The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/1352-7606.htm

The nature of workplace boundaries between Australians and Singaporeans in multinational organizations

A qualitative inquiry

Jennifer (Min Ing) Loh
School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences, University of New England, Armidale, Australia
Simon Lloyd D. Restubog
School of Organisation and Management, Australian School of Business, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and
Cindy Gallois
School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to explore the nature of intercultural experiences of Australians and Singaporeans working in multinational organizations. Cultural differences are expected to influence how boundaries and boundary permeability are constructed which in turn affect how Australians and Singaporeans interact and communicate with each other.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative interviews were conducted with 23 employees (ten Australians, 13 Singaporeans) working in multinational organizations in both Australia and Singapore. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze interviewees' intercultural experiences to determine the nature and composition of relevant boundary categories and permeability.

Findings – Seven workplace boundary categories of varying degrees of permeability were identified. Singaporeans were perceived to create more impermeable boundaries than Australians. Impermeable boundaries were found to also restrict intercultural interactions.

Research limitations/implications – The qualitative nature of the study, small sample size and interviewer's ethnicity could limit the generalizability of the results. Another limitation is that the data were based on self-reports and participants may have reported socially desirable responses.

Practical implications – The findings of this study have important practical implications for managers who seek to promote the value of shared group membership and group identity.

Originality/value – This study integrates social identity theory with cross-cultural theories and extends its application into a collectivist culture (e.g. Singapore) to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of workplace boundaries and boundary permeability between Australians and Singaporeans.

Keywords Australia, Singapore, National cultures, Multinational companies, Workplace

Paper type Research paper

The signing of the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in 2003 reflected the long standing and close relationship between Singapore and Australia.

The first and second authors contributed equally in writing this manuscript.

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

The authors thank Damien Sansom and Patrick James Garcia for their help during various stages of the project.

Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal
Vol. 16 No. 4, 2009
pp. 367-385

1352-7606
DOI 10.1108/13527600911000348

The two countries enjoy close economic links, and cooperate extensively in a wide range of multilateral commerce and trade, education, defense, regional and security issues. Indeed, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2008) noted that Australian merchandise exports to Singapore were estimated at $7.4 billion. In an address to the Australia-Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2004), the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry of Singapore reported that Australia was the preferred educational destination for many Singaporean students.

The first review of the SAFTA reported increased trade opportunities and intercultural exchanges between Singapore and Australia. For example, Downer-EDI (Australia's second largest engineering services firm) reported successful new business ventures in Singapore. Similarly, a growing number of Singaporean-owned companies were successful in establishing new business opportunities and networks in Australia (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004). Despite the close relationship between the two countries, very little is known about how Australians and Singaporeans interact or communicate in the workplace. Therefore, the present study provides an exploratory investigation of the intercultural experiences of Australians and Singaporeans working in multinational organizations. In this study, we propose that cultural differences between the two countries will influence how boundaries are constructed. Specifically, different types of boundaries and boundary permeability will influence how Australians and Singaporeans interact and communicate with each other.

One of the major considerations to bear in mind when individuals from different cultures interact together is to realize that they may have very different cultural assumptions, beliefs and values about how to work together. Culture refers to a set of ideas, behaviors, attitudes, and traditions that exist within large groups and distinguishes members of one human group from another (Hofstede, 1980). In essence, culture provides a set of standard norms to help individuals separate, define and draw boundaries between stimuli (Freeman and Bordia, 2001; Zerubavel, 1993). By examining how these boundaries are drawn and maintained, different societies reveal how they generate meanings for themselves, members of their groups and members outside their groups (Zerubavel, 1993). For example, Australia is considered an individualist society where people value autonomy and democracy (Freeman and Bordia, 2001; Irwin, 1996). People are encouraged to be assertive and to prioritize personal goals over group goals (Samovar *et al.*, 1998). In contrast, Singapore is a collectivist society where group consensus and group goals are paramount (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). People are expected to respect authority, value formal regulations and to abide by strict social restrictions (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). Therefore, we propose that the differences in cultural expectations between these two countries will influence how boundaries and boundary permeability are created.

A social identity approach to boundaries and boundary permeability

Boundaries are an inevitable consequence of cognitive categorization, a basic human cognitive process that enables individuals to simplify complex stimuli into meaningful groups or categories (Hogg, 2000). For example, the concept of symbolic boundaries is used to refer to the conceptual distinction made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space (Lamont, 2000). Others, such as Zerubavel (1993), conceptualizes boundary in terms of framing and "mental fencing" erected around geographical areas, historical events, individuals and ideas that appear to be similar or functionally related or associated. Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership (Epstein, 1992,

p. 232). They are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources (Bobo and Fox, 2003; Santostefano, 1995). In essence, boundaries simplify complex stimuli into meaningful groups or categories (Hogg and Abrams, 2001) and set the conditions for group identification and intergroup relations (Putnam and Stohl, 1990). Conceptualized this way, our social identities constitute a psychological distinction between different cultural and social groups. More importantly, these boundaries are perceived to be genuine because people believe they are and act as though they are real (Weick, 1969).

Social identity theory (SIT) offers a useful theoretical perspective that can help us better understand how boundaries affect group identification and intergroup relations. It suggests that the "pressure to evaluate one's own group positively through in-group/out-group comparison lead social groups to differentiate themselves from each other" (Tajfel and Turner, 1985, pp. 16-17). This process of differentiation aims to "maintain and achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimensions" (Tajfel and Turner, 1985, pp. 16-17). Very often, this can lead to in-group favoritism where members believe that one's own group is better than another group on some or all aspects of characteristics (Brewer and Brown, 1998). When this happens, intergroup interaction and communication become more difficult as members consciously draw a wall or boundary between themselves and the people they consider as outsiders.

SIT argues that people tend to support and positively evaluate the groups that embody relevant aspects of their social identities because this enhances their self-esteem (Brewer, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Demographic characteristics, such as cultural, racial or ethnicity become highly visible and salient during intercultural exchanges (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Milliken and Martins, 1996; Tsui *et al.*, 1992). Research has shown that people who possess similar demographic characteristics tend to perceive one another as similar and to be attracted to each other (Tsui *et al.*, 1992). This interpersonal attraction, in turn, is found to be positively related to many desired outcomes, such as communication, high social integration, group identification and affiliation (James and Khoo, 1991; Lincoln and Miller, 1979). Conversely, a workgroup in which the individual is dissimilar to others in terms of demographic characteristics may have increased conflict, restricted mobility and loss of self-identity (Ellemers *et al.*, 1993; James and Khoo, 1991; Zenger and Lawrence, 1989).

