

Crosscultural Differences in Perceptions of Justice: Consequences for Academia

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Abstract: *Most universities around the world have experienced an increase in international student enrolment. Cultural diversity may be greatly beneficial, but if not managed properly it may lead to problems in the classroom and beyond. The challenges associated with cultural diversity – such as differences in languages, management styles, protocols and traditions – have been widely discussed in the literature. This article focuses on a less obvious issue, crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice and their consequences for academic settings. Depending on their cultural background, students' opinions about the fairness of academic rewards, punishments and procedures may differ substantially. Our arguments and recommendations are based on generalisation of findings from 98 empirical studies that explored relationships between culture and issues of justice. We support our discussion with a series of examples typical for the college environment. The study may be of interest to a wide range of readers, including teachers, educational administrators, students and business practitioners.*

Introduction

The effects of differences in perceptions of justice have been broadly discussed in the literature. It has been found that perception of justice significantly influences productivity (e.g. Giacobbe-Miller, Miller & Victorov 1998), preferences for pay and bonus systems (e.g. Marin 1981), work satisfaction (e.g. Janssen 2001), pay satisfaction (e.g. DeConinck & Stilwell 2003), motivation (e.g. McFarlin & Sweeney 2000), organisational commitment (Johnson, Korsgaard & Sapienza 2002), conflict resolution styles (e.g. Tyler, Lind & Huo 2000), organisational citizenship behaviour (Moorman 1991), teamwork dynamics (Kirkman & Shapiro 2000), and many other aspects of organisational life. At the same time, it has been well documented that one's cultural background greatly affects one's opinion about what constitutes fair decisions and decision-making procedures (e.g. Leung & Morris 2000; Sama & Papamarcos 2000). With the rapid growth in the number of companies going international and diversification of the local labour force, issues involving crosscultural differences in perception of justice are becoming more salient.

Globalisation has touched not only the business sector but also academia. The composition of the student body in institutions of higher education around the world has become increasingly diverse. American, Canadian, Australian and Western European colleges and universities have experienced the highest international student enrolment. With more than 500,000 international students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the USA, and

around 250,000 in each of Europe, Canada and Australia, the percentage of foreign students varies between roughly 20 and 30 per cent, with the numbers much higher for technical majors and those in graduate programmes (AUCC 2005; IIE 2005). Moreover, the number of students in Western European and North American colleges and universities who come from distant and more culturally different regions such as Asia and the Middle East is increasing rapidly (Brem & Thierry 2004; Rowney 2006). The larger cultural distance (Kogut & Singh 1988) further intensifies the effects of cultural diversity on student group dynamics (Thomas 1999; Thomas, Ravlin & Au 2005).

International students benefit institutions of higher education in many ways. First, through worldwide recruitment universities can attract and retain the best available human talent. Second, one of the goals of modern education is to prepare students for work in the global environment. Opportunities to interact with classmates from different countries allow students to obtain first-hand experience of work in multicultural settings. Furthermore, diversity of experiences and backgrounds in the classroom alleviates groupthink (Janis 1982; Aldag & Fuller 1993). As a result, more ideas are generated and more opinions are voiced, enriching in-class discussions and project group meetings. Finally, international students are a significant source of revenue for institutions as well as for host societies in general. For example, according to the Association of International Educators, overseas students bring over \$13 billion dollars to the US economy annually (AIE 2005).

While the benefits of diversity are numerous, crosscultural diversity also poses various challenges. Differences in learning styles (Braman 1998; Anakwe, Kessler & Christensen 1999; Franchi 2002), languages and nonverbal communication (Taras & Rowney 2007), conflicts due to stereotyping (Stephan, Ageyev, Stephan & Abalakina 1993; Sakata 1995), and representation and status inequalities (Blau 1977; Toh & Denisi 2003) are some of the most obvious obstacles confronting international groups, and there are many more issues to consider. This paper deals with a less commonly discussed consequence of culture, that is, crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice and their effects on processes in the classroom and on student project teams.

Traditionally, justice has been studied exclusively in the workplace context. It may appear that the issue of crosscultural differences in perceptions of fairness is irrelevant to the university environment. Unlike employees, students do not receive salary or perks; they do not compete for promotions, more convenient schedules, and vacation in high season; and generally students are not subject to the rewards and punishments that are common in the workplace. Nevertheless, the issues of justice are as salient in academic settings as in the workplace. For instance, depending on cultural background, students may have radically different opinions about what constitutes a fair grade, who should receive a scholarship, how one should be punished for cheating on an exam, or how a conflict between a student and a professor should be resolved.

