

**ETHICAL ISSUES IN CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW****Dr. Lokeshver Singh Jodhana<sup>1</sup>,**Assoc. Professor,  
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Gandhi Nagar, Bhopal (M.P.) – 462033**Abstract**

*Research is the discovery and description of regularities in the universe. It helps in the development of theories to explain these regularities. The common goal of Cross-Cultural Research is to understand behavioral variability across culture. As the Corporate World in the present era has started acting as a global village, the role of Cross Cultural Management has gained utmost importance. But management is incomplete without a proper research, even in case of managing individuals from different cultural backgrounds. While a research is being carried out, it faces various issues in which ethics is one of the major aspect. In cross cultural management research, we need to be sure to choose reliable and valid measures. The ethical issues in cross cultural management research have started gaining importance worldwide, as such issues were often ignored while researches were being carried out. In fact, it has now become the standard practice to ensure compliance with ethics. The basic objective of this article is to enlighten the ethical issues involved in Cross-Cultural management research as per the present scenario.*

**Key words**

Ethical Issues, Research, Cross-Cultural Management, Ethics.

**Introduction:**

Managers equipped with the knowledge on Cross-cultural management issues are in great demand in organizations across the world. Cross Cultural Management studies the behavior of people in organizations around the world. Its prime focus is on organizational behavior within and between countries, across different cultures.

The spurt of global business has increased the demand for professionals who have the necessary skills in international management, especially in managing people from different countries of origin or cross cultural management. Knowledge and skill for cross cultural management can be acquired through the study of behavior of people of different countries in organizations, across the globe. Hands-on experience on cross cultural management would be possible through job experience. However, theoretical issues can be understood and the basic orientation to such theories is essential for today's managers.

Cross cultural management describes and compares organizational behavior across countries and cultures and perhaps most importantly, seeks to understand and improve the interaction of co-workers, clients, suppliers and alliance partners from different countries and cultures. Cross cultural management thus expands the scope of domestic management to encompass international and multinational spheres.

Research is the discovery and description of regularities in the universe, the world and in living organisms. Research helps in the development of theories to explain these regularities. Research in cross cultural management issues requires understanding the variables. Variable is any attribute or property in which organisms vary, and it must have at least two values. The common goal of cross cultural research is to understand behavioral variability across cultures. It means cross cultural research helps us obtain the answer to why and how of behavior --- how behavior varies across situations, how it differs among individuals and how it changes overtime, across the cultures. Both descriptive and inferential statistics can be used for cross cultural research.

Descriptive statics summarizes and describes the cross cultural constructs, while inferential statistics helps one understand the influence of extraneous variables in explaining cross cultural issues. Variance studies measure the dispersion, range and standard deviation. Total variance is the sum of systematic variance and error variance. Systematic variance occurs when the sum of total variability relates in a systematic fashion to variability in another variable. Error variance is that portion of total variance that is unrelated to the variables under investigation in a study. It is computed by dividing systematic variance by total variance.

In cross cultural management research, understanding of variance is most important, as through it, we can explain the cultural constructs. We also need to be sure to choose reliable and valid measures. Hence, understanding reliability and validity are very important. Again, some of the cultural constructs cannot be seen or observed; rather we believe in them. In such cases, to support our belief, we have to use reliable and valid measures.

**Cross Culture and its management with importance:**

At the foundation of all the cultures mentioned, lies the individual's culture. It is individuals who ultimately form the culture of an organization. The values they embody as members of an organization are formed partially through the family, social and national environment, and partially through the professional, organizational and corporate culture.

It is up to management to take into account the diversity of people in an organization and to manage their cultural differences. In an International context, however, what does cross-cultural management means?

Nancy Adler (2002) gives a definition about what cross-cultural management is about:

Cross-Cultural management explains the behavior of people in organizations around the world and shows people how to work in organizations with employees and client populations from many different cultures. Cross-cultural management describes organizational behavior within countries and cultures; compares organizational behavior across countries and cultures; and, perhaps most important, seeks to understand and improve the interaction of co-workers, managers, executives, clients, suppliers and alliance partners from countries and cultures around the world.

The importance of cross-cultural management is evident in a world where all kinds of co-operation between companies in many countries is on the increase. Whether these are mergers, takeovers, partnerships or strategic alliances, they all need to be analyzed in cultural terms, not only to determine where benefit can be gained but also where difficulties may be encountered when companies are working together.