Social identity research has found that individuals who perceived group boundaries to be permeable tend to share prototypical characteristics with members of that group; they also allow in-group members greater access to their groups (Ibarra, 1995; Jackson *et al.*, 1992). For example, Kilduff (1992) found that employees within multinational corporations of the same nationality often construct group boundaries that were permeable to in-group members but closed to out-group members. Rokeach (1960) found that people were more likely to cooperate, feel greater affection and display in-group favortism with members whom they shared similar values and attitudes. As a result, their sense of belonging and identification increased (Billing and Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), resulting in greater willingness to cooperate and work for the interests of the group (De Cremer and Van Vugt, 1999).

SIT has also been particularly concerned with boundary permeability and its effect on individual and collective mobility. Permeable boundaries are boundaries that are more open and allow individuals to pass from one group to another. Individuals can enhance their identity and access the resources offered by another group through individual mobility (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In contrast, impermeable group boundaries are closed or fixed, and individuals may find it very difficult to move

from one group to another (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Low status members may be especially sensitive to the system or structure that conveys whether or not it is possible for them to move up from one group to another. Under impermeable conditions, studies have found that low status members tend to create new comparison dimensions that are superior and more flattering to their in-group (e.g. through social creativity: black is beautiful) or they directly challenged the status of the high status group through social competition (e.g. women's liberation movement: Ellemers *et al.*, 1993). Although these studies contributed to the understanding of boundary permeability and its impact on the adoption of different mobility strategies, they were predominantly conducted using Western data with fundamentally individualist assumptions. Therefore, we cannot determine the types of mobility strategies members from collectivist societies will engage in. For example, are collectivists more likely to challenge the status quo or are they more likely to engage in social creativity than individualists? This is important when you consider that collectivists and individualists have very different cultural expectations, values and ways of doing things.

Cultural influences on boundaries and boundary permeability

Cross-cultural scholars noted several cultural factors that influence the formation and permeability of boundaries (Hofstede, 1991). We discuss each cultural influence below.

Collectivism-individualism. Cultures that are highly monolithic and interdependent (e.g. collectivist societies; Singapore) tend to create boundaries that are highly impermeable. Individuals from such societies are integrated from birth into strong, cohesive in-groups which provide them with life-long protection in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (c.f., Hofstede, 1991; Restubog and Bordia, 2007). Singapore, for example, is a collectivistic society where people are expected to prioritize group needs over personal needs. In-groups in Singapore generally consist of interrelated network of people who share common socio-demographic characteristics, values, beliefs and ways of doing things (Freeman and Bordia, 2001; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995, 1996). What this means is that Singaporeans tend to construct boundaries that are relatively fixed and impermeable. In contrast, Australia is an individualist society where people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families (Bordia and Blau, 2003; Irwin, 1996). The ties between individuals are looser and more permeable. Therefore, Australians tend to construct more permeable boundaries which allow greater mobility than Singaporeans. Indeed, past cross-cultural research has found that collectivist societies (e.g. Singapore) tend to create "tighter" boundaries while individualist societies (e.g. Australia) tend to create "looser" and more permeable boundaries (Triandis, 1995, 1996).

Power distance. Power distance is conceptualized as individuals' acceptance of the unequal distribution of power in societies and institutions (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). For example, Singapore is a high power distance nation (Hofstede, 1980). Singaporeans know their place in a hierarchical social structure and respect those with authority (Hofstede, 1980). Both consciously and unconsciously, Singaporeans know that people are not equal and that there are boundaries segmenting people into their rightful places. As a consequence, boundaries tend to be less permeable and more restrictive in Singapore. In contrast, Australia is a low power distance country (Hofstede, 1980). People in such society tend to be less accepting of unfair power distribution and react more negatively when treated unfairly by authorities (James, 1992; Loh *et al.* (2009)).

Uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance indicates the "extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and avoids these

situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 45). Australians are more accepting of ambiguity and uncertainty. They like to take risks and are in general less concerned about conflict (Freeman and Browne, 2004, p. 175). In contrast, Singapore is high in uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1991). Singaporeans prefer established structures, clearly defined rules, consensus, harmony and security (Hofstede, 1991). To reduce anxiety in ambiguous and uncertain situations (e.g. intercultural exchanges), many Singaporeans would construct boundaries between entities. In essence, these boundaries provide meanings to unknown stimulus and act as a set of organizing principles to facilitate successful interpersonal relationships.

Although boundaries and boundary permeability have been examined at both a theoretical and empirical level (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Zerubavel, 1993), the precise nature of workplace boundaries has yet to be fully explored in Australia and Singapore. In addition, most empirical studies have predominantly explored boundaries in traditional Western nations (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Ellemers, 1993) and failed to examine boundaries in more modern countries where conventional cultural dimensions, such as collectivism and individualism may co-exist (Triandis, 1995). For example, Ghosh (2004) found that within the Indian culture (a traditional collectivist society), different occupational groups and students were found to express varying degrees of individual-collectivism orientations. Although insightful, Ghosh's (2004) study did not provide any indication into the types of boundaries or boundary permeability modern Indians create. Therefore, the present study provides a cross-cultural exploration of the types of boundaries and boundary permeability constructed by Australians and Singaporeans during their intercultural exchanges. Thus, our study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What types of boundaries are created during intercultural exchanges between Australians and Singaporeans?

RQ2. What is the impact of the different types of boundary and varying levels of boundary permeability on the intercultural exchanges between Australians and Singaporeans?

Method

Participants

Participants were 23 employees (ten Australians, 13 Singaporeans) working in multinational organizations in both Australia and Singapore. All participants were screened before the interview. To be eligible for the interview, all participants had to have lived and worked in both countries for at least one year. Of the ten Australians, five were females and five were males. Their mean age was 35.5 years, with an average of 4.17 years of work experience. Seven of the 13 Singaporeans were females and six were males. Their mean age was 26.71 years, with an average of 3.18 years of work experience. The participants were employed in a diverse range of organizations, such as transportation, media, and information technology.