This article analyses the consequences of crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice in academic settings. Although our study did not involve data collection and hypothesis testing, the existing large body of literature on crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice provides a highly consistent set of findings in this area. Our arguments are built upon findings from 98 empirical studies that addressed issues of justice in crosscultural contexts (see Table 1 for a summary). Due to space restrictions, the complete list of reviewed studies cannot be provided in this paper; however, it can be obtained from the authors upon request.

Table 1: Summary of findings of 98 empirical studies that explored relationships between culture and issues of justice

	Individualism		Power distance		Masculinity avoidance		Uncertainty					
	+	ns	-	+	ns	-	+	ns				
Distributive justice (total number of reviewed papers: 47) Preference for equality rule equality rule need/generosity rule seniority rule	35	5	3	3	4	5	8	4	1	4	2	
	3	4	15	2	4	6	1	1	4	-	-	
	1	0	9	3	0	0	0	0	2	-	-	
	1	1	4	3	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	
Procedural justice (total number of reviewed papers: 52) Sensitivity to fairness of decision-making procedures Preference for more involvement in decision-making/ participative management less involvement/directive management Conflict avoidance Tendency to compromise Preference for third-party involvement (mediation) Likelihood of confrontational conflict resolution style Concern for maintaining good interpersonal relationships	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	-	-	
	8	1	1	2	1	15	4	1	0	0	5	
	0	0	22	18	1	0	0	0	11	8	1	
	1	2	16	4	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	
	0	4	14	1	1	1	1	1	2	-	-	
	1	1	8	4	1	0	1	3	2	-	-	
	3	1	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	-	-	
	1	2	13	1	3	1	0	0	4	-	-	
	Retributive justice (total number of reviewed papers: 18) Support for more severe punishment overall Support for more severe punishment for in-groups Ethical sensitivity Internal failure attribution bias (as opposed to external) Preference for universal application of rules/punishment	1	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		0	0	3	2	2	6	1	1	2	6	3
11		2	1	2	2	1	4	0	0	-	-	
12		2	1	0	1	5	4	0	0	-	-	
3		0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	-	-	
Reaction to injustice (total number of reviewed papers: 4) loyalty/acceptance neglect voice exit		0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	-
	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	-	-	
	2	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	-	-	
	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	-	-	

+ Number of studies that found a statistically significant positive relationship;
 ns Number of studies that found no statistically significant relationship;
 - Number of studies that found a statistically significant negative relationship.

We first offer a brief overview of the theoretical framework of culture that will be used in our discussion. Then we analyse the effects of crosscultural differences on perceptions of distributive, procedural and retributive justice. Built around a series of examples describing situations that are typical in academic settings, our discussion provides insights into what could cause misunderstandings and negatively affect group dynamics and how the issues should be managed. While there is no 'right' way to handle such challenges, our discussion offers suggestions for minimising the negative and maximising the positive effects of cultural diversity in academic settings. It may be of interest to educators, academic administration staff and policy-makers, and students, as well as corporate managers.

Theoretical Framework for Analysing Effects of Culture

Hofstede (1980) was one of the first to offer a scientifically founded model of culture, although attempts to quantify various aspects of culture can be traced further back in time (e.g. Kuhn & McPartland 1954; Ghiselli & Porter 1966; England 1967; Haire, Rokeach 1973). Hofstede's work was based on a large dataset representing over 50 countries, and identified four bipolar dimensions of national culture: power distance, individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity. Later, long–short-term orientation (also known as Confucian dynamism) was added to the set as the fifth dimension (Hofstede & Bond 1988).

Hofstede's dimensions are defined as follows. Power distance is 'the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions ... accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede & Bond 1988: 10). In other words, people from high power-distance cultures are more comfortable with a larger status differential than those from low power-distance cultures. According to Hofstede (1980, 2001), Asian and Latin American countries score high on power distance, whereas countries of Western Europe and Northern America are characterised by low power-distance cultures.

Individualism is the degree to which people prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups (Hofstede 1994: 6). In individualist cultures, it is assumed that any person looks primarily after his or her own interest and the interest of his or her immediate family (husband, wife and children). Collectivist cultures assume that any person, through birth and possible later events, belongs to one or more tight 'in-groups' from which he or she cannot detach. The in-group (whether extended family, clan or organisation) protects the interest of its members, but in turn it expects their permanent loyalty (Hofstede 1986: 307). It is important to highlight the existence of clear differentiation between in-group and out-group membership in collectivist cultures. Collectivists are highly loyal to their in-group (such as family or immediate friends), but they may completely ignore interests of their out-group members or other groups. According to Hofstede (2001), Western countries tend to score high on individualism, while Eastern cultures are mainly collectivist.

