

Exchanging Social Information Across Cultural Boundaries

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Social information exchange (SIE) in organizations has long been an area of interest for management scholars; however, in recent years, this literature has become fragmented and widely dispersed. As communication and transfer of information increasingly occur between individuals and aggregates of widely varying national and regional cultures, a reconsideration and review of the topic is appropriate, including identification of key issues in this research domain and an integration and synthesis of what we currently know about SIE across cultural boundaries. We examine the last 13 years of cross-cultural SIE research at the country, organization and subunit, team and dyad, and individual levels; provide a basic analytic framework; and provide propositions and direction to guide future research. Our review notes key findings based on three general topics in the literature: (1) antecedents to SIE, (2) process and relational outcomes of SIE, and (3) performance outcomes of SIE. We conclude that this area of research would benefit from increased focus on the nature of the relationship between the exchange partners, the broader social context in which exchanges are embedded, consideration of the capabilities of the actors and their task requirements, and timing of events. Issues regarding SIE quality and fidelity, motivations, cultural distance, and uncertainty are discussed. These research directions can potentially enhance diverse literatures, such as interpersonal interactions, team decision making, knowledge transfer, and corporate governance.

Keywords: *cross-cultural; microtopics; communication; knowledge transfer/replication; macrotopics*

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The business of organizations depends on the ability to exchange social information, and increasingly that exchange must occur across the national and regional cultural boundaries endemic to the global business environment (M. Wang, Zhan, McCune, & Truxillo, 2011). Although social information exchange (SIE) has played a role in the organizational sciences (e.g., Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, & Wagner, 2004; DiRienzo, Das, Cort, & Burbridge, 2007), the topic of SIE has, over the last 13 years, not been a specific focus in management journals.

Our purpose in providing this review is fourfold: (1) to clearly define the construct of SIE and its role in multi- or cross-cultural contexts, (2) to provide a theoretical framework for organizing this literature across multiple topic areas and levels of analysis, (3) to assess the state of our knowledge on cross-cultural SIE on the basis of this framework, and (4) to locate areas of development in our current understanding and gaps in the literature that have potential to produce new knowledge.

SIE

A Definition of SIE

Paralleling communications theory, SIE is considered to have two primary components (e.g., Burtis & Turman, 2006). First, the transfer of information from one entity to another is focused on the outcome of the movement of that information and is characterized by the quality or fidelity of the transmission (the extent to which the intention of the source was met; see Ronen, 1986, for a cross-cultural perspective on this process). Second, the SIE process is used to determine or cocreate our current context, its opportunities, and its demands (i.e., sensemaking; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). To the extent that the two parties to the exchange come to share a perception of the context, the communication was effective. Furthermore, this view of SIE specifies the social nature of both the process and the content. Cognitions about people differ from those about things, as the target's mental state, including cognition, motivation, and affect, is a relevant component of this perceptual process (e.g., Ravlin & Ward, in press). Drawing on this fundamental principle of social cognitive processes, we can infer that SIE occurs between two sentient beings or aggregates of beings and that its content has social targets, interpretations, and influences. The extent to which information is exchanged from a control-oriented or learning-oriented approach and is relational or social in nature, relative to being solely task focused, are likely to influence uncertainty (particularly in cross-cultural interactions; Koeszegi, 2004). These attributes ultimately affect the characteristics of the exchange.

Our domain extends to any type of SIE, both formal (e.g., an organizational policy manual) and informal (e.g., interpersonal conversation), between individuals, within teams, and between aggregate units. Such exchanges can take form in any media as long as they attempt to convey, or are perceived by one of the parties to convey, a message. The involvement of humans is a requirement to consider such exchanges social; for example, two digital devices exchanging information without human mediation is unlikely to be defined as SIE. Although such information may have social components, human motivation, affect, and cognition are required at some point in the exchange to make the resulting interpretation social in nature. Data that contain no interpretation are also not social information (e.g., Kasper, Legare, Scheibler, & Geiger, 2011). SIE includes attempts to exchange (e.g., convey or acquire

information), whether or not the parties agree that such an exchange has occurred, and encompasses messages of which the sender is unconscious. Exchange may occur directly, as in the case in which a headquarters operation conveys directives to a subsidiary, or indirectly, as when information is inferred from observation of others' experiences. We define SIE as a broad construct that refers to behaviors and perceived behaviors that attempt to convey and/or acquire information between and relevant to social entities, using multiple media.

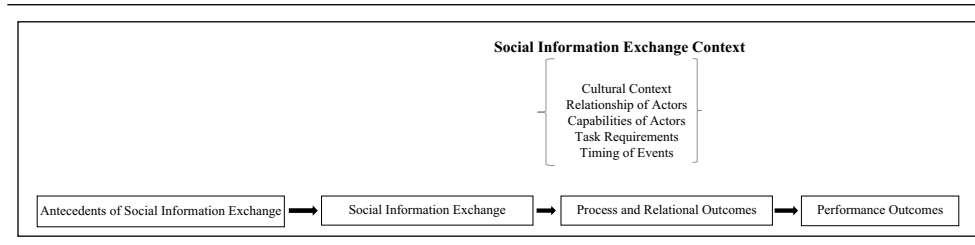
Global competition and other changes in the world economy have substantially affected the nature and significance of SIE. Technological changes allow for virtually instantaneous transfer of huge amounts of data (Jean, Sinkovics, & Cavusgil, 2010; Shin, 2004), and most of this information will be socially mediated in some form; that is, it will be interpretive products received from other people. Increases in the complexity of work, flatter structures, and competitive forces toward efficiency require employees to do more, and typically more dynamic, work (Wisman & Reksten, 2012). Employees and organizations must be able to access the information they need to meet job demands, and companies actively seek ways of transferring valuable knowledge from one part of their structure to another, often bridging cultural barriers to do so (Hansen & Lovas, 2004). Increased mobility around the globe and the influx of culturally different individuals into jobs reserved in the past for dominant cultural/demographic groups also enhance the difficulty of communicating information across demographic boundaries and increase the social (and socially uncertain) content of exchanges (Brannen & Peterson, 2009). All of these shifts increase pressure on individuals, subunits, and organizations for effective cross-cultural SIE.

Culture and SIE

In basic communication models, a sender is conceptualized as generating a message for a receiver, but noise distorts the message such that the communication is not received exactly as intended. Differences in culture (values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about behavior shared by members of a social group) often appear as noise in this framework, as culture influences the ability of the sender to convey and the receiver to interpret the intended communication (Ronen, 1986). Cultural distance increases social or relational uncertainty about the SIE partner (because of the increased number of potential predictions or explanations for a culturally different partner's behavior; e.g., Berger & Calabrese, 1975), complexity of the interaction, and the potential risks to be incurred in pursuing the interaction (Koeszegi, 2004), along with task uncertainty (the extent to which an entity can predict what, when, and how tasks must be done; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). These increases in uncertainty enhance the costs associated with searching for and identifying useful information about potential partners (Munyon, Perryman, Morgante, & Ferris, 2011) and are particularly important to SIE in sense or meaning making (Chia, 2003). The relationship between SIE and culture is arguably difficult to disentangle, in that culture is considered to exist to solve social problems (implying social interaction), and communication is the vehicle through which culture is created, transmitted, and changed (Hall, 1976). Here, we focus on the challenges raised by multiple cultures in the SIE process.

