein's paraphrase in the section title. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH) assumes that the languages people speak specifically affect how they perceive their environment, reason, and make decisions (Blasi, Henrich, Adamou, Kemmerer, & Majid, 2022). Consider the three examples of the influence of language on recognizing colors, scents, and direction.

There is only one term for blue color in English ("blue"), but two words in Russian distinguishing between light blue ("goluboy") and dark blue ("siniy"). This linguistic feature allows Russian speakers to discriminate much faster between different blue shades because they fell into different linguistic categories (Winawer et al., 2007). Second, it is common to believe that a smell's experience is impossible to put into words. There does not seem to be a vocabulary for odors in the same complexity in English (and most other languages) as for colors. Speakers usually identify the source that typically has that smell; they say an object smells like a banana or like a rose. However, the Jahai, a group of nomadic hunter-gatherers in Thailand, have a lexicon of over a dozen olfaction words. For example, the term "ltpit" describes the smell of various flowers, ripe fruits, or perfumes. Using a free naming task, Majid and Burenholt (2014) showed the Jahai could name smells as easily as colors; the odors are expressible in language as long as you speak the right language (Majid et al., 2018). Finally, Australian Aborigines of the Pormpuraawan tribe can always correctly determine the cardinal directions. Boroditsky and Gaby have shown that their language is behind the ingenious orientation. They do not use self-centered language like English (and most other languages), in which the right or left always depends on where the speaker stands. On the contrary, their language requires the use of absolute directions (e.g., north, east). They would not understand what turning right means because there is no such thing as right; they turn to, e.g., the east or northwest (Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010).

The specific features of language grammars – such as the ways of using tenses, gender, and the expressions of objects or pronouns, which will be reviewed shortly – may influence organizationally relevant behaviors, such as the extent of work discrimination or the degree of individual responsibility (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Mavisakalyan & Weber, 2018; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017).

Languages encode the future in different ways. For example, an English speaker must strongly mark future time, e.g., „It will rain tomorrow.“ On the other hand, a German speaker could say in the present tense: „Morgen regnet es,“ i.e., „It rains tomorrow.“ Grammatically separating the future and the present may lead speakers to disassociate the future from the present mentally. This language feature could make the future feel more distant, more irrelevant. In his seminal study, Chen (2013) found that the languages that grammatically associate the future with the present foster future-oriented behavior; speakers of such languages save more, retire with more wealth, smoke less, and are less obese; see also (Davis & Abdurazokzoda, 2016; Roberts, Winters, & Chen, 2015).

In the organizational contexts, managers of firms in countries where languages do not require speakers to mark future events grammatically perceive future consequences of earnings management to be more imminent. Therefore, they are less likely to engage in earnings management (Kim, Kim, & Zhou, 2017). On the other hand, speakers of languages with future tense marking are less likely to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors and support policies to prevent environmental damage (Mavisakalyan, Tarverdi, & Weber, 2018). Using language with future tense marking is also associated with a reduced perception of the risks associated with loan issuance, i.e., lower loan spreads and lower collateral use in loan contracts (Godlewski & Weill, 2021).

Grammatical gender is a specific form of the linguistic system in which noun classes must form an agreement system with other sentence elements, such as adjectives, pronouns, or verbs (Corbett, 1991). Standard gender divisions include masculine, feminine, and sometimes neuter, or animate and inanimate. In most languages, many nouns belong to a gender category that contrasts with their meaning (e.g., the word for "manliness" in Czech has feminine gender). Nevertheless, the gender system is usually somehow sex-based, and growing evidence shows that grammatical gender is associated with gender inequalities at work. The presence of gender in

language can act as a marker for culturally acquired gender roles, and these roles are essential determinants of labor outcomes. There is evidence of a higher prevalence of gender-discriminatory attitudes among speakers of gender-intensive languages (Mavisakalyan, 2015). Gay, Hicks, Santacreu-Vasut, and Shoham (2018) showed that female immigrants who speak a language with sex-based grammatical rules exhibit lower labor force participation, hours worked, and weeks worked. Santacreu-Vasut, Shenkar, and Shoham (2014) analyzed the impact of language gender distinctions on women's corporate presence. They found that countries where the language marks gender more intensely have lower female participation on the board of directors and senior management. They also found that the gender marking used in the headquarters' home country impacts female presence on multinational companies' subsidiary boards.

