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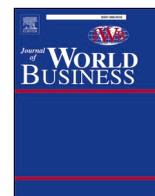
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Perspective article

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ABSTRACT

The centrality of communication in international business (IB) is undeniable; yet our understanding of the phenomenon is partially constrained by a cross-cultural comparative focus as opposed to intercultural, process-oriented research designs that capture the dynamic nature of communicative interactions. Our brief review of studies at the intersection of culture and communication in the context of global work interactions reveals the dominant research trends that guided IB scholarship to date in this domain. We propose eight shifts in perspective to advance the field's theorizing and create avenues for further research.

1. Introduction

Communication is at the core of most international business operations. Organizations are created, managed, lead, and dissolved through communication, which plays a major role in the exchange of knowledge, the development and maintenance of relationships, the negotiation of deals, and the establishment and preservation of partnerships. Increasingly, successful communication is recognized as a critical factor in the operations of multinational corporations (MNCs), at the interpersonal, group, and organizational level (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014; Bstieler & Hemmert, 2008; De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010; Felin, Foss, Heimeriks, & Madsen, 2012; Griffith, Hu, & Ryans, 2000; Griffith, 2002; Matveev & Nelson, 2004; Piekkari and Zander, 2005; Zander, 2005). For example, International Business (IB) research has linked effective communication to expatriate adjustment (Farh, Lee, & Farh, 2010; Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012), global leadership effectiveness (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016), multicultural creativity (Chua, 2013), and multicultural team outcomes (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010; Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander, & Maznevski, 2010; Zakaria, 2017), as well as firm-level activities such as entry mode decisions (Slangen, 2011), international joint venture performance (Kuznetsov & Kuznetsova, 2014; Liu, Adair, & Bello, 2017; Reus & Lamont, 2009), and MNC knowledge flows (Tippmann, Scott, & Mangematin, 2014).

Increasing levels and types of business internationalization, global mobility, global (virtual) teams, and new global communication technologies all require increased attention and understanding of communication processes and their implications for organizations. While numerous related domains, such as language (e.g. Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017; Tietze & Piekkari, 2020) or knowledge transfer (e.g. Gaur et al., 2019; Yildiz, 2020), have an established and systematized body of knowledge, only limited attention has been given to the importance of interpersonal communication, which is at the core of any business activity. With this editorial, we aim to strengthen the existing body of communication research in IB by reflecting upon the status of the field and identifying important gaps in our conceptualization of communication and current research approaches.

Our review of the field suggests that extant IB research on communication is cross-cultural in focus (measuring the influence of culture, often operationalized as value dimensions, on communications between nations) rather than intercultural (examining the process that happens when people from different cultures communicate). Studies comparing communication patterns across cultures, which we refer to as *cross-cultural communication*, predominantly rely on cross-country survey data to *compare* communicative style preferences or behaviors of individuals from two or more different cultures. These studies search for patterns of

behaviors that could be used to describe a given cultural group and compare it with (an)other group(s). On the other hand, *intercultural communication* studies examine the *process* that takes place when people from different cultures communicate[1]. These studies look at the interaction between people and what happens when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact. While cross-cultural insights are undeniably important and guide our sensemaking concerning group-level differences and culturally contingent patterns, we argue that the predominant focus on comparative communication patterns represents only a partial understanding of the role of communication in IB.

To this end, the overall purpose of this article and the special issue is to advance understanding and theorizing of communication research in IB. We discuss the dominant research approaches in IB studies addressing culture and communication that have guided the field's development thus far and propose eight shifts in perspective to map avenues of future research. We then introduce the articles in this special issue and their contributions to communication research in IB. Our goal is to encourage IB scholars to follow in the footsteps of these authors and continue advancing research at the intersection of culture and communication in the context of global work interactions.

2. Culture and communication research in international business – trends and shifts

Research at the intersection of culture and communication has generated numerous insights of critical relevance to international business practice. After reflecting upon some of the focal assumptions and approaches in the extant body of literature, we identify eight dominant research trends to date and recommend corresponding shifts in perspective. These shifts, in conjunction with the dominant research trends, aim to resolve research gaps, provide a fuller understanding of communication in IB, enhance theory-building, and advance the field.

