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**Diffusion Orientation is More Than Cultural Constraint**

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## Introduction

Diffusion orientation is one of the important cultural values and behavioral dimensions in the international management literature. In the literature, the concept of diffusion orientation refers to the integration of work, family (social), and personal roles and life spheres at the individual and cultural levels (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2000; Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009).

In the cross-cultural literature, diffusion orientation is conceived as, "the degree to which we engage others in specific areas of life and single levels of personality, or diffusely in multiple areas of our lives and at several levels of personality at the same time" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2000: 81). The concept of life spheres (or areas) deals with the range of performing obligations, while that of levels of personality deals with the universalist range of collective

programming identities. Individuals in diffusion cultures interpret their personal and private spaces with less demarcations, both in terms of performing obligations as well as collective programming identities. As a cultural construct, diffusion orientation is perceived as something given and that individuals adapt to as a cultural constraint.

In this study, we propose that diffusion orientation is more than cultural constraint. We investigate three alternative conceptions of diffusion orientation as a construct. First, diffusion orientation as cultural causation, that constrains human behavior and has a range of behavioral consequences. Second, diffusion orientation as cultural mediation, that mediates how people respond adaptively to extrinsic values and intrinsic behaviors. Third, diffusion orientation as cultural pathway, that is formed as a consequence of conscious and/or subconscious decision strategies of individuals. We refer these as theoretical, empirical, and strategic perspectives respectively.

*Theoretical perspective of diffusion orientation*. Cultural scholars, such as Hofstede (1980), hold that the cultural constructs have universal value (e.g. if women with fluid approach to work-life exchanges are accommodated) and behavioral (e.g. if the dominant groups with bounded approach to work-life exchanges are accommodated) consequences, as well as psychological (e.g. work-life enrichment belief) and sociological (e.g. work-life conflict behaviors)

consequences. We refer this traditional conception of diffusion orientation as cultural causation model, grounded in a perspective of culture as a constraint. This conception considers cultural constructs as institutionally shaped intrinsic organizational characteristics of a social system, that have a variety of direct organizational consequences. Cultural theory postulates that the managers should take cultural constructs as constraints, and should seek to help women and other diverse subjects adjust to the bounded approach to work-life exchanges.

*Empirical perspective of diffusion orientation.* Diffusion orientation has been found to have both positive (e.g. work life enrichment) as well as negative (e.g. work life conflict) effects (Ollier-Malaterre, 2016). Diffusion orientation itself has been found to be a cultural consequence of value (e.g. gender role dependence ideology) factors (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) as well as behavioral (e.g. boundary management style) factors (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006). This suggests that diffusion orientation mediates the relationship between extrinsic value and intrinsic behavior factors, on the one hand, and effects on work and life interactions, on the other hand. We refer this conception of diffusion orientation as cultural mediation model, grounded in a perspective of culture as a mediator of effects on one's life.

*Strategic perspective of diffusion orientation.* Culturally formed value of diffusion orientation empowers a subject to realize normative value of competing life

obligations (work-life boundary management), supplementary physiological identity (gender role dependence ideology), complementary psychological power (work-life enrichment), and parapsychological knowledge of the metaphysical value of both work and life in one's well-being (work-life conflict). However, instead of taking culturally constructed diffusion orientation as a normative constraint, subjects may choose to construct a new cultural value of diffusion orientation by recognizing the differential effects of positive sum (work-life enrichment belief), negative sum (work-life conflict behaviors), positive (gender role dependence ideology), and negative (boundary management style) correlation between work value and social value. They may construct this new workculture value as the cultural value within their society. We refer this conception of diffusion orientation as cultural pathway model, grounded in a perspective of cultural as a consequence of life decisions.

We next investigate specific pathway foundations of the cultural pathway model. Thereafter, we operationalize the construct of diffusion orientation based on these foundational dimensions. We explain the method for empirically validating the construct of diffusion orientation and its foundational dimensions. We use structural equations modeling to test the three models of diffusion orientation. Finally, we conclude by discussing our findings.