Procedure and data analytic strategy

Participants were recruited through personal contacts via snowball sampling. At the start of the interview, participants were told that the researchers were interested in their opinions about:

- their work experiences with colleagues in their multinational organization; and
- the challenges (if any) they encountered in their multicultural work settings.

For example, participants were asked, "What are some of the challenges you encountered when you work and interact with someone outside your culture?" To counter balance this question, participants were also asked to share their work experiences with colleagues from their own culture. Questions were framed in an open-ended format and when necessary, follow-up questions were used to clarify ambiguous responses. All interviews were conducted in English and were audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in English because the majority of Singaporeans speak English in both work and non-work contexts (Chew, 2007; Pakir, 2004). Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min. The interviews were then transcribed with the qualitative software program using NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing), which facilitated data condensation, codification, and the theory building process (Richards and Richards, 1994).

Interviewees' experiences and opinions were used to determine the nature and composition of relevant categories (Locke, 2001). Our methodology was largely influenced by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work on grounded theory which refers to "a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field notes, interviews, or other documents; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded" (Strauss, 1987, p. 22). Three broad stages were involved, namely:

(1) Theoretical sampling, where decisions about which data should be collected next are determined by the theory that is being constructed.

(2) Constant comparison.

(3) Composition of theoretical elements. In other words, we systematically and intensively analyzed data by constant comparison, aiming for methodically coded data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Facts, specific details and other information that interviewees seemed to repeat were noted during data collection. Based on this, some preliminary categories were generated to organize the data. Two decision criteria were used to extract potential categories. First, the terms "boundary" or "barrier", or words similar in meaning were examined and noted. Second, phrases used to describe how participants constructed different types of boundaries and boundary permeability (e.g. laws and rules) were employed to distinguish categories. In addition, potential problems or challenges reported by Australians and Singaporeans in their workplaces were noted. These initial categories were constantly refined, eliminated and new ones added as more information came from the interviews. Once data collection was completed, each transcript was re-analyzed to identify for common themes. As a result, a series of core categories were identified.

Some common themes identified were "individualist", "freedom", "collectivist", "no free speech", "authority", "hierarchy", "communication", and "different work roles". These themes were constantly compared with themes from other participants to determine their fit in the categories. Through this iterative process, a number of conceptual categories were generated. For example, themes such as "collectivist", "no free speech", and "hierarchy" were categorized under the category, "collectivist norm boundary". Next, interrelationships between the themes and statements within each category were analyzed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The relevance of each category to the core issues under investigation (i.e. types of boundaries and boundary permeability) were also

compared. This process was repeated until saturation was reached and all of the categories were labelled and distinguished as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In order to check for the accuracy of coding; two independent raters not associated with the study coded 50 percent of the interview responses, the resulting Kappa coefficient was 0.93. Disagreements were discussed until they were resolved (Bordia *et al.*, 2006).

Results and discussion

The qualitative analysis yielded seven interrelated but distinct categories of boundaries (see Table I). The extracts as a group indicated that Australians and Singaporeans constructed relatively similar types of workplace boundaries. However, the permeability of these boundaries varied as a function of nationality (i.e. Australians vs Singaporeans). More importantly, cultural differences, such as collectivism-individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance were found to influence the permeability of these boundaries. The following sections provide a detailed discussion on the description of these workplace boundaries.

Cultural boundary

Given the initial question which asked participants to describe their interactions with group members from different cultures and backgrounds, it was not surprising that the description of boundaries was related to cultural factors. Two cultural boundary types were noted: collectivist and individualist norm boundaries. Collectivist norm

Categories	Definition/summary
1. Cultural boundary	
Collectivist norm boundary	Refers to psycho-social boundaries created and maintained along dimensions or characteristics of a collectivistic society (e.g. most Asian countries like Singapore)
Individualist norm boundary	Refers to psycho-social boundaries created and maintained along dimensions or characteristics of an individualistic society (e.g. most Western countries like Australia)
2. Racial boundary	Refers to the barriers that exist along ethnic lines, such as whether individuals are Anglo Saxons or South East Asians. It also consists of physical features, such as skin color, height, body build, personal space, and distance.
3. Work Role Boundary	
Relationship focused	Emphasizes personal and hierarchical relationships within professional role. Personal relationships are important in any work/professional role
Task focused	Emphasizes work tasks over personal tasks in the professional context and with de-emphasized hierarchy status issues. Tasks are perceived as more important than personal relationships in any work/professional role
4. Communication boundary	
Explicit	Refers to low context communication where individuals use logical deductive thinking. Meanings are deduced from verbal messages
Implicit	Refers to high context communication where individuals rely on indirect contextual speech cues, including non-verbal behaviors, facial expression, gaze, touch, vocal animation, etc.

Table I.
Results of the content analysis for boundaries and boundary permeability

boundaries refer to psycho-social boundaries created and maintained along the dimensions or characteristics of a collectivist society. In contrast, individualist norm boundaries refer to psycho-social boundaries created and maintained along the dimensions or characteristics of an individualist society. Our findings indicated that both Australians and Singaporeans distinguished these cultural differences between the two countries. A total of 46 comments reflected these differences. The most significant difference observed was that Singapore was perceived to be a collectivist society where people are more interdependent and family oriented, whereas Australians are more independent, relaxed and free. The following excerpts illustrate some of these perceived cultural differences, with many Australian (80 percent) and Singaporean (76.9 percent) participants expressing positive features of the out-group culture:

> Singapore is more collectivist than Australia and people are more similar there (in Singapore) . . . Over here [in Australia], it is more carefree and more individualist.

> Australia is a free country where people believe in free speech and they are free to voice out their opinions.

> I do like the fact that the Singaporean culture shows respect towards their families, friends and the elderly. People there are also more willing to sacrifice for their families and communities.

> Australian culture is much more relaxed and more outgoing but for the Chinese, we have to be respectful. We are brought up with the thinking that we have to respect our parents, and to take care of our elderly.