2.1. From a cross-cultural to an intercultural perspective

As is the case for other domains of IB, research at the intersection of culture and communication predominantly takes a comparative cross-cultural perspective. Not surprisingly, much of the research employs cultural value frameworks to analyze communication patterns between culturally distinct groups. Since Hofstede's (1980) influential work, cultural dimensions have served as the primary reference point to operationalize culture and compare communication patterns (see e.g., Merkin, Taras, & Steel, 2014). Most studies map the patterns of differences between people from different cultural backgrounds with country-level cultural dimensions used as praxis for culture (e.g., Gunkel, Schlaegel, & Taras, 2016; Komarraju, Dollinger, & Lovell, 2008; Lü, 2018; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2011; Metcalf et al., 2006; Reynolds, Simintiras, & Vlachou, 2003; Salacuse, 1998; Tse, Francis, & Walls, 1994; Zander, 1997). Beyond cross-country comparisons, numerous studies continue to use wider constructs, such as geographical regions, as a proxy for culture. For example, despite increasing criticism of the East-West dichotomy in management research, it remains a fertile area of study at the intersection of culture and communication (e.g., Brett, Gunia, & Teucher, 2017; Luo, 2008; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013). While cross-cultural comparative research has undoubtedly been useful, its contribution is limited and, some argue, risks perpetuating cultural stereotypes that are not fully applicable in all contexts, with all people (Osland & Bird, 2000). Thus, overreliance on the comparative approach prevents scholars from capturing the true complexity of intercultural communications (Martin, 2015).

Few studies explore the interactional level where two or more

individuals meet and co-create meaning. Nevertheless, any meeting of culturally diverse individuals is an inherently dynamic process with continuously evolving forces at play, where outcomes are shaped in uniquely distinctive interactions and circumstances (Brannen et al., 2004; Lee, Nguyen, & Szkudlarek, 2020). Each intercultural encounter generates a novel combination and unknown results that are negotiated through the interplay among individuals' background, characteristics, situational circumstances, and contextual cues (Casrnir, 1999; Nardon, 2017) – all of which we reflect upon in greater detail below. Moreover, key concepts from the field of communication studies, such as proxemics (use of space), gaze (eye contact), kinesics (the use of body motions, such as gestures) and haptics (use of touch) are largely absent in current conceptualizations of communication in IB and should form an important part of future research agendas.

Cross-cultural comparative studies usually depend upon surveys that, while useful, can only reflect back what researchers design into them. Diverse methodologies, such as narrative analysis (e.g., Gertsen & Søderberg's, 2011), ethnographic field studies (e.g. Moore & Mahadevan, 2020), in-depth cases (e.g. Piekkari, Welch, & Zølner, 2020), critical analysis (e.g. Romani, Mahadevan, & Primecz, 2020) or even experimental designs (Fischer & Karl, 2020) are often better suited to the study of generative, fluid and dynamic intercultural encounters. A diverse set of methods would also allow to overcome communication challenges linked not only to the studied phenomena, but also to *how* we study them, as IB researchers continue to report struggles with data collection across cultural boundaries (c.f., Chidlow, Ghauri, Yeniyurt, & Cavusgil, 2015; Von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). The failure to understand how intercultural communication differences impact our own data collection and interpretation as well as research team collaboration (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012; Jonsen et al., 2013), will inevitably influence our findings and the quality of theories built from them. Although each method has strengths and limitations, diverse research methodologies reflect broader and more advanced conceptualizations of culture in cross-cultural management (Adler & Aycan, 2020) and constitute an important first step towards enriching intercultural communication theory-building in IB.

2.2. From a static to a processual perspective

Communication research in IB tends to focus predominantly on deductive investigations of variables that affect communicative outcomes, as opposed to studying emerging processes. When researchers explore communication processes in organizational studies, communication is rarely explored longitudinally, and little attention is given to the process of communication and its implications (Michailova, Holden, & Paul, 2020). Most studies rely on survey data that captures perceptions of communication processes, its retrospective recollection, and a subjective outcome assessment (e.g., Kennedy, Fu, & Yukl, 2003; Rao & Hashimoto, 1996). As a result, IB research involving communication often yields snapshot accounts of how individuals perceive the communication rather than documenting the interactive, evolving and complex process that takes place within a specific context. In this regard, research needs to move beyond cultural value frameworks as determinants of communicative interactions and take a processual perspective.