Masculinity–femininity indicates 'the relative importance of ... earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge' (Hofstede 1983: 55). People in masculine cultures value such behaviours as assertiveness, achievement, and acquisition of wealth. However, for people in feminine cultures, caring for others, social support and the quality of life are important. As with individualism, masculine values prevail in Western industrialised societies, while Eastern countries are typically characterised by feminine cultures (Hofstede 2001).

Uncertainty avoidance refers to how comfortable people feel in regards to ambiguity. Representatives from high uncertainty-avoidance cultures prefer formal rules and clear guidelines and indicate low tolerance for the unknown. Based on Hofstede's (2001) indexes,

Western Europe and Northern America are characterised by low to moderate levels of uncertainty avoidance, while Asian and Latin American cultures tend to be oriented to high uncertainty avoidance.

Finally, people with a short-term orientation expect 'quick results [and] consider "persistency" not an important personality trait' (Hofstede 2001: 360). They like to spend and rarely experience a sense of shame. In contrast, cultures with a long-term orientation emphasise persistence and perseverance; a sense of shame is common, and the ability to save and be thrifty is valued. Hofstede and Bond (1988) describe Eastern cultures as long-term oriented and Western societies as generally short-term oriented. Of note, we were unable to find any study that explored the effects of long-short-term orientation dimension on perceptions of justice. While this dimension is excluded from our analysis, it warrants further attention.

Following Hofstede's study, dozens of alternative models of culture have been offered by scholars from around the world (for a summary see Taras 2007). Of these, the models by Trompenaars (1993), Schwartz (1994), Maznevski and DiStefano (1995), Inglehart (1997) and the GLOBE team (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta 2004) are the most widely recognised. Nevertheless, despite a number of limitations of his IBM study (Roberts & Boyacigiller 1984; Schwartz 1990; McSweeney 2002; Voronov & Singer 2002), Hofstede's theoretical framework has remained popular, and his cultural dimensions are present in one form or another in virtually all subsequent models (Taras & Roney 2006), albeit often supplemented with several additional cultural factors, such as gender egalitarianism (House et al. 2004), relationship to nature (Maznevski & DiStefano 1995), hedonism and securing (Schwartz 1994), or universal-particular and affective-neutral (Trompenaars 1993).

Given the huge body of literature that has been based on Hofstede's model, as well as a generally universal support for the model's validity and utility, our discussion revolves mainly around Hofstede's cultural framework. Moreover, most of the alternative constructs have been shown to be empirically related to Hofstede's dimensions (Hofstede 2001). Since additional cultural constructs are not likely to explain much additional variance in the perceptions of justice, we decided in favour of brevity and parsimony and limited our predictive cultural constructs to those from Hofstede's model.

Effects of Cultural Values on Perceptions of Justice[sara]

Models of justice and fairness typically differentiate between *distributive*, *procedural* and *retributive* justice (e.g. Deutsch 1985; Folger & Konovsky 1989). Distributive justice addresses the perceived fairness of resource allocation. The decision-making process and the implementation of decisions are captured by models of procedural justice. Retributive justice is concerned with the perceived fairness of punishment and sanctions. Reaction to injustice is usually discussed separately, although this concept closely relates to procedural and retributive justice. We analyse the effect of differences in cultural values on each of these constructs separately.

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice relates to the perceived fairness of reward allocation. The typology of allocation rules is as follows:

- *equity rule* – rewards are distributed proportionally to individual contributions;

- *equality rule* – everyone's reward is identical regardless of individual contributions;
- *seniority rule* – outcomes are distributed proportionally to seniority (age, position in the hierarchy, or number of years in the group);
- *need rule* – outcomes are distributed proportionally to individual needs;
- *generosity rule* – one's own outcome should not exceed that of others (Deutsch 1985).

We found 47 papers that explored effects of culture on perceptions of distributive fairness. As summarised in Table 1, numerous earlier empirical studies have fairly consistently shown that, compared to their counterparts, people from individualist and masculine cultures tend to favour equity rule (e.g. Ramamoorthy 1997; Chen, Meindl & Hui 1998). On the other hand, collectivist and feminine cultures emphasise equality (e.g. Leung & Iwawaki 1988; He, Chen & Zhang 2004) and need/generosity rules (e.g. Murphy-Berman, Berman, Singh, Pachauri & Kumar 1984; Giacobbe-Miller et al. 1998), especially with in-group members (e.g. Hui, Triandis & Yee 1991). Cultures that are characterised by high power distance, often in combination with collectivism, as for example in Japan, typically prefer seniority rule (e.g. Ramamoorthy & Carroll 1998; Parks, Conlon, Ang & Bontempo 1999). As shown in Table 1, the findings on other possible relationships are either inconclusive or conflicting.