The fact that participants in our study favored the out-group culture contradicted past research which reported a tendency for group members to prioritize their in-groups (Brewer and Campbell, 1976; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) over out-groups. One plausible explanation is that our participants may have high levels of cultural awareness, a direct result of having worked and interacted with people from different cultures and backgrounds. One may also speculate that as multinational organizations around the world find ways to accommodate an increasingly diverse workforce, they actively promote a more culturally sensitive and tolerant work environment. As a result, our participants may be more sensitive to the need to be more unbiased in their opinions towards colleagues of different cultural backgrounds.

Consistent with previous cross-cultural studies (Hofstede, 1980, 1994; Triandis, 1990, 1995), our findings showed that Australians tend to be perceived as individualistic. In contrast, Singaporeans tend to be perceived as collectivistic. Participants also perceived Singaporeans to create "tighter" and less permeable workplace boundaries than Australians. Past cross-cultural studies have characterized Singapore to be a society high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995). What this means is that Singaporeans readily accept the unequal distribution of power in societies, institutions and adhere strongly to the need for hierarchical status. Singapore's dominant cultural values reflect "the importance of status differences and hierarchies" (Connor, 1996, p. 102). As a consequence, Singaporeans tend to create impermeable boundaries with existing social norms and rules. These boundaries then provide a coherent model for them to cope under situations of uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict.

> Singapore is a very strict country, there are many rules and laws to control us, and we are not very free.

> In Singapore, there are always rules and regulations for resolving conflict. That is, any Asian society will have a good set of rules and regulations in place.

> I think it is the Chinese culture. Social structures have boundaries so when you are in a classroom, it is a place for learning and you should not use that as a platform for personal opinion.

Both Australian and Singaporean participants reported that Singaporeans tend to appear defensive, unfriendly or unapproachable as the following extracts reflect:

> Many Singaporeans do not speak up. They are very quiet and reserved.

> When you try to approach Singaporeans, they get to be very defensive and cautious. It's in the culture, I suppose. Most Singaporeans or Asians in general just tend to be more self-contained.

> Singaporeans are always very sensitive and very self-conscious. I think they don't want to stand out from the crowd. They just want to be part of the crowd.

In contrast, Australians were perceived to create more permeable boundaries and this influenced how they were perceived by others. For example, comments that Australians are, "friendly and vocal people, their doors are always open to you and they are more relaxed" influenced how other people perceived them. Despite these positive comments, Australians were also perceived to be aggressive and tough by both Singaporeans and Australians themselves.

> Australians are arrogant people and I don't like to deal with them.

> Australian culture is very masculine, how do you say it . . . a lot of arguments in Australia get finished with violence. You know. . .if you have an argument, a really big argument with another Australian guy . . . that will usually result in verbal threats or violence.

> Australian culture is very aggressive and very upfront . . . passivity is not a dominant trait.

Racial boundary

Racial boundary refers to the barriers that exist between individuals of different races. This boundary comprises of salient racial characteristics, such as skin color, height, and body shape. The results showed that individuals often used racial identity to define and identify themselves. As a result, comments about race were often interpreted at a personal level and tended to be negative:

> It was very upsetting for me because I ordered a cup of coffee in fluent English and they looked at me as if I was from Mars because I have yellow skin and I am not suppose to be fluent in English.

> He was looking at me like, you are an Asian girl . . . probably your language proficiency is not as good as mine . . . he feels he is more superior.

Responses from participants indicated that Australians were considered the dominant group. This may be because Singaporeans are a minority who are racially different from Australians. As shown by the two examples below, both Australians and Singaporeans tended to view themselves with reference to the dominant group (i.e. Australians). According to Keto (1989), not only are dominant group members considered the defining group, but they are "the highest category – the best among all other groups and must be defined and judged solely with reference to that hegemonic category" (p. 489).

> I was treated like a pop star or a sports star or something just because of the color of my skin and the language I speak. They seem to have this "White man fever" mentality.

> No matter how you tell yourself that you are as good as the white people, somehow under there, you have the feeling that they are always (you know), they are always better than us.

In response to such negative feelings, Singaporeans seemed to have activated their racial identity and re-identified with core racial characteristics (e.g. yellow skin, Asian girl, etc.) as a form of uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000; Hogg and Abrams, 1993). More importantly, these prototypical characteristics are highly meaningful and salient to the core identity of the individuals and therefore, highly impermeable. As a result, mobility is highly restricted in this type of boundary (i.e. racial boundary). Indeed, previous studies have shown that minority individuals who perceived that a cultural boundary was impermeable reported that they were less likely to unite with speakers of the majority group, even if they were bilingual (Giles and Viladot, 1994; Hildebrandt and Giles, 1983). Instead, these individuals often communicate and identify with other racially similar group members. This perception is illustrated in the following quotes:

> If you happen to belong to the same dialect group, you feel much closer. I don't know . . . it is just a feeling, you feel more comfortable.

> You are always more comfortable in the American clubs in Singapore because the locals don't have beers like we would in Australia . . . it is a place we can go without offending anybody . . . so, you can go to these clubs where there are people with the same ethnic and racial backgrounds as you.

In our study, we did not find any direct evidence to suggest that racial tension exists between Australians and Singaporeans. However, an underlying resentment was reported by a number of Australians towards foreigners. Most of their concerns focused on the need for foreigners to conform to the Australian way of life:

> Racism is partially hidden and very rarely comes out. Sometimes, you might get a read in the newspaper . . . So, I would say to anyone coming from Singapore to be aware you are treading in somebody else's country and it's their rules, so you should play by their rules. You should behave and react as Australians do.

Work role boundary

Work role boundary was subdivided into two categories. Relationship-oriented work boundary refers to work boundaries which emphasize the personal relationships associated with one's work roles. In contrast, task-oriented work boundary emphasizes work tasks over personal relationships in one's work roles. Results indicated that both Australians and Singaporeans constructed work role boundaries. However, there were qualitative differences in the level of importance accorded to specific dimensions of work-role boundary. For example, Australians (57 percent) were more likely to emphasize task-oriented work boundaries than Singaporeans (23 percent), while Singaporeans were more likely to stress the importance of personal relationships over work tasks:

> Yes, there is a barrier. You don't mix the two . . . You can't cross them. I think the line has to be drawn. For example, when you leave work, they are just your workers or work mates; you are not a personal friend to them.