Consistent with literature on nonconscious habitual behavior in organizations (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999), "much communication behavior is scripted and proceeds in a routine manner consistent with the cultural field" (Thomas, 2008: 119). Either one or both parties

Figure 1
Analytical Framework—Social Information Exchange Across Cultural Boundaries



may not be conscious of how they exchange or the results of using such routines in culturally diverse settings. Thus, research suggests that culture affects the processes whereby the sender conceives of, formulates, and behaviorally executes a message; that similar influences occur on the receiver side; and that this cultural influence extends to other attributes of the process and content of SIE (Brannen, 2004; Ronen, 1986; see also recent quantitative, Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010, and qualitative, Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006, reviews on cultures' relationships with a wide spectrum of affective, behavioral, and performance outcomes). These multiplex connections indicate the importance of developing a better understanding of the mutually influential roles of SIE and culture for the conduct of effective interactions within and between organizations.

To facilitate an integration of the literature on SIE in cross-cultural settings, we developed an analytical framework based on our reading of the empirical articles in the search set described ahead (refer to Figure 1). We first categorized the research in terms of how each article fit into the heuristic framework on the basis of the role played by SIE in the study and by level of analysis. This process allowed us to examine differing types of SIE across a variety of research domains in terms of (1) its antecedents, (2) process and relational outcomes (e.g., trust) that tend to mediate the effects of SIE, and (3) consequences of SIE that represent important organizational outcomes (e.g., performance). When studies addressed multiple categories, we chose to group them with research on the most distal outcomes examined.

Literature Review 2001 to 2013

Ahead, we describe the methods used to define our research base drawn from the last 13 years of management research published starting from 2001, the year that Stohl's chapter "Globalizing Organizational Communication" was published. Stohl's chapter was chosen as a starting point because it provided a review of knowledge on this topic within the context of organizations up to the turn of the century.

Journal Selection

For this article, our focus was on management research (for a communications literature-focused review of culture in communication, see Adair, Buchan, & Chen, 2009). We initially

adopted the same top management journal list used by Werner (2002) and Werner and Brouthers (2002) and followed Pisani (2009) in adding *Organization Science* and *Organization Studies* to the list, as these journals have had two of the highest impact factors of management journals in recent years.¹ Within these journals, we performed an initial keyword search in EBSCOhost, looking specifically for articles that had the terms *culture*, *international*, *multinational*, *global*, or *foreign* in some form in the abstract and/or title in combination with any of the following terms (in various forms) in the abstract: *team*, *knowledge*, *information*, *voice*, *network*, *communication*, *training*, *context*, *conflict*, *negotiation*, *decision*, *social*, *power*, *status*, *relationship development*, *mergers and acquisitions*, *alliance development*, or *leader*. The search was limited to articles published from 2001 through 2013.

Of the initial search results, we removed those that were duplicates, did not address national culture, were comparative, focused on resource/economic exchange or unspecified experience, or were special issue calls/introductions, book reviews, or commentaries. The identified sample included 160 empirical articles (indicated with an asterisk in the reference list) in the top 22 management journals. Theoretical articles captured in the search, in addition to meta-analytic and sources in other literatures, were used to enhance our understanding of the phenomena of interest. We included studies that appeared to have cultural implications for SIE, although not all studies directly measured culture.

Review and Propositions

The literature draws primarily from cultural distance (Kogut & Singh, 1988), social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), transaction cost (Alchian & Demsetz, 1972), and agency theories (Ross, 1973). As shown in Figure 1, in combination with cultural content and distance, a number of contextual factors influence uncertainty and risk assessment in the process of initiating or engaging in SIE. These factors include the relationship between the interactants (e.g., Kostova & Roth, 2002), the broader context in which the interaction is embedded (e.g., Geppert, Matten, & Williams, 2003), the capabilities of the actor (e.g., Reus & Lamont, 2009), task requirements (e.g., Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010), and timing of events (e.g., Adair & Brett, 2005). In conjunction with culture, these contextual factors influence the selection of differing approaches to SIE as a response to uncertainty and risk assessments and associated outcomes (e.g., Collins-Dogru, 2012; Lavelle, Gunnigle, & McDonnell, 2010).

Propositions are provided as they are developed through the empirical findings. Because of the large number of articles reviewed, not all articles are mentioned in the text; however, all are listed in Tables S1, S2, and S3 in the online supplemental material.

Antecedents to SIE

The 53 identified studies on antecedents were categorized into two areas: (1) aspects of structure, including the extent of ties between actors and the tightness of the structure, and actor power/status relationships; and (2) culture, including cultural distance, content, and fit (see Table S1 in the supplemental material). These studies are summarized and then integrated using propositions for future research.

Structural attributes. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, a number of studies identified structural attributes that increased SIE, including the use of multinational corporation (MNC) structures, which are tighter and more clearly delineated as opposed to alliances or markets (Almeida, Song, & Grant, 2002). To the extent that structure focused on learning intent or capacity to deal with cultural diversity, SIE also increased (e.g., Lam, 2003; Simonin, 2004; Tregaskis, Edwards, Edwards, Ferner, & Marginson, 2010). Tighter ties related to competence development through knowledge sharing (Andersson, Forsgren, & Holm, 2002) and prior R&D copractice (existing ties) between subunits led to greater knowledge use between subunits (Frost & Zhou, 2005). Some studies noted a fit effect in that information was more likely to be sought or shared between partners that were a good fit technologically (Chung & Yeaple, 2008), in terms of relevance (Schulz, 2003), or in terms of origin and structure (Feinberg & Majumdar, 2001). Organizational restructuring (in essence, a lack of structure, perceived illegitimacy, or uncertainty) triggered increases in SIE in the form of sensemaking discourses (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006).

Other structure-relevant studies more specifically addressed the relationships between units and their relative power. Subunit power in the form of interdependence, importance, knowledge, and social capital led to more attention (information seeking) on the part of firm headquarters and more knowledge transfer (B. Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2007; Asmussen, Foss, & Pedersen, 2013; Driffield, Love, & Menghinello, 2010; Gooderham, Minbaeva, & Pedersen, 2011; Hansen & Lovas, 2004; Yang, Mudambi, & Meyer, 2008). When MNC attention took the form of positive mutual interactions with the subsidiary, attention led to more knowledge acquisition by the MNC (Tsang, 2002) and other subunits (T. C. Ambos, Andersson, & Birkinshaw, 2010). Negative attention took the form of increased monitoring or oversight, in which SIE is manifested by headquarters' collection of subsidiary process and performance information followed by corrective action and less subsidiary autonomy (B. Ambos & Schlegelmilch; D. Chen, Park, & Newburry, 2009). T. Edwards, Tregaskis, Colling, Jalette, and Susaeta (2013) also noted that different types of monitoring were used by MNCs depending on whether the tasks to be monitored were professional (higher-power units, more social control monitoring) or operational/technical (lower-power units, more output monitoring).