For example, while the concept of teamwork is a broad umbrella encompassing a multiplicity of processes and interactions, many studies in the field of IB focus either on subjective perceptions of communication efficiency defined through measures such as communication openness (e.g., Earley & Mosakowski, 2000) or on analysis of cultural value dimensions on communication preferences (e.g., Matveev & Nelson, 2004). A recent overview of the field indicates that most studies at the intersection of culture and teamwork focus on the effect of cultural diversity or cultural values on team processes rather than on the processes themselves and the adjustments needed to accommodate for cultural diversity (Zellmer-Bruhn & Maloney, 2020). In summary, it is

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[1] In IB it is not uncommon that the term cross-cultural is used as an 'umbrella' term for both streams of research or that the two terms 'cross-cultural' and 'intercultural' are seen as synonymous.

not surprising that a metanalysis of the impact of communication on multicultural team performance yielded inconclusive results (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010).

With the increasing prevalence of virtual teamwork and its often explicit temporal character, research increasingly takes a processual perspective on virtual communication (e.g., Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001; Zakaria, 2017). The topic of virtual teams reinforces the importance of studying the process that occurs when people from different cultures communicate, encouraging a research shift from a predominantly episodic or cross-sectional to a processual communication approach. As argued by Zakaria (2017), this processual focus includes paying attention to the fluidity and transformation of areas such as virtual intercultural communication styles, which, while often assumed constant, are not static and fixed throughout the process of communication.

Osland and Bird's (2000) effort at mapping the cultural sense-making process shows the complexity of intercultural interactions wherein past experiences, situational contingencies, and individual predispositions all interact to provide individuals with interpretative schemes to decode and respond to intercultural encounters. The sense-making process is ongoing throughout a communicative encounter, creating new recontextualizations and meaning-making. Longitudinal studies, such as Cole's (2015) five-year ethnography of high-context communication in the Japanese context of martial arts, are rare exceptions to the snapshot-focused studies in the field of IB. Taking a process-oriented approach allows for a more holistic perspective on the communicative process that includes emotions as an integral aspect of information and information sharing (Brătianu & Orzea, 2009), contextual complexity (Martin, 2015), and temporality of interactions.

2.3. From an etic to an emic perspective

Etic terminology, often used in cross-cultural comparative studies, is a set of universal linguistic terms that can be applied by an outsider across different cultures (e.g. individualism and collectivism). Emic terminology, on the other hand, is derived from within a culture and could be unique to that culture (e.g., *guanxi*). The anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959, 1976) brought the concepts of low versus high context communication to the attention of scholars and noted how differences in these communication styles negatively affected cross-border business situations and negotiations. While initially derived as an emic concept, Hall's concept was transformed into the core etic terminology which, along with Hofstede's (1980) cultural values framework, remain the dominant cultural dimensions that scholars use to conceptualize communication differences of culturally diverse groups and individuals in the functional paradigm (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019) (see Adair, Buchan, Chen, & Liu, 2015; Ward, Ravlin, Klaas, Ployhart, & Buchan, 2016 for recent research employing Hall's dimension and Merkin et al., 2014 for a review of studies applying Hofstede's framework).

Communication research in IB tends to rely more frequently on Hofstede's framework (1980), which originated in management studies and is focused on broadly-defined patterns of cultural values, than on communication concepts that emerged directly from analyses of interpersonal intercultural encounters, such as Hall's low and high context or emic values. While the popularity of Hofstede's comparative, etic approach across cultures can be attributed, in part, to the greater ease of survey measurement, such research assumes that Western-theories and measures are more important than unique emic (within-culture) values and indigenous cultural voices – the imposed etic bias (Berry, 1989)

Other concepts, such as conflict style inventories (i.e., Rahim's (1983) typology of integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising styles) or facework, verbal and nonverbal behaviors that protect/save self-face, other-face, mutual-face or communal-face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) provide alternative etic vocabulary employed to map patterns of communicative behaviors across cultures (e.g., Gunkel et al., 2016; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Face-saving in

the intercultural communication field is accepted as a universal phenomenon whose meaning and enactment varies by culture (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). First described by a missionary to China (Smith, 1894), the concept of face was originally perceived as a Chinese emic value until researchers recognized its various equivalents and presentations in different cultures and began applying it as an etic term.

