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### Are indigenous approaches to achieving influence in business organizations distinctive? A comparative study of guanxi, wasta, jeitinho, svyazi and pulling strings

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## Are indigenous approaches to achieving influence in business organizations distinctive? A comparative study of guanxi, wasta, jeitinho, svyazi and pulling strings

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Managers in five nations rated scenarios exemplifying indigenous forms of informal influence whose cultural origins were concealed. Locally generated scenarios illustrated episodes of *guanxi*, *wasta*, *jeitinho*, *svyazi* and pulling strings. Local scenarios were judged representative of local influence processes but so too were some scenarios derived from other contexts. Furthermore, many scenarios were rated as more typical in non-local contexts. While these influence processes are found to be widely disseminated, they occur more frequently in contexts characterized by high self-enhancement values, low self-transcendence values and high endorsement of business corruptibility. Implications for a fuller understanding of local business practices are discussed.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural; guanxi; influence; leadership; wasta

### Introduction

Contemporary international business faces a continuing challenge between the priorities of globalization and that of localization. Within the field of organizational behaviour, this challenge centres around the extent to which employees' relations with one another are driven by the universal priorities defined by an organization's task, or by the differing ways in which individual employees may interpret and react to one another's behaviour in different cultural contexts. Researchers have principally addressed this issue through comparative studies of leadership (Bass 1997; Smith, Peterson and Schwartz 2002; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta 2004; Aycan 2008a), of negotiation (Brett and Crotty 2008), and of human resource management practices (Aycan et al. 2000; Lazarova, Morley and Tyson 2009). Studies of this type have been focused on describing and explaining the extent to which perceptions, behaviours and practices differ from those found in organizations within the more frequently studied Western nations. While there is substantial evidence for average differences between national cultures, their magnitude will often be outweighed by variations between individuals within any particular sample (Gerhart and Fang 2006). To gain a fuller understanding, it is necessary to focus more directly on the range of individuals' behaviours in differing cultural contexts. In a recent extensive meta-analysis, Taras, Kirkman and Steel (2010) have confirmed that when

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measured at the individual level, cultural values do have a significant impact on organizationally relevant processes such as citizenship behaviour, feedback seeking, team-related behaviours, commitment and identification. Furthermore, these effects are stronger when measured among managerial populations than among others. A core concept guiding many of these studies has been the contrast between individualistic and collectivistic values that was first popularized by Hofstede (2001).

The range of studies reviewed by Taras et al. (2010) has been predominantly oriented towards determining whether values affect processes first identified within organizations in Western nations. With some notable exceptions (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang and Farh 2004; Farh, Zhong and Organ 2004), where these same measures have been employed in other parts of the world, researchers have simply used translated versions of those first validated in Western contexts, without extensive checks on local validity. While these type of studies can yield valuable information, they risk failing to detect effects that are especially salient in organizations within more collectivistic cultures.

A contrasting approach has been provided by theorists who have proposed that it is preferable to develop a series of inductive locally valid indigenous psychologies, rather than working from the starting points considered important by theorists in the US and other Western nations (Kim, Yang and Hwang 2006). Researchers working within this theoretical perspective have identified processes within organizations in non-Western national cultures that they define as distinctive and crucial to culture members' understandings of local phenomena. These would be processes that derive from the relatively enduring nature of interpersonal relations within cultural contexts that Hofstede (2001) found to be more collectivistic and more hierarchical. The most thoroughly investigated of these processes has been influence through *guanxi* in Chinese cultural contexts (Chen and Farh 2010). More descriptive accounts are available concerning *wasta* in Arab cultures, *jeitinho* in Brazil and *svyazi* in Russia. These concepts are all defined in terms of informal influence processes that are salient within organizations. The question addressed in the present study is whether these forms of influence can correctly be described as indigenous to the specific cultural context in which they have been described, or whether they actually describe forms of influence that are more widely disseminated and can therefore contribute to a broader understanding of influence processes within organizations in any cultural context. An influence process may be characterized by local respondents as typical of what occurs, but it can be considered indigenous only if it is found much less frequently or indeed not at all elsewhere (Kim et al. 2006). By testing how widely dispersed are specific forms of influence, we can clarify how much variation there is in the skills required of managers working across cultures.

### **Informal influence processes**

Four principal modes of interpersonal influence within business organizations have been proposed as important but culturally distinctive: *Guanxi*, *Wasta*, *Jeitinho* and *Svyazi*.

#### ***Guanxi***

*Guanxi* ('connections') have been identified by many commentators as an important aspect of interpersonal relationships within Chinese cultures. X.P. Chen and Chen (2004) describe the term as 'an indigenous Chinese construct ... defined as an informal particularistic personal connection between two individuals who are bounded by an implicit psychological contract to follow the norm of *guanxi*, such as maintaining a long-term relationship, mutual commitment, loyalty and obligation' (p. 306). Chen and Chen

identify three stages in the creation of *guanxi* relationships, the third of which is their pragmatic use for solving problems, with parties adhering to the principle of long-term equity. Researchers have recently begun to test empirically the bases on which *guanxi* rests and the circumstances that enhance or hinder its effects (Chen, Chen and Xin 2004). However, there is no consensus as to whether *guanxi* is best operationalized in terms of the presence of specific, particularistic ties (Farh, Tsui, Xin and Cheng 1998), presence of perceived *guanxi* (Farh et al. 1998), or presence of specified behavioural consequences (Law, Wong, Wang and Wang 2000).