A number of studies found practice diffusion to be affected by a variety of factors, including coercive isomorphism or other institutional forces generated by MNC involvement, which were similarly indicative of tighter structural connections (positive; Bjorkman & Lu, 2001; Guler, Guillen, & MacPherson, 2002), level of economic and political status and power of the location of the company headquarters (positive; Beck, Kabst, & Walgenbach, 2009), or local embeddedness of a practice (negative; Geppert & Matten, 2006).

At the *team* and *dyad levels*, studies have noted that some commonly recommended approaches to structuring work and relationships were not useful in virtual and/or cross-cultural contexts. Sapsed and Salter's (2004) study found that project management tools, typically used as a method of structuring information flows and project teamwork, did not facilitate cross-cultural SIE or conflict reduction because of the ambiguous nature of the power structure in the context of a lack of face-to-face interaction. Alternatively, Y. F. Chen and Tjosvold's (2006) leader-subordinate dyad study found that cooperative goal structures between members led to improved relationships and participative leadership in foreign-owned companies with Chinese employees.

For *individual-level* studies addressing a structural view, social capital, which is indicative of power and influence, was shown to lead to access to and transfer of knowledge upon repatriation (Reiche, 2012). Compensation structure also has been studied. C. C. Chen, Choi, and Chi (2002) found that local Chinese international joint venture (IJV) employees perceived a compensation (and presumably a power) disadvantage vis-à-vis expatriate employees that affected their perceptions of fairness and intention to leave, but this relationship was moderated by expatriate interpersonal sensitivity.

These structural antecedent studies are diverse, but they suggest that across levels of analysis, structure can be characterized by its tightness (the extent to which connections between interactants are explicit and numerous), power differentials between interactants, and types of exchange (e.g., control oriented, learning oriented) generated. Tighter structures in general increased the amount of information exchanged. Power influenced the direction of SIE, with the advantage going to the more powerful partner (e.g., Beck et al., 2009). Together, these factors (tighter structures, power differentials) reduce the uncertainty associated with task expectations generated by cross-cultural SIE for the interacting partners; however, they do not necessarily address the quality of the information utilized in the process and may limit its acceptance over time. Research in the area of positive attention by the MNC (e.g., T. C. Ambos et al., 2010; Tsang, 2002) is perhaps most helpful in extending this line of thinking. If the high power actor is concerned with control (to reduce task uncertainty and risk or driven by cultural or other context factors), tighter structures and actor power will positively influence SIE in the form of sequences of monitoring and correction. If, however, the actor perceives value in learning from the partner (e.g., knowledge sharing), then positive attention and involvement, in addition to monitoring and control, produces more mutual SIE. A lower power differential between interactants (e.g., through interdependence; e.g., Y. F. Chen & Tjosvold, 2006) may trigger increases in learning-oriented SIE.

When the power structure is unclear, cross-cultural SIE appears to focus on sensemaking or learning, as shown in studies of restructuring. Social uncertainty may be particularly high for these participants (Vaara et al., 2006). If a task-oriented structural element is introduced in a similarly unclear power structure, participants may reduce task uncertainty by simply ignoring it and thus reduce cross-cultural SIE (Sapsed & Salter, 2004). What is for the most part left unspecified, however, is how culture will influence these relationships.

Culture. Cultural distance and content were the primary cultural concepts identified in this set of studies as antecedents to SIE. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, consistent with increases in uncertainty as cultural distance increases, distance increased SIE in some cases (Sarala & Vaara, 2010; Vaara, Sarala, Stahl, & Bjorkman, 2012), although Vaara et al. also noted that social conflict led to less knowledge transfer. Using a broader institutional distance approach, Salomon and Wu (2012) found that distance reduced practice diffusion by foreign banks in a U.S. host environment, but more adoption was facilitated by having boundary spanners at multiple levels, by using more resources, and under conditions of higher interdependence, among other factors (see also Saka, 2004). Ferner, Almond, and Colling (2005) noted negative results on SIE for cultural distance in an American MNC and its European subsidiaries. Albuquerque, Bronnenberg, and Corbett (2007) found that a complex match between cultures, practices, and timing of events all influenced ISO standard diffusion in 56 countries such that fit between cultures and practices was positively related to diffusion.

National culture content (in particular, individualism) was found in some studies to promote SIE in the form of diffusion as well (e.g., Haxhi & Van Ees, 2010 at the *country level*; Tre-gaskis et al., 2010), indicating cultural differences in preferences for directive approaches to SIE.

At the *team* and *dyad levels*, patterns of negotiation were observed by Adair and Brett (2005) that showed specific behaviors were influenced by cultural origin and timing of events. Cultural stereotypes influenced the view of negotiators as being more or less aggressive when expressing anger (Adam & Shirako, 2013). At the *individual level*, a study of cultural distance in a sample of multinational manager teams (Troster & Van Knippenberg, 2012) found that employees of underrepresented nationalities were more likely to share their opinions, or voice to their managers, when the manager was open and similar to the employee in nationality; these relationships were mediated by psychological safety and affective commitment.

Typically, cultural distance is considered an impediment to communication. Knowledge that is cultural in nature is not well structured and is particularly generative of social uncertainty, and cultural influences on SIE-related affect and behaviors have been noted in reviews of the culture literature (e.g., Kirkman et al., 2006; Taras et al, 2010). While actors using a control-oriented strategy to convey information experience resistance when cultural distance is high, those actively looking for joint solutions based on a learning orientation should increase SIE in terms of mutual discussions that can identify the mix of practices and culture that will be effective for the partners going forward (e.g., Albuquerque et al., 2007). A specific tactic in this regard at the firm level is the use of boundary spanners (Salomon & Wu, 2012), which seems to mitigate cultural distance's negative effects.

Considering our review of both structure and cultural studies, we propose the following as opportunities to integrate these two areas further:

Proposition 1: Tighter structural forms provide avenues for information acquisition and conveyance, and thus enhance cross-cultural SIE, resulting in diminished task and social uncertainty. Cultural distance interacts with structural forms to diminish SIE and increase uncertainty, such that it has its greatest negative impact on SIE under conditions of loose structure.

Proposition 2: Power differentials between interactants influence the type of SIE that will be demonstrated. Greater power differentials enhance control-oriented cross-cultural SIE, and smaller differentials enhance learning-oriented cross-cultural SIE. Both forms of SIE diminish uncertainty; however, greater power differentials can result in negative reactions on the part of lower-power participants. These effects are moderated by the presence of tight structures and cultural distance, such that tighter structures and greater cultural distance increase these effects.

Proposition 3: When power differentials and structural forms are dynamic, SIE is generated to reduce uncertainty. Cultural distance is likely to moderate this relationship such that cross-cultural SIE will be reduced and uncertainty increased when distance is high.

