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Andre A. Pekerti

n-Culturalism in Managing Work and Life

A New Within Individual
Multicultural Model

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A New Within Individual Multicultural Model

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I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the one who makes me who I am (Philippians 4: 12–13; Message Translation).

n-Culturalism is a novel concept, as such this monograph contains a number of questions and propositions for future research. Please see a list of questions and propositions for *n*-Culturalism: A within individual multiculturalism model in Appendix A and B, respectively.

Introduction

This issue of Culture, Organization, and Work focuses on how culture shapes individual employee attitudes and behaviors, with special attention to how individuals with multiple cultural identities are impacted by the intersection of those identities.

Dr. Pekerti proposes a new model of “*n*-Culturalism” that goes beyond the lenses of biculturalism and multiculturalism to understand how culture impacts those who incorporate dynamic cultural identities, to include ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, and other subjective personal categorizations (imposed or adopted). This model of *n*-Culturalism focuses on how individuals’ multiple personal identities relate with each other and extends current theories by proposing that the epitome of multiculturalism is not merely to have access to various cultural or ethnic identities, but to be able to juggle those identities and draw on them in the most effective manner as required in any given situation.

A single individual who draws on multiple cultural identities is no longer rare in today’s workplace, and increasingly organizations are looking for those with the qualities that would make them adaptable and effective across cultural boundaries. Dr. Pekerti, in this volume, creates the argument that despite the conflicts inherent in having multiple cultural identities, *n*-Culturals are able to draw on a deep well of information and skills to work across cultural divides. He further suggests ways for organizations to develop mentoring programs to enhance the positive utility of *n*-Culturalism in the workplace.

We are excited to usher this issue into our brief series to elucidate an emerging concept that has the potential application to a wide variety of situations in the workplace. We hope that readers of this issue will heed Dr. Pekerti’s call for more research.

Andre A. Pekerti

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract The work and social environment in many parts of the world consists of individuals of multiple cultural backgrounds. Extending Benet-Martínez, Lee, and Leu's (2006) empirical definition of multicultural individuals, this chapter introduces a within-individual model of multiculturalism. It lays the foundation to explore the notion of multiculturalism within individuals. The chapter concludes with the definitions of bicultural and multicultural individuals, as well as a new concept, that is, *n*-Cultural individuals.

Keywords Acculturation · Bicultural · Cognitive · Monocultural · Multicultural · Multiculturalism within individual · Work environments · *n*-Cultural · Social identity

The process of cultures influencing one another has occurred for many centuries mainly via economic trade, migration, exchange of information, and ideas; however, only in recent times, the degree and intensity of globalization have become a salient factor that management and businesses view as something that needs to be addressed (Sam & Berry, 2010). Technological developments, among other things, have been attributed as the main cause of the rapid increase in economic and financial interdependence worldwide (globalization—Arnett, 2002; Rycroft, 2003). One of the major implications of the globalizing work and social environments that is rapidly becoming a new reality for many individuals is simultaneous exposure to a variety of several cultures, as opposed to being exposed to only one or two cultures (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Berry, 1997; Hong, Wan, No, & Chiu, 2007; Verkuyten, 2007).

For example, migration patterns in many parts of the world, in part due to the lower birth rates in the industrialized world (Thomas, 2010), have created numerous multicultural work environments where significant percentages of a nation's workforce are born overseas and speak a different language than those born locally (Healey, 2005; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009; Okoro & Washington, 2012). For example, 21 and 21.3% of Australia and USA's populations, respectively, speak another language; 49% and 13.4% were born outside Australia and the USA, respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics—ABS, 2016; United States Census Bureau, 2017). This situation results in a heterogeneous population in which employees within the same work environment use different cognitive frameworks to perform work tasks to accomplish goals.