**Literature Review.   Pathway Foundations of Diffusion Orientation**

From a metaphysical perspective, diffusion orientation can be interpreted as transfer of four types of energies – identity, obligations, power, and knowledge. We review literature to clarify four pathway foundations of diffusion orientation: diffusion of collective identity for transferring relationship programming (identity transfer), diffusion of performing obligations for transferring responsibilities (obligations transfer), diffusion of power orientation for transferring profiting (power transfer), and diffusion of knowledge sharing for transferring development (knowledge transfer).

*Collective programming identity* deals with the range of identities that an individual must consider in any social interaction (Parsons, 1951). Collective programming identity based on universalist codes is defined as "a difference between 'us' and 'them' in relation to the realm of the Sacred and the Superior such as God or reason, thus relating to salvation, progress and rationality." (Karolewski, 2011: 938). The non-members are considered inferior as long as they are not converted. The difference between those who have a close relationship to the superior identity, and those who do not, is a hierarchical one, but everybody (potentially) is capable of overcoming his or her inferiority, by converting to the right faith or adopting the superior institutions (Eisenstadt & Giesen 1995, p. 83). The institutional boundaries of collective identity may be crossed over, and 'us' identity may be transferred through communication, education and conversion

(Karolewski, 2011). This 'institutional identity' differs from the 'symbolic' identity being programmed within the collectivity. Whereas symbolic identity draws on shared symbols of commonality such as common currency, a common anthem, common holidays or even a common past, institutional identity is based on specific institutions (in the larger sociological sense including norms, procedures and regulations) and on the belief in the superiority of these institutions (Karolewski, 2011). Universalistic codes support a twofold identity transfer, by 'shaping conceptions of the normal' (Manners 2002), as well as 'conceptions of the superior' (Karolewski, 2011). The identity transfer spreads both norms of appropriateness and norms of superiority in third-party relationships. As a consequence, collectivity's institutions, procedures, norms and values become new rules of conduct for the third-party relationships. By adopting these norms third parties also assume the institutionally programmed identity of the collectivity. For instance, in a formal work setting, everyone connected with the work organization is treated impartially on the basis of a same general norm, procedure or rule; but those not connected to the work organization and not adopting its norms, procedures or rules, are excluded from the boundaries of the organization and its stakeholder groups.

*Performing obligation* deals with the range of performing obligations involved in any given form of social interaction. In a formal work setting, social relationships

involve targeted obligations, where we meet with or contact someone for some very particular reason constructed through their symbolic status and position. In contrast, in a family and friends setting, social relationships involve a broad or diffuse range of obligations. We rely on family and friends for a broad range of types of support, including conversation, support, accommodation, and intimate relationships. Such broad range of support has the potential of dealing with almost any set of interests and problems (Parsons,1951). When there are sustained interactions, social exchange theory predicts development of psychological contracts that transform transactional nature of exchange into relational nature (Emerson, 1972). Cook et al. (1990) observe that in social exchanges, strength and nature of reciprocity and obligation, and the degree and timing of its manifestation within a relationship is clarified over time. Diffusion is manifested when this sense of obligation flows across domains and across time, i.e., obligation transfer happens when obligation within one relationship (example a superior-subordinate) is reciprocated with a favor in the other domain (example personal), either immediately or at some other point of time (across time).

While the diffusion orientation through collective programming identity and performing obligations guides individuals to broaden the range of interests valued in a social interaction, two additional work-culture factors guide subjects to become more targeted.