SIE Process and Relational Outcomes

Fifty studies were located that focused on process or relational outcomes of SIE. These types of outcomes were often cast as potential mediators of more distal performance outcomes valuable to the organization. We categorized these process and relational outcomes into six groups and provide a summary of findings for each set, including: (1) relationship perceptions; (2) cooperation and conflict; (3) agreement; (4) perceptions of trust, justice, and

opportunism; (5) power and governance; and (6) acculturation and legitimacy (see Table S2 in the supplemental material).

Relationship perceptions. This set of studies emphasized the extent of positive attitudes and investment in the relationship between the interactants as outcomes of SIE. At the *firm/subunit level*, Shapiro, Ozanne, and Saaticioglu (2008) conducted interviews with North American buyers from Asian firms, finding that cultural sensitivity developed through interactions over time and positively influenced international business relationships. Commitment to the relationship was also a specific focus of research. In IJV top management teams, commitment to the IJV was a function of procedural justice and control perceptions (Johnson, Korsgaard, & Sapienza, 2002). Tsui-Auch and Mollering (2010) noted that diminished commitment of the local workforce was a result of lack of trust in foreign management on the basis of its dependence on local resources. These latter two studies both suggest that relationship commitment is influenced in part by beliefs in the foreign partner's power and resulting trust.

Jun, Gentry, and Hyun's (2001) *individual-level* study of expatriates living/working in Korea showed that greater knowledge of the culture led to greater SIE in the form of market participation, which decreased market alienation and led to higher satisfaction with the host culture. Also examining an aspect of SIE quality, Vignovic and Thompson (2010) determined that English-language grammatical violations typical of Asians produced negative attributions from U.S. students unless cues were given that the sender was from another culture. However, etiquette breaches were not similarly mitigated. Thus, the relational element of SIE quality was at least somewhat resistant to change.

Cooperation and conflict. Cooperation and conflict are key outcomes of cross-cultural interactions of research at the *firm/subunit level*. Moore (2011), in her study of a German acquisition of a British manufacturing facility employing multicultural workers, argued that interactions both within the subunit and at the national level explained resulting postacquisition conflict and decisions because the acquisition was embedded in the larger network of cross-national relations not considered prior to the acquisition. Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston, and Ambekar (2005) studied a United States–India biotechnology alliance that used appreciative inquiry to help resolve differences and build relational capital; after 6 years, some conflict continued. The authors concluded that the interventions needed modification or recontextualization based on cultural differences. Also, Boussebaa (2009) noted that the Anglo-American model of management, coupled with different national market conditions, led to conflict.

For cooperation and conflict, two findings stand out. First, transferring relational or people-oriented practices, even if they are considered to be best practices (e.g., appreciative inquiry), across cultures is likely to create conflict through increased social or relational uncertainty, and the practices are likely to require adaptation to the new environment. Second, to the extent that a cross-cultural relationship is embedded in the larger relational context, the nature of the ties is central to the development of both cooperation and conflict.

Agreement. Most studies on agreement across cultural boundaries were focused at *team* or *individual levels* of analysis. In a U.S.-based multinational, Baba et al. (2004) performed a 14-month longitudinal ethnographic study examining cognitive convergence over time in a

virtual team composed of members from developed nations. Knowledge sharing created convergence and also reduced the likelihood that specific knowledge domains would be ignored. Other types of SIE were useful as well, including similar but separate learning experiences. Self-interest played a role, in that leaders and members needed to perceive that SIE and convergence were positive for them. Lee, Yang, and Graham (2006) examined tension in cross-cultural negotiations in a simulation study. Compared with American participants, Chinese participants who experienced more tension were more likely to agree with but had less trust in and attraction for their American partner, whereas negative effects on both agreement with and trust in their Chinese partner resulted for American participants. Liu, Friedman, Barry, Gelfand, and Zhang (2012) examined U.S. and Chinese dyad members to determine whether convergence occurred in a negotiation setting. Need for closure inhibited, and need for face enhanced, reaching agreement in intercultural dyads, but these relationships were moderated by participant epistemic and social motives. Intracultural dyads were more easily able to reach consensus than were intercultural dyads.

These findings indicate that although increased SIE may be desirable in general, cultural fit issues may prevent the use of openness as a blanket strategy, as is often advocated in practice. This research also indicates the complexity of interaction patterns over time and the need to consider how differing motivations may further affect cross-cultural agreement.

Trust and opportunism. Trust between parties was a fundamental outcome in cross-cultural SIE studies and was also featured in studies with performance outcomes, which are reviewed ahead. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, SIE related positively to trust, although in some cases cultural barriers made this relationship unpredictable (e.g., Raz, 2009). Maekelburger, Schwens, and Kabst (2012) investigated perceptions of opportunism and the use of knowledge safeguards (e.g., host-country networks—forms of SIE) and institutional safeguards (e.g., cultural proximity) to protect a firm's specific assets. A key result was that SIE in the form of knowledge safeguards moderated the relationship between asset specificity and entry mode. At the *country level*, research suggested a positive role for more information exchange in limiting corruption (DiRienzo et al., 2007). These findings indicate that transparent behavior (as opposed to openly sharing competitive assets) will limit opportunistic behavior by building trust and that implementing more control-oriented knowledge safeguards could supplement this positive effect.

At the *individual level*, Neeley (2013) noted that when English was established as the company *lingua franca*, nonnative speakers responded with lowered trust and assertive interpersonal behaviors (see also Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari, & Santti, 2005). Marshall and Boush (2011) observed that culture had initial effects on trust in that Peruvians were less trusting of foreign partners than were Americans, but that these differences were not maintained over time. In addition, two meta-analyses (Rockstuhl, Ang, Dulebohn, & Shore, 2012; Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013) examined the connection between SIE-related variables and trust, both finding that the relationship between SIE variables and leader trust was stronger in horizontal-individualistic than in vertical-collectivist countries. Temporal factors emerged as an important theme (Nadolska & Barkema, 2007), as building trust is inherently a time-dependent process.

Governance. Organizational approaches to governance were examined in three *firm-level* studies in the review set (most governance studies were not reviewed because of lack of

discussion of SIE). Patterns of information asymmetry in firm acquisitions were associated with weakened incentives and ultimately lowered SIE in a study of governance activities following foreign acquisition (Kang & Kim, 2010). Firms at a greater information disadvantage were less likely to engage in governance activities. Griffith and Harvey (2001) observed that investment in assets specific to the cross-cultural relationship led to a more predictable, less uncertain relationship and that a greater knowledge gap in favor of a distributor provided greater control for the distributor. A final study by Chari and Chang (2009) found that in culturally distant countries, when knowledge regarding asset valuation was difficult to obtain, U.S. acquirers sought less equity in their investments in an effort to avoid a poorly quantified risk.

Acculturation and legitimacy. This set of studies included the most qualitative research, examining acculturation and legitimacy issues between cross-cultural merger and/or acquisition partners or expatriate employees and related adjustment, stress, and sensemaking. Larson and Lubatkin (2001), in a case survey study of Swedish, Swedish cross-border, and U.S. firms, observed that acculturation in the merger process (including cross-national mergers) was enhanced by such communication processes as introductions, training, cross-visiting, and other practices. Riad and Vaara (2010) addressed a similar issue in examining the acquisitions of major American companies or units by Belgian/Brazilian (Anheuser-Busch) and Chinese (IBM personal computer business) firms. They argued that such major foreign acquisitions created identity concerns that could be understood by examining how these events were discussed, using discursive humor, cultural stereotypes, and metaphors. Vaara's (2003) Finnish foreign acquisition study concluded that cultural confusion in social interaction was one major cause of slow integration. Helfen and Sydow (2013) observed that institution-level change through global labor union negotiations was dependent on specific negotiation practices and their strategic roots in perceptions of opportunities or institutional shortcomings.

