



## Contributing to Global Management Knowledge: A Case for High Quality Indigenous Research

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**Abstract.** The major contributor to global management knowledge is scholarship in developed economies, especially in North America and Western Europe. The development of a global management knowledge base lags behind the globalization of business enterprises. With the emergence of many developing economies around the world, progress in building the body of global management knowledge could be enhanced by encouraging high quality indigenous research in these novel contexts. This essay is a complementary piece to the APJM Special Issue on Asian Management Research: Frontiers and Challenges (August 2002). It discusses three types of global management models through two types of context-sensitive research. It argues the need for high quality indigenous research, using the influential studies on management in the Chinese context as illustrations. It offers guidelines on conducting high quality indigenous research that produces contextualized knowledge on the one hand and contributes to global knowledge on the other.

**Keywords:** indigenous research, context-sensitive research, contextualization, global management research

Rousseau and Fried (2001) published an interesting article in the first issue of the 2001 volume of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* entitled “Location, location, location: Contextualizing organizational research.” The authors cited two reasons that motivated the writing of that article. “First, the domain of organizational research is becoming more international, giving rise to challenges in transporting social science models from one society to another. Second, the rapidly diversifying nature of work and work settings can substantially alter the underlying causal dynamic of worker-organizational relations” (p. 1). The article is timely in recognizing that existing models of management in the literature may not be valid in other societal contexts (Hofstede, 1993; Rosenzweig, 1994). While that article encourages a higher level of contextualization in theory and method (e.g., by requiring a “sidebar” in all future empirical studies published in that journal), its focus is on organizational behavior research in general and not specifically international management studies.

Progress in international and cross cultural management studies has been slow. In an essay in the fortieth year anniversary issue of the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Lyman Porter (1996) reflected, “where one cannot point to a high level of accomplishment is the global dimension. American-based research on organizations, especially research on behavior within them, has been largely U.S.-domestic focused”. Reasons for this status are many, one of which is the perception of entry barriers created by disciplinary and paradigmatic preference held by the gate keepers of the leading scholarly journals. Fortunately, entry barriers to non-American studies in leading scholarly journals are decreasing (Li and Tsui, 2002) which suggests two possibilities, a higher level of open-mindedness by editors and reviewers

towards studies involving non-American samples and the improvement in quality of non-U.S. studies. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the issue of contextualization in international management research and to make a case in particular for high quality indigenous research as an important approach towards contributing to global management knowledge.

### **The current status of global management knowledge**

Few scholars would argue that much of management knowledge today is the product of scholarly work by researchers in North America, especially the United States, and secondarily by scholars in Western Europe. An examination of the authors and their affiliations in the leading journals and in the most popular management textbooks would reveal unambiguously that the major contributors to management knowledge are professors and students in American universities studying companies and workers within the U.S. national boundary. The preponderance of North American and Western European published scholarly journals provide further evidence that the major contributors to the body of global management knowledge are scholars in the developed economies of the U.S. and Western Europe. Table 1 shows the list of the top ten journals in the major disciplines that contribute to management knowledge, based on the 2002 citation impact analyses prepared by Bill Starbuck (2002) using data from Social Science Citation Index. In addition to management, psychology and sociology, I included economics and finance journals as a comparison on the level of research activities in disciplines directly related to management.

While the publication location of the journal is not a perfect indicator of the origin of the articles, it is a reasonable proxy for the type of research and sources of data that are likely included. U.S. authors studying U.S. samples are likely to publish primarily in U.S. journals while the European authors are likely to publish in European journals, even though most journals aspire to be "international" by attracting authors from other countries. As shown in Table 1, 100% of the management and psychology journals are published in the U.S. Eighty percent of the sociology and 50% of the economics/finance journals are published in the U.S., with the remainder published in Europe. None of the journals are based in Asia. Based on these data, it is reasonable to infer that management knowledge from other parts of the world, including South America, Africa, and Asia is a small part of the global management knowledge base. This also means that there is much room for research in these contexts to contribute to global management knowledge, especially by Asian scholars given the impressive economic growth of countries like the Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, India, and especially the People's Republic of China.

In a special issue devoted to advancing Asian management research, Lau (2002) expressed his belief that Asian management research has something to offer to the broader body of knowledge. He further admitted that "a majority of the body of knowledge in management today is work done by non-Asians" with much of the work addressing "mostly U.S. or European issues" (p. 4). However, despite an emerging body of literature on Asian management, "the work done so far is inadequate" (Lau, 2002:4). White (2002) provided an informative review of Asian management research covering the years 1980 to 2000, analyzing 840 articles in 30 journals. He concluded "that too much of the research effort has been limited to simplistic comparisons, correlational analyses providing no insight into

Table 1. Most cited social science journals that contribute to management knowledge.