**Another Definition:**

**Cross cultural management involves managing work teams in ways that considers the differences in cultures, practices and preferences of consumers in a global or international business context.**

**Concept of Cross cultural Research:**

Cross cultural management is and emerging area of research. There are highly differing views on cross cultural issues. Fonataine (2007) argues that most of the studies on cross cultural aspects have focused on differences in values between groups. The idea was to separate people into different cultural groups as they nurture different values. Cultural homogeneity was considered as the right solution for ensuring proper integration. This approach was discarded by Fonataine who contended that understanding cultural as also cross cultural management issues could be possible,

when we study the working of cross cultural managers. As per Fonataine, Cross cultural management:

- Allows researchers and practitioners to know where they and others are coming from.
- Allows researchers to identify under researched areas.
- Throws new light on emerging areas like knowledge management and systems theory and their role in shaping the culture of people.

The knowledge management approach, proposed by Holden (2002), criticized the anthropological framework of cultural analysis. Knowledge management facilitates an organization to shape the knowledge (both explicit and inherent) of employees and accordingly shape their culture. Inherent knowledge has to be gained by employees through personal experience. It includes beliefs, mental models and perceptions, which constitute the essential ingredients of culture.

It is a scientific method of comparative research which focuses on systematic comparisons that compares culture to culture and explicitly aims to answer questions about the incidence, distributions, and causes of cultural variation and complex problems across a wide domain, usually worldwide. Such questions include:

- What are the patterns of coherence and sources of coherence in the practices, beliefs, social roles, norms, expressions, and forms of organization and conflict in a) human communities? b) Other forms of groups? c) Other extra-community trajectories ?
- How much of that coherence is due to a) Common history, language, identity? b) Common or recurrent modes of adaptation to recurrent human problems? c) recurrent consistencies in how language, discourse and expression, social and d) Roles, norms and organizations constructed into shared cultures ?
- What are the patterns of decoherence and disjuncture, misunderstanding and conflict that arise given the a) multiplicity and overlapping of cultures? and b) cleavages and disjuncture of cultures?

Cross-cultural research strives to arrive at reliably supported explanations of why things are the way they are (Hempel, 1965; Nagel, 1961)

To compare culture is not to deny their individual uniqueness. Cross-culturalists do not deny the uniqueness of culture; uniqueness and similarity are always present, simultaneously. Cross-cultural research deals with what is general, what is true for some or even all human cultures.

Results of Cross-cultural research are generalizable to all types of society from a small hamlet with population in the hundreds or a few thousands to urban societies with population in the hundreds of millions. It helps researchers to make general (cross-cultural) statements about the similarities and differences of cultures and to identify what may be universal and variable about human cultures, as well as to discover reasons why the variation exists.

Cross-cultural psychologists generally collect primary data, they do not make use of secondary data derived from national surveys on issues such as crime rate, gross national product, etc. however, their comparison tend to be limited often only to two-cultures (the investigator's own and one other).

### **Culture, the basis for business ethics:**

There is common agreement that a country's culture is directly related to the ethical behavior of its managers. The behavior is exhibited in two main ways: first, by overt actions such as public or corporate statements and actions about ethical behavior; second, by the collection of the group of ethical attitudes and values.

One problem in dealing with culture is that it is difficult to define universally. It represents the values and patterns of thinking, feeling and acting in an identifiable group. While many nations possess the infrastructure of modern, developed civilization, culture represents how people in the civilization interact with one another.

### **Research Methods in Cross Cultural Management:**

Culture is a matrix of behaviors, beliefs, practices and values that typify a particular group of people. Culture deals with a variety of factors that influence all aspects of behavior. It emphasizes on group influence rather than individual variability. Cross culture is about the explanation of differences and sometimes similarities in the behavior of people belonging to different cultures using the scientific method as practiced in psychology. It focuses on the individual in the group context. Models of cross cultural research are detailed statements of the relationship between variables that assist in the prediction of important phenomena. Here, dependent variables are the factors that are influenced by independent variables. Models of Cross cultural research can specify the direction of influence.

Research on cross cultural management could be descriptive or inferential. Descriptive cross cultural research focuses on describing phenomena in a specific sample of people or describing differences between two or more specific samples of people. Inferential research, on the other hand, studies specific samples of people to understand how phenomena operate in large groups of individuals. Descriptive cross cultural research studies have been extensively carried out

by different scholars, but the differences are so enormous that a new research can only add to the list of differences.

On the other hand, inferential studies and models help us analyze cross cultural issues. Irrespective of these studies, we can classify the type of cross cultural research into Emic or Etic. Emic Models view behavior as culture specific while Etic models consider behavior as universal. Like any other social science research, cross cultural research also follows a definitive pattern. The research construct may be used to study the behavioral phenomena that may not be directly observed.

A limited cross cultural research verifies the validity of standards or indigenous psychological constructs. A broad cross cultural research, on the other hand, views culture as a relevant psychological construct to build models and use it as a variable.

The most important methodological problem in cross cultural management research is bias. Bias may be stimulus based, methodological and in choosing the universe. Bias may drag us to incorrect interpretations of results and may also have adverse influence on the people on whom the research is being carried out.