Recent work has focused upon *guanxi* relations between superiors and subordinates. Chen, Friedman, Yu, Fang and Lu (2009) identified three elements of subordinates' *guanxi* relations with their superiors: affective attachment, inclusion of personal life and deference. Measures of these elements were more predictive of positive outcomes than were simple indices of the presence or absence of *guanxi*. Yan and Altman (2009) asked superiors and subordinates to describe *guanxi* episodes, which were then content analyzed. Two-thirds of episodes were coded as described positively, but the remainder comprised instances of subordinate ingratiation and superior exploitation of the relationship. Consistent with the finding that *guanxi* is not always regarded as beneficial, Cheung, Wu, Chan and Wong (2009) reported that the relationship between perceived *guanxi* with one's supervisor and positive work outcomes was mediated by job satisfaction.

There have been few comparative studies of *guanxi*. Both Law et al. (2000) and Chen et al. (2009) found that behaviours associated with presence of *guanxi* in Chinese superior-subordinate relationships predicted consequences related to outcomes and career progress that differed from those predicted by measures derived from US leadership theories. Chua, Morris and Ingram (2009) showed that affective ties ('affect-based trust') among business managers in China were more strongly associated with perceived reliability ('cognition-based trust') than among US managers. These authors did not ask their respondents to explicitly identify *guanxi* relationships, but they interpreted their results in terms of providing an empirical contrast between Chinese *guanxi* and US networking.

Each of these studies supports the distinctiveness of *guanxi*, but none has tested whether influence derived from its particularistic basis differs from influence processes within organizations that have been described within other collectivistic cultures.

### *Wasta*

*Wasta* ('going in between') is reported to be a widespread practice in many Arab nations (Hutchings and Weir 2006). It is defined as a process whereby one may achieve goals through links with key persons. These links are personalistic, and most often derive from family relationships or close friendships (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993). *Wasta* has not been studied empirically, but descriptive accounts emphasize its ubiquity in organizational practices. Loewe, Blume and Speer (2008) found that Jordanians associate *wasta* with loyalty and solidarity. Interviewees reported that they continue to rely on it because it is impossible to overcome bureaucratic obstacles in any other way. In Kuwait, the need to rely on *wasta* is said to be high, and its use pervasive (Ali and Ali Al-Kazemi 2006). In the Arab nations of North Africa, *wasta* is referred to as *ma'arifa* ('who you know') or *piston* ('pulling strings') (Yahiaoui and Zoubir 2006). It is also referred to as *laktaf* ('shoulders').

Mellahi and Wood (2003) surveyed recruitment decisions in Algerian SMEs, reporting that hirings were increasingly obtained through links with acquaintances or friends rather than through family links. Thus, the types of relationship on which *wasta* rests may be

changing, just as Chen et al. (2004) have reported for *guanxi*. Although *wasta* is often portrayed as corrupt, some authors point out its beneficial functions, arguing that it gives '... individuals a sense of belonging to a social entity that provides unconditional acceptance, and assistance to the novice in solving problems that are commonplace to someone more experienced. These functions are positive for the individual and for society' (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993, p. 191).

Some authors have asserted that while internationalization and the reduced role of state enterprises in China are leading to declining importance of *guanxi*, the strongly familistic basis of much enterprise in Arab cultures serves to sustain *wasta* (Hutchings and Weir 2006). However, the emphasis of recent studies on superior–subordinate *guanxi* suggests a change in *guanxi* focus rather than a decline in its importance.

### *Jeitinho*

*Jeitinho* ('little way out' or 'adroitness') is reported to be a strong characteristic of behaviour in many segments of Brazilian society, including business organizations (Neves Barbosa 1995; Duarte 2006). The term was first popularized in the context of admiration for the dexterity of certain football players. The concept refers to creative ingenuity in rapidly achieving short-term solutions to problems. This may include ways of circumventing bureaucratic rules or of avoiding potential difficulties with superiors in strongly hierarchical contexts. It will often involve working through others on an egalitarian basis, with persons who may or may not be previously acquainted. As social hierarchy is well accepted in Brazilian culture, the use of *jeitinho* at different organizational levels is more a matter of magnitude, than of incidence.

