A worldview approach to the difficulty of confidence on a global team

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Abstract

There is continued need in academic and practitioner domains for improved engagement across cultures. To address the need for intercultural approaches at the intersection of theory and practice with a focus on interculturality as action rather than research knowledge, we describe a worldview approach to intercultural difficulties experienced in a real-world global management team. A part of deep culture, worldview is often left undefined, conflated with similar terms, or expressed as a typology in intercultural literature. We therefore propose a novel worldview conceptualization, fusing seminal, interdisciplinary literature, and resulting in three composite universals – morality, agency, and positionality (MAP). We collected anonymous, self-reported narratives from members of a multinational project and applied MAP as a heuristic to deductively guide interpretation. Research questions focused on identifying intercultural difficulties, revealing tacit worldview assumptions about reality to gain an emic view of intercultural Others, and exploring the connection between both. Four overarching findings about the methodological use of MAP resulted. Five intercultural difficulties were identified; we focused specifically on the "difficulty" of confidence. Worldview MAP has theoretical and methodological implications for intercultural scholarship and informs practical application in organizations seeking innovative approaches to intercultural competence and conflict mitigation and resolution.

Keywords: Worldview, Confidence, Deep Culture, Global Management Teams, Morality, Agency, Positionality

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1. Introduction

Since the intercultural field has roots in the practical application domain, i.e., The US Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (Hall 1966; Martin / Nakayama 2010; Rogers / Hart / Miike 2002), research on intercultural communication should maintain an iterative relationship with intercultural practice. Focus shifts from viewing interculturality as theoretical knowledge to practice in work with clients, customers, volunteers, and teams. Both academics and practitioners develop ways to improve engagement across cultures. Research should respond to needs for professional practical applications. To attend to such needs, we propose a novel worldview conceptualization as a heuristic to gain insights about conflicts in global teamwork. Our conceptualization emerged inductively from a review of seminal, interdisciplinary worldview literature; we used it to guide deductive interpretation of anonymous, self-reported narrative data from members of a real-world global management team. Rather than observing and identifying difficulties experienced on the teams and referring to extant individual values to explain them, we apply three composite universals – morality, agency, and positionality (MAP) to reveal the problem itself. Survey prompts were designed to elicit responses that revealed intercultural difficulties experienced on the team. A worldview approach improves intercultural working relationships by taking the emic perspective of an intercultural Other – someone from a culture group different to one's own. Our findings elucidate existing practice, which, in turn, inform research, theory, and future practice. Our recommended intercultural practice flows as follows: An intercultural critical incident or event takes place in a professional setting. Difficulties are observed or otherwise identified. An interdisciplinary worldview construct is deductively applied to gain insights about the difficulty from the emic perspective of a cultural Other. Results are then transferred by way of storytelling in a subsequent event to avoid, ameliorate, or make amends related to the difficulty.

2. Rationale for a worldview approach

Worldview, as conceived by German philosopher Kant in 1792 (Naugle 2002), is at the deepest level of culture (Kearney 1984). As opposed to surface-level culture in which differences are observable, the tacit nature of worldview is deeply ingrained and not easily discernible. Yet, if novel and practical ways of dealing with interculturality in professional settings are to be developed, the critical importance of identifying worldviews governing thoughts, words, and actions cannot be ignored (Barney 1981; Hiebert 2008; James / McLeod, 2014). To illustrate worldview's influence as well as its hidden nature, consider a critical incident that took place in our case study with a multicultural organization:

Early one morning, key staff members from the visiting country received a call from the local president and host. One or more participants had damaged furniture in a hotel meeting room late the night before. The hotel was a locally run establishment. The first response from the visiting side was to ask, "How much did the damage cost? And who did it?" Depending on the worldview assumptions of the reader, this may seem an inherently and completely reasonable response. Focus on the damage, fix the property, find the person who did it, and hold them responsible for it. The hosts did not share this assumption. Harm had been caused, but it was not physical; it was to the relationships. The hotel owner, as it later turned out, had a longtime personal and professional relationship with the host. Reputation and character were at stake and the path to remediation was an in-person, immediate, and sincere apology.

This story illustrates the invisible yet critical role of worldview in everyday business situations; it is the invisible elephant in the room made more visible through narrative. To discover tacit perceptions of reality, it is necessary to develop a bounded definition of worldview and identify its constituent elements.