Journal name	Citation value	Published in	Citation value	Published in
<i>Management Journals</i>				
Academy of Management Review	3.925	US	3.240	US
Administrative Science Quarterly	3.783	US	2.820	US
Academy of Management Journal	2.557	US	2.572	US
Strategic Management Journal	2.373	US	1.281	US
Research in Organizational Behavior	2.013	US	1.086	UK
Human Resource Management	1.500	US	1.064	US
Journal of Management	1.211	US	1.064	US
Organization Science	1.155	US	0.858	US
Journal of Business	1.143	US	0.833	UK
Journal of International Business Studies	1.114	US	0.625	UK
<i>Psychology Journals</i>				
Psychological Bulletin	7.175	US	6.672	US
Psychological Review	6.822	US	4.576	US
American Psychologist	6.498	US	2.971	US
Annual Review of Psychology	5.583	US	2.497	Holland
Cognitive Psychology	5.029	US	1.819	US
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	3.277	US	1.449	UK
Journal of Behavioral Decision Making	2.243	US	1.457	UK
Journal of Personality	1.905	US	1.181	UK
Journal of Applied Psychology	1.664	US	1.015	Holland
Journal of Vocational Behavior	1.178	US	1.069	US
<i>Sociology Journals</i>				
American Sociological Review	3.925	US	3.240	US
Annual Review of Sociology	3.783	US	2.820	US
American Journal of Sociology	2.557	US	2.572	US
Social Forces	2.373	US	1.281	US
Sociological Review	2.013	US	1.086	UK
Work and Occupations	1.500	US	1.064	US
Social Problems	1.211	US	1.064	US
Journal of Social Issues	1.155	US	0.858	US
Work, Employment and Society	1.143	US	0.833	UK
British Journal of Sociology	1.114	US	0.625	UK
<i>Economic/Finance Journals</i>				
Journal of Economic Literature	6.672	US	6.672	US
Quarterly J. Economics	6.822	US	4.576	US
Journal of Finance	6.498	US	2.971	US
Journal of Financial Economics	5.583	US	2.497	Holland
American Economic Review	5.029	US	1.819	US
Review of Economic Studies	3.277	US	1.449	UK
Economic Journal	2.243	US	1.457	UK
Review of Financial Studies	1.905	US	1.181	UK
European Economic Review	1.664	US	1.015	Holland
Rand Journal of Economics	1.178	US	1.069	US

underlying processes, and skewed, idiosyncratic sampling. The result has been a lack of theory development and contribution to conceptual discourse beyond an audience specifically interested in Asia, with little relevance for management practice.” White believed that the concern for local relevance by Asian scholars may have been achieved at the expense of rigor in this research effort.

White’s observation of the state of Asian management research is supported by the conclusions of a citation study of 226 articles on management and organization in the Greater China region published in 20 leading English language academic journals during the period of 1984 to 1999 (Li and Tsui, 2002). Table 2 lists these 52 studies, the journals in which they were published and the number of citations each has received. Through additional analysis of these most cited articles, Tsui and Lau (2002) observed that “most of the influential research has an indigenous nature” (p. 16). By that, they meant that the context is explicitly modeled in the study, either as an independent variable or as a moderator variable. A defining characteristic of the most frequently cited studies is that they are all grounded in rich contextual information. In other words, it is the *high quality* (measured by citations) contextualized research, not the simple replications or studies that test Western models or findings, that have the potential to contribute to global management knowledge. In the following discussion, I draw examples primarily from the 52 most cited China-related studies to illustrate how contextualization can lead to novel insights and result in value added contribution to global management knowledge.

### **Approaches to developing global management knowledge**

In discussing approaches to developing global management knowledge and the need for contextualization, I begin with the ideas of Cheng (1994) who discussed the concept of universal knowledge. Cheng used the term universal knowledge to refer to “research findings that can be applied cross-nationally to explain or predict variation in a given dependent phenomenon using the same predictor variable(s)” (p. 163). This definition implies that universal knowledge is context-free or context insensitive and should be applicable across national boundaries. Clearly, the management field seems to have a bias toward context-free knowledge (Blair and Hunt, 1986) and even Cheng (1994) seemed to imply this preference by defining universal knowledge as context-free predictions. Interestingly, reviews have reported that most of the findings from existing studies (most of which were conducted in organizations located in the U.S.) did not replicate in other nations (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982; Doktor, Tung and Von Glinow, 1991; Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984). Therefore, the extant management knowledge is far from being universal. Cheng (1994) also argued that the simple replication of U.S. studies in other nations is not a useful approach in building universal knowledge. Instead, he advocated context-embedded research, i.e., research that uses a nation’s social, cultural, legal, and economic variables as predictors and organizational attributes as dependent variables. More recently, Child (2000) referred to “high-context” versus “low-context” theorizing in cross-national studies, with the former stressing national differences and the latter emphasizing universal applicability in models and constructs. Given the Western-orientation of the dominant management research

Table 2. 52 Most cited articles on management and organizations in Greater China region.

Author	Journal	No. of citations
1. Nee (1989)	<i>ASR</i>	95
2. Nee (1992)	<i>ASQ</i>	78
3. Earley (1993)	<i>AMJ</i>	75
4. Leung and Bond (1989)	<i>JCCP</i>	71
5. Nee (1991)	<i>ASR</i>	65
6. Walder (1995)	<i>AJS</i>	48
7. Hamilton and Biggart (1988)	<i>AJS</i>	61
8. Yan and Gray (1994)	<i>AMJ</i>	45
9. Hwang (1987)	<i>AJS</i>	47
10. Walder (1992)	<i>ASR</i>	44
11. Boisot and Child (1988)	<i>ASQ</i>	43
12. Lin and Bian (1991)	<i>AJS</i>	39
13. Bond and Forgas (1984)	<i>JCCP</i>	33
14. Earley (1994)	<i>ASQ</i>	33
15. Nee (1996)	<i>AJS</i>	32
16. Peng and Heath (1996)	<i>AMR</i>	29
17. Lin and Xie (1988)	<i>AJS</i>	28
18. Child and Markoczy (1993)	<i>JMS</i>	27
19. Walder (1995)	<i>ASR</i>	27
20. Whitley (1990)	<i>OrgStu</i>	27
21. Whitley (1991)	<i>OrgStu</i>	24
22. Shenkar and von Glinow (1994)	<i>MS</i>	24
23. Walder (1996)	<i>AJS</i>	24
24. Shenkar and Ronen (1987)	<i>AMJ</i>	23
25. Lockett (1988)	<i>OrgStu</i>	22
26. Ralston et al. (1993)	<i>JIBS</i>	22
27. Tan and Litschert (1994)	<i>SMJ</i>	22
28. Bond (1987)	<i>JCCP</i>	20
29. Black and Gregersen (1991)	<i>HR</i>	20
30. Ralston et al. (1992)	<i>JAP</i>	20
31. Chen (1995)	<i>AMJ</i>	19
32. Black and Porter (1991)	<i>JIBS</i>	18
33. Boisot and Child (1996)	<i>ASQ</i>	17
34. Kirkbride, Tang and Westwood (1991)	<i>OrgStu</i>	17
35. Birnbaum and Wong (1985)	<i>ASQ</i>	16
36. Graham, Mintu and Rodgers (1994)	<i>MS</i>	16
37. Kelley, Whatley and Worthley (1987)	<i>JIBS</i>	16

(Continued on next page.)