Although few IB studies have explored culture-specific, emic insights in understanding communication behaviors, those that did provided unique and rich findings. For example, Crossman and Noma (2013) demonstrate the importance of *sunao* – a Japanese value associated with cooperation, obedience, and meekness, among others – in intercultural communication. The authors explain how the concept of *sunao* influences the interpretation of intercultural behavior and the communication cycle, but it is also critical for organizational learning and successful international operations. Taking a similar culture-specific perspective Zhu, Nel, and Bhat (2006) explore the influence of cultural nuances on the choice of communication strategies during different stages of the development of intercultural business relationships. The authors articulate how the emic values of 'old mates' in New Zealand, *guanxi* in China, *jan pehchan* in India, and *ubuntu* in South Africa lead to diverse communication strategies in different contexts. The managers in this study defined relationship building in relation to each culture's sociocultural and economic context (Zhu et al., 2006 p. 35). Extending this qualification, although *ubuntu*'s group solidarity is usually described in positive terms, negative aspects, such as discrimination due to age, gender, social standing (Mdluli, 1987) or disabilities (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2018) were also reported in different African locations. Furthermore, Bell, (2002) argued that ubuntu is really a spectrum of communalism and individualism, depending on the situation. Jackson, (2015) also warned that the popularization and commoditization of an emic concept like ubuntu may blind scholars to the dynamic nature of emic values. Instead of assuming they are static, he recommends that scholars study "the processes involved in the production of indigenous thought" (Jackson, 2015, p. 85) and also take into consideration power and geopolitical dynamics. Thus, it is worth remembering the following important caveat: "uncritically adopting a purportedly emic concept may be just as counterproductive as forcing etic concepts on an indigenous value system (Noorderhaven, Koen, & Sorge, 2015 p. 98).

IB research in the emic domain is still in its infancy. However, mapping and understanding emic insights are of critical importance in understanding how information is exchanged and making sense of the barriers created by culture-specific assumptions around human interactions. Deeply rooted assumptions about communication can be uncovered through careful reflection upon culture-specific values, ideals, beliefs, and metaphors. For example, Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn's (2001) analysis of teamwork metaphors in five different countries revealed culture-contingent, deeply embedded assumptions regarding team functioning. Communication studies in IB could advance the field by including emic perspectives and carefully applying them.

2.4. From decontextualized to context-rich accounts

With the focus on cross-cultural comparisons, much research on communication in IB is decontextualized. Yet, increasingly researchers have called for understanding communication practices in broadly defined context(s) (c.f., Hinds, Liu, & Lyon, 2011; Holliday, 2012; Martin & Nakayama, 2015). As argued by Varner (2000), the multiplicity of contexts is crucial for making sense of communicative processes in a business environment. For example, Bjerregaard, Lauring, and Klitmøller (2009) call for a dynamic and contextual approach that will allow researchers to take into consideration how social, political, economic, organizational, and power relationships ascribe meaning and influence intercultural communication. Teamwork, conflict management, and any other type of interaction call for the inclusion of contexts in which a given communicative encounter occurs (Harush, Lisak, & Glikson, 2018; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Liu, Adair, Tjosvold, &

Poliakova, 2018). For instance, virtuality in itself is a context of specific importance. Many researchers argue that virtual communication can exacerbate the challenges of intercultural communication (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Holtbrügge, Weldon, & Rogers, 2013), thus requiring even more sensitivity and attention to cultural and contextual dynamics. Yet again, current research in this domain focuses predominantly on the impact of cultural values on communicative behaviors and the core behavioral repertoire for effective communication in virtual work (Abugre, 2018; Holtbrügge et al., 2013; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004). While email communication is most commonly explored, a growing number of studies investigate the impact of culture on the use of other virtual communication channels, such as videoconferencing (Ozcelik & Paprika, 2010) or instant messaging (Guo, Tan, Turner, & Huzhong, 2008). There are increasing calls to diversify the research focus to include other media and online collaboration platforms (Jimenez, Boehe, Taras, & Caprar, 2017). Recent research indicates that certain media types are more useful for different types of interactions and can accommodate a multiplicity of backgrounds of the participating individuals and their organizations (e.g., Klitmøller & Lauring, 2013), again stressing the diversity of contexts affecting all communicative encounters.