A number of these studies noted that culture was used as a discursive sensemaking tool in the cross-cultural environment (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Riad & Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2011) to legitimize cross-cultural relationships. Riad, Vaara, and Zhang (2012) provided interesting evidence of companies' embeddedness in the broader international arena. Public texts written about the acquisition of the IBM personal computer business by the Chinese company Lenovo influenced SIE recursively across the two countries of the firms involved. Vaara and Tienari examined a financial services merger of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish firms in which antenarratives (story fragments) were used in sensemaking regarding the merger as it developed to provide legitimacy for both engaging with and resisting the changes using global, nationalist, and regionalist (Nordic) logics.

At the *team level*, Barinaga (2007) examined team members from five cultures using cultural differences to make sense of their experiences, explaining misunderstandings and justifying choices made in the project. SIE was used as a discursive tool leading to positive and effective group experiences. Other studies noted the need for recontextualization in change practices based on the cultures involved (Nyberg & Jensen, 2009; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011).

At the *individual level*, Fan and Wanous (2008) compared training experiences that presented realistic information regarding tasks and environment and differing coping skills regarding stressors to sojourners versus a traditional approach. The realistic information and coping skills program generated better results, particularly over time, with regard to stress

and adjustment. In a study of expatriates, Fisher and Hutchings (2013) observed that employees must undergo a process of sensemaking to adjust effectively to the foreign environment. Delmestri (2006) found that firm-level globally integrated human resource management practices provided information for Italians working in international firms to enact Anglo-Saxon identities while keeping positively regarded aspects of the Italian identity. Further determinants of the enacted identities were the degree of identification with the firm's culture and the role of the individual. Yagi and Kleinberg's (2011) case study of global Japanese-U.S. boundary spanners revealed that cultural knowledge and repertoire of cultural identities influenced an individual's SIE behavior in terms of boundary spanning, which thereby shaped his or her negotiated cultural identities.

In a *multilevel* study, contracting as a source of social information in IJVs was assessed by Gong, Shenkar, Luo, and Nyaw (2001). The extent of parent firms' contract completeness, as well as communications effectiveness, played a mediating role between parent firms' objective gap and CEO role ambiguity and partially mediated the relationship with role conflict for the CEO. More social information reduced ambiguity but did not entirely eliminate conflict.

Increased SIE influenced acculturation and legitimacy in these studies and led to greater multilevel adjustment and reduction of stress. However, the process of information exchange must accurately recognize the cultural differences involved and utilize them in creating the new context. Legitimacy requires mutual or learning-oriented SIE to ensure that there is input and adaptation on the part of both interactants regardless of relationship power differentials.

We should note that it is fundamental to consider that each tactic used in conveying social information in cross-cultural interactions is subject to variable interpretation through the lenses of the cultures present in the context. Also, these studies indicate a fluidity in interpretation and identity that should be taken into account in this line of research. The sensitivity to context of interpretation and identity demonstrate that temporal consistency, or a transparent evolutionary story, in a message will be extremely important. That is, events triggering cultural conflict may be reduced once an agreement is reached but will not be likely to disappear entirely, and such triggering events can reignite differences that a firm, team, or individual may believe have been eliminated. Cultural beliefs can be used as tools to assist communicators to jointly form impressions, make attributions, and create interpretations that can be agreed upon without loss of face or reputation, but, as noted earlier, SIE motives must be served by such agreement. For the remaining propositions, cultural distance is considered a consistent negative moderator of the relationships proposed.

Proposition 4: Through reduction of task and social uncertainty, over time, learning-oriented or mutual SIE positively influences attitudes about cross-cultural relationships; increases agreement, cooperation, and trust; and reduces conflict and perceptions of opportunism.

Proposition 5: SIE that aims to directly transfer relational or people-oriented practices cross-culturally is likely to result in conflict. Adaptations that are based on learning-oriented SIE are fundamental to improving attitudes and beliefs in the cross-cultural transfer of practices with social components.

Proposition 6: Trust in cross-cultural relationships is not only influenced by learning-oriented SIE but may often require control-oriented SIE as well, and the belief that the partner has the capability to carry out its part of the task. Cultural distance increases the propensity for control-oriented SIE to be used to limit opportunism.

Proposition 7: Cross-cultural relationships are embedded in a broader context. Whether external relationships are supportive of or detrimental to the partnership will influence the cooperative or conflictual nature of the relationship and potential reemergence of negative relational outcomes over time.

Proposition 8: Asymmetrical SIE is not only a result of but leads to power differentials between cross-cultural SIE partners. To the extent that information is difficult to obtain (because of expense, knowledge safeguards, or tacitness), firms will withdraw from governance, individuals will withdraw from efforts to control, and SIE will be reduced to limit their exposure to risk.

Proposition 9: Learning-oriented cross-cultural SIE should be thoughtfully designed to allow for joint interpretations and convey consistent but potentially evolving information across media, sources, and time to create an ongoing relational context between partners.

Performance-Related Outcomes

In looking at the relationship between SIE and more distal outcomes, we used four outcome categories to organize the 57 studies in this section: (1) learning, (2) ability to compete, (3) innovation, and (4) performance and effectiveness (see Table S3 in the supplemental material).

Learning. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, Gamble (2006) observed that when training was based on home-country practices (Japan and the United Kingdom), it led to more effective skill development. Petersen, Pedersen, and Lyles (2008) found that overconfidence and a recognition of low performance led to knowledge gaps in entrant firms and that this knowledge gap related to less ability to learn or apply new information. Brannen and Peterson (2009) looked at *individual-level* outcomes of cross-cultural mergers and acquisitions. Outcomes included cross-cultural work alienation that deterred successful technology transfer, knowledge sharing, and other effectiveness indicators. Training interventions were found to mitigate work alienation effects. Also with regard to cross-cultural competencies, one study found that individual openness led to better cross-cultural training performance and that cognitive ability led to language acquisition in European managers (Lievens, Harris, Van Keer, & Bisqueret, 2003).

These studies suggest that cultural training improves learning and mitigates cultural distance's negative effects on learning. As with practice diffusion, training practices should also recognize culture of origin to be most effective. Furthermore, information about negative characteristics of the competitive context and recognized knowledge gaps may actually lead to diminished learning capacity. Firm or individual attributes may offset this effect.