### **Methodological Problems:**

Some of the methodological problems in cross cultural management research are as follows:

- Design or measurement bias for improper definition of the universe.
- Not selecting the appropriate behavioral parameters.

The most common and difficult problems for cross cultural researches are, however, non-identical universes sampled with selective measures attributes. A Cross cultural researcher, therefore, requires guarding against all the above methodological problems, while framing his/her research.

### **Cultural conflict:**

Newspapers contain stories highlighting the domestic unethical behavior of managers. The behavior includes:

- illegal campaign contributions;
- bribery;
- knowingly selling defective goods;
- hiding information; and
- other troubling acts.

These instances represent individual or organizational misconduct; there is an ethical framework that is not followed. The more serious problem entails two different ethical standards meeting in a business transaction. This situation is characterized as a cultural conflict.

While considering countries that do not share a common cultural heritage, the challenges can be even greater.

### **Cross Cultural Analysis:**

The basic premise of cross-cultural analysis is that statistical cross-cultural comparisons are possible because cultures will, out of necessity of perpetuation, have some traits in common with each other within clusters of characteristic behavior or patterns of traits. The early basis for cross cultural analysis was strongly based in the concept of Cultural Revolution. The premise of the cultural evolutionists was that all societies progress through an identical series of distinct evolutionary stages. Cross-cultural analysis requires testing of hypotheses drawing statistical correlations based on the assumption of the existence of universal patterns.

### **Ethics:**

Ethics are the basic [concepts](#) and [fundamental principles](#) of decent human [conduct](#). It includes [study](#) of universal [values](#) such as the essential equality of all [men](#) and women, human or [natural rights](#), obedience to the [law](#) of [land](#), [concern](#) for [health](#) and [safety](#) and, increasingly, also for the [natural environment](#).

Primary cultural values are transmitted to a culture's members by parenting and socialization, education, and religion. There are also secondary factors that affect ethical behavior. They include differences in the systems of laws across nations, accepted human resource management systems, organizational culture, and professional cultures and codes of conduct.

### **Ethical Issues in Cross Cultural Management:**

Our objective is not to point out which practices are ethical and which are unethical. Our objective is to understand the differences and outline a means of managing them. What is important is that some cultures might view these practices with different levels of condemnation. Therein lies the problem for managers engaged in cross-cultural transactions. How do they anticipate and manage differences in ethical behavior rooted in differences in culture?

In fact, it has now become the standard practice to ensure compliance with ethics. Some of the ethical guidelines can be listed as follows:

1. **Informed Consent:** People can only be the research sample or subject when they give their consent for participation in the research. This would be possible only when all the

information is provided to them as accurately as possible so that they can make an informed choice to become a research sample or subject.

2. **Maintenance of Confidentiality:** Sample persons in cross-cultural management research should also have the right to privacy and confidentiality.

Some organizations also develop an ethics committee to review compliance of ethical guidelines. In such cases, the available ethical guidelines should be followed by the cross-cultural researchers.

### **Ethical Issues in Cross Cultural Research:**

Ethical Issues in cross-cultural research involve issues such as values and worldviews, definitions, research design, informed consent, entry into the field, confidentiality, approaches to data collection, participant roles, ownership of data, writing, representation, and dissemination of results.

With respect to values and worldview, Hudson & Taylor Henley, (2001); Sue & Sue, (1990) noted that marginalized and minority participants frequently report feeling misunderstood by researchers from mainstream (Euro-American) culture. Rapport building can be used by the researcher to foster relationships with minority participants (Stubben, 2001; LaFromboise, 1993; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1990). A key to understanding and conducting research with participants from cultural minorities is the utilization of a systems approach (Sue & Sue, 1990). For example, Aboriginal families tend to include extended family members, place importance on collective identity and strong tribal affiliations (Thomason, 1999). Pedersen (1991) suggests that no two families, or groups, are ever culturally the same; each family internalizes aspects of the cultural norms of the group in its own way. Factors such as acculturation, class, education, and ethnic identity underpin such within and between group differences (Axelson, 1990). Religion and spirituality are often extremely important factors in the lives of ethnic minority clients, and can provide a valuable source of social connection and self-esteem in times of stress or crisis (Malone, 2000).

Herring (1999) and Atkinson, Morten & Sue (1993) also suggest that socioeconomic concerns, societal discrimination and poverty are some of the issues faced by many people from ethnic/cultural minorities. The impact of underemployed and unemployed parents on marginalized youth is tremendous; it has been suggested that the most immediate effect of poverty is restricted access to environmental resources with which to improve lack of health care services and education, substandard housing, and inadequate nutrition (Rivers & Morrow, 1995).