Table 2. (Continued).

Author	Journal	No. of citations
38. Farh, Earley and Lin (1997)	<i>ASQ</i>	15
39. Laaksonen (1984)	<i>OrgStu</i>	14
40. Parish and Michelson (1996)	<i>AJS</i>	14
41. Adler, Brahm and Graham (1992)	<i>SMJ</i>	13
42. Xin and Pearce (1996)	<i>AMJ</i>	13
43. Entwisle et al. (1995)	<i>ASR</i>	12
44. Liu (1992)	<i>CQ</i>	12
45. Guthrie (1997)	<i>AJS</i>	11
46. Ralston et al. (1997)	<i>JIBS</i>	11
47. Beamish and Wang (1989)	<i>MIR</i>	10
48. Hall and Xu (1990)	<i>OrgStu</i>	10
49. Walder (1989)	<i>CQ</i>	10
50. Luo (1995)	<i>MIR</i>	10
51. Oberschall (1996)	<i>AJS</i>	10
52. Zhou, Tuma and Moen (1997)	<i>ASR</i>	10

Note: Adapted from Table 2 in Li and Tsui (2002). The full list of references can be found in Li and Tsui (2002:103–106).

Citation counts are up to Dec 31, 2000. *AMJ*—*Academy of Management Journal*; *ASQ*—*Administrative Science Quarterly*; *AJS*—*American Journal of Sociology*; *ASR*—*American Sociological Review*; *CQ*—*China Quarterly*; *HR*—*Human Relations*; *JAP*—*Journal of Applied Psychology*; *JCCP*—*Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*; *JIBS*—*Journal of International Business Studies*; *JMS*—*Journal of Management Studies*; *MIR*—*Management International Review*; *MS*—*Management Science*; *OrgStu*—*Organization Studies*; *SMJ*—*Strategic Management Review*.

paradigm, contextualization is not only desirable but essential to develop value added global management knowledge, especially in contexts that differ drastically from the typical North American or Western European locations in terms of legal, economic, social and cultural systems, such as those in the Asian countries.

By definition, international management research involves different populations. This means that one cannot conduct simple replication that involves testing the same hypotheses using the same measurement and same analyses with another sample in the same population. According to the typology of replications proposed by Tsang and Kwan (1997), meaningful replication in international management can be in the form of either empirical generalization or generalization and extension. The former involves testing whether the results of a previous study can be generalized to a different population, using the same measurement and analyses. The latter involves employing different research procedures and even different measurements to test the same theory as a previous study but in a different population. Both forms are context-embedded research since they involve drawing samples

from a new context or population. However, while both forms of replication are valuable in that the context is taken into account in the design of the new study, such replication is still limited since the knowledge being discovered is confined to the boundary of the existing theory. What is needed to advance global knowledge, I argue, is more context-specific—or indigenous research—that involves the highest level of contextualization by going beyond the bounds of existing theories.

#### *Contextualization in context-embedded research*

In international management, a common form of contextualization is using differences in nation level attributes, such as cultural or economic variables, to predict differences in organizational and individual level phenomena. For example, nation has been found to lead to differences in organizational structure (Hamilton and Biggart, 1988) and culture (Hofstede, 1980). Individuals have been found to react differently in terms of cooperation, conflict, or perception of fairness depending on the dominant cultural value or economic ideology of the societies (Chen, 1995; Kelley, Whatley and Worthley, 1987; Ralston et al., 1997). This stream of research uses the national context as the main independent variable and compares a central phenomenon in different national contexts using the same theory and same variables. Though they are not simple replications of existing studies, they do involve conceptual extension of the theory as a function of unique characteristics of the context. These studies are similar to what Tsang and Kwan (1999) classified as empirical generalization, i.e., whether the theory can be applicable or generalized to different national contexts.

A second type of context-embedded research that Cheng (1994) did not discuss but is nonetheless important involves using nation level attributes (e.g., individualism) as moderators rather than as main effects. This involves a higher level of contextualization by theorizing how the relationship between an independent and dependent variable may vary depending on the nation level attribute being considered. For example, Earley (1993) found that individuals with a collectivistic value (Chinese managers) performed more poorly when alone or in an outgroup than when they were in an ingroup. Individualists (U.S. managers), on the other hand, performed more poorly working in an ingroup or an outgroup than alone. This study showed that cultural value (individualism or collectivism) moderates the relationship between performance and group membership. Chen (1995) compared the reward allocation preferences of a sample of U.S. and Chinese employees. He found that Chinese preferred differential rules for reward allocation, whereas Americans preferred egalitarian rules. Specifically, the Chinese had a preference for a differential rule in both material and socioemotional rewards. On the other hand, the Americans had a stronger preference for egalitarian socioemotional rewards than for material rewards. The author proposed non-intuitive hypotheses drawing on his rich knowledge of the context. In the process of economic reform, reduced protection by the state and an increasingly competitive open market caused a drastic change from sociopolitical to economic goals. This explains why economic goals dominate cultural values (e.g., collectivism) in resource allocation preferences among Chinese workers. The contemporary economic context is a more powerful shaper of worker preferences than traditional values. Such insight is not possible without

the author's intimate knowledge of the economic reform and its impact on people within the People's Republic of China setting. This type of study is similar to the generalization and conceptual extension in the typology of replication by Tsang and Kwan (1999). By using the context (i.e., nation or its cultural values) as a moderator, the theory is extended and modified, resulting in different predictions for the two samples drawn from two populations in the two national contexts.