Crosscultural differences in relation to distributive justice can come into play in various academic situations. First, cultural differences may affect perceptions about grade fairness. Based on the assumption that collectivists tend to favour equality and individualists prefer equity (Murphy-Berman et al. 1984; Ramamoorthy 1997; Chen et al. 1998), it can be expected that, compared to students from individualist societies, students from collectivist cultures will be more comfortable with little variation in grades among individuals, even if some students do noticeably better on assignments than others. In contrast, individualists are expected to favour a grade system that clearly reflects an individual's quality of work, even if it means that some students will receive grades significantly lower or higher than those of other students. In addition, it can be expected that collectivists, who favour generosity rule, may experience a sense of guilt if their marks are substantially higher than those of their peers (Miller 2002). Moreover, being accustomed to the generosity rule in resource allocation, students from collectivist and/or feminine cultures are more likely to expect a slight grade increase, if the final mark falls between grades, for example A- and B+.

Given that in collectivist and feminine cultures the need rule is commonplace (Murphy-Berman et al. 1984; Giacobbe-Miller et al. 1998), it is more likely that students from these cultures who do not do well on a test (and need a better grade) will expect to be given a make-up test option so that they can improve their grades. For example, in schools and universities in the countries of the former Soviet Union, which are characterised by a collectivist orientation and need-based resource allocation, a make-up exam is frequently not an option but a requirement. After failing an exam, students are expected to write it again, frequently several times, until they receive a passing grade. At least in their first years of education in Western countries, students from the former USSR frequently find it very unfair that they are not given a chance to take the exam again to improve their grade.

The same patterns of behaviour can be expected in peer evaluations of individual contributions to team project assignments, often used by professors as a component of the final grade for a course. Generalising the findings from earlier studies that explored crosscultural differences in distributive justice (e.g. Leung & Iwawaki 1988; Ramamoorthy

1997), it may be proposed that, compared to students from individualistic cultures, those from collectivist cultures are more likely to provide similar evaluations to their team members, regardless of variations in individual input. In contrast, evaluations provided by students from individualist cultures are more likely to vary depending on individual contribution. In other words, collectivists are more likely to favour equal grades for each team member, whereas individualists tend to prefer that the grades vary in proportion to the individual contribution of each team member. It can be further hypothesised that students from collectivist countries are likely to favour the equality and generosity rules in evaluations only for their in-group members, but the equity rule for their out-group members (Murphy-Berman, Cukur & Berman 2002).

Based on the earlier findings that interpersonal relations (Matsumoto, Weissman, Preston, Brown & Kupperbusch 1997), group harmony (Kwan, Bond & Singelis 1997; Constantine, Gainor, Ahluwalia & Berkel 2003), and generosity (Hui et al. 1991) are emphasised in collectivist and/or feminine societies, it can be expected that students from these cultures are less likely to provide negative feedback in peer evaluations. In the same vein, students from collectivist and feminine cultures are more likely to expect favourable evaluations from their peers and in letters of recommendation obtained from their professors or research supervisors.

Given the persistent empirical evidence that cultural collectivism and femininity relate to higher support for the need-based allocation of rewards (e.g. Hundley & Kim 1997; Giacobbe-Miller et al. 1998), it can be expected that students from collectivist and/or feminine cultures are more likely to support decisions based on the need rule regarding distribution of scholarships, research grant allocation, opportunities to assist a professor for added income, or competition for a summer internship or job provided through the university. However, students from individualist cultures are more likely to believe that merit-based selection is appropriate (Murphy-Berman et al. 1984). Lastly, representatives from cultures characterised by high power distance and collectivism, such as Japan, may favour the seniority rule and believe that preference in resource allocation should be given to students who are older, are more advanced in the programme, or have a higher social status (Rusbult, Insko & Lin 1995; Schuler & Rogovsky 1998).

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice relates to the perceived fairness of the decision-making process. We found 52 studies that addressed the relationship between culture and procedural justice (Table 1). According to the literature, preferences for modes of decision making (e.g. Ali, Taqi & Krishnan 1997; Leung 2003), extent of involvement (e.g. Sopachitwattana 1999; Nyambegera, Sparrow & Daniels 2000), conflict resolution style (e.g. Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Pearson & Villareal 1997; Leung & Morris 2000) and interpersonal treatment (e.g. Blader, Chang & Tyler 2001) vary across cultures.