In terms of evaluation, Neves Barbosa positions *jeitinho* in between favours (which are seen as positive and are given to people with whom one has close relationships) and corruption (which is always seen as negative). In this way, *jeitinho* can be viewed as either positive or negative. Barbosa (2006) distinguishes between *dar um jeitinho* (to have a way out) and *jeitinho brasileiro* (Brazilian way out). The former expression describes the solution of a problem no matter what, even when it seems that it cannot be solved through legal or official procedures. In this sense, *dar um jeitinho* is close to the notion of corruption. The second expression refers to the use of creativity and pragmatism in dealing with everyday events and is understood as part of Brazilian national life. Thus, *jeitinho brasileiro* is seen as a strategy used by all Brazilians (Duarte 2006). It essentially involves ways of achieving one's goals that are quick and indirect, but which do not threaten the preservation of interpersonal harmony (Amado and Vinagre Brasil 1991).

### *Svyazi*

Among the widely discussed informal procedures prevalent in Russian organizations is the use of overt corruption, namely *blat* (Ledeneva 1998). A more neutral term is *svyazi*, said to be similar to *guanxi* (Batjargal and Liu 2004). On the basis of interviews with Russian and Chinese managers, Michailova and Worm (2003) concluded that *guanxi* relations are more intense and personalistic than *svyazi*. They consider *blat* as a specific form of *svyazi* that became more frequent during the period of the Soviet command economy. Batjargal (2008) also characterized *svyazi* networks as less personalistic than *guanxi* linkages. However, he found no difference in the way that they predicted venture capital referrals in Russia and China.

### ***Pulling strings***

The British culture of the UK is employed as an exemplar of the individualistic Western cultures within which the mainstream models of influence have been formulated. 'Pulling strings' is an idiomatic phrase in use in the UK. It refers to obtaining favours particularly through links with influential persons. These links may be longstanding ones, deriving from family connections or shared schooling, but they may also develop from shorter-term chance contacts. The phenomenon has not been the subject of academic study, and there have been no published suggestions that the phrase refers to a process that is indigenous to the UK. In fact, the same phrase is in use within Indian organizations. In relation to obtaining employment within the UK, it is widely disapproved, with formal procedures being perceived as more equitable. In her anthropological analysis of British culture, Fox (2004) does not refer to pulling strings explicitly, but notes a ubiquitous emphasis on the concept of 'fair play'.

### **Comparison of influence processes**

Each of these influence processes has in common its reliance on interpersonal linkages that have no formal status. However, they differ in their relative emphasis on the intensity, duration and hierarchical nature of the relationship between the parties. Influence associated with *guanxi* and *wasta* occurs in contexts that are typically hierarchical and involve a long-term emotional commitment. Behaviours used by Law et al. (2000) to define *guanxi* included giving one's supervisor birthday gifts, visiting or calling him during holidays and always taking his side. Failure to maintain a *guanxi* relationship will involve a mutual loss of face. Receipt of favours through *wasta* involves a continuing obligation to uphold the honour of one's benefactor. *Jeitinho*, *svyazi* and *pulling strings* may also derive from longer-term relationships and may involve hierarchical relations, but they do not necessarily do so. They can occur between those at the same organizational level and may not entail strong, continuing obligations to the same extent.

Khatri, Tsang and Begley (2006, p. 62) have explored 'cronyism', which they defined as 'a reciprocal exchange transaction where party A shows favour to party B based on shared membership in a social network at the expense of party C's equal or superior claim to the valued resource'. Khatri et al. consider cronyism to be a subtype of corruption, but they distinguish it from *guanxi*, on the grounds that although reliance on *guanxi* may harm others, it does not necessarily do so. The same would be true of the other types of social influence examined in this study, and we have noted already the distinctions made in Brazil and Russia between terms that connote corruption and those that do not. *Wasta* also does not necessarily imply corruption.

### **Development of hypotheses**

A preliminary study (Smith, Huang, Harb and Torres 2011) found little support for the distinctiveness of *guanxi*, *wasta* and *jeitinho* between students in four nations. As managers may hold more differentiated understandings of influence processes within organizations, the present hypotheses are nonetheless stated in a form that favours distinctiveness. The first hypothesis provides a check that the responding managers do perceive that the scenarios used in this study validly represent the concepts that are being sampled:

*Hypothesis 1:* Managers from each nation will perceive scenarios derived from their nation as more representative of the specified local concept than are the scenarios derived from other nations.

If it is established that each concept is validly represented, then it becomes possible to test whether they are distinctively typical of the processes that occur normally within businesses in a given nation.

*Hypothesis 2:* Managers from each nation will perceive scenarios derived from their nation as more typical of the influence processes that occur in their locality than are scenarios derived from other nations.

Khatri et al. (2006) reasoned that cronyism would be most frequent in nations that score high on Hofstede's dimensions of collectivism and power distance. If the testing of Hypothesis 2 finds only weak evidence for local distinctiveness of informal social influences, it becomes similarly useful to consider where such processes would be particularly salient, using available indices of cultural difference. If the influence processes sampled are adequately representative of cronyism, we may also expect belief in business corruptibility to be prevalent in similar locations.

*Hypothesis 3:* Influence scenarios will be rated as most typical by managers in nations characterized by collectivism, high power distance and acceptance of business corruptibility.