Whetten (2002) considered this type of research as "contextualizing general knowledge." It is to show the limits of the "general knowledge" that exists in the literature. However, the "general knowledge" here refers to knowledge that is essentially based on the dominant U.S. research findings. Therefore, this type of context-embedded moderator research may be more appropriately considered as "extending context-specific knowledge." This type of research generates a form of universal knowledge (in which the predictions by the same variables would vary by context) that is clearly valuable in advancing global knowledge.

In summary, context-embedded research uses the context (in this case nation states or cultural variations associated with nation) as the primary explanatory variable. The results may be that relationships among variables do not vary by context. These findings result in context-free knowledge. When the relationship between variables differs from one context to the next, we have context-bounded knowledge. Either types of knowledge can result from context-embedded research that compares one context to another in either a single country (when results of a single country study are compared to those in the literature of another country) or multiple country studies (when two or more countries are compared directly in the same study).

#### *Contextualization in context-specific research*

Both types of context-embedded research are "context-sensitive" in that the context is explicitly considered in the theoretical model as either main effects or as moderators. In both types of research, the starting point is a conceptual model derived from the existing literature. However, the knowledge generated from such research is constrained by the initial theory that guided the study. Global knowledge can gain from the highest level of contextualization or context-specific research in the novel contexts. Such research would focus on the phenomena in new contexts unfamiliar to western researchers. These usually would be single nation or single culture studies. The best example of context-specific research is the work by local scholars using local language. However, context-specific research by local scholars may not involve explicit contextualization in that the context is taken for granted by the researcher. In other works, the context is implicit in the theories and methods of inquiry. Such context knowledge usually is not obvious to and not shared by scholars outside of the context. However, to contribute to global knowledge and to facilitate global "scholarly conversation" (Huff, 1999), the researcher needs to ensure that the context-specific research is connected to the existing knowledge base through explicit contextualization. Contextualization needs to be a deliberate aspect of the theory and research process. Whetten (2002) describes two approaches to make explicit such connection to the global literature in context-specific research. One is *making the familiar appear novel* and the other is *making the novel*

*appear familiar*. Both approaches ensure the linking of the context-specific phenomena to existing scholarly knowledge on similar or related phenomena.

An example of the first type of context-specific research, i.e., making the familiar appear novel, is the study of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in Taiwan by Farh, Earley and Chen (1997). These authors began with defining citizenship behavior using the definition in the existing literature. They asked Taiwanese employees and managers, in an open-ended survey, to identify work behaviors that fit the definition provided. Through an inductive process, they discovered several new dimensions in addition to substantiating existing dimensions. In addition, they found the relationship between perceptions of justice and OCB (a familiar phenomenon to Western researchers) differ for individuals with high and low levels of traditionalism, a context variable. This research accomplished making the familiar (OCB) appear novel by extending the concept and measurement of this familiar construct and showing how a context variable (traditionalism) sets a boundary to the construct's predictive validity. While these authors may have deep knowledge of the Taiwan culture, they did not assume that Western scholars share such knowledge. Therefore, they contextualized the study by identifying locally meaningful dimensions of citizenship behavior through an inductive process. Thus, they made the familiar appear novel by starting with a familiar concept and bringing in the novelty through a contextualized research process. They accomplished this inductively by identifying the OCB dimensions and deductively through developing the hypothesis on the moderating role of the cultural concept of traditionalism.

Another example of context-specific research that utilized the approach of *making the familiar appear novel* is the study by Yan and Gray (1994) on the issue of bargaining power in Sino-foreign joint ventures. The authors began with an existing framework and proposed an expanded and revised model after four in-depth case studies. The expanded model included several factors that may be unique in the Chinese context. Through the grounded inductive process, the authors extended the extant knowledge on international joint venture control and developed a model that reflected the context of the phenomenon. Such knowledge would not have been possible if the authors had chosen to test a priori hypotheses derived from the existing theories of bargaining power.

The highest level of contextualization is found in the examples of context-specific studies that employ the strategy of *making the novel appear familiar*. Studies on the nature of corporate transformation and its distinctive governance mode in China are examples of such context-specific research. Boisot and Child (1988) analyzed the transaction governance structure in China in the era of economic reform. They pointed out the possibility of multiple governance modes owing to the coexistence of central planning, economic reform, and Chinese culture. Later, they proposed that network capitalism is the emerging economic order in China (Boisot and Child, 1996). Nee (1992) compared marketized, private and nonmarketized firms, and concluded that marketized firms have advantage because they benefit from both market opportunities and redistribution by the central government. Walder (1995b) analyzed how jurisdictions at various levels of government responded in the transition economy. He found local governments relative to central governments to be better in monitoring enterprises because of lower non-financial interests. All these authors showed an extensive knowledge of the economic and structural changes in China and their

research approach made the novel appear familiar through connecting their observation of unique Chinese features to familiar concepts in the existing literature on social systems, economic structures and organizations.

Context specific knowledge also facilitates the studies of individuals and careers in this transition economy. Walder (1995a) examined the criteria for the selection of candidates into professional and administrative positions. He found both educational and political credentials to be important for administrative positions while only educational credentials were important for professionals. Professionals did not have the same advantage as administrators in authority, income, and housing. This study suggested that political credentials remained an important factor for good careers in the State owned enterprises. Nee (1989, 1991) compared cadres (those with political credentials) to entrepreneurs. In his studies, cadres did not enjoy economic advantage over entrepreneurs. In another study (Nee, 1996), using a sample of almost eight thousand households in rural China, he found the income gains of private entrepreneurs to be greater than that of the cadres. These results suggest that while political status continued to be useful in administrative careers in government bureaucracies, an administrative career lags entrepreneurs in the market economy in terms of earning power.