Contextual influences are particularly relevant for communication encounters embedded in situations of inequality or even exploitation, such as large clients in developed economies communicating with their service providers in developing economies (Cheok, Hede, & Watne, 2015; Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). Influenced by critical theory, an increasing number of scholars argue that all communication encounters are likely to be embedded in a complex system of contextual inequalities (Allen, 2010; Martin & Nakayama, 2015). When actors are better able to understand the inequalities that occur in intercultural interactions, this empowers them to improve their communication competence and effectiveness (Martin & Nakayama, 2015). Thus, research in intercultural communication should reflect both socio-political and historical contexts as well as devote more attention to the tangible consequences of implicit and explicit inequalities, systems of oppression, and biases. Ethnocentric nationalistic tendencies and the polarization of viewpoints driving the public debate in many countries profoundly influence attitudes towards culturally diverse others and are of great relevance to communication research in IB (Lee et al., 2020). The challenges of perceived and actual power imbalances, (implicit) bias, and microaggression (Shenoy-Packer, 2015) are omnipresent in workplace contexts and are yet to be fully considered by the field of IB.

2.5. From an individual to a relational perspective

The field of IB has been increasingly criticized for its over-reliance on individual-level conceptualizations (Szkudlarek, Nardon, Osland, Adler, & Lee, 2020). The domain of communication is no exception. One of the most significant streams of work within the intercultural communication domain addresses the importance and development of intercultural communication competence (ICC)[2]. It has been studied in various disciplines (e.g., language education, sociolinguistics, business) and is one of the multidisciplinary roots of global leadership (Osland, 2008). Despite the abundance of research in this domain, there is often a gap between 'knowing' and 'doing' when it comes to intercultural communication effectiveness in IB (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). We argue that this is the case because much of the IB literature takes a linear and individual-focused positivist approach, underscoring specific individual competencies, attitudes, behaviors, and skills, as people advance through a course of training or an intercultural experience. However, as intercultural communication scholars outside the field of IB argue,

intercultural communication competence is relational (Martin, 2015). This relationality calls for a dialectical approach that recognizes that communication, and therefore ICC, is dynamic and constructed in interaction and that individuals can be simultaneously competent and not competent, in their intercultural encounters (Martin, 2015).

Dinges and Lieberman's (1989) empirical study of ICC argues for revising existing models of intercultural competence that favor person-centered variables. They contend that context, the type of situation, and the other participants involved have a larger impact on ICC than do individuals themselves. In a recent review, Chen (2017) argues that the field needs to move towards interpretative and critical paradigms and culturally diverse views on ICC to overcome the Western, individual-focused approach that has dominated the field to date. The core future research focus for advancing the field is an approach that recognizes ICC has a "relational component in that individuals' behaviors influence others and are in turn influenced by them" (Michailova et al., 2020, p.523).

2.6. From an organizational to an interpersonal perspective

While much communication-related research in the field of IB studies individual-level dynamics, some streams of work take a predominantly organizational-level perspective. The domain of knowledge transfer, a well-researched topic in the field of IB, serves as an example. Few studies in this area focus explicitly on interpersonal communication, despite the central role it plays in numerous knowledge transfer models (e.g., Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey, & Park, 2003; Oddou et al., 2013). Most studies take an organization (with a whole organization or a subsidiary as a unit of analysis) or work unit-level perspective to investigate knowledge characteristics, organizational culture, and the perceived importance of sender and receiver attitudes, motivation or communication skills (Minbaeva, 2007; Morgulis-Yakushev, Yildiz, & Fey, 2018), as investigated on a group-level. Similar trends can be seen in research on cross-country partnerships, such as mergers, joint-ventures, and acquisitions, where organization- and country-level data dominate (e.g., Bresman, Birkinshaw, & Nobel, 1999; Rao-Nicholson, Khan, & Stokes, 2016; Reus & Lamont, 2009).

In contrast, the study of dyadic, interpersonal relationships constitutes a fairly recent advance in the repatriate knowledge transfer field (Jannesari, Wang, Brown, & McCall, 2016; Bucher, Burmeister, Osland, & Deller, 2020; Burmeister, Lazarova, & Deller, 2018). Nevertheless, even when interpersonal interactions are researched, most scholars rely on survey data, which does not always capture the interactional character of the knowledge transfer process. The focus on the processual account and the interplay among the individual communicative behaviors and assumptions of the knowledge sender, the knowledge receiver and the organizational members who could affect this process (e.g. the team leaders) are key to improving the firm's learning outcomes (Lane, Greenberg, & Berdrow, 2004). They are also essential for enhancing organizational processes such as post-merger integration and other forms of collaboration.