When people of different ranks are involved in the decision-making process, the most salient cultural construct in the analysis of procedural justice is that of power distance. First of all, it has been consistently found that, compared to representatives from low power-distance cultures, those with high power-distance orientation are, on average, less sensitive to the fairness of decision-making procedures (James 1993; Tyler et al. 2000). Furthermore, high power-distance orientation has been shown to relate to higher preference for directive management style (Dorfman & Howell 1988; Offermann & Hellmann 1997), and avoidance

of conflict and confrontation in general and with superiors in particular (Ohbuchi, Sato & Tedeschi 1999), as well as higher respect for decisions made by higher authorities (Tinsley & Brett 2001). On the other hand, low power-distance orientation relates to preference for participative management and decision-making (Sopachitwattana 1999; Klinsontorn 2002) and propensity to voice disagreement and challenge higher authorities in the decision-making and conflict-resolution processes (Brockner, Ackerman, Greenberg, Gelfand, Francesco, Chen et al. 2001; Morris, Williams, Leung, Larrick, Bharnagar, Li et al. 1998). A similar pattern has been consistently found for uncertainty avoidance, although fewer studies have explored the effects of this cultural construct. An interesting observation about the effect of power distance on preferred level of involvement in the decision-making process is that people with high power-distance orientation are reluctant to provide input only when a higher authority makes the decision. When the decision is being worked out among peers, active participation is also common in high power-distance cultures (Leung 2003).

Generalising these findings to academic settings, it can be expected that students from high power-distance cultures would be more willing to accept decisions made by professors or by university administration and would not expect to be consulted and involved in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, when working with peers on team assignments, students with a high power-distance orientation may display a high level of involvement in decision-making unless a formal team leader has been appointed by the class instructor or elected by the team members. In contrast, students with a low power-distance orientation are more likely to attempt to influence a professor's decisions about, for example, assignment distribution, the grading system, or the date for a rescheduled class meeting. They are also less likely to accept a decision by university administration about, for example, a tuition increase or scholarship distribution unless they have had a say. This proposition is supported by findings from studies that analysed the effects of students' cultural origin on, among others, the probability of their participation in student protests and movements (Rhoads 1998; Van Dyke 1998).

The cultural constructs of collectivism–individualism and masculinity–femininity have been shown to be relevant in explaining procedural justice perceptions when decisions are worked out amongst peers. Earlier empirical studies have consistently shown that individualists and people with masculine orientation prefer higher involvement in the decision-making process (e.g. Ramamoorthy & Carroll 1998; Lam, Chen & Schaubroeck 2002), are more likely to aggressively defend their position (e.g. Leung 1988; Gabrielidis et al. 1997), and often are ready to sacrifice interpersonal relationships to ensure a desired outcome (Leung & Lind 1986; Kwan et al. 1997). Finally, research has consistently indicated that in the decision-making process individualists are comparatively more likely to pursue personal goals, whereas collectivists are more oriented towards group interest (e.g. Mann, Radford & Kanagawa 1985; Kashima, Yamaguchi, Kim & Choi 1995).

Generalising these empirical findings to the academic context, it can be expected that students from individualist cultures are more likely to be willing to assume leadership roles in student organisations, project teams, or informal groups, as doing so may increase their chances to affect the decision-making process. Similar behaviour may be observed along the masculine–feminine culture dimension. People from achievement-oriented masculine cultures tend to prefer close involvement in decision-making, which they see as a way to achieve personal goals. On the other hand, in feminine cultures, the need for group harmony and interpersonal relations overweighs egoistic interests, leading to a less aggressive compromise-oriented style of decision-making.

Furthermore, compared to feminine cultures, masculine societies are characterised by a much higher degree of formalisation (Leung & Lind 1986; Tse, Francis & Walls 1994). This would suggest that project team members who are from masculine cultures will insist on developing and following formal decision-making procedures and fixed deadlines. In contrast, students from feminine cultures are likely to prefer an informal and more relaxed work style. Along the same line, students from masculine cultures will expect their professors to develop and strictly follow a detailed syllabus containing clear information regarding course structure, assignment requirements and grading procedures; those with a feminine orientation will be more comfortable with a working-out-the-plan-along-the-way approach.

Conflict Resolution

When individuals find themselves in a conflict situation, their cultural background may affect their preference for conflict resolution. Based on the earlier studies that explored the relationship (Table 1), a preference for adversary procedure is stronger in individualist than in collectivist societies (e.g. Leung 1988; Gabrielidis et al. 1997). Collectivists, in contrast, tend to seek animosity reduction and prefer mediation and negotiation (e.g. Leung, Au, Fernandez-Dols & Iwawaki 1992; Gire 1995). Thus, in a conflict situation, the project team members from individualist cultures are likely to attempt to resolve the conflict 'right now and right here', possibly using an insistent style. Students from collectivist cultures are likely to avoid direct confrontation and may appeal to other team members or the course instructor for mediation.