Languages also differ in the use of pronouns – the necessity of their use or, conversely, the freedom to omit them and the degree of politeness a speaker should express. For example, Spanish or Czech allows people to speak without personal pronouns and thus a subject in a sentence. In Czech, it is possible to say “Napsal jsem skvělý článek,” i.e., “Wrote an outstanding paper,” without stating “I” wrote it, because a specific form of a verb “napsal” determines the first person.

Kashima and Kashima (1998) speculated that the obligatory use of the pronouns “I” or “you” emphasizes the person as the agent of sentence meaning. Therefore, cultures whose language does not allow the personal pronoun drop may be more individualistic. On the contrary, cultures whose language allows the personal pronoun drop may be more collectivist. Similarly, in some languages (e.g., Czech, German, Spanish), there are two different singular second-person pronouns (e.g., in German, “du,” “Sie”) to stress the social or status distance of speakers. In other languages (e.g., English), no such distinction exists. Again, speakers of languages that require the use of multiple second-person pronouns that emphasize social differences can be expected to be more based on hierarchy and lower egalitarianism.

Several empirical studies confirm that linguistic variables predict cultural variation in measures of individualism and egalitarianism (Davis & Abdurazokzoda, 2016; Kashima & Kashima, 1998; Licht, Goldschmidt, & Schwartz, 2007). By de-emphasizing the individual's significance, languages with the personal pronoun drop perpetuate cultural-specific values and norms that give importance to the collective. Speakers of such languages are less likely to complete secondary or tertiary education; the effect's magnitude is also stronger among females (Feldmann, 2019). Davis and Williamson (2016) studied how a culture, also instrumented by the personal pronoun drop, affects how society regulates new firms' entry; they found that more individualistic countries regulate entry more lightly. Similarly, individualistic cultures positively affect perceived levels of the rule of law, non-corruption, and democracy in nations (Licht et al., 2007). On the contrary, societies characterized by collectivistic culture (i.e., by the personal pronoun drop) are characterized by smaller government subsidies and transfers as well as health and education expenses (Kammas, Kazakis, & Sarantides, 2017). It seems collectivism and redistributive policies function as substitutes rather than complements.

Proposition 2a. *The features of language grammar are associated with culturally specific norms, preferences, or behaviors. They influence constructs relevant to HR management such as gender roles, perception of sustainability, respect for others, preference for hierarchical or non-hierarchical HR management.*

3.1. Language matters: implications for HRM education

It is challenging to change the way people use language, and it is also true that some language traditions may lead to (more) injustice or impulsive, emotional, and suboptimal choices. Consider a study about how gender determines the way we speak about professionals. When discussing professionals or their work, people are more likely to refer to males by surname alone. For example, pundits talking about politicians are more likely to use a surname when speaking about a man vs. a female. Simultaneously, people referred to by their surname are seen as having higher status and more deserving of awards and accolades (Atir & Ferguson, 2018). There is a traditional feminists' view that sexism exists in languages and promotes culture-dependent gender inequalities. Recent quantitative studies confirm that gendered languages may harm gender equality (Lewis & Lupyan, 2020; Mavisakalyan, 2015) and, at the same time, there are simple, effective interventions that can change the perception of prevailing social norms about gender (He, Kang, & Lacetera, 2021).

Besides the highly demanding and somehow controversial forced use of gender-neutral language (the promotion of general use of gender-neutral terms and non-gendered ways of communicating (Milles, 2011)), there is a ready-to-go intervention – a practice of explicitly talking or writing inclusively of both sexes may be promoted; e.g., through the use of “/” to include terms and parts of speech applicable to each gender, ideally feminine gender first (for example waitress/waiter); as suggested by (Mavisakalyan, 2015). A voluntary ban on using derogatory and non-inclusive words in an organization can be similarly helpful. Djourelouva (2023) exploited an abrupt ban on the term “illegal immigrant” by the Associated Press (A.P.). She found that articles mentioning “illegal immigrants” significantly declined in outlets that rely on A.P. relative to others, and individuals exposed to these outlets started to support less restrictive immigration and border security policies.