Numerous scholars have highlighted potential issues in multicultural work environments and at the same time enlighten us with the cultural underpinnings of the issues. On the one hand, these issues can range from simple embarrassing misperceptions that lead to misunderstandings (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Boyacigiller, Goodman, Phillips, & Pearce, 2003; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Cutler, 2005); on the other hand, the behaviors can be so contextually inappropriate or unacceptable that the consequences are costly to all parties involved. Due to the costly and potential negative effects of cultural clashes in work situations, scholars and management practitioners have become more aware of the need to understand the impact of multicultural individuals in work contexts.

These examples present common issues that are faced by people who come from different national and/or cultural backgrounds who work together. A relevant question in our discussion is how individuals who have lived in different cultures and nations identify themselves with more than two cultures and function in work and non-work environments. In this monograph, I address and expand a line of inquiry which dates back to the last century (Park, 1928), namely whether an individual who lives at the confluence of more than two cultures can effectively lay claim to belonging to more than two cultures. Further, do individuals who lay claim to more than two cultures through a number of permutations, such as having mixed heritage, born within a nation with a multicultural society (e.g., Indonesia), raised in a second culture, living in a third and fourth culture, plus laying claim to other cultural domain affiliations functionally in work and non-work environments actually exist? Alternatively, are these individuals mythical beings? Are individuals who are living at the confluence of two or more cultures limited by human capacity; and as such, can only effectively lay claim to belonging to one or two cultures? Further, do these individuals face the same challenges as other multicultural individuals, such as biculturals with regard to making sense of their experiences, managing their identities including managing acculturative stress? In an attempt to address some of these questions, I assert that a more nuanced theory concerning multicultural individuals needs to be developed to understand the potential impact that such individuals have and can have on organizations (see Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez & Gibson, 2005). I take a different perspective on cultural psychology (Shweder, 2000) and cross-cultural psychology (Segall, Lonner & Berry, 1998). Cultural psychology examines the influences of cultures on a single individual rather than a single cultural context, while cross-cultural psychology explores cultural differences perceived within the same individual. In this monograph, I present a within-individual multiculturalism model. The model integrates both cultural and cross-cultural psychology disciplines since the model addresses the influences of multiple cultures within a single person (Hall, 2005).

An appropriate example of the positive effect of multiculturalism within individuals in organizations is the 44th President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. Obama who was born in Hawai'i has Kenyan heritage; thus, he is a Kenyan-American, who lived in Indonesia, then studied the *Qur'an* in his youth, and later became a Christian. His multiculturalism can be said to have influenced his behaviors. His very presence in the White House Barack Obama (including his spouse,

Michelle Obama, the former First Lady) might be said to have served as a role model for many African-Americans, young and old, both within the US political and American general population. For example, on May 23, 2012 (Calmes, 2012), *The New York Times* published a story with a photograph of President Obama bowing to a 5-year-old African-American boy who touched the president's hair. It depicted the fact that the boy needed to touch the president's hair to assure himself that the man in the White House was similar to him, including the curls on the president's head. He had asked Mr. Obama, "I want to know if my hair is just like yours?" Relevant to this monograph is the fact that Mr. Obama has influenced American politics and American life by motivating millions of African-Americans to imagine possibilities they would not have imagined previously—simply by being Barack Obama, a Hawai'ian born Kenyan-American, Christian with experience living in Asia—albeit having a very important distinction, being Barack Obama while residing in the White House.

Mr. Obama's legacy as a president will be debated for decades; however, for many who live at the boundaries of society due to their multiculturalism he represents someone they can model in mainstream society, especially within societies where there are tensions between the mainstream majority and marginalized groups in society, such as in the USA. As with many successful leaders, Mr. Obama was a skilled communicator. One of his greatest skills as a president was to instill inclusiveness. For example, in his speeches, Mr. Obama would often use "we" and "us," which in turn invited and enabled his staff, members of his party and the public to identify with him, and thus influencing his followers to be part of his vision (Calhoun, 2015).