## **Method**

### ***Pilot study***

A range of pilot scenarios were elicited from local managers in the language used at the location being sampled (Arabic, English, Portuguese and Russian). Each scenario is an influence event involving a manager that is said to have occurred, which is described in two to five sentences. All scenarios referred to contexts familiar to managers. Pilot test respondents were located in the same nations in which the main study was to be conducted. They were asked to rate on 5-point scales the extent to which each of the pilot scenarios was representative of the local influence process. The three scenarios rated as most representative in each location were then selected for use in the main, cross-national study. Mean representativeness of the selected scenarios was 4.93 (Brasilia, Brazil), 4.71 (Moscow, Russia), 4.66 (Al Dammam, Saudi Arabia), 4.33 (Singapore) and 3.97 (Birmingham, UK). The specific circumstances described in each set of scenarios were necessarily varied, since the criterion for selection was that respondents within each nation rated it as most highly representative of the local influence process.

### ***Participants***

In an exploratory study of this kind, it is important to sample as widely as possible within each nation, since the purpose is to focus on concepts whose meanings are broadly shared rather than distinctive to any particular organizational culture or function. Forms of convenience sampling that are appropriate to the local cultural context were employed in each nation. In the UK, managers were approached while attending training programmes; 122 responses were obtained (80% response). In Singapore, respondents in business dress were approached as they left a subway station in the central business district; 101 responses were obtained (70% response). In Brazil, 186 responses were obtained from middle-level managers who were former MBA students that had been contacted by e-mail, while a further 64 respondents were managers in a finance company (overall response 39%). In Saudi Arabia, MBA and other types of students approached relatives and friends who are managers; 116 responses were received (70% response). In Russia, postgraduate students visited privately owned enterprises and collected data by interview. In a minority



Table 1. Sample characteristics.

		Brazilians	Russians	Saudis	Singaporeans	British
<i>n</i>		246	129	116	101	122
Male (%)		45	47	90	53	49
Age		36.1	34.6	36.6	32.8	27.1
Years worked		9.5	7.8	10.7	9.8	5.3
Responding by e-mail (%)		74	25	29	21	0
Openness to change:	Mean	0.06 <sup>a</sup>	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	-0.07 <sup>a</sup>	-0.04 <sup>a</sup>	-0.05 <sup>a</sup>
	$\alpha$	0.75	0.65	0.73	0.76	0.73
Conservation:	Mean	-0.35 <sup>b</sup>	-0.42 <sup>b</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	-0.16 <sup>a</sup>	-0.36 <sup>b</sup>
	$\alpha$	0.74	0.78	0.69	0.73	0.64
Self-enhancement:	Mean	-0.32 <sup>b</sup>	0.19 <sup>a</sup>	-0.14 <sup>b</sup>	-0.13 <sup>b</sup>	-0.14 <sup>b</sup>
	$\alpha$	0.68	0.67	0.68	0.69	0.72
Self-transcendence:	Mean	0.74 <sup>a</sup>	0.23 <sup>c,d</sup>	0.14 <sup>d</sup>	0.38 <sup>b,c</sup>	0.54 <sup>b</sup>
	$\alpha$	0.70	0.62	0.63	0.62	0.68
Business corruptibility:	Mean	2.06 <sup>c</sup>	2.93 <sup>a</sup>	2.50 <sup>b</sup>	2.69 <sup>b</sup>	2.57 <sup>b</sup>
	$\alpha$	0.74	0.80	0.68	0.79	0.76

Note: Means for PVQ and business corruptibility are adjusted for gender and age covariates; <sup>a, b, c, d</sup> means in the same row with the same superscript do not differ from one another at  $p < 0.05$ .

of instances, responses were submitted by e-mail; 129 Russians responded (91%). All participants were in full-time employment in the country of their nationality. Demographic details of the samples are provided in Table 1. All data were collected in 2009.

## Measures

In order to establish plausibility for Saudi respondents, actors in all scenarios were presented as male. After pilot testing was complete, minor modifications were made by the authors to ensure that the scenarios accorded with circumstances prevailing in all of the cultural contexts being sampled. The selected Brazilian, Russian and Saudi scenarios were then translated into English, and all 15 scenarios were subsequently translated into the local language used at each of the other sites. English is the customary business language in Singapore. The scenarios were also modified to disguise their place of origin, by replacing the names of actors in the scenarios by widely used local names. Appendix 1 shows the English language versions of the scenario from each nation that was judged to be most representative of the relevant local concept by respondents from that nation. The scenarios were placed in the survey in randomized sequence. For each scenario, respondents were asked to imagine that they themselves were the person who sought to achieve influence.

The extent to which each scenario was perceived as representative of the local influence process was rated on a single, 5-point scale (5 = definitely yes, 3 = not sure and 1 = definitely no). The extent to which each scenario was perceived as 'typical of events like this around here' was rated on a single, 5-point scale (5 = very typical and 1 = not at all typical).