Zhou, Tuma and Moen (1997) examined job shift patterns and found that state organizations still offered strong incentives, which retained employees. Employment in the private sector has grown, but this growth seems to be due to the departure of workers from workplaces with less redistributive benefits rather than the departures from state organizations. In other words, state organizations remained attractive employment options. Lin and Bian (1991) found job movements to be usually from collectives (which operate like private enterprises) to state sectors and from state enterprises (some of which had to operate in the market economy) to state agencies (or state bureaucracies). State agencies with their strong redistributive benefits continue to be favorable employment settings. As state organizations continue to reform and their redistributive benefits become a smaller part of the total compensation package, employment patterns may change further in the future. These findings are indigenous to this economic context and specific to this juncture of the nation's development. Their value to the global literature clearly is not based on the relevance of the finding for firms operating in other national contexts. Their value is in the new insight they offer on employment changes in a transition economy. Despite the context-specific nature of the knowledge produced by these studies, they influenced subsequent research evidenced by high citations, and became part of the global management knowledge base.

In summary, the authors of these well-cited studies analyzed the issues as they exist in the context using an inductive approach or grounded theory building and elaboration. Contextualization is important particularly in contexts with cultural roots drastically different from Western cultures. Contextualized research in emerging economies like China or Eastern Europe must take into account the influence of cultural roots as well as modern political economy and emerging institutions in analyzing the behavior of firms and individuals inside the firms. Contextualized research, whether *context-specific* or *context-embedded*, requires deep knowledge of the local context. In other words, contextualized research must be indigenous.

*Defending the need for (especially high quality) indigenous research*

I use the term “indigenous” to describe the context-specific research that involves the highest degree of contextualization, or research that does not aim to test an existing theory but to derive new theories of the phenomena in their specific contexts. Indigenous research focuses on both novel and familiar issues in novel contexts and thus ranges from very unfamiliar (novel issues in a novel context) to somewhat familiar (familiar issue in a novel context) to scholars outside that context. Indigenous research should be high on novelty relative to continuity or connection to the dominant paradigm or knowledge (McKinley, Mone and Moon, 1999). It achieves continuity by linking to existing literature on similar or related phenomena, i.e., by *making the novel appear familiar*. A high level of novelty coupled with an appropriate degree of continuity provides international or mainstream (Western) scholars the opportunity to reflect on the nature, potential limits, and possible extensions of current perspectives.

High quality indigenous research involves *scientific studies* of local phenomena using local language, local subjects, and locally meaningful constructs, with the aim to test or build theories that can explain and predict the specific phenomenon and related phenomena in the local social cultural context. By scientific studies, I mean methods of inquiries that follow the logic of science adopted widely in both physical and social sciences (Kaplan, 1964; Wallace, 1971). Scientific studies involve both theory and data. The aim can be to either test theories using empirical data or develop theories by observing regularities or patterns through empirical generalizations. High quality indigenous research must follow closely the scientific process and adhere to rigorous theorization and empirical methods. To expand global management knowledge, there is enormous need for high quality single country indigenous research. It is the indigenous research in the U.S. or Western Europe that has resulted in the current body of management knowledge. Asia management scholars have a great opportunity to contribute to global management by conducting high quality indigenous research in their countries.

*Three types of global management knowledge*

I have described two general types of context-sensitive research, involving different levels of contextualization that contribute to three types of global management knowledge. Context-embedded research starts with existing models and incorporates relevant contextual factors in modifying or extending the theoretical predictions on the dependent variables. This research generates context-bounded models. This research also has the potential to discover context-free models when the findings show insensitivity to the context. Through contextualization, context-embedded research takes the findings of context-specific research and extends their boundaries and identifies their contingencies. Through context-embedded research, we can identify knowledge that is context-bounded and knowledge that is context-free. Context-specific or indigenous research, involving the highest level of contextualization, aims to understand and explain local phenomena aided by existing literature. Researchers may begin with an existing model or constructs, but they try not to be bounded by a priori conceptual frameworks. Through context-specific research, they

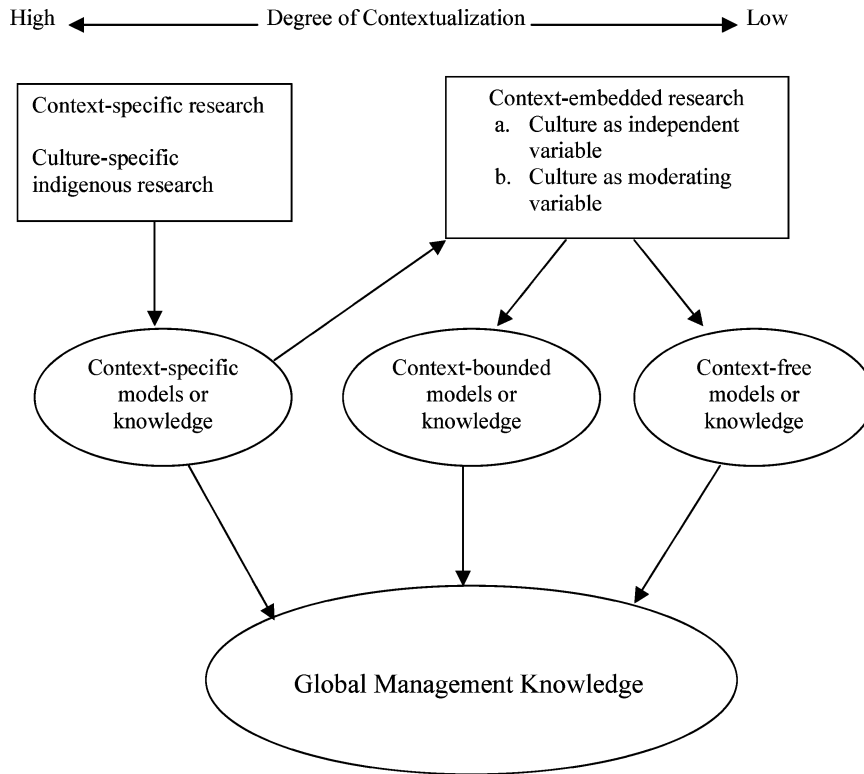


Figure 1. Development of global management knowledge.

identify context-specific models that may provide the foundation for comparative and cross-cultural research, which in turn may lead to context-bounded knowledge. The three types of models/knowledge comprise the content of an overarching global management knowledge base. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the three types of global management models or knowledge developed through context-specific and context-embedded research.

