Situating culture in the global information sector

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Abstract *Presents a theoretical approach to understanding the local culture of firms in the multinational information sector. Called situating culture, this approach holds that cultural understanding is locally situated, behavioral and embedded in everyday, socially negotiated work practices. The application of this theory is provided through cases from the workplace cultures of US multinational IT firms operating in Ireland. These examples show how the local culture of a global IT firm represents the interaction of industry, corporate and national contexts. It results in locally situated work practices and distinct socially negotiated realities that ultimately impact behavior in these settings. The theoretical approach of situating culture contributes to a better understanding of contextualism in the cross-cultural IT environment. This understanding, in turn, has implications for future cross-cultural IS research as well as for cross-cultural IT practice.*

Introduction

Accompanying the technological developments of recent decades and the overall trend toward globalization with respect to both business and IT, has come the potential for increasing standardization and homogeneity of IT products and services. For example, Schroeder (1989) reflected the "conventional wisdom" that a standard logic for MRP obviated the need for each company to reinvent this logic. More recently, enterprise systems such as SAP have been developed in the hope of achieving increased organizational control through information technology in both domestic and cross-cultural settings. By logical extension, it could be expected that this movement would include the global homogenization of IT work as well. Meadows (1996) explored this notion in his discussion of globalizing software development.

However, against this trend is another body of literature which argues that diversity persists in the ways that the local cultures of individual organizations around the globe adapt standard practices, rules, technologies, etc. (Fleck, 1994; Grant, 2000; Kidd and Yau, 2000; Kumar and van Hillegersberg, 2000; Markus *et al.*, 2000; Soh *et al.*, 2000; Walsham, 2001). This idea of localized knowledge has also been explored in Escobar (1995) who asserts that the taken-for-granted notion of economic development is socially constructed to reinforce and reproduce existing Western power structures (i.e. the construction of "less developed countries"). He advocates local knowledge stemming from the

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everyday practice of "peasants" within a particular setting. His rethinking of development recognizes multiple economic models within the context of local constructions. Further, this local diversity exists not only in the use of IT products and services, but also in the way IT work, itself, is done. Thus, according to this argument, the global IT sector is not monolithic.

The acknowledgement of local diversity within a global IT environment, in turn, motivates the need for greater theoretical development in order to better understand the interaction between multiple cultural contexts and social behavior at work in the global information economy. In generating such theory, generally accepted notions of the information economy workplace must be deconstructed so that an understanding of this workplace can be reconstructed in new ways that incorporate locally situated diversity. This deconstruction/reconstruction is reminiscent of Lewin's (1951) unfreezing/refreezing conceptualization of organizational change.

Thus, there is a fundamental need for more theory to guide our understanding of culture and context in the global IT setting. While there is a considerable and growing body of IS[1] literature which brings theories of contextualism to bear on issues related to organizations in a domestic environment, there is less theoretical development regarding contextualism as it relates to IS issues in a cross-cultural setting. This paper addresses that need by presenting a theoretical approach for understanding the local culture of firms in the multinational information sector. Called, situating culture, this approach holds that cultural understanding is locally situated, predominantly behavioral, embedded in everyday and evolving practices, jointly negotiated by actors within specific contexts and constituting situated learning (Weisinger and Salipante, 2000). We illustrate this approach of situating culture through examples from the workplace cultures of US multinational IT firms operating in Ireland. These examples show how the local culture of a global IT firm emerges from the confluence of industry, corporate and national contexts, resulting in unique locally situated work practices or distinct socially negotiated realities that ultimately impact behavior in these settings.

The next section discusses contemporary views of contextualism and culture within which we position our representation of situating culture. We then present our methodology and selected field data via thematic examples that illustrate the notion of situating culture. Finally, we discuss our findings and the implications of this theoretical approach for future global IS research, as well as for IT management.

Context and culture in the multinational IT sector

Fundamental to an understanding of the situated nature of multinational IT workplaces is an understanding of two concepts: context and culture. Context, according to Giddens (1984), is the structure or environment within which social interactions occur. These social interactions can be examined at multiple levels of analysis. For example, in a study of strategic organizational change,

Pettigrew (1990) explicitly accounted for the influence of various contexts, including organizational, industry, economic and political contexts.