Respondents' perceptions of scenario positivity were evaluated by four 5-point semantic differential ratings relating to each of the scenarios. The scales were happy-unhappy (1 = happy; 5 = unhappy, subsequently reversed to give high scores for positive evaluations), unjustified-justified, embarrassed-unembarrassed and proud-ashamed (reversed). These scales were designed in English and then translated back into local languages where necessary.

In order to determine whether positivity was construed in similar ways within each sample, principal component analyses were conducted for ratings relating to each scenario in turn. Single factor solutions were indicated in 72 of 75 instances. Variance accounted for by single factor solutions averaged 58%, with no percentage lower than 42. Internal consistency estimates were also computed for ratings of each scenario separately. Mean alpha was at 0.66 for Saudi responses and at 0.74 or higher for other nationalities. Sixty-eight percent of values of alpha exceeded 0.70. Mean positivity scores were subsequently calculated to form a single positivity rating for each respondent's rating of each scenario.

Respondents next completed a 21-item version of Schwartz's Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) (Schwartz et al. 2001). Respondents were asked to evaluate on 6-point scales a series of persons embodying differing values. Response categories range from 'Very much like me' to 'Not at all like me'. The mean level of endorsement of all 21 items was also computed to provide a control for respondent acquiescence, since it is known that both acquiescent and extreme responding to Likert scales vary between national cultures (Smith 2004; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho and Shavitt 2005). A measure of extreme responding is provided by the standard deviation of the mean.

Attitudes towards business corruptibility were measured with the 14-item Intercultural Business Corruptibility Scale developed by Leong and Lin (2010). This scale comprises a balanced set of items endorsing or rejecting business corruptibility, with 5-point response categories keyed from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. Respondents also provided their demographic details.

## Results

Responses to the PVQ were averaged to yield scores on the four major domains of values identified by Schwartz et al. (2001). Means and reliability estimates for these measures and for business corruptibility are provided in Table 1. The scores for each nation were compared by univariate analysis of covariance, with gender and age as covariates. As indicated in Table 1, the Saudis and Singaporeans scored significantly higher on conservation values than respondents from the other three samples and significantly lower on self-transcendence than all other samples. The Russians scored significantly higher on self-enhancement and on business corruptibility than all other samples. The Brazilians scored significantly higher on self-transcendence and significantly lower on business corruptibility than all other samples. There were no significant differences in openness to change values. The UK sample scored moderately on all dimensions. Thus, the samples do vary from one another substantively. This makes it possible to test whether indigenous influence processes are distinctive.

Preliminary analyses indicated no significant multivariate effects for gender, for responding by e-mail, for years worked and for acquiescent responding, and these variables were therefore excluded from further analyses. Data analysis was conducted through multivariate analysis of covariance with nationality as the main independent variable, representativeness, typicality and positivity as dependent measures, and age as a covariate. Significant effects were obtained for nationality with Pillai's Trace ( $F(60, 2688) = 15.38$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = 0.26$ ) and for age ( $F(15, 669) = 3.05$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ).

It was first necessary to establish the extent to which the scenarios derived from each nation are seen by local respondents as adequately representing the relevant influence process. As shown in Table 2, significant univariate effects of nationality on the representativeness were obtained for four of the five types of scenario. Table 2 also shows

Table 2. Mean representativeness of scenarios.

Scenarios	Brazilians	Russians	Saudis	Singaporeans	British	F	Partial $\eta^2$
Jeitinho	3.70	2.25	2.88	2.54	2.72	47.76***	0.22
Svyazi	3.93	4.41	3.83	3.75	4.25	11.71***	0.06
Wasta	4.14	4.60	4.38	3.92	4.51	13.51***	0.07
Guanxi	3.93	3.95	3.86	3.88	4.06	0.90	0.00
Pulling strings	3.90	4.31	3.71	3.68	4.32	16.78***	0.09

Note: Representativeness was measured on 5-point scales; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

that the adjusted mean representativeness of all own-nation scenarios was rated well above the midpoint on the 5-point rating scale for all nations. However, representativeness of other-nation scenarios was also rated high in some instances.

Post hoc comparisons of means with Bonferroni correction were made. The Brazilians rated the *jeitinho* scenarios as more locally representative than did the Russian, Singaporean, British and Saudi respondents (all  $p < 0.01$ ). The Russians rated the *svyazi* scenarios as more locally representative than did the Brazilians, the Saudis and the Singaporeans ( $p < 0.01$ ). British respondents saw pulling strings scenarios as more locally representative than did the Singaporeans, Brazilians and Saudis (all  $p < 0.01$ ). Saudi respondents rated the *wasta* scenarios as more locally representative than did the Singaporeans ( $p < 0.01$ ). The Singaporeans did not see the *guanxi* scenarios as any more locally representative than did respondents elsewhere. Thus, the scenarios from all nations were seen as adequately representative of the relevant indigenous process, but in many instances other types of non-indigenous scenario were seen as equally representative.