Last but not least, few studies at the intersection of communication and culture take a multi-level perspective. This gap provides an interesting opportunity that is likely to generate novel insights and improve both interpersonal interactions and organizational outcomes.

2.7. From an economic value perspective to an emotional value and well-being perspective

The majority of research on communication in IB focuses upon strategic themes, such as effective business negotiations, rather than on inter- (i.e. appraisal and feedback) and intra- (i.e. emotions in communication) personal aspects of workplace interactions. An economic value perspective is understandable given the primary purpose of business activity, but as Granovetter (1985) argued, "Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to

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[2] The term 'intercultural communication competence' is often employed interchangeably with cross-cultural communication competence and intercultural/cross-cultural competence.

a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations. (Granovetter, 1985, p. 487). Social relations in our domain of interest comprise the core elements of everyday work life and have direct impact on individual and organizational functioning (e.g., Harvey, Reiche, & Moeller, 2011; Makino, Caleb, Li, & Li, 2020; Molinsky, 2007). For instance, we found limited research on feedback in culturally diverse settings, corroborating similar findings by DeNisi and Murphy (2017) in their review of performance appraisal and management. The scarcity of work in this domain is surprising considering the omnipresence of feedback interactions in the workplace and the long-established impact of feedback on individuals' motivation and performance (Lam, DeRue, Karam, & Hollenbeck, 2011; Pavett, 1983). Furthermore, while a culturally diverse context increases the need for feedback, cultural differences are likely to negatively impact feedback-seeking behaviors (Ashford, Blatt, & Walle, 2003). For example, cultural differences are likely to influence whether feedback-seeking behavior is "respectful or appropriate" (Ashford et al., 2003, p. 784) in the first place. Since individuals have a propensity to evaluate and appraise others based on generalizations related to cultural stereotypes, often without considering the role and complexity of work and non-work contexts (Chiang & Birtch, 2010), poor intercultural feedback interactions are likely to have a profound impact on individuals working in culturally diverse settings (Bailey, Chen, & Dou, 1997). The research void on culturally contingent feedback approaches and the interaction processes between feedback giver and receiver warrants more attention by researchers.

Returning to the example of negotiation in IB, we find, in contrast, an ample body of research focuses on the cultural specificity of negotiation behaviors of culturally distinctive groups. An abundance of work identifies the behavioral patterns observed in a given cultural context and/or behaviors or traits of negotiators from specific cultural backgrounds (see for example, Graham and Lam's (2003); Liu, Friedman, Barry, Gelfand & Zhang, (2012) and Ma's (2007) work on Chinese negotiation). Ultimately, this stream of work is designed to optimize business outcomes for negotiators participating in exchanges of economically important resources. This is a worthy goal, but we argue that the field also needs to devote greater attention to daily communicative interactions and their impact on employee well-being, workplace culture and climate, and long-term organizational functioning. In addition, as suggested by Szkudlarek (2009), the field of IB needs to continue reflecting upon the function of the knowledge it generates. and whether it is framed to gain advantage in a business encounter or to foster genuine intercultural relationships and increase the well-being of both organizations and their members.

2.8. From cultural influences on communication to communication influences on culture

The overwhelming majority of studies in IB approach communication as an outcome of culture and cultural differences. However, the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) perspective views communication as the primary actor, contending that "communication is the means by which organizations are established, composed, designed and sustained" (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011, p.1150). This view is increasingly gaining legitimacy and recognition as a critical dimension of communication in management and organization studies (Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017).

While different theoretical traditions coexist within the CCO field, different streams are united by the notion that organizations are invoked and maintained in and through communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Considering the important role of intercultural communications on the creation and maintenance of international business and international organizations, it is surprising that this type of theorizing has received scant attention.

There is a growing field of research within IB that assumes culture is

constructed and negotiated (Primecz, Romani, & Sackmann, 2009) and that values and identities are shaped and contested in MNCs (Brannen & Salk, 2000). However, few studies have explored this process in detail. These exceptions include Brannen and Salk's (2000) work on negotiated culture in a German-Japanese joint-venture, Clausen's (2007) study on sensemaking and the emergent negotiated culture in the context of Japanese-Danish collaboration, and Lauring's (2011) description of the informal and power-related communication between Danish expatriates in a Saudi Arabian subsidiary. These studies advanced the field by recognizing that culture is negotiated and socially organized in a local context. All these authors called for more nuanced conceptualizations of culture in intercultural communication and argued that communication is simultaneously an ongoing process of making sense of circumstances while constructing those circumstances. In summary, this research underscores the importance of recognizing the interrelationship among culture, context, and communication and focusing on the mutually constitutive dynamics of intercultural communication.