In the past, research in the field of management and organizations on the topic of how culture influences people have for the most part presumed that individuals possess only one cultural framework without considering other possibilities, such as individuals with multiple cultural identities and frameworks. Extant research has used a number of approaches in an attempt to understand how the influence of multiple cultures affects individuals. These approaches include social identity (e.g., Tajfel, 1981), social cognition (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000), and acculturation (e.g., Berry, 2003). We have also learned a great deal about the effect of integrating identities in and on individuals (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004) and in turn the capacity for multicultural individuals to shift frames (Hong et al., 2000). Research has also documented how multicultural experiences people have lead to positive effects on creativity (e.g., Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008; Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012), intercultural effectiveness (e.g., Thomas, Brannen, & Garcia, 2010), cognitive complexity (e.g., Lakshman, 2013, Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006), and subsequent flexibility (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). Despite the attempts to understand and study multicultural individuals by differentiating their types (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Rocas & Brewer, 2002), no single theory of multicultural individuals currently exists that is robust enough to extend our understanding of how these individuals function in work and non-work contexts, whereby individuals may take advantage of their multiple cultural experiences and identities as valuable resources for themselves and their organizations.

This monograph presents a cognitive approach to discuss the notion that individuals can maintain simultaneous multiple cognitive frameworks. It draws upon a number of existing works on acculturation, culture and cognition, psychology (general, social, cognitive, and cross-cultural), cultural intelligence, identity, management studies, and sociology to develop a nuanced theory of multicultural individuals. The monograph begins by extending Benet-Martínez, Lee, and Leu's (2006) empirical definition of bicultural and/or multicultural individuals beyond someone who identifies with two cultures to a significant degree, and beyond one who is exposed to multiculturalism or exposed to multiple cultures (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). These distinct individuals, who have developed beyond being bicultural and/or multicultural, are henceforth called *n*-Culturals. Please see Table 1.1, for a summary of current distinctions between monoculturals and biculturals/multiculturals. To establish and conceptualize *n*-Culturals, this monograph combines recent ideas on identity theory and social identity theory. These theories provide the cognitive- and social-based theoretical foundations to argue that *n*-Culturals function by simultaneously maintaining multiple cultural identities and their saliences. Based on existing acculturation research, the discussion follows by establishing that *n*-Culturals are already operating using an *integrated-adoption* or *integrated-contact* acculturation mode; therefore, they operate with additional frameworks compared to monoculturals and/or biculturals as a function of their *knowledge of cultures* (K), *identification* (I), *internalization* (I), *commitment* (C) and multiple *identities' salience* (S) in relation to perceived situations. This monograph presents *n*-Culturalism as the epitome of multiculturalism, which extends this continuum beyond its current perspective.

I then explore the double-edged experiences of *n*-Culturals and other multiculturalists to acknowledge that regardless of how skillful these individuals are, they chronically face multiple conflicts brought on by acculturation challenges, that is, acculturative stress (Berry, 2006; Berry & Annis, 1974; Cruz & Blancero, 2017; Lee & Church, 2017; Rudmin, 2009) including cognitive challenges (Lakshman, 2013) and *ethno-cultural identity conflict* (Cruz & Blancero, 2017; Ward, 2008). These challenges include social cognition challenges, which require multiculturalists to resolve internal conflicts caused by difference in cultural values in particular situations (acute cognitive stress). I explore these social cognition challenges and explore how *n*-Culturals may function in organizational settings by managing their multiple identities through cultural metacognitive processes, which in turn enables *n*-Culturals to manage their multiple active identities in any social context, including the workplace. Examples are presented to illustrate how an individual's heritage, other cultural identities, including the host culture's identity can be activated simultaneously with different levels of salience (importance) and strength (intensity).

The monograph ends with a discussion on the utility of the model when applied to work situations in multicultural settings, including how *n*-Culturalism may be developed through a mentoring program. In particular, I present a suggestion on how organizations can develop mentoring programs designed for multicultural individuals who are struggling. The purpose of the program is for mentors to help mentees go through the process of acculturative stress by recognizing existing boundaries in the