Despite the need to maintain impermeable work role boundaries, Australians, in general, were less concerned about maintaining a strict hierarchical code of conduct at work compared to Singaporeans. The following extracts illustrated this difference:

> They always call me "Mr Forrest" because I have hired them but I would say to them, "Hey, look, just call me Tom".

> There is an obvious hierarchical status in the Singaporean work system and you should know who to approach in order to get things done.

> Singaporean work ethic is strongly based on a hierarchical structure . . . you have to respect someone who has been there longer, even if they are at the same level as you.

In contrast, Singaporeans reported the need for more permeable work role boundaries. For example:

> In order to be highly productive, you need to maintain good interpersonal and professional working relationships with your team members. If the interpersonal relationship gets very strained . . . you are going to be less productive than other teams.

Our findings were consistent with that of Alderfer's (1987) theory of intergroup relations, which suggests that distribution of power (e.g. hierarchical code of work conduct) among cultural identity groups, both inside the organization and in the larger society, affect how people think, feel and behave at work. Our findings also suggest that concerns about the need to maintain harmony in relationships facilitate Singaporeans' motivation to create more permeable work role boundaries. In contrast, Australians are less concerned about boundary permeability issues because personal goals are more important to them than group goals.

Communication boundary

Communication boundary refers to the manner in which individuals maintain their groups through expressive behaviors. Explicit communication boundaries can be thought of in terms of a low context communication style, where individuals use logical-deductive thinking (Hall, 1976). In contrast, implicit communication boundaries can be understood in terms of a high context communication where individuals rely on indirect contextual codes of speech or non-verbal behaviors. Qualitative differences were found in the way Australians and Singaporeans perceived their communication with others. The following quotations reported by Australians reflected these differences:

> Because there is something beyond the "yes" . . . So it is up to you to interpret what that "yes" means.

> You need to read their tone, the way they convey their body language. Basically, you have to read their body language and dig for the truth.

These comments suggested that Singaporeans were perceived by Australians to have a more implicit form of communication style. Non-verbal behaviors were used to maintain these implicit communication boundaries. When Australians tried to cross these communication boundaries, they had greater difficulty understanding the "hidden messages". The following quotations illustrated these communication difficulties:

> Asking people to be more explicit when they are not really comfortable in doing that, opening your ears and eyes, overstating the case, saying things explicitly when it is not necessary.

> There would be no direct shouting, but certain power games are implied . . . so other Chinese would understand, what this facial gesture meant, what this hand gesture and tone meant, but for a foreigner, we had no idea, so we wouldn't get the non-verbal cues. This caused a lot of misunderstandings.

Communication boundaries in Singapore were generally perceived to be less permeable than those in Australia, specifically by Australians who found it difficult to "read between the lines". As the above quotes illustrated, communication boundaries emerged

to balance the tension between how individuals receive and interpret information. When boundaries are not managed properly, it can result in miscommunication (Coupland *et al.*, 1991). One problem of miscommunication is that it is often attributed to the personal deficiencies of an individual. As a consequence, individuals end up blaming one another instead of seeking for more appropriate explanation for the misunderstanding.

General discussion

In this study, we aimed to identify different types of workplace boundaries and the permeability of these boundaries which were created by Australians and Singaporeans working in multinational organizations. The results indicated that Singaporeans and Australians created different types of workplace boundaries with varying levels of boundary permeability. In terms of cultural boundaries, Australians were perceived to construct more permeable boundaries than Singaporeans. The varying levels in permeability may be influenced by the different cultural expectations Australians and Singaporeans have. For example, Singaporeans living in a high power distance country are more likely than Australians (living in a low power distance country) to accept the unequal power distribution in society. They expect less powerful members (e.g. low status) to abide by the authorities and to stay in their respective places. Thus, boundaries are created in such a way to ensure that mobility can be easily restricted. Singaporeans also feel greater anxiety about uncertain or unknown matters than Australians (Hofstede, 1980). One strategy for managing and minimizing uncertainties is to create tighter or less permeable boundaries around entities to ensure safety and security. In countries where strict rules and regulations are the norms, boundaries become the medium not only to organize how people should think, feel and do things, but also as a mechanism for regulating people's mobility. Indeed, Tajfel (1978) noted that, "boundary permeability is created by laws, rules, sanctions and social norms designed to prevent members of a lower status group to penetrate into the higher status group (p. 51)". Therefore, boundary permeability provides the rules for establishing social hierarchies and separating people into different social classes. Boundaries and boundary permeability are essential means through which people acquire membership, status and resources.

Singaporean society may be characterized as inherently "Confucian" in its conceptualization of interpersonal interaction (Ho and Chiu, 1994). Confucianism emphasizes the need to maintain harmonious personal, social and work relationships. For example, Smith and Schwartz (1997) found that people from Asia often find it difficult to refuse the requests of others because doing so may ruin the harmony that exists in their relationships (Smith and Schwartz, 1997). This has important implications when you consider that Singaporeans live in a tightly knit society where individuals are embedded within cohesive in-groups (Hofstede, 1991). As a result, Singaporeans may find it extremely difficult to separate their work and social roles. Our results supported this finding and found that Singaporeans were more likely than Australians to integrate their work and social roles. This is consistent with past cross-cultural research which found that individuals from Asia (e.g. Singaporeans) tend to have a heightened awareness of others and their relationships with them. Thus, such individuals aim to relate well with others, to act appropriately in social situations, and to promote and value conformity and cooperation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, Australians being more independent are less constrained with the ties that bind them to their social roles and obligations. Therefore, they are more likely to focus on work issues at the workplace rather than blurring work and personal issues together.

Results for the category of communication boundaries found that Singaporeans had a less direct mode of communication, preferring communication to be more implicit and non-verbal. In contrast, Australians tend to have a more explicit communication boundary. This is consistent with previous cross-cultural communication research (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1994; Hall, 1976), suggesting that Singaporeans tend to create less permeable communication boundaries than Australians. Maintaining an appropriate level of boundary permeability is important because communication boundaries that are too rigid can impede communication, while boundaries that are too permeable can blur social or personal identity. Indeed, the results of this study showed that impermeable communication boundaries (i.e. implicit) created many communication problems between Australians and Singaporeans.