In collectivist countries, whose language naturally reduces the autonomy and the significance of an individual, even in tasks or situations where individualism is beneficial, management education should do more to teach the importance of psychological safety and motivate employees to exercise their judgment and activity; with the eventual possibility of participatory leadership (Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017). On the other hand, in individualistic cultures and organizations, it would help if speakers were taught to have a lower fondness for using the pronoun “I” in discussions with others and a tendency to blow their own horn in every situation, possibly leading to alienation, hostility, and low social cohesion in a group (Bedeian, 2002).

Intercultural management education needs to recognize that understanding a different language in cross-cultural collaboration is often imperative, not just for the obvious benefits such as “ability to exchange common courtesies in the host language” or risks such as

“missing out on crucial pieces of work-related information” (Littrell et al., 2006, p. 370–371). This is not just a question of a need for communication (which can be eventually solved by AI with excellent translation skills). It is a much deeper issue of the qualitatively different mental models that different languages shape and how their speakers construct personal responsibility, relationships with coworkers, or gender differences. Or, as Nam et al., 2014 highlighted, in case of intercultural training: “[D]iversity has been translated with reference to racial, ethnic, or gender differences in the United States, other countries have their own experiences on how people differ, depending upon their historical and linguistic heritages ... This means the training teams need to identify the areas where a single concept can have different but equally viable operational definitions depending on culture” (2014; p. 49).

Proposition 2b. *The understanding that a specific language creates a different mental model by which people perceive reality can be used to study the different impacts of the same management practices in different cultures. Incorporating obtained knowledge into (intercultural) HRM education or intercultural training will lead to more effective practice.*

4. Geography and biology as a destiny

As illustrated by the introductory example of the influence of agriculture types on society’s authoritarianism level, and eventually on companies’ leadership styles, geography could set cultural norms (Lonati, 2020). Diamond’s seminal book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1999) has provided a strong foundation of geography for the persistence of cultural diversity and variant economic development across the globe (Laitin et al., 2012).

Recently, Gelfand et al. have proposed a more psychologically granular theory (to accompany Hofstede’s dimensions or Schwartz’s value survey); it states that cultures can be divided into a spectrum of tight-and-loose ones according to the intensity of the rules that their citizens respect and they demand from their fellow citizens (Gelfand, 2018; Gelfand et al., 2011). Rules at the level of laws, social norms, and habits, as well as standards of everyday activities; for example, how acceptable it is to laugh out loud in the park, in the elevator, or even at a funeral. In Japan, South Korea, or Pakistan, it is unthinkable in all these cases; on the contrary, in Brazil or the United States, it is quite common or at least acceptable. Gelfand et al. argue that societies that historically faced crises must come together and create tight rules. Without coordination and reliance on each community member behaving as requested, society would not survive. Geographical and biological factors such as natural disasters, resource scarcity, diseases, and population density can quickly destroy society. When a country faces threats, it develops strict rules for regulating its citizens’ behavior; there is more substantial pressure to comply and little tolerance for deviance. Such countries usually have more authoritarian governments or stronger religions. Gelfand et al. (2011) confirmed that the greater the risks the nation has faced in history, the tighter way of life its members now live.

Using this scheme (Fig. 3), it is possible to go beyond national differences because if a geographical factor may be the determinant of constructs as diverse as self-monitoring, self-regulation, individualism, or reliance on a delegation to subordinates across firms today, it is possible to use more granular data in determining differences in organizational behavior also within a country. For example, tight U.S. states have lowered drug and alcohol use or homelessness; however, they also have higher incarceration rates, more significant discrimination and inequality, lower creativity, and lower happiness relative to loose states (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). Similarly, current psychological differences within different parts of China may be explained by different types of local agriculture – a history of farming rice makes local cultures more interdependent, whereas farming wheat makes local cultures more independent (Talhelm et al., 2014). Growing rice requires a large amount of slow-flowing water. In areas where these conditions do not exist, it is necessary to create and maintain complex irrigation systems that bring so much water to the individual fields that the rice does not dry