2.9. Moving the field forward

Our reflection on the literature at the intersection of culture and communication in IB reveals research approaches that restrict our understanding and conceptualization. To clarify and extend this argument, in Table 1 we specify: 1) the main research questions characterizing each of the eight current trends; 2) the resulting shortcomings or challenges in the communication in IB literature to date; and 3) our recommendations for future research based on shifts in perspective. These recommendations are aimed to encourage research designs that incorporate both the dominant trend and the recommended shift in perspective. Our view is not that the dominant trends should be eliminated, but that they could be enhanced by the recommended shifts.

Our reflection on the state of the field of research at the intersection of culture and communication in IB points to diverse ways in which research insights could be expanded, and theory could be advanced to more effectively inform practice. The next section describes how the exemplary articles in this special issue answer this call.

3. Conclusion and special issue contributions

The goal of this special issue is to encourage the theoretical and empirical development of communication research in IB by capturing the iterative, interactive, context-dependent processes of communication to improve both local and global business practices. The articles illustrate the potential of intercultural communication research to enrich our understanding of important international business phenomena. They also exemplify, in part, our recommended shifts in research perspectives. Their specific contributions to advancing the field at the intersection of culture and communication are explained in the following paragraphs.

The qualitative study by Wang, Clegg, Gajewska-De Mattos, and Buckley (2020) enhances our understanding of language issues in communication by qualitatively exploring emotions in the context of language standardization in a Chinese-owned multinational organization using English as a working language. They found that both native and non-native English speakers experienced language-induced emotions that influenced their ability to communicate, resulting in both positive and negative consequences for knowledge transfer and organizational functioning. Thus, one important contribution to our understanding of intercultural communication is that language-induced emotions were experienced not only by individuals speaking a second language, but also by native speakers. A second important contribution is a suggestion that language standardization may have negative implications in the long term, given its potential for inhibiting individuals from sharing information across linguistic boundaries. In addition, the study exemplifies the benefits of shifting from a cross-cultural to an intercultural communication perspective.

Table 1
Advancing Communication Research in International Business.

Proposed Research Shifts	Main Research Questions Posed in Studies on Communication in IB to Date	Major Shortcomings or Challenges of Studies on Communication in IB to Date	Future Research Directions to Advance Theory Building
From a cross-cultural to an intercultural perspective	• Do communication patterns and styles vary across countries? • And if so, could those variations be explained with cultural values frameworks?	• Does not capture dynamic interaction and complexity of intercultural communication. • Risk of forming and/or reinforcing stereotypes about communication patterns.	• Explore co-creation of meaning, study generative and evolving aspects of communication. • Take context, situation and circumstances into consideration. • Incorporate a broader view of communication (e.g., body language, use of space).
From a static to a processual perspective	• Does a specific set of variables (e.g., communication perceptions), affect communication outcomes? • Can cultural values and beliefs explain communication outcomes?	• A snapshot view of communication. • Retrospective recollection of communication. • Variables that influence communication are seen as static over time.	• Study interactive, evolving and complex communication processes. • Note the dynamic, rather than static nature, of communicative encounters. • Focus on how the ongoing process of sense making, such as individual predispositions, past experiences, and situational contingencies, affects the communication process.
From an etic to an emic perspective	• How do communication patterns vary across countries on cultural (etic) dimensions (values, beliefs and/or attitudes)? • Are cultural (etic) dimensions related to communication outcomes?	• The use of etic dimensions can lead to a superficial, even faulty, impression when comparing communication patterns across countries. • Etic dimensions cannot capture within-culture specific aspects of the communication process.	• Identify and employ emic insights to provide detailed rich analysis of the communication process. • Use of emic perspectives to reveal culture-contingent assumptions and their impact on communication.
From decontextualized to context-rich accounts	• How do cultural values affect communicative behaviors and preferences? • And are the communicative behaviors and preferences related to positive organizational outcomes?	• Research findings fail to consider context-related complexity and specificity (e.g. only limited communication forms and media are examined when studying communicative behavior in virtual teams).	• Examine communicative interactions in their unique context. • Demonstrate sensitivity to cultural, historical and contextual dynamics. • Study a multiplicity of contexts when necessary to make sense of specific communicative processes.
From an individual to a relational perspective	• In what way does the individual's intercultural communication competence matter for communication outcomes? • Are individuals' attitudes, beliefs or values related to their intercultural communication effectiveness?	• Does not take into account that communication and communication competence is a 'two-way street', where other participants also affect the intercultural communication interaction.	• Need to take a relational perspective as communication and behavior is influenced by, and influences others. • Need to take a more 'holistic' view of the communication process and embrace contradictions. • Need an interpretative and critical lens to overcome individual-centered research.
From an organizational to an interpersonal perspective	• What does group level data on communication tell us about organizational outcomes? • Can cultural dimensions explain inter-unit communication patterns (e.g., regarding knowledge transfer).	• Lack of interpersonal-level perspective despite its centrality to communication processes and organizational outcomes. • Organizational-level data does not capture dynamic communication in interpersonal relationships. • Few studies applying a multi-level design to investigate intercultural communication.	• Carry out both interpersonal- and interaction-based communication studies. • Study both communicative behavior and the assumptions they are built upon to understand how these assumptions have an impact on the communication process. • Explore multi-level design to improve interpersonal interactions and organizational outcomes.
From an economic value perspective to an emotional value and well-being perspective	• How can international business outcomes be optimized (e.g., communication in international negotiations)? • How can conflict be minimized and economic value be maximized through communication?	• Does not consider the role played by communicative interactions on employees' emotional well-being. • Does not consider key areas of interpersonal work interaction (e.g. communication regarding employee feedback).	• Explore communicative interpersonal interactions to understand the impact on employees' well-being and emotions. • Study the role and impact of communicative daily interactions on workplace culture, climate and organizational functioning.
From cultural influences on communication to communication influences on culture	• How does culture (cultural dimensions) affect communication (as an outcome)?	• Assumes causal direction between culture and communication. • Overlooks the role of communication in how culture is constructed and negotiated.	• Draw on 'communicative constitution of organizations' to examine how organizations and culture are formed and maintained through communication. • Need to recognize the interrelationship between culture, context and communication.