Ability to compete. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, studies addressed outcomes such as success in internationalization, stability, competitive standing, and subsidiary failure. Political conflict in the host country was shown to lead to a decrease in subsidiary survival (Dai, Eden, & Beamish, 2013), as would be predicted by risk reduction withdrawal strategies. Examining politics internal to the organization, Shenkar and Yan (2002) noted that unequal partners with no prior relationship and a weak governance structure led to partner political behavior and greater likelihood of relationship failure. Wu, Sinkovics, Cavusgil, and Roath (2007) addressed the importance of gaining local market knowledge for U.S. firms engaged with a variety of foreign distributors. Findings indicated that trust, knowledge sharing, and contract-based relationships all improved the focal firm's ability to compete, but that establishing trust was particularly important for reducing potential distributor opportunism. A study of Dutch

firms by Nadolska and Barkema (2007) found that although prior learning regarding cross-national acquisitions and joint ventures was useful, the most effective acquirers, in terms of acquisition rate and frequency, determined what information was applicable in new settings, thus continuing the communication cycle over multiple decades. These studies emphasize the importance of understanding the temporal dimension of SIE and that initial knowledge may not be appropriately applied over time, perhaps due to overestimating its current value or misunderstanding the dynamic relationship between parties that can affect future outcomes.

Innovation. Innovation is intrinsically linked to SIE and was studied in a number of contexts. At the *firm* and *subunit levels*, Lederman (2010) found that firm knowledge (research and development, employee education, and importation of knowledge) led to product innovation. Spencer (2003) pointed to the importance of being able to identify high quality, relevant knowledge in the process to enhance innovation. Ciabuschi, Dellestrand, and Martin (2011) recalled the theme of attention noted in the antecedents section in their findings that subsidiary embeddedness and headquarters' involvement led to subsidiary innovation performance, which also spilled over to the MNC. In a series of studies at the *individual level*, Chua, Morris, and Mor (2012) found that cultural metacognition led to affect-based trust across cultural groups (U.S., Asian, and other-culture participants) and ultimately to creative collaboration.

Performance and effectiveness. *Firm-* and *subunit-level* research has examined a broad set of performance indicators. The effects of parent resource provision and decision influence on knowledge acquisition and IJV market performance were shown to depend on when in the IJV life cycle these events occurred (Steensma, Tihanyi, Lyles, & Dhanaraj, 2005). Similarly, Fryxell, Dooley, and Vryza (2002) found that for young IJVs only, formal control was related positively to performance. Social controls related to performance when trust between partners was high. Agreement on strategy and operating procedures led to objective achievement (Yan & Gray, 2011), and in this same domain, Kim, Park, and Prescott (2003) found that multiple modes of firm integration, including those based on information, led to greater effectiveness. In their research on Taiwanese electronics suppliers, Jean et al. (2010) found that supplier information technology resources were mediated by SIE (normative expectations for the exchange, expectations about working together, and output monitoring in improving performance), with a cooperativeness norm having the strongest impact. Cultural distance was not a factor in this study. Also in the export domain, communication practices were found to be at the root of a host of positive processes and outcomes in Australia/Thailand export-import partnerships (Styles, Patterson, & Ahmed, 2008). Communication and cultural sensitivity were related to reciprocal commitments to the exchange and investment in the relationship, in addition to trust and ultimately export performance.

These studies all examined control mechanisms in cross-cultural relationships and have implications for temporal effects as well. Studies such as that by Fryxell et al. (2002) imply that more formal control by the parent is most effective in earlier stages of an IJV's life cycle, whereas social controls require the establishment of trust over time. Establishing normative expectations, integration via information exchange, and trust were all noted to be important to limiting opportunism and improving performance.

Several studies took a fit approach to understanding SIE and performance at the firm and subunit levels. Cultural adaptation of norms for exchanging information required consistency with the parties' cultures to relate positively to performance (Griffith & Myers, 2005).

Katsikeas, Samiee, and Theodosiou (2006) found that home- and host-country similarity and the technical intensity/velocity of the firm led to market strategy standardization, and a fit between the strategy and environment led to performance. Research focused on Russian and U.S. partnerships found that national cultural and organizational attributes had impacts on learning and adaptability, which in turn positively influenced firm effectiveness, with adaptability being particularly important in Russian units (Fey & Denison, 2003). Kirkman, Cordery, Mathieu, Rosen, and Kukenberger (2013) noted a U-shaped curve in terms of diversity and community of practice performance. As richer communication media were used under conditions of low diversity, the negative relationship between diversity and performance diminished. At high levels of diversity, performance increased with the use of richer media.

Team- and dyad-level research has explored similar topics. Zellmer-Bruhn and Gibson (2006) performed a study on both learning and performance at the team level. They observed that global integration negatively, and local responsiveness and knowledge management norms positively, related to team learning, which in turn led to both positive relationship outcomes and performance. Virtual teams allocated more time to preparation, in particular under conditions of high interdependence, which led to better transactive memory and team effectiveness (Maynard, Mathieu, Rapp, & Gilson, 2012). Other SIE team-level predictors of performance included accommodation and avoidance conflict styles (negatively; Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001), team learning orientation (positively), and team performance avoidance (negatively; Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, & Van Dierendonck, 2013). Overall, this research stream indicates that learning and information sharing orientations aid performance in culturally diverse teams but that sensitivity to specific cultures in the SIE process is also important in producing a positive outcome. Time may also play a role in that pushing for a global approach initially may be ineffective prior to social relationships being established.

In cross-cultural negotiations research, Imai and Gelfand (2010) found that cultural intelligence increased SIE and ultimately joint profits in a negotiations setting with American and Chinese executive master of business administration students. Furthermore, Liu, Chua, and Stahl (2010) found that quality of communication, defined as clarity, responsiveness, and comfort, was diminished in intercultural dyads as compared to intracultural dyads and that higher communication quality led to more effective negotiation outcomes, most notably in intercultural dyads.

At the *individual level*, Little, Nelson, Quade, and Ward (2011) found that guidance from supervisors on engaging in emotional display was helpful in reducing performance errors and increasing satisfaction when employees interacted with English-speaking callers. Cross-cultural training in this environment may also be contingent on direct cultural influences. In a *multilevel* study, research examined the interaction effects of SIE and national cultural distance on decision effectiveness. Y. Luo (2006) studied firms from Europe, North America, and Asia Oceania making Chinese investments. Honesty and transparency (interactional justice) were found to buffer effects of cultural distance on trust and decision effectiveness for boundary-spanning executives and their Chinese partners at the microlevel and attachment between IJV partners at the macrolevel. This study suggests individual- and aggregate-level analogue characteristics have cross-level effects such that individual characteristics may in some cases affect aggregate performance outcomes, and aggregate characteristics may affect individual-level performance outcomes. Furthermore, aggregate-level characteristics may alter the relationship between individual-level antecedents and outcomes such that the

positive effect of certain antecedents is enhanced, or vice versa. For example, climate-level variables, such as psychological safety, may enhance an individual's tendency to voice and affect decisions (Troster & Van Knippenberg, 2012), or organization-level focus on global culture may diminish a subsidiary's likelihood of innovation (Boussebaa, 2009). These types of relationships represent a significant opportunity for future research as they have received relatively little attention to date.