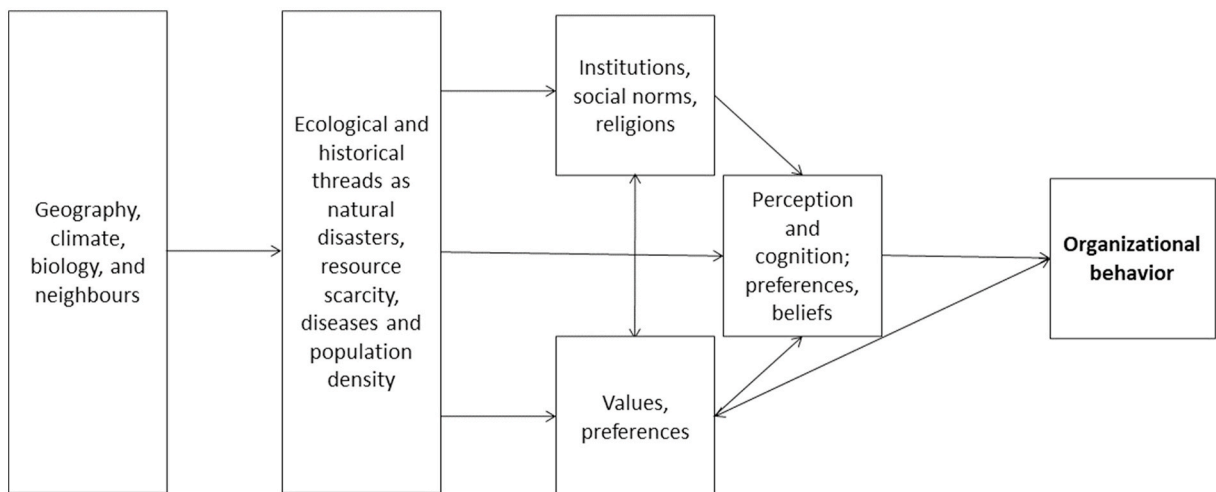


Fig. 3. A simple framework of how geography, climate, and biological agents influence organizational behavior; adapted from (Gelfand et al., 2011).

out nor is washed out by the water. The individual families' fields are interdependent, irrigation must be coordinated, and everyone must help maintain the entire system. Rice cultivation requires a collective and the maintenance of traditions, growing wheat not so much.

Geography can affect several other cultural patterns (Sparrow & Wu, 1998); Alesina, Giuliano, and Nunn (2013) suggested that topsoil quality in the early days of agriculture may be responsible for different gender roles. Areas with good soil made it possible to create longer, straight fields. Elsewhere, the soil was low-quality, the terrain sloping and rocky. On quality soils, people eventually invented and used the plow. Men usually led the draft animals and the plow because it was physically demanding work. The women stayed home and cared for the offspring and the running of the household. As men became responsible for most of the calories the family acquired, they also had much more power. Even today, plow-grown cultures tend to have a much lower proportion of women in executive or management positions.

In another study of the influence of geography, Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001, 2012) focus on the mediation influence of European colonialism. They tested a relationship between the mortality rate faced by European settlers in the colony and the quality of the legal framework and the institutions they set up there. In places like the current United States, where Europeans could settle without significant losses, they invested in establishing well-functioning institutions. They expected their descendants to remain there and tried to bequeath them a functioning government. On the other hand, they chose a colonial extraction strategy in places where they had been dying of disease and in skirmishes, where the prospect of the long-term settlement was gloomy, such as in tropical Africa. They did not try to establish a judicial or legal system; the aim was to keep the natives pliable and export the maximum of raw materials. Institutions founded by colonial powers have been influenced by geography and, although modified, persist and affect people's lives even centuries after their inception.

Finally, I will briefly mention the influence of biological factors. People are consciously and unconsciously motivated to avoid diseases, infections, and parasites. Humans evolved a set of psychological mechanisms that promote disease-avoidance, i.e., the behavioral immune system. One of the system's manifestations is the avoidance of unfamiliar stimuli because they could be potentially contaminated. It was proposed that when diseases or infections are common (or momentary salient), strong in-groups and authoritarian attitudes emerge that seek to avoid and reject the new and out-groups (Fincher & Thornhill, 2012; Houdek, 2018; Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2013); but see also the critique of this empirical approach (Hackman & Hruschka, 2013; Hruschka et al., 2014; Hruschka & Hackman, 2014; Hruschka & Henrich, 2013). High prevalence or salience of infections correlates with conformity, strengthened family ties, religiosity, preservation of cultural norms, and xenophobia (Fincher & Thornhill, 2012; Schaller, Murray, & Bangerter, 2015; Schaller & Murray, 2008). In the most extensive study conducted on the topic, the higher prevalence of infectious pathogens was related to more authoritarian attitudes across U.S. metropolitan areas, U.S. states, and almost fifty other countries. The correlation also predicted conservative voting behavior in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and more authoritarian governance and state laws (Zmigrod, Ebert, Götz, & Rentfrow, 2021).