*Profiting oriented power attribution* deals with the varying power attributions among individuals based on their symbolic performing obligations, and that allows powerful subjects to capture profiting through exchange relationships. Individuals with superior symbolic performing obligations, based on their history of distinguished accomplishments and symbolic positions, are attributed omnipotence – all-powerful – characteristic. Social relationships with powerful individuals become diffused, as individual subjects endorse the power of those individuals to manifest anything, and seek to be a part of their power sphere by valuing and fulfilling all their needs and expectations. The powerful individuals reciprocate by delegating power and authority to the individual subjects, and acting as benevolent benefactors who have a moral responsibility as servant leaders to profit from the exchange so that they may help the individual subjects at all costs. Diffusion is manifested when the power of the powerful individuals is transferred to the subjects, as well as when the subjects seek to perform extra-role obligations for the powerful individuals from a formal work setting.

*Knowledge sharing for planning heuristics* deals with the varying knowledge sharing among individuals based on their institutional identities, and that forms the basis for the planning heuristics governing the exchange system. Individuals with superior institutional identities, based on their family or community of origin and/or affiliation, are perceived to have omniscience – know-it-all – characteristic.

Social relationships with knowing individuals become diffused, as individual subjects romanticize the knowledge of individuals within those institutional boundaries and seek affirmation of their knowledge by openly and freely sharing that knowledge with them. The knowing individuals reciprocate by recognizing the value of that knowledge and counter-sharing that within their institutional boundaries. For instance, Chow et al. (2000) reported that Chinese were reluctant to share information with an out-group member, but open to share with an in-group member. Similar propositions have been made by Sinha et al. (2001) on how Indians differentiate between *apne log* (in-group members) and *paraye log* (out-group members). Knowledge sharing within institutional boundaries acts as a reassurance to the insecure knowledge identity by raising confidence of and legitimizing the individual who originally made the knowledge but is without the institutional identity. This validation transfer gives credibility to the knowledge making subject to work on the planning heuristic of capturing residual value in the social space outside the institutional boundaries.

Given the significance of power attribution and knowledge sharing in guiding individuals to become more targeted, from a metaphysical perspective, the construct of diffusion orientation reflects more than the open range of collective programming identity and performing obligations. On the one hand, it reflects a complete preference for a universalist range of collective identity and performing

obligations, manifesting in the absorption of alternative identity through transfer of performing obligations.   In other words, those with alternative identities are also assigned superior performing obligations after they absorb the collective identity. On the other hand, superior performing obligations of those without superior institutional identities are attributed to a perverse outcome of inferior institutions. Therefore, subjects with collective programming identity face institutional pressures to become very discriminating about power attribution and knowledge sharing.   A subjective identity of diffusion orientation reflects a condition where the individual attributes power to and shares knowledge with only those who meet the culturally mediated objective criteria of superior performing obligations.

**Methodology**

**Item Development**: For Identity transfer scale, we derived items from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's (2000) scenario portraying how the boss in a diffusion culture assumes the identity of a "father-figure", socially acting as a mentor and indulgent care-giver and from Liden & Maslyn (1998)'s leader-member exchange construct based on the identity exchange subdimensions of loyalty, affect and professional respect.  For Obligation transfer scale, we adapted items from LMSX scale (Bernerth, Armenakin, Field, Giles & Walker, 2007.   For Power transfer scale, we adapted items from the different types of power (French & Raven, 1959).   For Knowledge transfer scale, we adapted items from Lee (2001),

guided by De Long and Fahey (2003) categorization of knowledge into three types; a) Human Knowledge: individuals' knowledge about how to do a particular task; b) Social Knowledge: cultural norms that exist; c) Structured Knowledge: knowledge of procedures in organizations and systems.).

We surveyed 301 respondents (mean age = 34.39 years). The sample consisted of 64.8 percent males. 70.2 percent were married. 75.1 percent were in Delhi. 74 percent worked in private sector. 70 percent completed the survey offline. 8 responses were incomplete and discarded. The item psychometrics met the criteria for using confirmatory factor analysis and testing the construct of diffusion orientation.

In the confirmatory factor analysis, factor correlations were moderate to strong (ranging from 0.26-0.77) indicating that covariance amongst these factors can be explained by a higher-order factor. In the revised model, we allowed the three factors to load on to a general higher-order factor. The fit indices for the model were similar to the previous model ($\chi2$ (32) = 147.90, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.92, SRMR= 0.055, RMSEA = 0.085).