On the basis of this group of studies, we propose the following:

Proposition 10: Information such as low performance indicators or recognized knowledge gaps requires intervention on the part of the organization (training or structural changes) to reduce uncertainty and in turn increase effective responses. This need may be offset by firm and individual characteristics such as cultural intelligence or openness.

Proposition 11: Continued attention to, evaluation of, and exchange of social information regarding the dynamics of the context and relationship between cross-cultural partners are required to maintain or improve the relationship and its effectiveness.

Proposition 12: Formal structural attributes such as embeddedness and control, informal connections across internal and external links, and partner-level attributes such as cultural metacognition increase SIE and, in turn, innovation within cross-cultural partnerships. To the extent that SIE focuses on knowledge sharing and joint sensemaking as opposed to control, innovation will be more significantly enhanced.

Proposition 13: Timing of control-oriented SIE moderates its impact on joint performance. Initial use of control-oriented SIE reduces task uncertainty. If followed by the establishment of mutual expectations and trust through knowledge sharing and joint sensemaking, this process will reduce relational uncertainty, limit opportunism, and improve performance.

Proposition 14: Partner cultural intelligence and/or cultural sensitivity increases the likelihood of use and effectiveness of both control-oriented and learning-oriented SIE in the service of shared goals.

Discussion

Review of Findings

This review of the recent management literature on cross-cultural SIE netted some interesting, but complex, findings. At all levels of analysis, it seems clear that cultural boundaries make a difference in how SIE influences and is influenced by other factors. Although null effects were occasionally observed (e.g., Jean et al., 2010), the most consistent finding continues to be that cultural differences between interaction partners create challenges, require added SIE, or point to needed changes in SIE approaches for actors to realize cross-cultural relationship benefits. The findings here also point to some apparent paradoxes. At the country level, research suggests a positive role for more information exchange in limiting corruption but that diffusion of information is bounded by cultural expectations (DiRienzo et al., 2007; Haxhi & Van Ees, 2010). Cultural differences provide opportunities for learning but also barriers to the knowledge transfer needed for success (e.g., Stahl & Voigt, 2008). Studies at multiple levels indicate that trust is an important factor in cross-cultural relationships (Khan, Westwood, & Boje, 2010), but approaches to SIE are often control oriented as opposed to learning oriented (B. Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2007). Temporal factors emerge as an important theme (Nadolska & Barkema, 2007), as building trust and diffusing and adapting

practices are inherently time-dependent processes; however, dynamic competitive forces limit the amount of time possible for change processes (Wisman & Reksten, 2012). This body of work is beginning to address these contrasts and the conditions that lead to them, but significant research remains to be done. Ahead, we briefly identify key research areas and suggest how these emphases could be extended.

Relationships between the interactants. Because the relationship provides a context element for the interaction, it is difficult to predict the consequences of SIE without knowing about it (J.-D. Luo, 2011). At the firm and subunit levels, power was an important characteristic of the relationship between actors (Beck et al., 2009) and was a common theme in the qualitative studies (e.g., Barinaga, 2007). In the case of high power differentials, the higher-power partner (e.g., the MNC relative to subsidiaries) tended to use a control-oriented approach to SIE, attempting to directly transfer practices across culturally different units using control mechanisms such as monitoring (D. Chen et al., 2009). Institutional forces, such as coercive isomorphism, were found to be effective in practice diffusion (Guler et al., 2002), and, clearly, this approach to conveying specific task practice information or utilizing one party's perspective or interpretation reduces uncertainty in an inherently uncertain relationship and may result in substantial reductions in perception of risk, in particular as related to task goals and processes. However, it is unlikely that control-oriented SIE is sufficient when cultural differences are great and/or not well understood or when tasks are particularly ambiguous and/or uncertain. Asymmetries of information help to create power differentials (Kang & Kim, 2010) and in some cases lead to a withdrawal from the relationship (Shenkar & Yan, 2002). Few studies at the team and individual levels have addressed power dynamics in cross-cultural SIE. On the basis of firm- and subunit-level findings, we could expect to see individuals withdraw from relationships in which they feel too disadvantaged by a lack of information and to see powerful individuals or teams implement standardization across cultures to implement their preferred practices, create expectations of adjustment on the part of the lower-power participant, and, in general, develop relationships that reflect an agency perspective and the interpretive frame of the higher-power participant (Vaara et al., 2005).

Evidence from multiple levels of analysis supported the view of cross-cultural trust building as a difficult process (Buchan, 2009). This domain is one of the few in which knowledge sharing potentially has a negative outcome, in that misplaced trust in sharing information can result in opportunistic behavior between distant partners. For example, research on export performance indicates the importance of SIE in limiting opportunism (e.g., Wu et al., 2007); however, the process is not clear. Is opportunism more likely because of in-group effects derived from cultural differences between the individuals involved (e.g., Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005)? Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor's (1979) findings that individuals seek information from those close to them and perceive it to be more accurate suggests that partners may not seek information from each other when they are culturally different. Or is it a function of poor understanding (Neeley, 2013)? Dealing with trust and opportunism requires a delicate balance of two conflicting processes: making oneself vulnerable to another party while at the same time limiting potential for opportunism through agency mechanisms. It is of course expected that much SIE will occur in the service of developing and defining specific types of relationships, and this relationship building process is likely to be a fertile area of research in the future.

Broader context. Studies that used qualitative methods or addressed network issues were most likely to consider the broader context of the cross-cultural relationship (e.g., Collins-Dogrul, 2012). For some communicators, the context is an important component of the content of the SIE (Hall, 1976). Here, dyadic studies on negotiation and individual-level studies provided the least information on the broader context, in part because of the experimental nature of much of this research (e.g., Lee et al., 2006). We expect that individual-level responses to intercultural interactions are substantially affected by other connections in the context, for example, as expatriates are affected by family issues (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001). Because culture is not isomorphic with economy, ecology, or attributes of relationships between people, it is unlikely that we can build a practical understanding of cross-cultural SIE without considering context in depth.

Capabilities of the actor. Different approaches to actor capabilities were examined at different analytic levels. The predominate focus was on individual- or dyad-level knowledge or personality attributes such as cultural metacognition, cultural intelligence, and openness (e.g., Imai & Gelfand, 2010). At the firm or subunit levels, structural characteristics were noted to increase abilities for information acquisition and application to cope with complex IJV environments (Almeida et al., 2002), and in cross-cultural teams, transactive memory structures were observed to improve performance (Maynard et al., 2012). This is an area that could benefit from more multilevel and process-oriented research, as noted ahead.

Task requirements. Task type was addressed in a small number of studies, primarily in terms of what type of monitoring or control would be effective (e.g., T. Edwards et al., 2013). To the extent that the work is more output oriented or routine, we observed some trends toward direct control, whereas work done by higher or professional levels was approached from a relational or social perspective. Also, the extent to which the actor can determine what information is important or useful is a developing theme, in that the current environment tends to provide a great deal of information that requires selective attention (e.g., Spencer, 2003). Consistent with T. Edwards et al., our approach to thinking about this issue focused primarily on the extent to which the information to be exchanged is uncertain and the extent to which information is relational (more significantly affected by cultural differences) as compared to task focused. Although both types of information have social components, to the extent that the exchange requires judgment, opinion, relationship building, innovation, or reaching agreement, we expect more learning-oriented approaches to SIE. Multiple interpretations play an important role, and joint sensemaking must occur to be effective. These processes also require the element of selective attention and the recognition of the importance of relational information, in that the relational components of cross-cultural exchanges can be lost as the actors focus on solving task problems.