Some diseases and parasites can directly and permanently change people's cognition and preferences (Flegr, 2013; Houdek, 2017, 2018). For example, *Toxoplasma gondii* is a unicellular parasite that causes acute toxoplasmosis in humans. Infected subjects have an increased risk of traffic and work accidents, an impairment of memory and attention, and increased aggression. *Toxoplasma*-positive subjects also demonstrate changes in their personality; they have lower novelty-seeking, impulsiveness, or extravagance; but infected men score lower in conscientiousness and self-control. Cross-country differences in levels of neuroticism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity also seem to be associated with the prevalence of toxoplasmosis (Lafferty, 2006).

Proposition 3a. (As well as deep historical events) Geography and biological factors lead to culturally specific norms, preferences, or behaviors. They influence constructs relevant to HR management, such as trust or hostility, learning, motivation, creativity, or compliance.

4.1. Geography and biology matter: implications for HRM education

Studies on the influence of geography and biology on the emergence of cross-cultural differences show that different institutions, norms, or beliefs were usually functional in their specific ecological contexts. Maybe more surprising is that these factors' long-run effects are still observable among people living and working in a globalized world. Overcoming the influence of geography and many biological factors on cross-cultural values and behavior may be complicated; however, variations or natural shocks to these factors can help HRM educators identify how changing culture affects organizationally relevant behavior due to these factors (Klüppel et al., 2018).

On the other hand, limiting the influence of certain biological factors, such as diseases, is undoubtedly happening, leading to significant increases in productivity and human capital (Almond, Currie, & Duque, 2018; Miguel & Kremer, 2004; Ozier, 2018). Simultaneously, some diseases may also lead to neurodiversity, which can have surprisingly positive effects (Houdek, 2022). As a thought-provoking example, consider that some personality changes made by *Toxoplasma gondii* could be beneficial in specific tasks, professions, or occupations (Johnson et al., 2018). This provocative thought was robustly tested by Lerner, Alkærsg, Fitza, Lomberg, and Johnson (2020). They found that *Toxoplasma*-positive women are more likely to enter into entrepreneurship and start a venture by themselves than *Toxoplasma*-negative individuals. They also have a higher variation in business performance across time, yet they can achieve a higher aggregate performance level. In sum, following a parasite infection, people are more likely to venture.

As noted in the section on the influence of history, geography and biological factors provide nuanced insights into understanding the emergence of specific norms, beliefs, or skills in various cultures. Without their consideration, it is impossible to formulate generally valid intercultural cooperation or training principles. However, there is currently no research in HRM education that integrates this knowledge. One can only agree with Nofal, Nicolaou, Symeonidou, and Shane (2018, p. 22): "The lack of research in this

area is puzzling. We are all biological creatures and our biology affects all aspects of our behavior, including our work. By ignoring our biology, management researchers are missing an important part of the explanation for managerial behavior ... The biological perspective may affect career coaching and may help organizations provide individualized practices suited to the different distinctive abilities of their personnel.”

Proposition 3b. *The influence of geography and biology on culture has a different impact on the same management practices in different cultures. Incorporating obtained knowledge into (intercultural) HRM education or intercultural training will lead to more effective practice.*

5. Conclusion, contribution, and limitations

Each new theory or empirical evidence in one field allows other fields to see their findings from a different perspective, formulate innovative research questions, and think about developing more complex theories and richer ways of testing them. This article has offered a range of findings that provides such opportunities for HRM education in the context of cross-cultural behavior differences.

It has been shown that several empirical traditions can identify the grounds for cross-cultural differences (not only) in organizational behavior. The reviewed studies use growing datasets of historical events and shocks, variations in language structures, or the variability of geographical and biological conditions to identify why a particular cultural trait originated and persisted; or ceased to exist. In this way, they may significantly enhance the effectiveness of intercultural training and cross-cultural management education in general, now usually based on correlations between a specific organizational behavior and national culture. Although there are calls for management and organizational scholars to use this knowledge (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Nofal et al., 2018), relevant studies in (cross-cultural) HRM education are still rare. Knowledge of the origin of cultural differences makes it possible to suggest more sensitivity for training designers to examine deep-seated causes of cross-cultural differences and improve intercultural management at a fundamental level.