The theme of organizational context has been incorporated into a wide spectrum of IS research directed at all aspects of the information systems life cycle. Walsham and Waema (1994) addressed context explicitly by employing Pettigrew's contextualism to explore interactions among strategic content, multilevel contexts, and cultural and political perspectives in a case study of information systems strategy and implementation. Little (1993) used case studies of expert systems introduction to illustrate the influence of organizational context on information system development.

Many more scholars have included context implicitly in their research. Context has been explored under the rubric of social theory (Jones, 2000; Klein and Hirschheim, 1993), socio-technical design (Mumford, 2000) and social informatics (Kling, 1999; Sawyer and Eschenfelder, 2002). Urquhart (1997) considered the role of communication in eliciting contextual information related to IS requirements, while Sawyer and Southwick (1997) examined the role of temporal context in the development and implementation of information systems. Crowston (2000) argued for organizational processes as a contextual measure in IS evaluation. Finally, Wilson and Howcroft (2000) examined the gender context of an information systems failure.

In contrast to studies of context at the organizational level of analysis, contextual IS research at the societal level of analysis is less prevalent, as Walsham (2000) points out in his discussion of an agenda for global IS research. This research typically consists of country-level studies that examine the influence of a particular national context on IT development, diffusion and use. For example, La Rovere (1996) explored the institutional and economic conditions that stimulated the rapid diffusion of IT in the Brazilian banking sector. Trauth examined the influence of socio-cultural context on the diffusion of electronic data interchange in The Netherlands (Trauth *et al.*, 1993) and on the development of an information economy in Ireland (Trauth, 1996, 1999). Walsham and Sahay (1999) showed the influence of national context on the success of a GIS implementation in India.

While context is concerned with the structure or environment within which the social interactions occur, culture is concerned with the meanings that are ascribed to that context. One issue when considering culture is the degree to which it is believed to be fixed and immutable or variable and emergent. Hofstede (1980) is representative of the view that national culture is assumed to be a relatively stable entity that is based upon shared assumptions. Hence, he defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind" which distinguishes human groups (Hofstede, 1980, p. 25). Other definitions of national culture in this vein define culture as beliefs, values and assumptions, which are reflected in behaviors, artifacts and symbols (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1963). At the organizational level culture has been defined as "the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks

about, and reacts to its various environments," (Schein, 1992). Similarly, Argyris and Schon (1974) discuss the use of mental maps among organizational actors that inform their actions.

The alternative view is that culture is fragmented, variable, historically situated (Brightman, 1995), and varied, contentious and "in-the-making" (Prus, 1997; Wagner, 1981). Rather than viewing culture as a holistic, relatively stable set of characteristics, this view emphasizes the permeability, fluidity and contentious nature of culture. According to this view, culture does not exist in the minds of people but rather in their behavior:

> Behavior must be attended to ... because it is through the flow of behavior – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation (Geertz, 1973, p. 17).

An example of emphasizing social practice (Turner, 1994) rather than social cognition is Montealegre's (1997) study of a Guatemalan sugar producer. He illustrates the interplay between IT and the social, as well as the organizational context. Using the language of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), the (organizational or societal) structures within which social interactions occur are modified by those interactions. Montealegre (1997) illustrates this by showing that different social settings engender different technologies, while these, in turn, reinforce or transform organizational and social structures over time. Consistent with this line of thought, we argue, here, that the interplay between aspects of the national, organizational and professional IT contexts affect how IT work gets done and that how this work gets done helps to reshape and redefine the local setting. According to this view, culture does not refer to stable, generalized dimensions assumed to be held in common by members of a particular group. Rather, it is fluid, contextually dependent, and created by actors within a group who may hold conflicting assumptions and worldviews. In other words, "culture is what culture does."

The two themes of context and culture come together in the concept of "cultural knowing." Relying upon a view of culture as practice or action, Weisinger and Salipante (2000, p. 387) define cultural knowing as a social process that "stems from situated invention and mutual learning" based in everyday action/practice. This perspective leads to a view of lived culture as a socially negotiated, dynamic, practical and locally situated process. From this theoretical viewpoint, social interactions occur through structure (context), and at the same time create it. Taking Giddens' (1984) perspective, culture is a socially enacted dynamic process. Cultural knowing, therefore, refers to the knowledgeability (Giddens, 1984) of how to interact effectively cross-culturally in a given context, including situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and practice.