Hypothesis 2 tests the extent to which respondents perceived that the indigenous process exemplified by their scenarios is more typical of events in their culture than are the other scenarios. Table 3 shows significant univariate effects of nationality on the typicality of each type of scenario, as well as estimated marginal means for typicality. Brazilian respondents perceived the *jeitinho* scenarios as significantly more locally typical than did those from all other nations ( $p < 0.001$ ). Russians saw *svyazi* scenarios as significantly more locally typical than did Saudi, Singaporean, British ( $p < 0.001$ ), as well as Brazilian respondents ( $p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, Saudi respondents saw *wasta* scenarios as significantly less typical than did Brazilians and Russians ( $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, Singaporeans saw *guanxi* scenarios as significantly less typical than did Russians and Brazilians ( $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, British respondents reported *pulling strings* as significantly less typical than did Russians ( $p < 0.001$ ) and Brazilians ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Thus, while there is support for the prediction that *jeitinho* is distinctive to Brazil, the other four types of scenario were all rated as most typical by Russian and Brazilian managers rather than by local managers. Hypothesis 2 is thus not supported.

Table 3. Mean typicality of scenarios.

Scenarios	Brazilians	Russians	Saudis	Singaporeans	British	F	Partial $\eta^2$
Jeitinho	3.68	3.27	2.87	3.13	2.99	20.83***	0.11
Svyazi	3.46	3.73	2.95	2.72	3.03	29.52***	0.15
Wasta	3.88	4.03	3.17	3.13	3.00	38.89***	0.19
Guanxi	3.99	4.03	3.29	3.50	3.48	24.23***	0.12
Pulling strings	4.05	4.35	3.51	3.50	3.77	23.51***	0.12

Note: Typicality was measured on 5-point scales. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4. Mean positivity of scenarios.

Scenarios	Brazilians	Russians	Saudis	Singaporeans	British	F	Partial $\eta^2$
Jeitinho	2.10	2.92	2.53	2.67	2.64	53.37***	0.24
Svyazi	2.02	3.01	2.75	2.83	2.54	62.89***	0.27
Wasta	1.95	2.72	2.68	2.89	2.40	50.41***	0.23
Guanxi	2.43	3.40	3.09	3.29	3.19	61.63***	0.26
Pulling strings	2.52	3.33	3.00	3.12	3.07	38.00***	0.18

Note: Positivity was measured on 5-point scales; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Positive evaluations of each type of scenarios were next examined. No prediction was made as to whether local scenarios would be evaluated more positively. Table 4 shows significant univariate effects of nationality on positivity, as well as their estimated marginal means. The Brazilians saw *jeitinho* scenarios as significantly less positive than did all other respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ). Their ratings of other types of scenario were also all significantly lower than those of the relevant local respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, the Russians saw *svyazi* significantly more positively than did the British and Brazilians ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the Saudis ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Saudis saw *wasta* as more positive than the British did ( $p < 0.05$ ) and saw *pulling strings* more positively than the British did ( $p < 0.01$ ). The British saw *pulling strings* less positively than did the Russians ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the Brazilians were most negative about all types of influence, while the Russian ratings were equal to or higher than the ratings from all others.

Hypothesis 3 concerns links between dimensions of culture and the rated typicality of scenarios. Since data are available from only five nations, systematic tests of this hypothesis are not possible. However, since the typicality ratings are found to be strongly correlated across all types of scenario (ranging between 0.46 and 0.72), it is possible to compute a mean for each nation for the overall typicality of informal influence processes. This mean correlates at 0.79 ( $p < 0.10$ ) with the presence of corruption as estimated by Transparency International (2008), at 0.80 ( $p < 0.10$ ) and 0.52 (ns), respectively, with means for power distance practices and in-group collectivism practices provided by House et al. (2004). There is suggestive support for Hypothesis 3.

The relation between mean endorsement of business corruptibility and scenario positivity was tested separately for each nation, partialling out age. Positivity was linked with business corruptibility ( $p < 0.001$ ) for all types of scenario by Brazilian, Russian and Saudi respondents. Effects were the same for Singaporean respondents, except for *jeitinho* scenarios. Among UK respondents all effects were weaker ( $p < 0.05$ ), and no relation was found for *guanxi* or *wasta* scenarios.

## Discussion

The present results indicate that all five informal influence styles were rated as both representative of their locally indigenous designation and typical of what occurs within their local cultural contexts. However, only *jeitinho* can fully satisfy the criterion of uniqueness. The *jeitinho* scenarios were perceived as significantly more typical by Brazilians than by any of the other populations that were sampled. *Svyazi* was rated as highly typical by Russians, but only slightly more so than by Brazilians. More strikingly, *guanxi* was rated as more typical by Brazilians than by Singaporeans, and *wasta* and *pulling strings* were both rated as significantly more typical by Russians than by local respondents. Thus, the majority of these influence processes must be considered culture-related rather than culture-bound.