These above factors related to cultural context and social environmental issues are salient issues in psychosocial development, and can significantly impact the mastery of key developmental tasks in childhood and adolescence (Pedersen, 1991). Research investigations must, therefore, be based on an understanding of diverse cultural dynamics and their necessary impact on psychosocial development.

Research design is another ethical issue in cross-cultural study. It focuses on the incongruence which may exist between researchers' views or theoretical frameworks and those of the group or culture in any research project. Where differences exist between researcher and participant, they must be respected, and care must be exercised to not project one's own values onto the research process, nor judge a participant's behaviour that varies from one's own culturally sanctioned standards (Lee, 1995). For example, mental health professionals and researchers have tended to adopt Western European, largely male cultural definitions of what constitutes healthy and normal functioning (Thomason, 1999). Self-reliance, self-actualization, assertiveness, autonomy, insight, and resistance to stress are seen as some of the tenets of healthy mental functioning (Sue & Sue, 1990). These are the goals toward which clients are often encouraged to strive; these qualities are not, however, valued equally in all cultures. For example, effective healing for First Nations means working on interconnectedness rather than autonomy, which is often the goal for individual focused therapy (Appleton & Dykeman, 1996). Therefore when considering research procedures or instruments across cultures, it is important to take varied meanings into account (Peavy, 1998).

Educational attainment and achievement is another area that is greatly impacted by cultural definitions and expectations for success in life and work. For instance, some collectively oriented cultures view individual educational and vocational achievement as important only when it positively impacts the group, in contrast to a typical Euro-North American emphasis on individual growth and goal attainment (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993). When working with participants in a cross-cultural situation, researchers must be aware of differences related to local norms, mainstream culture knowledge, language proficiency skills, educational opportunities, and culturally appropriate role models (Daily, 1988; LaFromboise, 1993; Martin & Farris, 1994). Additionally, minority and marginalized groups face limited access to educational and employment opportunities (Diller, 1999). Research interpretation and recommendations can thus be impacted by factors such access to educational and employment opportunities, or socioeconomic status (Herring, 1999).

In terms of informed consent, cross cultural research and interaction requires a special definition (Piquemal, 2001). In some cultures, ethics is a more fluid concept that requires constant reexamination and redefinition; therefore informed consent must be viewed and implemented as an on-going process. That is consent must be asked for and given at almost every step of the research process to assure that it is valid and that the participants remain fully informed and cognizant of each aspect of the research proceedings. The standard letter of consent that participants read and sign is only one part of this process, and indeed, can act as a barrier to truly informed participation unless fully explained in understandable language.

The source of consent for many marginalized groups also requires special consideration and so must be more clearly and operationally defined. This must be done on a case-by-case basis because each ethnic/cultural community or group has a strong and self-created identity that is each unique and different from other cultures' notions of self-identity. Identity, as community research itself, must be viewed through a process of interpretation which focuses more on the importance of the relationship and experience itself rather than its content (Piquemal, 2001).

Entry into the field in research across cultures requires researchers to proceed in culturally sensitive ways. Respect and continuous communication are two essential elements in this process (Mtonga, 1986). Asking, rather than telling, and an on-going consultation with knowledgeable key informants in the community will help to build mutually beneficial research partnerships.

On the area of approaches to data collection, issues such as community damage and inaccurate findings have been identified as major concerns with ethnic/racial minority participants (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991). Culturally appropriate research affords a method that allows socially legitimate collective knowledge to be used as part of the methodological framework of the research (Brandt-Castellano, 1986). To Parlee (1983), "Psychological knowledge would be dramatically changed if it were consistently developed through interaction with its 'subjects' and its intended audiences instead of being developed with professional colleagues in mind and 'given away'" (p. 1).

Another issue is community ethics which deals with concerns about power centre around who makes decisions about research processes, methodology, data collection and analysis. In a research relationship, community ethics is a concept that means that a collaborative and agreed-upon decision-making process exists that enables communities to hold the power the research (Hart, 1995). However, in terms of research ethics, the community may not always have the information or knowledge to make sound ethical decisions which the academic researcher is, at least, ethically bound to consider. For instance, in a community-based research project, the co-researchers from a community may formulate questions for a survey that the academic research

questioned ethically, but the researcher may respect the community-researchers' power in the process.

**Conclusion:**

In the present competitive scenario, the Cross-Cultural Management Research plays a pivotal role to understand behavioral variability across organizational culture. While a research is being carried out, it faces various issues in which ethics is one of the major aspects. As we have already discussed in the above research, we need to be sure to choose reliable and valid measures in spite of all the cultural conflictual pressures. Hence, the ethical issues in cross cultural management research have started gaining importance worldwide, as such issues were often ignored while researches were being conducted. In fact, it has now become the standard practice to ensure compliance with ethics. The basic objective of this article was to enlighten the ethical issues involved in Cross-Cultural management research which we have tried to cover as much as possible.

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