For the test of the cultural pathway hypotheses, we included items on the four constructs – work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, work-family boundary management, and gender role freedom ideology.

*Work-family conflict.* We used ten items scale by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996). Conflict was measured in both directions, i.e., work to family conflict (WFC, α = 0.92) and family to work conflict (α = 0.85).

*Work-family enrichment.* We measured work-family enrichment using six item scale developed by Carlson et al (2006). Enrichment was measured in both directions- work to family enrichment (WFE, α = 0.84) and family to work enrichment (FWE, α = 0.80).

*Work-family boundary management.* We measured work-family boundary management using the Boundary Management Style (BMS) scale by Kossek, Lautsch and Eaton (2006). Originally the scale had 9 items (α = 0.70) but we deleted one item (I tend to handle emails related to my family separate from emails related to my work) because this is not relevant in all work contexts surveyed in India.

*Gender role freedom ideology.* We adapted four item measure of gender role ideology by Jaga (2014). The alpha was 0.76.

All the items in these scales were measured on a five point scale, with responses ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree.

**Findings**

Diffusion orientation has a stronger correlation with work-family enrichment than with work-family conflict or with work-family boundary management. Scholars have previously predicted work-family enrichment to be stronger than work-family conflict in diffusion cultures (Ollier-Malaterre, 2016; Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009). Our findings suggest that this is not a product of cultural mediation (cultural-effects model), but a pathway to cultural construction (cultural pathway model). To validate these findings, we test three models – cultural-causation (or culture as an invariable and universal constraint) model, cultural-effects (or cultural mediation or artifact) model, and cultural as a pathway consequence (cultural construction) model – using path analysis structural equations modeling (Figure 1).

All the fit indices supported the validity of cultural construction model. Diffusion orientation is constructed through direct and mediated work-family enriching effects of gender role ideology, and through direct and mediated work-family conflicting effects of boundary management style. The fit indices were weaker and below acceptable thresholds for the cultural mediation model that views diffusion orientation as a cultural artifact, whose antecedents are gender role ideology and boundary management style, and whose consequences are work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. The fit indices were even worse for the orthodox cultural constraint model that diffusion orientation is culturally caused

effect on work-family enrichment and conflict, boundary management style, and gender role ideology.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

**Discussion**

Although we find evidence for the cultural pathway construct of diffusion orientation in the sampled subject population from India, the scores of sampled individuals vary significantly from low to high diffusion orientation.    What explains these variations in the subjective diffusion orientation, within a constant culturally mediated force?    In order to explain these pathway construction differences, we distinguish between two types of subjects, based on their exchange behaviors within and without the institutional cultural ideologies. We refer them as perspective diffusers and perspective targeters,

Perspective diffusers are guided by an aspiration to gain an advantage in their private exchange relationships, by trading off benefits of their social exchange relationships.    They realize this advantage by seeking relationships with at par value – the relationships based on the norms of fair market exchange.    They ascend the value accrued from these relationships to above par by transferring identity and/or obligations.   Perspective diffusers transfer identity to those who are willing to transfer their knowledge in exchange, enabling them to accrue a quality

advantage. For instance, Apple transfers the coveted Apple identity to those who are willing to transfer their knowledge to it, by classifying them as its preferred employees, suppliers or customers. Perspective diffusers transfer obligation to those who are willing to transfer their freedom power in exchange, enabling them to accrue a cost advantage. For instance, Apple transfers the revered Apple obligation – the obligation to serve the mission of Apple – to those employees, suppliers or customers who are willing to make 100% commitment to Apple.