While both context-embedded and context-specific research studies are useful, the most lacking and most difficult to implement is context-specific or indigenous research that involves the highest level of contextualization. To facilitate such endeavors, I offer below some guidelines on conducting high quality indigenous research.

### Conducting high quality indigenous research

I will begin by describing what high quality indigenous research is not. Then, I will offer a few suggestions to guide the conduct of high quality indigenous research. First, high quality indigenous research is not about testing the applicability of western models. While it is generally a good practice to begin with a model taken from existing literature for a

preliminary analysis of the phenomenon (and to make the novel familiar), the researcher must not be bounded by the model and thus blinded to interesting or unique patterns that go beyond the boundary of the existing conceptual framework. Thus, the first rule of thumb in conducting high quality indigenous research is to treat existing knowledge at best as preliminary and let the observation be guided by the phenomenon rather than the a priori framework. Second, high quality indigenous research is not about justifying the use of non-American or non-European samples. Instead of focusing on justifying a non-American sample, the research should focus on the unique attributes of the sample and how these attributes may influence the phenomenon being studied. Third, indigenous research is not about translating existing measures. Existing measures may be a starting point but the researcher must ensure that the indicators are meaningful in the local context and belong to the domain of the locally developed constructs. Last but not least, indigenous research is not comparative or cross-cultural research. By definition, comparative or cross-cultural research involves at least two nations or cultures. Indigenous research aims to understand a specific context and thus it must avoid involving two contexts that may differ on unknown dimensions.

My suggestions address the two general issues of relevance and validity. The researcher needs to consider the issues of both practical and theoretical relevance. The research study must meet the standards of rigor in terms of theoretical depth and internal and external validities. Novel contexts imply the need for grounded research and the inductive method to discover regularities in new phenomena. However, such research can be informed and guided by existing frameworks. While full induction may be appropriate for introducing new theories on new phenomena, partial induction may be relevant to extend or revise existing theories on similar phenomena in new contexts. Lastly, research is needed to evaluate the appropriateness of the most common research methods currently used by Western scholars. Might respondents in different cultural context react differently in experimental conditions, when completing surveys, or being observed by a researcher in their natural work settings?

#### *The criterion of relevance*

For indigenous research, the first priority should be to generate knowledge that is valid, meaningful and useful, i.e. relevant, for organizations and managers in the local context. Such a priority will guide the researcher to emphasize contextualization in theorization, measurement, and research methodology. Guided by the criterion of local practical relevance, the researcher will choose topics that are important and interesting in the local context. This will facilitate entry to organizations and cooperation of managers and employees in the research process. All of the most cited Chinese studies discussed earlier meet the criterion of local relevance. Topics of low local relevance are not likely to generate local interest, and the researcher is not likely to discover novel insight on important phenomena.

A focus on local practical relevance along with connection to the existing literature or current knowledge on the topic or phenomenon being analyzed will facilitate creating knowledge that may interest global scholars. Theoretical relevance is improved by drawing on the global literature on the topic. By relating to models, theories, and constructs in

the existing literature, the new findings can extend, add to, and perhaps even modify our current knowledge about management and enrich our understanding of management in the global context. By making the novel appear familiar, the researcher enhances theoretical relevance. Studies about a local context should cite any local literature where such literature exists. If the researcher is not a native, it is critically important if not a necessity for local researcher involvement in the investigation. International collaboration clearly is desirable to facilitate high-quality indigenous research (Teagarden et al., 1995). Western scholars can bring knowledge about the existing literature, with its rich body of theories, constructs and research methods. Local scholars can contribute local knowledge, read local literature, ensure high-quality data from local subjects, provide meaningful interpretation of the findings, and in general, ensure the local relevance of the research. Many scholars have called for such global research collaboration to advance the quality of international management research (e.g., Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Teagarden et al., 1995).

#### *The criterion of validity*

High quality indigenous research must meet the standards of rigor in measurement, sampling plan, data quality and research design to ensure construct, internal and external validity. Construct validity in indigenous research does not mean simply construct equivalence in terms of factor structures. It means meeting the standards of content validity, criterion-related, convergent and discriminant validities. It means using locally meaningful indicators. This is especially important for psychological constructs whose meaning is affected by the social and cultural tradition. For example, what does motivation mean in China, India, or Argentina and what are the relevant indicators? What about the concepts of fairness or justice, conflict or trust in the workplace? A “consideration behavior” performed by a leader in the United States (e.g., taking an employee to lunch) may be an organizational obligation in China. Visiting a sick supervisor is expected of employees (as part of loyalty) in China or Japan but is not at all expected in the West. Chen, Tsui and Farh (2002) developed an indigenous measure of loyalty to supervisor. They included the two Western dimensions used to measure this construct (Becker, 1992) and, through interviews with local employees, identified three additional dimensions. They found the three additional dimensions identified in the Chinese sample to be much better predictors of employee performance in China than did the two original dimensions generated in the West. A recent edited book on Chinese management (Tsui and Lau, 2002) includes three chapters that focus on developing indigenous measures of organizational citizenship behavior (Farh, Zhong and Organ, 2002), of employment relationship (Tsui, Wang and Zhang, 2002), and of organizational culture (Xin et al., 2002), all in the People’s Republic of China. These authors used an inductive process and identified locally meaningful dimensions and indicators that go well beyond the measures that are found in the existing literature. These measures will be useful not only to guide future research in the context in which they were developed, but also may be used for comparative research and thereby contribute to a broader intellectual discourse. This is the process of “reverse exporting” of concepts discussed by White (2002).