The role of time. Temporal approaches were used in some research, focusing on recursive sensemaking and identity reformulation in qualitative research (firm- and subunit-level studies, e.g., Delmestri, 2006; Riad & Vaara, 2010; see also nonempirical work on identity in cross-cultural settings, e.g., Shapiro, Furst, Spreitzer, & Von Glinow, 2002; Vora & Kostova, 2002) or patterns of interactions over time in negotiations (Adair & Brett, 2005). Other studies linked interactions over time to improved relationships (Shapiro et al., 2008) and

convergence (Baba et al., 2004). Further tests of process models of cross-cultural SIE incorporating the role of time would advance our understanding as to how antecedents lead to SIE, how SIE leads to mediating processes like trust, and, ultimately, how these mediators affect performance. Time may mitigate or exacerbate both positive and negative effects of cultural differences, and SIE quality, and how SIE is managed, are central to these impacts (Gibbs, 2009).

Quality and fidelity of cross-cultural SIE point to important future research as well. Although we did not organize the literature by SIE modality, two studies are particularly informative regarding these two SIE assessments. First, Liu et al. (2010) developed an approach to evaluating communication quality with the three dimensions of clarity, responsiveness, and comfort of the interaction. Different modalities, such as direct experience, technology-mediated communication, or indirect knowledge sharing would be expected to have significantly different attributes in respect to these dimensions. Second, communication media richness has been found to play a role in mitigating negative effects of diversity on communication and performance and in enhancing positive effects (Kirkman et al., 2013). Both quality and fidelity are likely to diminish as uncertainty increases, but some forms of SIE are more acceptable in some cultures than in others. Fit effects are thus an example of potential predictors of how SIE occurs and is effective.

Interaction motives have also not received a great deal of attention (for an exception, see Liu et al., 2012; for theory-based examples, see Biggart & Delbridge, 2004; Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). An actor's motivation (e.g., to obtain accurate information, to build a relationship) is likely to have substantive impacts on choice of partners, SIE modality, and whether more than one perspective is shared. Preliminary evidence suggests that collectivists focus on more self-transcendent motives and individualists on self-enhancement (White & Lehman, 2005); from these findings, we may speculate that beyond culturally derived patterns of communication, the ultimate reason for the exchange of social information varies across cultures. Research also suggests that for corporations, knowledge transfer is motivated by market (moving best practices), cultural (bringing practices successful on the home front), and political (advancing entity interests through knowledge transfer) preferences (T. Edwards, 2011). This mixture of motives may create conflict with a partner, in particular as high power differentials reduce motivation for local adaptation on the part of the high power participant.

Many studies focused on the fundamental idea that increasing SIE would increase effectiveness. That is, the expectation was that some sort of convergence occurs through SIE, although exactly what converges is not entirely clear. Convergence or divergence can occur differentially with regard to cognition and/or values, affective reactions and displays, and behavior (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2011). For some tasks, all that is needed is the interlocking of behavior (Stohl, 2001). However, higher-level problem solving, creative processes, or consensus require more cognitive agreement. Life domain may play a role in convergence and divergence processes as well (e.g., Trompenaars, 1993), and culture also affects consistency of views across these domains (Boer & Fischer, 2013), indicating that although some components may converge, others may diverge (Bjorkman, Stahl, & Vaara, 2007). Beyond considering these processes within entities, it is also important that more attention be paid to the dynamic nature of cultures themselves in the rapidly changing global environment. Some evidence suggests that Western consumption culture continues to spread; other

findings suggest unique “multiple global consumer cultures” have developed through global information exchange (Smith Speck & Roy, 2008: 1197). Much has been written on this topic; still, it appears that we have more to learn.

Limitations

Because of the widely dispersed approach taken to this conceptual domain in the literature, many different theoretical bases (e.g., cultural distance, agency, transaction costs) are in play across the research, which made it difficult to fully integrate conclusions. The complexity of the topic did not allow us to specify all possible relationships. However, we believe we have identified some key areas of integration that should be helpful to researchers in this domain in the future. It is also difficult to be sure that we did not miss articles that at least implicitly address SIE across cultural boundaries. In some cases, articles in the review measured information exchange through rather distal means, for example, by looking at numbers of cross-cultural sales (X. P. Chen, Liu, & Portnoy, 2012). Furthermore, articles noting some type of prior experience, historical or otherwise, tended to lack specific details regarding what implications that experience might have for SIE and thus were omitted. Studies that focused on financial issues and mode of entry but that did not appear to directly address SIE were also beyond the scope of this article. We also limited the review to regional and national cultures.

We focused on a somewhat narrow range of journals in an effort to capture the management view of the domain of cross-cultural SIE, but we have not included relevant articles from other research domains (e.g., cross-cultural psychology). Interestingly, the reviewed journals revealed a rather skewed pattern in terms of where such research was published. Approximately one third of the studies appeared in the *Journal of International Business*, followed by about 25% published in the *Journal of Management Studies* and *Strategic Management Journal* combined. Relatively few studies appeared in more micro- or labor-oriented outlets (about 12%). This pattern resulted in substantially fewer articles focusing on individuals, and to some extent on teams and dyads. However, we believe we have captured those management studies that meaningfully address cross-cultural SIE and that future research and practice may benefit from the examination of this research set.

Conclusion

Dynamic changes in the world economy have implicated the importance of sources of competitive advantage beyond financial capital. Knowledge derived from human capital is fundamental to creating valuable, rare, inimitable, and necessary resources (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Furthermore, social capital, or the network of relationships that employees bring to and create within their organization, is now recognized as a fundamental resource to the firm (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Both effective knowledge transfer and the development of social capital rely on SIE (Bell, Filatotchev, & Rasheed, 2012). Thus, the shift in the foundation of competitive advantage is a macrolevel change that has increased the importance of SIE in management research and practice. For practitioners, some paths identified here should be helpful. Executives, managers, and all those who work in multicultural settings should recognize that cultural boundaries create uncertainty and therefore matter in the exchange of social information. A number of avenues can be used to address

these challenges, such as structuring organizations with the requisite level of complexity, providing cultural training and experience, and focusing on developing relationships that can transcend these boundaries. These processes should be maintained over time if the intent is for the relationship to continue. Using these approaches appears to increase in importance as the social or relational content of SIE becomes predominate relative to task and/or more routine content. Understanding that performance is significantly dependent on cross-cultural relationships may provide a shift in balance from agency- and control-based strategies for cross-cultural effectiveness toward those based in positive relationship development that emphasizes joint contributions.

Note

1. Our journal list included *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Decision Sciences*, *Human Relations*, *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, *Industrial Relations*, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Management Science*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Psychological Bulletin*, and *Strategic Management Journal*.

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