Several studies have found (e.g. Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988; Tinsley & Brett 2001) that individuals in high power-distance cultures prefer to consult higher authority when faced with a conflict. They expect the supervisor to make the final decision, which the parties involved in the conflict are unlikely to question. In contrast, people from low power-distance cultures are accustomed to 'talking over' the points of dispute between the opposing sides. Thus it can be expected that, in a conflict situation, students with low power-distance orientation will attempt to express their opinion directly and try to find a solution by discussing the problem with the opponent. In contrast, students from high power-distance cultures would probably like the professor to be involved in the matter; however, they would expect the instructor not to mediate but to make the ultimate decision.

This difference will be even more pronounced in a conflict between a student and a professor. The student from a low power-distance culture is likely to be more comfortable about presenting his or her point of view directly to the professor. Moreover, if the attempt to resolve the issue with the professor is unsuccessful, the student is unlikely to hesitate to present the issue to the dean or other administrator. Conversely, the student used to a high power distance would probably tolerate unfair treatment and avoid direct confrontation with the professor.

In addition, earlier findings indicate that masculine cultures are characterised by extensive use of formalised procedures and documented guidelines, in contrast with feminine cultures in which emotions and personal beliefs are emphasised (Bierbrauer 1992). In conflict resolution, people from feminine cultures are more likely to rely on traditions and religious norms rather than on state laws (Fontaine & Severance 1990). Thus, in a conflict situation, students with feminine cultural backgrounds are likely to use personal feelings and 'common sense' to define what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. Conversely, students with a masculine cultural orientation are likely to rely on the syllabus, student organisation bylaws, or other official documents to support their arguments.

Retributive Justice

Retributive justice relates to individuals' perception of the fairness of punishment and sanctions. In academic settings, punishment can take various forms; for example, grade deduction for late assignment submission, late registration/payment fees, unfavourable feedback from professors or peers, or disciplinary actions such as expulsion from the university. Students' perception of grades is somewhat circumstantial. They may perceive a grade to be a reward if it is higher than expected, but a punishment if it is lower. In addition, students' perception of the fairness of grades can depend on the way in which assignments are graded. There are two basic grading systems. Under the first, the grader starts at zero and awards certain points for every correct answer. The final grade is the sum of all awarded points. Under the second grading system, the grader starts at 100 per cent and subtracts points for each mistake. The final grade equals 100 per cent minus the sum of subtracted points. Although the choice of grading system does not usually affect the final grade, students are more likely to perceive their grades as punishment if the latter grading system is used.

Definition of Wrongdoing

Definition of wrongdoing has a crucial effect on individuals' perception of fairness and their reaction to perceived injustice. What may be regarded as legitimate action in one culture may be considered as highly illegitimate and deserving punishment in another culture. Therefore, the same punishment can be perceived as fair from one cultural perspective but as totally unjust from another. To avoid the problem of differences in crosscultural perceptions of (in)justice, cultural experts have been used in legal proceedings to interpret the action of the defendant from the perspective of the defendant's cultural background (Zhang 1984).

Crosscultural differences in the definition of wrongdoing are inevitable in academic settings. For example, helping a peer on the exam could be interpreted as cheating in one culture, but as being a good friend in another culture. Also, being late for a class could be considered trivial by individuals from one cultural background, yet regarded as delinquency deserving punishment by those from another. Consequently, opinions about the fairness of punishment may also differ.

Perception of Fair Punishment

According to Leung & Morris (2000), the purpose of punishment, and consequently the perception of appropriate injunction, may be viewed differently by representatives from different cultures. For example, in individualist cultures, punishment is usually seen as direct retribution. It usually involves making the wrongdoer suffer in order to compensate the victim's suffering or to pay back the value of the damage. Serious misconduct frequently leads to incapacitation, removal of the individual from the group to preclude his or her breaking the rule again. In collectivist societies, on the other hand, punishment is typically justified as a route to rehabilitation or as denunciation of the act as wrong. Frequently the wrongdoer is required to restore the relationship with the victim or to publicly acknowledge guilt and ask for forgiveness. Giving the individual a second chance or an opportunity to improve is customary. In addition, punishment of the entire group for a misconduct of a single group member is common in collectivist cultures.