Internal validity refers to the absence of alternative explanations for the findings. This requires both a strong theory and a strong research design including appropriate sampling and

valid measurement. The theory must include constructs and relationships that are relevant and meaningful for the context in which it is being tested. Identifying relevant control variables requires knowledge of the nomological network of related phenomena and constructs in the local context. Further, the research design should include using appropriate scales for measuring the constructs. In some cultures, there is a strong tendency to acquiesce to authority figures. Experiments using student subjects or lower level employees might produce questionable data. Managers in an MBA class might be very willing to comply with a professor's request for completing questionnaires. Whether they would provide true or accurate data is another matter. I once heard a researcher asking a manager why a set of surveys returned from his company had almost identical answers. The manager replied that he would check with his secretary. Later it was found out that the secretary completed all of them in her good intention to help both the manager and the researcher. For contexts where social science research is not a well-understood exercise, the researcher should take extra caution to ensure the quality of the data.

In new contexts where management research is a recent introduction (and where indigenous research is encouraged), there is a great need for developing indigenous theories. It is well accepted that grounded theory building is appropriate when phenomena are ill-defined and when existing theory cannot provide convincing answers to the research problem of interest (Eisenhardt, 1989; Lee, 1999). Grounded theory building is a necessary step in developing management models that capture the richness of a local context. Grounded theory building requires skills in abstracting generalizations from vast amounts of qualitative and quantitative data with highly context-embedded meanings. Both local knowledge and conceptual capability are necessary for developing locally valid theories and models. Once these inductively and indigenously developed models are confirmed, refined, or elaborated through deductive testing, we can compare knowledge generated in that context on the phenomena with knowledge on similar phenomena described in the existing literature. Only after we have established the validity of models in a local context can we have confidence in the results on studies that compare this context to other social cultural contexts.

Of course, there is also the concern of compromising generalizability to other contexts with highly contextualized research. In fact, this is a common criticism raised with single-case ethnographic studies in any context. However, we must keep in mind that the goal of indigenous inductive research is to generate context-valid constructs and models. Therefore, generalizability of the findings to other contexts should not be employed as an important criterion in judging the contribution of such research. If the models derived from the indigenous research depart significantly from existing theories, the contribution is potentially even more valuable. We can discover which of our existing theories are context-specific (to the West or to the East). For example, we might find models of motivation or leadership to be different in different national contexts. Such context-specific knowledge may not be universally applicable (Cheng, 1994). However, knowledge on models indigenous to one context (e.g., China), like models indigenous to any other contexts (e.g., United States, France, or Brazil), as long as they are products of high-quality research, should contribute to global management knowledge. Generalizability of newly discovered models into the international domain can be examined in future context-embedded research as discussed earlier.

*The methods of full and partial induction*

The above discussion suggests the importance of theory building studies that can be accomplished through an inductive or grounded methodology. Again, using research in the Chinese context as a case in point, a most recent update of this research (Tsui et al., 2004) shows that most of the 100 plus studies published between 2000 and 2003 continued to be tests of existing management theories—whose substance is based on studies of Western firms in developed economies. For example, in studying firm level issues, researchers have invoked concepts from institutional, agency, resource-based and stewardship theories, transaction cost economics, strategic choice versus environmental determinism, business system theory, cultural distance, and competitive versus cooperative dynamics. In the individual level studies, role theory, justice theory, and cultural diversity were used. Only two studies proposed new theories. Building on the resource based theory of the firm, a geo-economic theory is developed to explain how geographic differences influence economic development and management (Schlevogt, 2001). A case study of an international joint venture produced an integrative political theory to explain how escalation of joint venture partners' political behavior explained the failure of joint ventures (Shenkar and Yan, 2002). Given China's unique social, cultural, historical, and political mosaic, one might expect different structural or dynamic characteristics of firms when compared to organizations in developed Western economies. The need for grounded theory building in novel contexts, such as China, is evident.

The extant literature provides many fine examples of inductive studies (e.g., Barker, 1993; Barley, 1986; Bartunek, 1984; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1988). I consider these as fully inductive studies since the researchers entered the investigation with a broad research question but not an a priori framework or well defined constructs. Through a grounded theory building approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1984), the authors derived new constructs and empirical generalizations that form the core of a new theory or model which then guided future deductive testing.

When researchers focus on an issue in a novel context but one that may have extensive research in another context, they can begin with a preliminary framework. This was the approach adopted by Yan and Gray (1994) when they analyzed the bargaining power and management control of U.S.-Sino joint ventures in the People's Republic of China. This preliminary framework involved three major constructs: bargaining power, management control, and venture performance. Through four in-depth cases, Yan and Gray identified a set of conditions (e.g., learning, maturity) that changed the bargaining power between the two partners as well as a set of moderators (e.g., trust, common goals) that changed the relationship between the pattern of management control and the performance of the joint venture. If the authors had simply tested the hypotheses derived from the initial framework, they would not have discovered how changing conditions affected bargaining power or the contingent variables affecting the link between management control and venture outcomes. This is a good example of a partial induction approach that may be particularly useful in analyzing familiar issues in novel contexts. The issue is familiar because there is a well-established body of knowledge on bargaining power in the negotiation literature and in

inter-organization relationships. Such a partial induction approach allows connection to the current body of literature while promises the discovery of new insight. This type of research achieves a high level of both novelty and continuity (McKinley, Mone and Moon, 1999). This way, the outcomes of this partial induction research will contribute more directly to global management knowledge.