However, in extant intercultural literature, worldview is often invoked but left undefined (Abrams / McGaughey / Haghighat 2018; D. Dutta 2016; Lawton / Foeman / Braz 2013; Lee 2006; Suwinyattichaiporn / Johnson 2018), invoked, discussed, or investigated alongside terms such as beliefs, belief systems, religious beliefs (Dodd 1987), rationalities (U. Dutta 2018), reality and thoughts (Frayne 2017), ideology (Ganapathy-Coleman 2013), cultural values, religious worldview, cultural worldview, cultural context, morals, moral orders (Dorjee / Baig / Ting-Toomey 2013); mindset (Ladegaard 2007) and identities (Drummond / Orbe 2010).

To better understand specific sociocultural groups, intercultural scholars have also focused on worldview typologies such as traditional Muslim worldview (Croucher / Oomenn / Steele 2009), Indian Hindu worldview (Ganapathy-Coleman 2013), whiteness worldview (Hoops 2014), and US worldview of race (Drummond / Orbe 2010). Several intercultural communication scholars have expanded worldview by defining the term concretely and/or offering theoretical conceptualizations (Corson 1995; Fantini 1995; Dorjee / Baig / Ting-Toomey 2013; Ishii / Klopf / Cooke 2010).

The basis for the literature review was to determine the ways in which worldview is invoked and applied in intercultural communication literature. Although the resulting sample highlights the critical importance of worldview and offers insights into its tacit nature and impact on behavior, the review also reveals the degree to which worldview is or is not operationalized or whether its component parts are identified. A parsimonious, heuristic conceptualization to identify specific worldview assumptions in various contexts remains largely underdeveloped in intercultural communication literature. We therefore propose a novel theoretical conceptualization based on a broad review of seminal, interdisciplinary worldview literature.

Table 1: MAP Theoretical Conceptualization Based on Three Existing Approaches to Worldview.

	Morality (why? for what purpose)	Agency (how? by what means)	Positionality (who? what? where? when?)
Philosophical Questions	• How are we to act and to create in this world? • What is right and wrong? • What are life-orienting core commitments? • What are the general principles by which we should organize our actions? • By what criteria are we to select possible futures? • How do we assess global reality and the role of our species in it? • Is human nature good, evil, or both?	• Why is our world the way it is, and not different? • How does the world function? • Why are we the way we are, and not different? • What kind of global explanatory principles can we put forward? • How can we influence and transform the world? • What future is open to us and our species in this world? • What happens to a person at death? • What is the preferred personality? Doing, growing, or being? • Why do we feel the way we feel in this world?	• What is the nature of external reality? • How is it structured? • What is a human being? • What is the meaning of human history? • What is the relationship between humans and nature? • What is the relationship between humans? • What is the orientation toward time? • What is the orientation toward space?
Cultural value Dimensions	• Shame/honor • Guilt/innocence • Power/fear	• Fate/control of the environment • Uncertainty avoidance • Masculinity/femininity (gender role differentiation) • High/low context communication styles • Doing/being • Task/relationship	• Patron/client • Hierarchy/egalitarianism • Achieved/ascribed status • Proxemics • Contact/noncontact • Individualism/collectivism • Time orientation • Power distance
Worldview universal categories	• Values	• Causality	• Self • Non-self/other • Relationship • Allegiance • Space • Time • Classification

Tbl. 1: Created by authors. See Georges 2016; Muller 2015; Shweder et al. 1997; Steffen 2018; Strauss 2017; R. Strauss / C. Strauss 2019; Williams 2018; Wilson 2013.

Given the vast field of research on cultural values, it is worth differentiating between values and worldview and clarifying the additional benefits provided by worldview. Values are not simply behavioral or cognitive preferences; they are grounded in worldview, a deeper assumption about reality that provides a context for the values. Worldviews, therefore, inform and support values. In order to construct a conceptualization for revealing worldviews, values are a necessary element but are insufficient alone. Similarly, worldview, insofar as it is a component and deep, invisible layer of culture, is also distinguished from the broader, overarching concept of culture. Disciplines with a worldview focus include philosophy, cultural anthropology, missiology, intercultural communication and competence, and cross-cultural psychology. Three main approaches are philosophical questions which every worldview must answer, cultural value dimensions, and universal categories. Review of literature in these disciplines inductively informed a conceptualization consisting of three composite universals, morality, agency, and positionality, which puts philosophical worldview questions, cultural values, and worldview universal categorical approaches into relationship with each other (see Table 1).