While it may appear that, compared to individualists, collectivists will tend to justify a lighter form of punishment, this is not the case. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that collectivists tend to be 'soft' only on their in-group members. When dealing with out-group individuals, collectivists are likely to display the judgement patterns typical of

individualists (e.g. Leung 1988; Gomez, Kirkman & Shapiro 2000). In other words, a collectivist's perception of fairness appears to vary depending upon the subject.

Numerous studies have explored crosscultural differences in attribution styles and perceived locus of control (e.g. Krull, Loy, Lin, Wang, Chen & Zhao 1999; Carpenter 2000). The findings typically indicate that, in individualist cultures, a failure is usually attributed to an individual's internal properties, such as lack of skills or insufficient preparation. In collectivist cultures, however, a failure is usually believed to be caused by external, uncontrollable factors (Table 1). Generalising these findings to the academic context, we suggest that students with an individualist orientation would perceive a low grade to be unfair if they had put considerable effort into preparing for the test but still scored low. When discussing the grade with the professor, individualists are likely to argue that they deserve a better grade because they worked very hard. On the other hand, collectivists would blame external societal factors such as poor teaching, ambiguous requirements, or lack of help in preparation for the test. If appealing for a better grade, collectivists are likely to argue that they misunderstood the expectations and requirement, or that the test covered some material that was not adequately delivered in class.

Another cultural construct that is important in analysis of perceptions of injustice, but not included in Hofstede's crosscultural model, is that of universalism-particularism. Universalists believe that all individuals falling under a rule should be treated the same. In contrast, particularists may vary their treatment depending on who the person is and what the circumstances are (Trompenaars 1993). It has also been shown that individualism is closely related to universalist orientation, while collectivists are often willing to make exceptions from rules for their in-groups (e.g. Roeder & Hannover 2002; Vitell, Paolillo & Thomas 2003).

Based on these assumptions, it can be hypothesised that students from universalistic cultures are likely to accept, for example, grade deductions for late submission or higher fees for late payment, regardless of the reason for the delay. On the other hand, students from particularistic cultures are likely to perceive the penalties as unjust if exceptional circumstances caused the delay.

Reaction to Injustice

What happens when, after going through multiple stages of conflict resolution, those involved still perceive the final decision as unfair? According to numerous studies, if individuals believe a verdict to be unfair, their response to the perceived injustice may be greatly affected by their cultural background (e.g. Blader et al. 2001; Brockner et al. 2001). Basically, the response to perceived injustice may be either psychological (being upset, feeling angry) or behavioural (taking an overt action). Further classifications of responses to perceived injustice usually differentiate between loyalty, neglect, voice and exit (Hirschman 1970). In the academic context, a loyal reaction to perceived injustice would be acceptance of the decision. A reaction of neglect would involve decreased diligence, effort and participation. An example of a voice reaction would be active protest or student strike. Finally, those choosing the exit reaction might either drop out or transfer to another course, programme or institution.

The relationship between culture and reaction to injustice has been explored in a few studies – we found only four. However, the findings of the empirical studies have been quite consistent (Table 1). To summarise, high power distance has been found to relate positively

to a loyal or accepting reaction to perceived injustice, and negatively to a reaction of neglect or voice. The relationship between power distance and exit seems to be insignificant. Individualism and masculinity have been found to relate to a higher probability of reaction by exit and voice, and a lower probability of reaction by neglect, while findings for loyalty or acceptance are inconclusive. Unfortunately, we found no studies that empirically tested the effects of uncertainty avoidance on reaction to injustice. In addition, it has been found that behavioural and often violent reactions are comparatively more common in cultures scoring high on tradition of honour (Perisiany 1965; Bourgois 1995).

Generalising these findings to the university environment, students from a high power-distance culture will be less likely to question grades or challenge decisions, even if they consider them unjust. However, although students from high power distance are unlikely to react overtly in response to perceived unfair treatment, they may reduce their effort and lose interest in participating in class and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, students from individualist and masculine cultures are less likely to tolerate perceived injustice; they would be more comfortable with asking the professor to review a grade or a decision that they perceive to be unfair. They can also be expected to tolerate a professor's critical remarks and negative feedback, even if they perceive them to be unjust. Although perceived unfairness may decrease the satisfaction of students from individualist and masculine cultures with their professors or institutions, it is unlikely to affect their diligence adversely. Instead they are more likely to actively challenge the decisions that they perceive to be unfair. When they perceive the final resolution to be unjust, students from individualistic and masculine societies are most likely to actively question the decision, even to the point of organising student protests. They are also more likely to drop out or transfer to another institution, either overtly as a form of protest or simply to avoid the need to accept the situation that is perceived as unjust. Furthermore, given that feminine cultures emphasise interpersonal harmony and relations (Hofstede 1980), it could be expected that students from these cultures would try to maintain a friendly relationship with the professor even if they failed the course. For students from masculine, achievement-oriented cultures, low grades or failure could result in hatred of the professor.