This article’s novelty and added value lie in its potential to revolutionize intercultural training and cross-cultural management education. Cross-cultural training designers and management educators can develop more nuanced and effective programs by understanding the deep-seated origins of cultural differences. This innovation enhances the effectiveness of intercultural training and empowers organizations to manage cross-cultural teams more efficiently. In essence, by addressing the root causes of cultural differences, we can foster a more inclusive, understanding, and productive global workforce.

The methods of research in HRM can also be profoundly enriched by adopting an interdisciplinary approach, particularly in the realm of HRM education focused on cross-cultural differences. By integrating insights and increasingly rich datasets from anthropology, linguistics, or cross-cultural psychology (Blasi et al., 2022; Muthukrishna et al., 2021), a deeper understanding of the origins and persistence of cultural traits can be achieved. This holistic perspective, which transcends surface-level correlations, can pave the way for more effective and fundamentally-rooted intercultural training, addressing the nuanced challenges of a globalized workforce.

Indeed, there are limitations to the knowledge presented in this paper. HRM educators may ask if they can apply this knowledge to individual representatives of culture to teach how they should behave in a work situation, especially if they are employed outside of their country of origin or in an organization with strong corporate culture. The answer will be ultimately empirical; however, vast literature shows that cultural components persist in new environments. Studies of second-generation immigrants’ preferences and behavior show that they intensely reflect their country of origin, not just the country where they now live; these studies show that family arrangements (Giuliano, 2007), savings rates (Fuchs-Schündeln, Masella, & Paule-Paludkiewicz, 2020) or women’s careers motivations and limitations (Alesina & Giuliano, 2010) are enduring cultural elements. It is, therefore, to be expected that indigenous cultural elements will be present in strong corporate cultures and HR practices.

Using experiments or random or at least sufficiently exogenous shocks is necessary to infer causal effects. In the case of cross-cultural differences research, it is typically too challenging to meet these requirements. Therefore, it is necessary to use complex identification strategies such as regression discontinuity design, propensity score matching, or difference-in-difference estimations, which face several challenges. Consider, for example, the discussed influence of language structures on culturally specific values, beliefs, and norms. However, the language and the culture may be the outcomes of more in-depth and unobserved factors like historical or genetic descent. These identification challenges lead to spurious correlations and omitted variable bias, and, as shown by Roberts and Winters (2013), the insufficient model explanation of the association between language and cultural traits is much more plausible than many studies admit. It is likely that languages, as well as cultures, adapt to different environments. Social context, environment, genetic factors, or communication technologies may pressure languages to adjust and thereby diversify (Lupyan & Dale, 2016).

Indeed, the effects of historical shocks, geographic locations, or infection stress also suffer the same identification problems as the language as a culture instrument (Hruschka & Hackman, 2014; Klüppel et al., 2018; Mavisakalyan & Weber, 2018). Nevertheless, field and laboratory experiments can sometimes confirm whether the estimated outcomes are a real consequence of the used instrument or variable. However, very few results of mentioned studies have yet been independently conceptually or directly replicated. For example, a recent study using the Chinese language (in which speakers can choose whether or not to use the future tense when referring to a future event) didn’t find that the grammatical marking of the future makes people feel that the future is further away (Chen, He, & Riyanto, 2019). Another problem is that for many discussed variables (e.g., wars, slavery, parasite infection), it is impossible to experiment with adequate external validity (not to mention respecting ethical or legal norms).

This article did not attempt to present a single compact framework that would link all the constructs discussed, as this may not even be feasible. Indeed, for effective management education, this is probably the most significant limitation because the presented findings may lead to the conclusion that it is hard to develop simple management practices, leadership styles, cultural intelligence trainings, or mindsets that can be applied in an intensively context-dependent environment. This article aimed to detail and exemplify the basic

principles and findings used to study causes of cross-cultural organizational differences and show through several case studies that this knowledge can be used to educate HRM more effectively (not only) in cross-cultural settings. Subsequent research will undoubtedly refine and expand many of the results discussed, and management education scholars will link them with thus enriched theories.

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Authors' contributions

P.H. is the sole author.

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During the preparation of this work, the author did not use AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Data availability

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