We used the following research questions to apply this bounded MAP conceptualization to the experiences of global team members:

RQ1 What intercultural difficulties do the global team members experience?

RQ2 What are the underlying worldviews, or tacit assumptions about reality, of the team members?

RQ3 What is the connection between the difficulty and the worldview?

3. Method: MAP analysis of narratives, cultural difficulties, and worldview in an organizational setting

We collected 585 anonymous, self-reported narratives from multicultural teams of junior consultants collaborating on real world case studies from multinational corporations (Steiner 2019). Although investigation of intercultural interactions inherently indicates those occurring between two (or more) distinct cultures, we chose to refer to the teams as European and Asian for two reasons. The purpose was to avoid making essentializing statements as well as furthering the idea of national culture. Secondly, both the European and Asian cohorts were themselves diverse with participants coming from different nations and speaking several languages. While there were distinct cultural sides in the teams, there was also a multi-faceted heterogeneity.

The teams proposed solutions to challenges faced by companies in international markets. At the conclusion of their cases, team members were asked to respond to five reflection questions about both intercultural difficulties and benefits. The questions were formulated to elicit stories that would directly connect with the proposed worldview conceptualization and reveal tacit assumptions underlying the difficulties as well as the advantages. They were centered around sense of self, other, and relationship (positionality), sense of self-efficacy, agency, locus of control, and causality (agency), and sense of desirable/acceptable versus undesirable/unacceptable ways of behaving in a multicultural context (morality). The questions were as follows (Steiner 2019):

1. Think about a time when the team was working together very well. Please describe this time in a few sentences. What were the signs that the work was going well? What qualities do you think made the team successful?

2. Think about a time when you thought a teammate was doing or saying the wrong thing or a negative thing? Describe it in a few sentences. What made it wrong or negative? How would you change it to make it right? That is, what would you do differently?

3. Think about how you communicated and acted with teammates during the team project time. Describe your ability to communicate and work together across differences in language and culture. What did you do well? What do you wish you could change and why?

4. Think about how a teammate communicated and acted in the group during the team project. Describe his or her ability to communicate and work together across differences in language and culture. What did he or she do well? What would you change about how this person communicated or acted and why?

A final question focused on the overall perception of both personal and professional benefits of collaborating across cultures in an organizational setting. The purpose was to gain an impression of the overall motivation for engaging cultural Others, without which, any global endeavor would be disadvantaged from the outset. The questionnaire was presented in both English and Japanese, and participants were invited to respond in the language most comfortable for them to elicit the most authentic responses.

Using MAXQDA software, two analysts performed theory-guided coding of the texts using the worldview schema shown in the table at the composite level–morality, agency, and positionality. We referred to the sub-dimensions to guide and check interpretation. Through iterative rounds of analysis, coding, and checks for intercoder agreement, we developed a qualitative codebook to support replication of this study's results by other scholars as well as future worldview investigations in other contexts. Multiple

revisions were made to the MAP conceptualization, sub-dimensions, codebook, and coding techniques. Five coding rounds were conducted to achieve an acceptable level of inter-coder agreement at the sub-dimension level of morality – guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and power/fear. Using Cohen's Kappa formula to correct for chance agreement, intercode reliability was calculated at .727.

4. Findings: Narrative insights into an emic view of intercultural others

MAP is a theoretical conceptualization derived directly from an inductive synthesis of existing interdisciplinary work on worldview theory and related concepts; it was reified via analysis of narratives from participants in a global management case study. MAP possesses several strengths. First, the composites align with universal narrative elements such as actor, setting, action, and aspirational resolution. Second, all three MAP composites were present in all narratives. MAP elements appeared in a nested format or inverted triangle in the narratives. Morality was found in the longest text sections, followed by agency and positionality. That is, one composite was typically predominant in a narrative text and informed the other two. MAP is a meso-level analysis lens that guides interpretation at the micro sub-dimension level and suggests macro worldview claims.

Five intercultural difficulties were found: confidence, exclusion, varying assumptions about what constitutes socially acceptable behavior, use of private and professional time, and differences in characteristics and qualities of relationship (Steiner 2019). In this paper, we focus on confidence for two reasons–the high frequency of reporting on the difficulty in the narrative data from all participants, and more importantly, the surprising contrast provided by both sides regarding its desirability. We explore whether, based on worldview associations, the presence or paucity of confidence exhibited by global team members actually cons-

titutes a difficulty. Further, we question whether more nuanced ways of considering confidence, based on a worldview approach, can alter the assumption of the trait as advantageous and instead suggest the potential benefits of a perceived lack of confidence.