In some Latin cultures, the code of honour prescribes a response of violence to affronts to self or in-group members (Perisiany 1965). Similar behaviour can be observed in some subcultures in the USA (Bourgois 1989, 1995). Students who grew up with these values could be expected to react overtly to perceived unjust punishment imposed by the class instructor or university administration or to negative evaluations by educators or peers.

Conclusions

Students in universities and colleges that have a high percentage of internationals have a unique opportunity to obtain first-hand experience as members of an international team. Cultural diversity in the classroom prevents groupthink, enriches discussion through the generation of more original ideas, and ultimately should increase the quality of the educational process. However, groups that involve international students and/or faculty members are likely to face numerous challenges stemming from language differences, varying learning and working styles, stereotypes, and many more. Such challenges can hinder the group dynamics and learning process and lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

This paper addresses several possible consequences of crosscultural variations in perceptions of justice in academic settings. We have discussed how cultural differences in

interpreting and perceiving fairness can affect the emotional and behavioural responses of students in situations that involve the distribution of rewards and punishments.

When dealing with conflict, it is tempting to accuse one's opponent of being 'wrong'. However, thinking in terms of 'right' and 'wrong' is usually inappropriate when a conflict involves people of different cultural backgrounds. What seems 'wrong' in one culture may appear perfectly 'right' in another, not because one culture is 'wrong' and the other one is 'right', but because they are simply different.

This paper does not provide specific prescriptions for dealing with crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice. Instead, we have focused on increasing awareness about the causes and possible consequences of crosscultural differences in opinions about fairness. Most conflicts are caused by a failure to understand the opponent's point of view on the subject. Dealing with a crosscultural conflict is much more complex, as the differences are not only in attitudes but also in definitions of fairness and appropriateness of procedures, outcomes and responses to perceived injustice.

The following recommendations are directed to educational administrators, teachers and educational policy-makers. To prevent prejudice and a narrow-minded approach to handling disagreement and conflict, educators need to increase awareness of crosscultural differences in perceptions of justice. These issues should be included not only in orientations for international students and faculty, but also in those for locals. Dispute resolution is a two-way street, and joint effort is required to minimise losses and benefit the learning process. It is important to note that, because newcomers are usually overwhelmed with information, discussions about possible future misunderstandings and conflict included in their initial orientations may appear less relevant and thus may not be taken seriously. Additional training may be required later in the school year. The more appropriate time for such awareness training would probably be closer to the end of the semester, when exam stress, and consequently conflict, is more frequent.

Communication is always vital to those handling any conflict situations. Communication is even more critical to those handling a crosscultural conflict, as it may not only involve differences in opinions about the subject of the conflict, but also differences in values and preferences for how the dispute should be handled. Thus schools should develop policies that facilitate communication between conflicting sides. It is important to help the conflicting parties recognise that it may not be that one or the other party is wrong, but that they define 'wrong' differently.

Finally, some decisions may not satisfy everyone. Depending on their cultural backgrounds, people may react differently to solutions that they believe to be unfair. It is vital to promote awareness of crosscultural differences in reactions to perceived injustice. Understanding that reactions may be different will help develop policies and procedures that minimise undesired reactions and prevent further misunderstanding and conflict escalation due to misinterpretation of responses to dispute resolution.

In conclusion, we note that predictions about an individual's behaviour made on the basis of that person's nationality must be made with caution. Although many scholars have pointed out significant within-country variation in cultural values (e.g. Huo & Randall 1991; Lau & Ngo 1996; Lenartowicz & Roth 2001), crosscultural studies have usually been based on a nation as a unit of analysis. In a review of 210 crosscultural studies published between 1995 and 2001, Schaffer & Riordan (2003) found that 79 per cent used nationality or country of

origin as a proxy for culture. Unfortunately, assumptions about individuals' cultural values are also too common among practitioners. We frequently encounter labelling of, for example, Chinese students as collectivists and American students as individualists. While such labelling may generally be accurate, exceptions are certainly numerous, since age, level of education, religion, socioeconomic status and other factors may significantly affect individual cultural values (Taras & Steel 2006). Furthermore, personal cultural values are likely to change over time as a person is exposed to new environments and circumstances; acculturation is especially salient in the case of students (Rosenthal, Bell, Demetriou & Efklides 1989; Khairullah & Khairullah 1999; Shih & Brown 2000). Thus we would like to emphasise the danger of making blind assumptions about expected behaviours and reactions of international students based solely on their nationality.

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