In another qualitative study by Outila, Mihailova, Reiche, and Piekkari (2020), the authors explored the role of trust and control in the communication of managers and subordinates in a Finnish MNC in Russia. The authors discovered that Russian managers and subordinates perceived trust and control as complementary, while Finnish expatriates saw them as substitutive. The Russian managers carried out numerous informal communicative practices that simultaneously focused on executing control and fostering trust, a combination seen as contradictory by the Finnish expatriates. This article contributes to our understanding of intercultural communication by providing an in-depth analysis of the function of formal and informal communication processes in the Russian context. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of emic, culture-specific insights for making sense of communicative practices.

Glikson and Erez (2020) enhance our understanding of virtual communication by exploring the micro-dynamics of intercultural communication and its impact on the emergence of a safe communication climate. They employ a processual perspective and a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between the relational content in initial messages, perceptions of a safe

communication climate, and performance. The first messages exchanged among team members played a significant role in shaping the team's communication content, which in turn influenced the communication climate and performance. They advance the field by further elucidating communication dynamics in the context of virtual teams and by taking a process-oriented perspective on communication that articulates micro-practices. Furthermore, this research illustrates how communication influences team culture rather than culture's influence on communication, exemplifying the CCO perspective.

In sum, the three articles in this special issue advance the field by bringing new research perspectives and methodological approaches to the study of communication in IB. These articles are good examples of rigor and creativity in exploring critical communication issues that are, at times, hard to grasp. They all take an intercultural perspective and advance our understanding of the process of intercultural communication by exploring novel elements in communication encounters (i.e., emotion, communication safety, and understandings of trust and control). To varying degrees, they reflect the recommended shifts that grew out of our analysis of the extant literature.

Our ambition with this article was to lay a path for IB scholars by motivating and guiding them to move forward in the outlined research directions. While recognizing important contributions and advances which have been made thus far, we believe that there is still much to learn about the complex processes of intercultural communication. We hope the shifts of perspective outlined above and the articles included in our special issue will help in advancing work on communication in the field of IB, including new conceptualizations and theories. Moreover, the shifts we recommend could be of relevance to culture-related research way beyond the theme of communication. We are hopeful the proposed shifts will prove inspirational and prompt more research, insights, and enhance communication theory in IB.

Acknowledgments

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