5. Discussion: The so-called difficulty of confidence

Intercultural difficulties occur because of differences in outward behavior and communication styles and the worldview assumptions beneath them. Through written anonymous narratives, participants reported intercultural difficulties experienced in global management team case studies in multinational corporations. The focus of this paper is the difficulty of confidence as perceived by the participants. We describe how tacitly assumed norms can be perceived as difficulties that require adaptation on the part of one or both groups. However, we argue that neither confidence nor reticence should be viewed as preferable or superior, rather, a worldview approach is necessary to understand different intercultural perceptions. This analysis serves as an example for future practitioners translating cultural knowledge into intercultural engagement.

5.1. The problem from the European perspective

In response to the prompt about what European participants would change about their teammate's behavior, they frequently storied that their Asian partners should be more confident. They described confidence as speaking freely, openly, directly, and honestly and expressed the wish for their counterparts to be more direct, participate in discussions more proactively, openly admit when they do not understand, and assert their opinions in the open forum. The converse of confidence was reported as being shy, reserved, and insufficiently proactive. To refrain from admitting that one does not understand a foreign language concept was considered untruth-

ful. The underlying assumption was that direct, open, and transparent communication is correct and desirable, while reticent behavior is somehow wrong, undesirable, or less effective.

5.2. The problem from the Asian perspective

The Asian participants, by contrast, acknowledged their propensity for quiet reflection and small group discussion before speaking out loud and promoting ideas. They shared stories about their efforts to be more direct, to speak up, be bolder – essentially, to emulate European behavior and communication styles. Someone from a more Western perspective might expect the Asian participants to suggest more time for quiet reflection or side bars for consensus building to improve team performance; that is, to encourage the European members to act in a way more in accordance with their Asian approach to group dynamics. Instead, the opposite was true. The general theme was one of inadequacy – my way of being is not sufficient; I must emulate others rather than suggest that they adapt to me. The Asian group seemingly deferred to the European perspective of confidence, without asserting or implying the Europeans should adapt to the Asian perspective of confidence.

5.3. The problem illuminated through contrasting narratives

Although the Europeans directly expressed lack of confidence as an issue, they did not directly state their norms are better and confidence is a positive trait. Rather, this was implied and likely lay outside their awareness. Given the authors' similar cultural orientation, these reports were unsurprising and would have escaped our own awareness had it not been for a counter narrative. Juxtaposing European narratives with those of their Asian counterparts revealed a surprising entrée into worldviews held by both groups. This diminishment of self in favor of the characteristics of an intercultural Other is a telling insight into deep worldview

assumptions, specifically, those related to positionality. This response suggests, "I am less than and should strive to be more like a sophisticated or successful European." Notably, the Asian group did not assert or imply that the Europeans should be more like them. The reverse was often not true in European stories. That is, although many expressed efforts to adapt to their Asian colleagues by trying to be "more polite," as understood inherently through their own worldview lens, few, if any, expressed the wish to eschew confidence, directness, or proactiveness and be more like their reserved Asian colleagues. One evening, a European participant queried, "Why do we always have to adapt to them, and they don't have to adapt to us?" to which the researcher probed, "How do you know they're not?" Silence ensued. Contrasting narratives answered that question and revealed the dilemma surrounding confidence. As an internal, mental construct by nature, confidence was not, and likely could not, be researcher-observed in participant interactions. The reality was that the Asian participants were striving rather diligently to project more confidence and directness even in the face of linguistic barriers. However, those adaptation attempts and the requisite amount of energy and thought to achieve them passed mostly unnoticed by the Europeans, for whom confidence was the assumed normal and correct way of being. This case demonstrates the necessity of a theoretical conceptualization of worldview to resolve intercultural difficulties, as they are not always consciously known to the participants or may be known to members of only one culture group. In The Silent Language, Hall (1959) stated that culture hides more than it reveals and that it hides most effectively from its own participants. When people are behaving on cultural autopilot, a worldview approach can provide profound insight to observed, outward actions.