Smith (2001, p. 22) warns cross-cultural researchers that "organizational practices are likely to be driven not just by prevailing values, but by a variety of more immediate situational factors" that may be organization- or society-specific. He then recommends that cross-cultural management research explore further the "nature and efficacy of management practices within an

increasingly multicultural world" and aim to show "how a particular practice works out *in a given context*" (Smith, 2001, p. 23, emphasis added). In a similar vein, earlier work by Schneider and Barsoux (1997, p. 47) presents a picture of foreign MNC locations as revealing multiple spheres of influence: national, regional, industrial, professional, functional, and corporate. These conceptions of local cultural context are consistent with the crux of our argument that culture is situated at the local level and is revealed in everyday realities and practices.

Our focus on the situated nature of culture and its implications for the cross-cultural IT workplace can be seen as part of a larger trend in social science. In contrast with the paradigm of social units as entities with objective, stable existences, ethnomethodology presents an alternative interpretation of social organization in which "society is achieved through interaction, rather than society being the given, existing, structure within which interaction takes place" (Strum and Latour, 1999, p. 116). For example, in understanding work, Suchman (1994) characterizes human action as situated in the context of particular circumstances, and Button and Dourish (1996, p. 1) examine ethnomethodology as a vehicle for concentrating on the details of practices in the course of understanding work and organizations "from the inside." Our argument about the mutually constitutive relationship between IT work and the cultural context within which it occurs is consistent with the view of society as continually constructed by active social beings as reflected in actor-network theory (e.g. Law and Hassard, 1999).

Taking this situated view of context and culture has several implications for cross-cultural IS research. First, it means that research frameworks and findings would allow for the movement over time, or the reshaping of culture as it is commonly viewed. Second, it means that research would take into account contextual factors that influence local cultures. Finally, it means that researchers would more deeply explore behavior and practice as signals for the very local cultures being studied.

Situating culture

In order to apply the concept of situating culture to assist in examining the processes through which the lived culture of a local IT firm emerges, an examination of workplace behaviors at multinational IT firms in Ireland was conducted. The purpose is to show how a culture of local practices is influenced by multiple contexts, including that of the home and host countries, the corporation, and the IT industry. These different contexts are interwoven to produce a locally situated culture within the work environment of the particular multinational IT firm. Ireland was chosen for this study because it is representative, along with India (Heeks, 1996) and Israel (Malhotra, 2000), of countries that have recently and rapidly become popular outsourcing locations for multinational IT companies. Two themes – managing knowledge workers and managing diversity – are used to illustrate how the situated culture operates, emerges and adapts in an IT workplace.

Methodology

In this study, Trauth conducted in-depth interviews with 12 individuals at two multinational IT firms in Ireland. The open-ended interviews, which typically lasted 90 minutes in duration, covered a range of topics related to the interaction between factors in the cultural context and workplace behaviors in the firm. Transcripts of the taped interviews were open coded and analyzed in grounded fashion (Strauss, 1987). These accounts were supplemented by participant observation and document analysis. The data employed in this paper are part of a larger study of cultural influences on Ireland's information sector (Trauth 2000). Trauth (1997) and Trauth and O'Connor (1991) provide further details on the methodology for this particular study while Myers (1994) and Myers and Harvey (1995) provide other examples of the type of interpretive analysis used in this research.

In the analysis of this data, the characteristics of cultural knowing as articulated by Weisinger and Salipante (2000, p. 376), are used to interpret the accounts about the local cultures at these two IT firms. We show how aspects of cultural understanding, exemplified in situated culture, are revealed in these scenarios. The examples from these firms illustrate the fluidity of culture, and how localized meanings in particular contexts give rise to different manifestations of multiple contextual influences.

Results

Theme 1: managing knowledge workers. Part of an overall management restructuring effort at Firm A was the assertion of more headquarters' control over the foreign subsidiaries. At the time of this study, Leo, an American, had recently replaced the first managing director, an Irishman. Leo told several stories about culture clashes with Seamus, the Irish human resources director. When Leo wanted to adopt management approaches that were different from the norm in Irish firms outside the IT industry (where Seamus had worked before coming to this firm) Seamus' typical reaction was that "This is Ireland. You can't do that, this is Ireland." Nevertheless, over time a level of homeostasis had been achieved. The following two examples illustrate how a distinct situated culture was emerging in the Irish location of this firm.