Finally, the results indicated that racial characteristics were regarded as highly salient and meaningful for both Australians and Singaporeans. Both Australians and Singaporeans perceived each other's racial boundaries to be highly impermeable. This made crossing these boundaries extremely difficult. These results are in accordance with Pelled (1996) who argued that visible racial diversity, as a source of visible difference, tends to incite intergroup bias and results in negative outcomes for work groups.

Limitations and future research directions

Our research is not without limitations. First, although the use of a qualitative approach provided rich and detailed information about boundaries and boundary permeability, a limitation of this study is that the data were obtained from a relatively small sample ($n = 23$). Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the greater population. Qualitative researchers (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) noted that the sample size for grounded theory relies heavily on theoretical saturation (Glasser and Strauss, 1976; Goulding, 2002; Locke, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Theoretical saturation occurs when "(a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well-established and validated" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 212). In essence, the researcher continues to expand the sample size until data collection reveals no new data (Douglas, 2003; Goulding, 2002; Locke, 2001). Throughout our data analytic strategy, we have adhered to this principle and collected data until "saturation" was reached and all the categories were labelled and distinguished. Along similar lines, we should note that previous studies using grounded theory tend to have a small sample size (Chaudhury and Miller, 2008; Chen and Partington, 2004; Dugsin, 2001; Khan and Watson, 2005; Kim, 2004; Tjitra, 1999; Walsh and Horenczyk, 2001). Second, the findings were based on self-reports and thus, participants may have reported socially desirable responses. Finally, the ethnicity of the first author, who conducted the interviews, could have influenced participants' responses. Interpersonal deference theory suggests that respondents tend to avoid making disparaging remarks about the race of the interviewer (Welch *et al.*, 1973). However, previous studies have also found that general deference does not occur as long as the interview questions do not relate to ethnicity (Weeks and Moore, 1981; Welch *et al.*, 1973). In this study, the standard questions asked of all participants did not center specifically on participants' ethnicity or race. Rather, the questions focused on participants' work experiences within culturally diverse work groups. Nevertheless, future research should consider using Australian and Singaporean interviewers for Australian and Singaporean respondents, respectively, in order to minimize this source of bias.

Despite these limitations, this research has contributed to the literature in two important ways. First, we integrated SIT with cross-cultural theories to provide a deeper understanding of the precise nature of boundaries and the impact that varying levels of boundary permeability have on Australians and Singaporeans' intercultural exchanges. A second contribution is that we have extended the application of SIT into Singapore, a traditional but technologically advanced collectivist culture. The overall findings of this study suggest that boundary permeability influenced people's ability to interact and communicate with others in the workplace. Specifically, Australians seemed to have greater difficulty with the non-verbal aspect of Singaporeans communication style. Singaporeans use silence as a strategy to indicate strength, power and disagreement (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1994). This may be perceived by Australians as a sign of weakness, lack of commitment and uncooperativeness on Singaporeans' part. If not managed properly, these different communication styles may result in conflict between Australians and Singaporeans. Because communication and cooperation are integral components of effective work processes and associated with a range of positive group behaviors (Mael and Asforth, 1992), future research should identify the impact they have on key organizational outcomes (e.g. work performance).

Practical implications

The findings of this research have practical implications for management practice. We suggest that employees should be trained to identify workplace boundaries, which are likely to impede work processes. For example, individualists should learn that collectivists tend to create more permeable interpersonal and professional relationship boundaries than they do. An understanding of this would provide information on how best to conduct social and intercultural exchanges in the workplace. For example, Leung and Bond (1984) found that Chinese participants were more inclined to assist in-group members and forfeit personal rewards, while Americans formed no such in-out group distinctions. In other words, individualists may be more willing to exchange money, goods, and information, whereas collectivists may be more motivated if the reward is given at the group level (Foa and Foa, 1974). As a result, culturally diverse work members may be differentially motivated by group identification and group membership issues. In such situations, managers should seek to promote the value of shared group membership and to build perceptions of a common group identity. This would not only reduce the threat perceived by culturally dissimilar group members but would also reduce the inherent ambiguity that exists when culturally diverse group members are "thrown together" in a group. Finally, different cultural values should be integrated in team building exercises. For example, people from individualist cultures should learn that people from collectivist cultures are more tolerant of authority, whereas people from individualist cultures are less trusting of authorities. Such exercises would create a greater understanding and sensitivity among culturally diverse work members (Restubog and Bordia, 2006, 2007). To achieve successful intercultural work exchanges, we recommend that the methods above be combined to create the best possible training intervention for culturally diverse work members to help them adjust and interact effectively in a multicultural work environment.

References

Alderfer, C.P. (1987), "An intergroup perspective on group dynamics", in Lorsch, J. (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizational Behavior*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 190-222.

Ashforth, B.E., Kreiner, G.E. and Fugate, M. (2000), "All in a day's work: boundaries and micro role transitions", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 472-91.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), "*Year Book Australia, 2008: Australia's Bilateral Relationships*", available at: www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/57AF1259CBCDBEE8CA2573D20010A7D2?opendocument (accessed 1 July).

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2004), "Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) – a business guide", available at: www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/safta/ch4_safta_guide.html (accessed 31 August 2008)

Australia-Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2004), "Address by minister of state Raymond Lim to the Australia-Singapore chamber of commerce and industry in Sydney, Australia", available at: app.mfa.gov.sg/2006/press/view_press_print.asp?post_id=1020 (accessed 23 May 2008).

Billig, M. and Tajfel, H. (1973), "Social categorization and similarity in intergroup behavior", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 27-52.

Bobo, L.D. and Fox, C. (2003), "Race, racism, and discrimination: bridging problems, methods, and theory in social psychological research", *Social Psychology Quarterly – Special Issue: Race, Racism, and Discrimination*, Vol. 66 No. 4, pp. 319-32.

Bordia, P. and Blau, G. (2003), "Moderating effect of allocentrism on the pay referent comparison-pay satisfaction relationship", *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, Vol. 52 No. 4, pp. 499-514.

Bordia, P., Jones, E., Gallois, C., Callan, V. and DiFonzo, N. (2006), "Management are aliens: rumors and stress during organizational change", *Group and Organization Management*, Vol. 31 No. 5, pp. 601-21.