The means in Table 2 were compared across horizontal rows in order to test how specific types of scenario were labelled by respondents from different nations. However, if one also reads the data in the table vertically, it can be seen that the scenarios originating from the UK were perceived as most typical by all samples. This result was also obtained in the preliminary study by Smith, Huang, Harb and Torres (2011) with student respondents, using a different set of scenarios. Pulling strings may be more widespread than other types of informal influence style.

The styles of influence exemplified by the scenarios used in this study were not popular with our managerial respondents, with very few mean ratings exceeding scale midpoints. Furthermore, the cultural distinctiveness of these styles is unrelated to their popularity. While there is evidence for the distinctiveness of *jeitinho* to Brazil, the Brazilian ratings of positivity were particularly low and lowest of all in respect of *jeitinho*. The distinctive Brazilian combination of frequent informal influence processes and their relatively lesser popularity underlines the need for distinctive Brazilian management practices (Tanure and Duarte 2005). In contrast, among Russians *svyazi* was relatively distinctive and less negatively rated than elsewhere. As Beekun, Stedham, Yamamura and Barghouti (2003) conclude, informal influences that favour the in-group at the expense of others may be judged more acceptable in Russia than elsewhere.

Cross-national surveys that involve the comparison of mean scores need to control for known cultural differences in response style (Smith 2004; Johnson et al. 2005). The present results have yielded scale means most of which are higher for the Russian sample and lower for British and Singaporean samples. However, the validity of the conclusions drawn rests on the premise that these differences are substantive rather than artefactual. The inclusion of controls for acquiescence provides the necessary assurance of measurement validity. Given the known global distribution of acquiescent responding, it is likely that the present effects would have been stronger rather than weaker if controls had not been included.

This study has indicated that there are elements in common between informal modes of influence in widely varying cultural contexts. Rather than featuring different types of informal influence, national business cultures appear to differ more in the frequency and intensity with which these processes occur. It is important to consider how these findings might contribute to a more universally valid model of influence within organizations. *Guanxi* and *wasta* rest particularly on a strong degree of relatedness between the parties involved. In contrast, mainstream models of influence have focused more on the effectiveness of formally appointed leaders (House et al. 2004; Aycan 2008b). These approaches to the study of influence are not independent of one another, since relatedness can be an important element in the effectiveness of a formally appointed leader. Indeed, most published studies of *guanxi* have been focused on relations between superiors and their organizational subordinates (Law et al. 2000; Chen et al. 2009; Cheung et al. 2009; Yan and Altman 2009). Law et al. (2000) and Chen et al. (2009) found the predictive power of perceived *guanxi* with one's supervisor to be greater than that of conceptions of leadership developed in the US that also emphasize relatedness, namely Graen and Wakabayashi's (1994) LMX measure and Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert's (2005) measure of commitment to the supervisor. In relation to the present findings, these results would be interpreted in terms of the greater local validity of the *guanxi* measure compared to that of the two measures that were not locally developed.

Empirical studies of *guanxi* relationships have almost all been based upon samples located in the People's Republic of China (PRC), whereas the present sample responded to *guanxi* scenarios constructed in Singapore. Substantial contrasts have been noted between these two

national cultures (Bond 1996). Perhaps PRC respondents would not perceive the Singaporean scenarios as adequately representative of *guanxi*. To check on this possibility, 101 PRC managers studying for a Master's degree in the UK rated the present *guanxi* scenarios for representativeness. Their mean rating was 3.98, a little higher than the Singaporean rating of 3.88. For present purposes, therefore, we conclude that *guanxi* as exemplified by the Singaporean scenarios does not differ substantively from *guanxi* in the PRC.

Influence based on relatedness entails the need to maintain and sustain the relationships that are involved. It is evident that in those locations where indigenous social influence processes have been proposed, indigenous ways of maintaining in-group relationships have also been identified. Within the nations currently sampled, we find models of face (Hwang and Han 2010), of honour (Gregg 2005) and of *simpatía* (Triandis, Lisansky, Marin and Betancourt 1984). These aspects of local cultures may sustain types of relationships within which influence processes identified as typical are constrained. In some cultures, influence may occur primarily in the context of hierarchy and of long-term relatedness. In other cultures, there may be more peer influence and more influence between strangers.

These differing contexts will each require relational skills of managers seeking to achieve effective influence in work settings, but the skill sets may well differ. North American studies of impression management have identified friendliness as a key component of success (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley and Gilstrap 2008), whereas upward influence in more hierarchical cultures will involve choosing appropriately among a wider range of behaviours including for instance ingratiation, self-promotion, loyalty and modesty (Bond 1991; Zaidman and Drory 2001; Leong, Bond and Fu 2006). The scenarios employed in the present study described the occurrence of influence but did not include full details on how it was achieved. This may explain why the results have emphasized the commonality of influence techniques rather than their distinctiveness.