One problem they had to resolve was the tardiness of the workers. Seamus recommended the implementation of time cards in order to force people to come to work on time. Leo was not happy about this. He thought of IT workers as professionals who ought not be managed like factory workers, putting in their time. He preferred to treat them as knowledge workers who focused on the task not the time. But he was prepared to defer to Seamus' greater knowledge of Irish culture and Irish workers ... until Seamus dropped the bombshell that Leo would have to punch a time card as well! The reason, Seamus explained, was that the egalitarian ethic and attitude toward authority in Irish culture dictated that all workers must be seen to be equal. Thus, all levels of management, as well as workers would have to punch time cards. Leo was a 50-something manager who had worked his way up through the ranks in order to

arrive at this position of managing director. As he adamantly explained in an interview, he had done that sort of thing earlier in his career and was not about to do it at this point in his life.

Leo struggled to find a compromise to get them through this impasse. How could he get people to come to work on time, maintain an egalitarian climate and yet avoid what he thought of as degrading behavior for someone in his position? His solution was flextime. The workers could come to work anytime between 7.00 and 9.00 in the morning and leave after an eight-hour day. Seamus was opposed to this solution. The workers would not do it; Irish workers needed strict control, he said. But Leo prevailed and was proven to be more than right. Not only did workers put in the eight-hour day, they actually came early during the summer. During the long days of sunlight workers came to work closer to 7.00 a.m. than 9.00 a.m. in order to get in an entire game of golf after work!

Another issue at Firm A concerned the practice of wearing identification badges for security purposes. As with the previous example, this issue also arose from headquarters' desire to exert more control over its subsidiaries. Aidan, a middle manager, told the story in his response to a question about authority:

> Aiden: [The Irish attitude toward authority] is that laws are optional, unlike the US and the UK.] This is due to our occupation by the British. Then, it was right to go against them. It's totally pervasive . . .
>
> Interviewer: Does this attitude enter the workplace?
>
> Aidan: Yes. I'll tell you a story. Recently some men from the US [headquarters of our firm] came here and were appalled at the lack of security. No one was wearing their ID badges because we were told we had to and besides, we all know each other, unlike in the US. There is an attitude of flaunting authority. So headquarters gave us the pronouncement, "You have to wear an ID badge." After vetting[2] it here there was passive resistance to it. Management insisted that we wear an ID badge, so we did. We wore each other's but each of us wore an ID badge!

There is no disputing Aidan's point that everyone knows everyone. Ireland is a small society and the IT sector is even smaller. It is typical to have several members of an extended family working at the same multinational firm. In this context there is no anonymity, thus, the need for ID badges was seen as superfluous at best and insulting at worst.

In the first example, the situated culture emerged from a dialectical process that occurred within a particular set of business circumstances. Management at the US headquarters was attempting to assert more control over foreign subsidiaries. The organizational context was characterized by a change in management as Leo replaced an Irish managing director. But the IT work culture led Leo to view time cards as antithetical to knowledge work. On the other hand, Seamus' experiences in non-IT firms in Ireland led him to conclude that Irish workers needed to be controlled if they were to arrive at work on time. Finally, the egalitarianism within the Irish culture required that Leo find a solution that could be implemented in management ranks as well. All of these

factors coalesced in flextime, a solution that worked at this particular workplace. Both managers negotiated this new reality through a combination of their own cultural predispositions and their various work experiences.

The second example from Firm A reveals multiple influences as well. Once again, the US headquarters was attempting to exert more control over foreign subsidiaries. The resistance by the Irish IT workers reflects post-colonial attitudes toward authority[3]. At the same time, the IT sector within a small society meant that identification badges were of questionable value. In this case, these multiple cultural influences led to a subversive practice – the wearing of each other's name badges.

These two examples show how the situated culture at Firm A was emerging. The socially constructed practice of flextime, and the rather rebellious custom of wearing other colleagues' ID badges, constitute situated learning about managing knowledge workers in these settings. A manager at Firm A would learn that flexibility in this local work setting is positively valued (e.g. flextime) and that if management controls are used in ways that are perceived to be coercive (e.g. excessive control on the part of headquarters management), a negative response can be expected (e.g. wearing each other's security badges). Further, this manager would learn that the negotiated meanings of egalitarianism in both Irish and US national cultures, and the IT work culture, are not necessarily congruent. That is, Leo's reaction to Seamus' suggestion that even managers would need to punch time cards was that egalitarianism seemed to be going too far!