Brewer, M.B. (1981), "Ethnocentrism and its role in interpersonal trust", in Brewer, M.B. and Collins, B.E. (Eds), *Scientific Inquiry and the Social Science*, Jossey-Bass, New York, NY, pp. 345-59.

Brewer, M.B. and Brown, R.J. (1998), "Intergroup relations", in Gilbert, D.T., Fiske, S.T. and Lindzey, G. (Eds), *Social Psychology*, McGraw Hill, New York, NY, pp. 554-94.

Brewer, M.B. and Campbell, D.T. (1976), *Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Attitudes: East African Evidence*, Sage, New York, NY.

Chaudhury, S.R. and Miller, L. (2008), "Religious identity formation among Bangladeshi American muslim adolescents", *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 383-410.

Chen, P. and Partington, D. (2004), "An interpretive comparison of Chinese and Western conceptions of relationships in construction project management work", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 397-406.

Chew, P.G.L. (2007), "Remaking Singapore: language, culture, and identity in a globalized world", in Tsui, A.B.M. and Tollefson, J.W. (Eds), *Language Policy, Culture, and Identity in Asian Contexts*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 73-93.

Connor, U. (1996), *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-cultural Aspects of Second Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Coupland, N., Giles, H. and Wiemann, J.M. (1991), *Miscommunication and Problematic Talk*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

De Cremer, D. and Van Vugt, M. (1999), "Social identification effects in social dilemmas: a transformation of motives", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 29 No. 7, pp. 871-93.

Douglas, D. (2003), "Grounded theories of management: a methodological review", *Management Research News*, Vol. 26 No. 5, pp. 44-60.

Dugsin, R. (2001), "Conflict and healing in family experience of second-generation emigrants from India living in North America", *Family Process*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 233-42.

Ellemers, N. (1993), "The influence of social structural variables on identity management strategies", *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 27-57.

Ellemers, N., Wilke, H. and van Knippenberg, A. (1993), "Effects of the legitimacy of low group or individual and collective status-enhancement strategies", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 64 No. 5, pp. 766-78.

Epstein, C.F. (1992), "Tinker-bells and pinups: the construction and reconstruction of gender boundaries", in Lamont, M. and Fournier, M. (Eds), *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, pp. 232-56.

Foa, V. and Foa, E. (1974), *Society Structures of the Mind*, Thomas, Springfield, IL.

Freeman, M. and Bordia, P. (2001), "Assessing alternative models of individualism and collectivism: a confirmatory factor analysis", *European Journal of Personality*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 105-21.

Freeman, S. and Browne, E. (2004), "The influence of national culture on dissolution communication strategies in Western versus Asian business relationships: a theoretical model", *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 169-82.

Ghosh, A. (2004), "Individualist and collectivist orientations across occupational groups", available at: http://ebooks.iaccp.org/ongoing_themes/chapters/ghosh/ghosh.php?file=ghosh&output=screen (accessed 1 November 2007).

Giles, H. and Viladot, A. (1994), "Ethnolinguistic identity in Catalonia", *Multilingual: Journal of Cross-cultural and Inter-language Communication*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 301-12.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Aldine, Chicago, IL.

Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1976), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Aldine, New York, NY.

Goulding, C. (2002), *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide for Management, Business and Market Researchers*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Gudykunst, W.B. and Nishida, T. (1994), *Bridging Japanese North American Differences*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hall, E.T. (1976), *Beyond Culture*, Anchor Press, New York, NY.

Hildebrandt, N. and Giles, H. (1983), "The Japanese as subordinate group: ethno-linguistic identity theory in a foreign context", *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 25 No. 44, pp. 436-66.

Ho, D.Y.F. and Chiu, C.Y. (1994), "Component ideas of individualism, collectivism, and social organizations: an application in the study of Chinese culture", in Kim, U., Triandis, H.C., Kagiticibasi, C., Choi, S.C. and Yoon, G. (Eds), *Individualism and Collectivism: Theory, Method and Applications*, Sage Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 200-12.

Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values*, Sage Press, Beverly Hills, CA.

Hofstede, G. (1991), "Empirical models of cultural differences", in Bleichrodt, N. and Drenth, P.J.D. (Eds), *Contemporary Issues in Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Swets & Zeitlinger, Lisse, pp. 4-20.

Hofstede, G. (1994), *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*, Harper Collins Business, London.

Hogg, M.A. (2000), "Subjective uncertainty reduction through self categorization: a motivational theory of social identity processes", *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 223-55.

Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (1993), "Towards a single process uncertainty reduction model in social motivation in groups", in Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (Eds), *Group Motivation: Social Psychological Perspective*, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, London, pp. 173-90.

Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (2001), *Intergroup Relations: Essential Readings*, Psychology Press, Hove/Philadelphia, PA.

Hogg, M.A. and Terry, D.J. (2000), "Social identity and self categorization processes in organizational contexts", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 121-40.

Ibarra, H. (1995), "Race, opportunity, and diversity of social circles in managerial networks", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 673-703.

Irwin, B. (1996), *Communicating with Asia: Understanding People and Customs*, Allen Unwin, Sydney.

Jackson, S.E., Stone, V.K. and Alvarez, E.B. (1992), "Socialization amidst diversity: the impact of demographics on work team oldtimers and newcomers", in Staw, B.M. and Cummings, L.L. (Eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 45-109.

James, K. (1992), "The social context of organizational justice: cultural, intergroup, and structural effects on justice behaviors and perceptions", in Cropanzano, R. (Ed.), *Justice in the Workplace*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 21-50.

James, K. and Khoo, G. (1991), "Identity related influence on the success of minority works in primarily non-minority organizations", *Hispanic Journal of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 169-92.

Keto, C.T. (1989), *The Africa Centered Perspective of History*, KA Publications, Blackwood, NJ.

Khan, S. and Watson, J.C. (2005), "The Canadian immigration experiences of Pakistani women: dreams confront reality", *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 307-17.

Kilduff, M. (1992), "The friendship network as a decision making resource: dispositional moderators of social influences on organizational choice", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 62 No. 1, pp. 168-80.

Kim, S.S.S. (2004), "The experiences of young Korean immigrants: a grounded theory of negotiating social, cultural and generational boundaries", *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 517-37.