### Limitations

The validity of the present results rests upon the adequacy with which the scenarios that were employed represented each of the influence processes. While the validation checks that were employed do provide substantial evidence for representativeness, it is possible that the brevity of the scenarios did not fully capture the richness of the processes involved. Sampling a wider range of more fully described scenarios in future studies would be desirable. A second issue concerns the use of managers as respondents. Current trends towards globalization may attenuate contrasts that would be more apparent in less cosmopolitan sections of the workforce. While the present samples did differ both in the values that respondents endorsed and in their typicality of using informal influence styles, other more traditional cultural groups might provide stronger evidence of cultural distinctiveness.

### Conclusions

This study indicates substantial commonality between four of the five indigenous influence styles that were studied. However, this finding in no way undermines the utility of employing each of these concepts to understand aspects of organizational behaviour in their location of origin. On the contrary, it suggests that insights accomplished in one such setting may help to illuminate similar phenomena in a broader range of locations. By conducting multiple-nation comparisons, we can best assess the validity of conclusions drawn from studies that have involved only one or at most two nations.

The present findings suggest that informal influence varies between nations more in amount than in its specific qualities. Consequently, it may well prove that an understanding of the distinctive attributes of the better-studied informal influence processes such as *guanxi* can also enhance managerial effectiveness in non-Chinese contexts where informal influences are also salient. As has been found in studies for instance of leadership and of organizational citizenship (Farh et al. 2004; Aycan 2008a), it is likely that the precise meanings of very specific behaviours do vary between cultures, but that the more general concepts are applicable in a broader range of cultural contexts (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). For instance, detailed understandings of how Chinese subordinates use *guanxi* to enhance relations with their supervisors and their consequent career prospects (Wei, Lu, Chen and Wu 2010) may well have broader applicability. In contrast, because we find greater evidence for the distinctiveness of *jeitinho*, there is less prospect that studies such as that providing evidence for the role of *jeitinho* in the adoption of ethanol fuels in Brazil (Nardon and Aten 2008) will have wider implications.

The present results underline two types of continuing challenge to contemporary practice. First, they emphasize the difficulties of implementing uniform application of specific human resource management practices. For instance, the use of selection procedures intended to discount the influence of prior acquaintance between selectors and candidates on hiring becomes increasingly problematic where informal influences are strongly present. Creative adaptations are likely to be needed, whereby prior acquaintance and presence of requisite skills are both given weight. We have some evidence of adaptations of this type. For instance, in Algeria we have noted that Mellahi and Wood (2003) identified increased reliance on trust that a candidate would do a good job, rather than simple reliance on family connections as an adequate basis for appointment. More recently, McKenna, Richardson, Singh and Xu (2010) have identified the complex ways in which the relationship between formal Western selection procedures and informal Chinese aspects of selection processes was negotiated over time in a major Chinese manufacturer.

The second challenge arises in the context of cross-national work relationships. For managers whose skills have been acquired primarily within contexts in which Western concepts of networking prevail, understanding the more extensive prevalence of informal social influence within other contexts can be problematic. Effective behaviour requires an understanding of both the nature of relations between others in these contexts and the development of one's own capacities to create types of relationship based on *guanxi*, and so on. Researchers into cultural intelligence (Thomas and Fitzsimmons 2008) have identified meta-cognitive awareness as a prerequisite to the development of such skills. In other words, the overarching need in these circumstances is to be aware of the nature and importance of informal influences in a given context and to then find ways of addressing them to the benefit of the organization. Detailed case studies can best itemize both progress and pitfalls in developing such skills in particular contexts such as China (Gao, Ballantyne and Knight 2010). The present study complements this more specific perspective by delineating and clarifying the nature, extent and relative distinctiveness of informal influence.

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### Appendix: Examples of scenarios used

**Brazil:** It is lunchtime at the company. The company cafeteria is full of people, with long queues leading to the two cash desks. Some employees had been standing in the queue for nearly 30 minutes. Suddenly, Stuart comes up to the second person in the queue and asks 'Would you mind if I come in front of you in the queue? I have a very important meeting in 20 minutes, and if I have to join the end of the queue, I will certainly miss my meeting!'

**Russia:** Peter, a rich man, wanted to open his own restaurant in the city centre. His friend Gordon works in the city's central district government. Peter asked Gordon to help him. Gordon found a fine building in the city centre and then helped Peter to buy it as a damaged property that could be 'written off' for a small sum. Peter then opened his restaurant in the city centre.

**Saudi Arabia:** Tom is a recent graduate from a local university. He called his uncle in order to help him to get a position in a retail company without applying through that company's recruitment procedures. His uncle, who is a general manager in another large company, contacted the human resources manager in the retail company and requested him to recruit his sister's son. In fact, after one week, Tom got the position without going through any recruitment procedure.

**Singapore:** The dean of the business school is a non-executive director in a large financial institution. He recommended Tony, one of his former students, for a job opening at this company. Although as a new graduate Tony is not the most suitable or competent candidate, the firm nonetheless offered him a position.

**UK:** Dan's father went to the same school as Ashley, who is now the chief executive of the local hospital. Dan needs to get some work experience before applying for an MBA programme. Dan's father asked Ashley to hire him in a junior position for a year and Ashley was able to arrange this.