Theme 2: managing diversity. Firm B had been in Ireland for ten years at the time of this study, giving respondents a basis for reflecting upon the interaction between US and Irish cultural influences on the Irish IT workplace. One example of the way in which this interaction was producing a new, situated culture is that of gender diversity. At the time of this study Irish women had been historically underrepresented in the workplace for reasons that were both economic – the scarcity of jobs – and cultural – attitudes about a mother's place in the home. But in Firm B, respondents explained how the interaction of US, Irish and IT cultures was producing a new IT workplace culture with respect to women.

Irish workers noted the cultural interaction that occurred through the exposure of Irish workers to US perspectives about gender in the US IT headquarters of Firm B. During interviews about gender and the IT industry, these workers noted the differences between the USA and Ireland with respect to female participation in the IT labor force. Martin commented that when he visited the USA the proportion of women in the workplace always surprised him. He would meet product managers and senior executives, an experience that was rare in Ireland, he said. Respondents said that these experiences influenced their views about gender when they came back to Ireland.

In addition, the industry culture of the Irish IT industry – as reflected in the management structures of companies – represented a change from a hierarchical to an egalitarian approach to management-worker interaction.

According to Deirdre, the Irish human resource director at Firm B, this egalitarian attitude toward management contributed to changed attitudes about women in IT.

> Interviewer: Do you think it's easier for a woman to get on in the electronics than in traditional industry?
>
> Deidre: Relatively speaking, yes. Definitely. Because there is a culture of equality, equal benefits, equal opportunities.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think any of that has to do with the fact that it's an American based multinational?
>
> Deidre: Yes, I do. Definitely. It has a lot to do with it. I think the whole equality thrust in the group, the same benefits for people is very much American initiated. And a single status [for everyone]. I mean, in [Firm B], for example, they will tell you the stories [about an Irish non-IT firm] in [this Irish city], they had about four different dining rooms. They had the executive dining room, senior management dining room, middle management dining room. You know, they had special car park spaces. You know, this was one of the status symbols of how you got on. How well you were doing. All those are thrown out by companies such as [Firm B]. When [Firm B] started, a lot of the things they did – people on the floor, equal contribution – was unique and it was radical in Ireland at the time. Now it's practically the norm. And you're out of date if you talk any different kind of language.

This aspect of the situated culture at Firm B reflects an integration of attitudes about gender and equality in the workplace. According to the respondents, US attitudes about women's role in the IT sector and values embedded in the IT sector about equal opportunity entered this Irish IT workplace through the firm's management structures. The influences from the IT culture were combined with the experiences of the Irish workers who had been to the USA to render quite acceptable the notion of women professionals and managers working in IT firms in Ireland.

At Firm B, those Irish workers who had been to the US headquarters were exposed to women in various management capacities. To the extent that these experiences altered their views of women in IT, they represent situated learning about managing gender diversity in the workforce. The acceptance of women managers by workers in this local setting and the promotion of women's career advancement by management give evidence that situated learning was occurring.

Discussion

The foregoing analyses help us to address the question: "How do multiple cultural contexts come together to influence social behavior at work?" We propose that this occurs through the process of "situating culture" in a particular setting. We illustrate our perspective on cultural interaction by showing how a "new culture" was emerging from the interaction of the various cultural influences. While it might seem rather obvious that cultural interaction occurs when multiple cultures come together, our conception of situating culture, in fact, represents a departure from some conventional wisdom in two respects.

First, it is often believed that a monolithic corporate culture is what dominates in the multinational workplace. But what the analyses of Firms A and B show is that the culture of each workplace emerged as a unique entity that resulted from a combination of cultures: the corporate culture of the firm, the national culture of the firm's headquarters, the industry culture and the national culture of the local context. Second, our conception of culture as a dynamic entity whose characteristics can be inferred from actual workplace behavior stands in contrast to a widespread view that culture is a stable entity that exists in the minds of individuals. Indeed, some of the findings of this research showed that Irish IT workers behaved in ways that ran counter to cultural stereotypes.