Perspective targeters are guided by an aspiration to gain an advantage in their social exchange relationships, by trading off the costs in their private exchange relationships. They realize this advantage by seeking relationships with below par value – the relationships based on the norms of social exchange outside the market parameters. They ascend the value accrued from these relationships to at par by transferring knowledge and/or power. Perspective targeters transfer knowledge to those who are willing to transfer their identity in exchange, enabling them to accrue a quality parity. For instance, an emerging market Apple supplier transfers its knowledge to Apple, because that allows the former to fulfill the identity of Apple supplier and thereby position itself in the global market at par quality. Without this knowledge transfer, Apple may prefer a supplier relationship with at par value – one within the established global market where knowledge needs no discovery. Perspective targeters transfer power to those who are willing

to transfer their obligations in exchange, enabling them to accrue a cost parity. For instance, an emerging market supplier transfers the control over its freedom power to Apple, because that allows the former to fulfill the obligations of Apple and thereby position itself in the global market at par cost. Without this power transfer, Apple may prefer a supplier relationship with at par value – one within the established global market where power needs no shaping.

We propose that the varying behaviors of perspective diffusers and perspective targeters are a function of their resource conditionality. The cultural behaviors of perspective diffusers are linked to a munificent resource conditionality. Their challenge is to seek additional knowledge for leveraging their munificent resources, and to test the potential power of their munificent resources, so that they may "form" stretched aspirations. The cultural behaviors of perspective targeters are linked to a constrained resource conditionality. Their challenge is to discover a different identity for their constrained resources, and to shape a different set of obligations of those resources, so that they may "fulfill" their core aspirations.

What matters for the cultural behaviors is not the objective – but the subjective – resource conditionality. And, what matters for subjective resource conditionality is not the behavioral traits – but the exchange objectives – of the subject. Individuals with diffusion objective perceive their resource conditionality

to be munificent, because they focus on trading knowledge and freedom power from their social relationships in exchange for their private identity and obligations. The greater the private identity and obligations they trade, the more munificent their resource conditionality becomes.  Individuals with targeted objective perceive their resource conditionality to be constrained, because they focus on trading identity and obligations from their social relationships, in exchange for their private knowledge and freedom power.   The greater the private knowledge and freedom power they trade, the more constrained their resource conditionality becomes.

**Conclusions**

In this paper, we review literature to construct a perspective that the diffusion orientation guides individuals to broaden the range of interests valued in a social exchange. A subjective identity of diffusion orientation reflects a condition where the individual attributes power to and shares knowledge with only those who meet the culturally mediated objective criteria of superior performing obligations.    We deconstruct behavioral construction of diffusion orientation in a sample of white-collar respondents from the two cities of India, and reconstruct confirmatory evidence for a constructive perspective of diffusion orientation.

We investigate the thesis that diffusion orientation is more than cultural constraint.  Our findings confirm that subjects construct diffusion orientation as a

state of perspective reconstructing through positive affirmation of both gender role freedom ideology, as well as work-family exchange in the form of conflict, enrichment, and boundary management.

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**Figure 1: Cultural Pathway, Mediation, and Causation Models**

1)  Cultural Pathway model (culture as a consequence)

GRI         → WFE →

                                          DO

BMS    →    WFC →
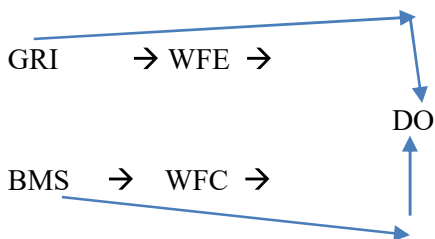
2)  Cultural Mediation model (culture as an effect)

GRI                                       WFE

                       DO

BMS                                       WFC
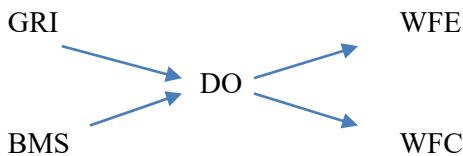
3) Cultural Causation model (culture as a constraint)

DO → WFE

DO → GRI

DO → BMS

DO → WFC