*Need for methodological studies in novel contexts*

There is a further dilemma in using existing paradigms when conducting research in novel contexts. In addition to the potential conceptual limitation of existing theories, discovery of true knowledge or novel insights in the new contexts also may be limited by the method of inquiry. The dominant methods used by Western scholars include the paper and pencil survey (including the modern internet version), the laboratory experiment, interviews, participant or non-participant observation, and the use of archival data or unobtrusive measures. Understanding how subjects in novel contexts respond to observation or instrumentation would be important to assure the accuracy of responses. For example, researchers have shown that Chinese people tend to be more modest in self-ratings of performance than their U.S. counterparts (Farh, Dobbins and Cheng, 1991). The cultural value of “doctrine of the mean” (Fu and Tsui, 2003) suggests that Chinese people may have a tendency to avoid using extreme scores possibly resulting in a high level of central tendency. Chinese modesty also may lead to the avoidance of direct criticism of others. How would such cultural traits influence the quality of interview data?

It is possible that people in different cultures may have different degrees of reactance to being measured or observed. There also might be cultural differences in the susceptibility to social desirability or the prevalence of implicit theories about personality and work behaviour. Consistency bias and implicit theories are largely responsible for the error in measurement associated with common method variance. Would Chinese people be more or less susceptible to common method variance problem, given the tendency to avoid extreme scores and reluctance to criticize others directly? Do Chinese people carry the same implicit personality theories and engage in similar mental processes as Westerners? How do the potential differences in cognitive maps and mental processes affect Chinese people’s behaviours when they participate in research studies?

Differences in ontology and epistemology in different cultures clearly will have implications for research approaches. For example, Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999) in their reflection of a UK-Chinese research collaboration experience found that their Chinese partners focused on obtaining accurate data and factual information in interviews while the British researchers’ interests were in perceptions and interpretation. Thus, these authors considered the Chinese as realists and the British as constructionists in their ontological positions. They further classified the Chinese as holists with attention to similarities while the British as dualists with attention to differences. However, there may be another contextual explanation for the Chinese researchers’ focus on data accuracy. Insiders in China know that accuracy in published data for any organizations cannot be assumed. Therefore, extra effort is needed to ensure accuracy in the information for research purposes.

The need for studies on the efficacy of different methodologies in indigenous settings is clear. Such methodological studies also may lead to the identification of new methods of inquiry reflecting different training and ideology, as well as culturally determined thinking patterns of the people within the culture.

### *Summary*

I have offered four suggestions to ensure high quality indigenous research that will contribute to global management knowledge. All four suggestions require a deep knowledge of the context and incorporation of that context in theorization and research methods. First, the criterion of relevance requires the contextualized selection of topics and definition of research questions. Second, the criterion of validity requires a higher level of attention to construct and internal validity than external validity. This means the indigenization of construct measurement and specification of contextualized models. Third, there is a need for more inductive research to identify contextualized theories through either full or partial induction methods. In particular, for contexts without an extensive body of literature, and in emerging economies where businesses are new phenomena, there is a need to build new theories of management and organizations. This means taking an inductive approach, hence qualitative methods, to construct development and theory building. However, the various methods of observation and data collection in the existing paradigm may need to be scrutinized. Methodological studies are desirable to evaluate the relevance of the most popular methods and the identification of new methods that may be meaningful in the novel context, to fit local conceptions of ontology and epistemology.

The need for context-sensitivity in cross-cultural research is not unique to management. Similar issues pervade research in other behavioural disciplines. For example, Rogler (1999) in an excellent article in the *American Psychologist* discussed the problem of cultural insensitivity in mental health research both across different cultural groups within the U.S. as well as research in cultural settings outside of the U.S. He explained how the concept of procedural norms, which is a well accepted institutionally structured research process in the American scientific community emphasizing standardization in measurement and data collection procedures, may explain the persistence of cultural insensitivity in research. He suggested several approaches that we can take to prevent such norms from “suppressing, biasing, or deflecting cultural understanding” (1999: 424). His advice applies aptly to management research.

### **Conclusion**

I have argued the need for both context-embedded and context-specific research in international management to fill the void in the global management knowledge that comprises three types of models. The first is models that are *context-free*, that is, applicable to any social, cultural, or political context. The second type is *context-bounded* models, which are applicable to some contexts but not others. The third type is *context-specific* models, or knowledge that is valid only for a particular local context. Based on the history and origin of management research, the body of extant management knowledge we have to date

is far from global, with particular lacking from developing economies in South America and Asia—including the People’s Republic of China which has the world’s largest workforce. However, progress is in sight. The recent creation of academic organizations such as the IberoAmerican Academy of Management (<http://www.iberacademy.org>), the Asia Academy of Management (<http://www.baf.cuhk.edu.hk/asia-aom>), and the International Association for Chinese Management Research ([www.iacmr.org](http://www.iacmr.org)) provides scholars with opportunities to contribute to the body of global management knowledge by promoting, participating in, being receptive to and appreciating high quality indigenous research in non-American contexts, nations or cultures.

Developing new knowledge in global management at one level is akin to developing new schools of thought in organizational theory (McKinley, Mone and Moon, 1999). For the new school to gain legitimacy, it must display sufficient levels of both novelty (defined as being new, unique, or different) and continuity (defined as linkage to intellectual frameworks that are already familiar to mainstream scholars). However, the future of global management knowledge will require more attention to novelty relative to continuity. I hope a convincing case has been made in this paper that an unchecked concern for continuity will certainly limit the potential of discovering truly unique or new theories or insights in the novel contexts, especially in Asia with many countries that differ on legal, social, and cultural institutions.

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