Lamont, M. (2000), *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Leung, K. and Bond, M.H. (1984), "The impact of cultural collectivism on reward allocation", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 793-804.

Lincoln, J.R. and Miller, J. (1979), "Work and friendship ties in organizations: a comparative analysis of relational networks", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 181-99.

Locke, K. (2001), *Grounded Theory in Management Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Loh, M.I., Restubog, S.L.D. and Zagenczyk, T.J. (2009), "Consequences of workplace bullying on employee identification and satisfaction among Australians and Singaporeans", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 41, November.

Mael, F. and Asforth, B.E. (1992), "Alumi and their alma mater: a partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 103-23.

Markus, H.R. and Kitayama, S. (1991), "Culture and the self: implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 98 No. 2, pp. 224-53.

Milliken, F.J. and Martins, L.L. (1996), "Searching for common threads: understanding the multiple effects of diversity in organizational groups", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 402-34.

Nippert-Eng, C. (1996), "Calendars and keys: the classification of home and work", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 563-82.

Pakir, A. (2004), "Medium of instruction policy in Singapore", in Tollfson, J.W. and Tsui, A.B.M. (Eds.), *Medium of Instruction Policies: Which Agenda? Whose Agenda?*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 117-33.

Pelled, L.H. (1996), "Demographic diversity, conflict and workgroup outcomes: an intervening process theory", *Organization Science*, Vol. 7 No. 6, pp. 615-31.

Putnam, L.L. and Stohl, C. (1990), "Bona fide groups: a reconceptualization of groups in context", *Communication Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 248-65.

Restubog, S.L.D. and Bordia, P. (2006), "Workplace familism and psychological contract breach in the Philippines", *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp. 563-85.

Restubog, S.L.D. and Bordia, P. (2007), "One big happy family: understanding the role of workplace familism in the psychological contract dynamics", in Glendon, A.I., Myors, B. and Thompson, B.M. (Eds), *Advances in Organizational Psychology: An Asia-Pacific Perspective*, Australian Academic Press, Brisbane, pp. 371-87.

Richards, T.J. and Richards, L. (1994), "Using computers in qualitative research", in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 445-62.

Rokeach, M. (1960), *The Open and Closed Mind*, Basic Books, New York, NY.

Samovar, L.A., Porter, R.E. and Stefani, L.A. (1998), *Communication between Cultures*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Santostefano, S. (1995), "Embodied meanings, cognition and emotion: probing how three are one", in Cicchetti, D. and Toth, S.L. (Eds), *Emotion, Cognition, and Representation. Rochester Symposium on Developmental Psychopathology*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, pp. 59-132.

Smith, P.B. and Schwartz, S.H. (1997), "Values", in Berry, J.W., Segall, M.H. and Kagitibasi, C. (Eds), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, MA, pp. 77-118.

Strauss, A.L. (1987), *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998), *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Tajfel, H. (1974), "Social identity and intergroup behavior", *Social Science Information*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 65-93.

Tajfel, H. (1978), *Differentiation between Social Groups*, Academic Press, London.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", in Austin, W.G. and Worchel, S. (Eds), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Brooke/Cole, Monterey, CA, pp. 33-47.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1985), "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior", in Worchel, S. and Austin, W.G. (Eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Nelson Hall, Chicago, IL, pp. 7-24.

Tjitra, H.W. (1999), "Cultural specific problem solving styles: the strength and the problem areas of German-Indonesian groups", *Psychologische Beitrage*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 368-84.

Triandis, H.C. (1990), "Cross-cultural studies of individualism and collectivism", in Berman, J.J. (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1989: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Current Theory and Research in Motivation*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, IL, pp. 41-133.

Triandis, H.C. (1995), *Individualism and Collectivism*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

Triandis, H.C. (1996), "The psychological measurement of cultural syndrome", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 51 No. 4, pp. 407-15.

Tsui, A.S., Egan, T.D. and O'Reilly, C.A. (1992), "Being different: relational demography and organizational attachment", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 549-79.

Walsh, S.D. and Horenczyk, G. (2001), "Gendered patterns of experience in social and cultural transition: the case of English-speaking immigrants in Israel", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 45 Nos. 7/8, pp. 501-28.

Weeks, M.F. and Moore, R.P. (1981), "Ethnicity of interviewer effects on ethnic respondents", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 245-49.

Weick, K.E. (1969), *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, Addison-Wesley Pub Co, Reading, MA.

Welch, S., Comer, J. and Steinman, M. (1973), "Interviewing in a Mexican-American community: an investigation of some potential sources of response bias", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 115-26.

Zenger, T.R. and Lawrence, B.S. (1989), "Organizational demography: the differential effects of age and tenure distributions on technical communication", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 353-76.

Zerubavel, E. (1993), *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Further reading

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2007), *The First Review of the Singapore-Australia Agreement, 14 July 2004*, Sydney, available at: www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/safta/safta_review1_jms.html (accessed 12 April 2008).

About the authors

Jennifer (Min Ing) Loh is a Registered Psychologist and a Lecturer in Psychology in the School of Behavioral, Cognitive and Social Sciences at The University of New England. Her current research interests include workplace bullying, stress and coping of migrant women, and cross-cultural management. Her research has been published in *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, International Journal of E-Learning, Australasian Psychiatry, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry and Social Psychiatry* and *Psychiatric Epidemiology*. Jennifer (Min Ing) Loh is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: mloh4@une.edu.au

Simon Lloyd D. Restubog is a Senior Lecturer in Organizational Behavior in the Australian School of Business at The University of New South Wales. His research focuses on antecedents and maintenance of psychological contracts, workplace deviance, and cross-cultural organizational behavior. His research has been published or in press in high quality peer-reviewed journals such as: *Applied Psychology: An International Review, British Journal of Management, Human Resource Management Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal Cross Cultural Psychology, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* and *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.

Cindy Gallois is Professor of Communication and Social Psychology in the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland. Her current research interests include intergroup communication in intercultural, organizational, and health contexts, and social psychology of language and communication. She is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, International Communication Association, and Academy of Intercultural Relations. She serves as the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* and is also on the editorial boards for the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, Human Communication Research, Communication Theory, Journal of Communication, Management Communication Quarterly,* and *Asian Journal of Communication*.