5.4 Making MAP actionable for the practitioner

The divergent understandings of confidence and underlying assumptions about the preferable approach revealed something very striking about the morality, agency, and positionality of both groups. Morality became clear through positionality markers, as these dimensions are highly interrelated. The narratives from both groups described very different agency assumptions, or how one accomplishes goals. Cultural groups diverged, preferring either low-context, task-oriented communication or versus high-context communication focused on building relationships and group harmony. With respect to morality, and specifically, an innocence/guilt orientation, preserving objective truth is privileged over honor. The focus is on the facts, what is true and correct, not on the individual or relationship. That is, preserving task over relationship. As a result, the Asian morality of honor/shame, was perceived as inadequate. This was considered a weakness that required attention or development. This assumption was employed without pausing to recognize how an honor/innocence morality was at play from the European perspective, shaping implicit judgments of teammate behavior. Without naming and reflecting on cultural moralities, intercultural teams could be kept in an intractable conflict, risking relationships and future collaboration opportunities. This example demonstrates how worldviews connect to intercultural difficulties and are revealed by narratives in which both are embedded. The purpose of MAP analysis is to reveal what culture typically hides and the ways in which assumptions unconsciously play out in team narratives and behavior. Worldview MAP-based knowledge allows the intercultural practitioner to identify points of shared contention in teamwork, thus revealing what is otherwise left invisible. Then, practitioners can invite a more nuanced discussion of the issue at hand. Team difficulties, when identified through worldview, can be reframed into oppor-

tunities for intercultural learning and exchange. Using MAP, practitioners are equipped to act at the intersection of cultural knowledge and real-world interaction, leading participants to a more conscious awareness of their invisible worldviews that drive everything they think, say, and do. A worldview understanding of the why beneath the what is essential for identifying conflict or potential points of conflict, mitigating it when it happens, and remediating as needed.

6. Limitations

Any study focused on interculturality must take cross-cultural threats to validity into consideration (Penã 2007). The most fundamental elements of worldview – person, self, and other – vary across cultures (Kuiper 1990) are conceived differently across cultures. Kearney (1984) proposed six elements universal to every worldview yet acknowledged that any such undertaking is bound by the researcher's own worldview. Moreover, like all studies, regardless of topic, this study is also influenced by the authors' cultures and worldviews. There are inherent cultural validity limitations in the proposed conceptualization, the associated codebook, development of the reflection questions, and the findings derived from analyzing the narrative data. Author awareness of potential cultural validity complications informed our research design choices and allowed us to mitigate three specific limitations. First, when designing reflection questions for participants, we considered how our own culturally-bound lenses could affect or guide narrative responses and strove to choose language that would mitigate that effect. For example, we first focused on positive experiences that would allow respondents to save or preserve face even though all reports were anonymous. When asking participants to describe negative experiences, we invited them to also indicate how the interactions might be improved or changed. Second, we acknowledged linguistic challenges due to

various proficiency levels and offered the questions in both English and Japanese and provided respondents with the option to respond in the language of their choice. Third, we recognized the risk of having narrative analysts from similar cultures and considered possible alternative interpretations that would be likely from analysts of dissimilar cultures and worldviews. Accordingly, we concede that members of disparate cultures may apply codebook concepts and processes differently depending upon both language and cultural value differences.

7. Implications and future directions

Ideally, practice and research should circularly inform each other. To achieve an iterative relationship, we integrated the results of this study into subsequent global management projects. The goal was to take a lessons-learned approach from previous team experiences and, through facilitated discussion, move from imparting intercultural research knowledge toward practitioner action. This process included first inviting new cohort members to brainstorm potential areas of intercultural difficulty at the outset of their projects. Then, we presented MAP by way of storytelling about intercultural difficulties experienced by previous participants. Storytelling about the difficulty of confidence heightened awareness of the invisible force of worldview with regard to outward behavior and expression. Participants were then better equipped to interpret team meetings, company visits, and presentations through the memorable and parsimonious MAP lens and relatively quickly gain deep insights in practical settings. As a result, participants shifted from relying on culture knowledge to an improved intercultural strategy and action in a practical setting. This article functions to facilitate replication of this same process. Not only can practitioners apply MAP to parse out difficulties and foster intercultural competence in real-world settings, but they can also share this theoretical concep-

tualization in presentation or workshop form for participants to apply for themselves in future settings. Training others to fully apply MAP, however, is a higher level of knowledge that would require further professional development. Nevertheless, as our findings have been utilized in subsequent global team projects, MAP clearly has the potential to help shift from intercultural knowledge-based approaches to the doing of intercultural competence.

8. Acknowledgements

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