Whereas national culture is often conceptualized at a broad level and is equated with a country's geographic borders, we illustrate the ways in which IT workplace behavior in the cross-cultural context is affected by multiple contextual influences at the individual, group, organizational, societal and professional levels. These influences help to redefine culture as a locally-based phenomenon, grounded in the everyday practices and behaviors of particular groups of people in particular settings.

This approach is consistent with a recent call to improve theoretical and methodological approaches in cross-cultural research that was outlined in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Cross-cultural Management*. Triandis (2001, p. 19) challenges cross-cultural researchers to examine how dimensions of cultural variation (such as Hofstede's individualism-collectivism) emerge in different ecologies (resources, geographies) and how historical factors shape them. He asks how these broad cultural dimensions play out in particular settings. In this paper we answer the challenge by highlighting the apparent contradictions related to Hofstede's power distance dimension. We noted the divergent viewpoints about egalitarianism and how they are played out in Irish IT workplaces. These contradictions suggest that such broad dimensions are perhaps useful only at a high level of analysis (i.e. at the country level) but not at the level of interaction where a variety of contextual factors can affect behavior.

There are very tangible implications for both research and practice of adopting the situating culture approach when conducting cross-cultural IS research. Following on Triandis' suggestion, the challenge is to problematize investigation of the multinational IT workplace. Researchers would first need to investigate the ways in which presumed broad cultural dimensions play out in the day-to-day behavior of specific workplaces in particular contexts. Then, attention would need to be given to characterizing the organizational and work/professional contexts, and their influence on cross-cultural behavior. In order to accomplish this, serious attention must also be paid to the choice of appropriate research methodologies. For example, a mass-mailed survey may not be the best method for exploring the situated culture of particular multinational offices. Finally, attention must be given to the generalizability of research in the cross-cultural context.

The implications for practice follow from acknowledging that the culture of a specific site of a multinational IT firm is locally situated and that it derives from socially negotiated, practical, everyday behaviors. In Smith's (2001) analysis, organizational practices are driven by immediate situational factors. Thus, specific behaviors become locally relevant through the process of reconciling aspects of national, the multinational headquarters, the specific firm and the IT industry contexts. The situated culture of a particular firm emerges as a result of social negotiation regarding everyday work practices, as in the compromise resulting in flextime or the cynical practice of workers wearing each other's security badges. The local culture reflects the nexus of contextual influences, reflected in all of our examples, but most prominently in the scenario discussing gender diversity. Thus corporate training should move beyond consideration of generic value differences across cultures and into the way in which these differences are manifested in particular IT workplace settings, and the way in which context affects behavior. This approach would, then, be applicable across the spectrum of IT work from requirements analysis to programming teams to user support.

Conclusion

In the Preface of her book on global diversity in information systems, Avgerou (2002, p. vii) observed that:

> My curiosity for ... the way the exploitation of the potential of information technologies takes different courses in different social contexts, was triggered ... while I was studying the practices of systems development in ... four European countries ... I was impressed with the differences manifested in the computerization efforts pursued in similar organizations of different countries. Although all four organizations were engaged in developing very similar applications through quite similar professional systems development practices, the motives and background against which the development processes were deployed, and the consequences of innovation projects in their socio-organizational context differed substantially.

In this statement Avgerou expresses the essential challenge for all IS practitioners and theorists: to better understand how the human context surrounding the technology influences its development, implementation and use. In the cross-cultural IT workplace, the challenge becomes one of better understanding how multiple human contexts come together to influence IT work and the IT workplace.

In this paper we have responded to this challenge by presenting a theoretical approach for improving our understanding of contextual IS research that is carried out at the socio-cultural level of analysis. Our theoretical perspective, called situating culture, stands in contrast to views of culture as fixed and immutable. Our examples of the situated culture of local firms challenges the often-held assumption of a monolithic workplace culture across all sites of a multinational firm. Instead, we present a conception of local cultural context that incorporates global diversity and enhances our understanding of how particular practices emerge in a given context. To do this we advocate a more

behavioral approach to cultural analysis that focuses on understanding the actual behaviors of people in a cross-cultural IT workplace. Thus, this approach emphasizes the locally situated, socially negotiated, practical and contextually embedded nature of culture (Weisinger and Salipante, 2000).

We illustrated how the local cultures of global IT firms emerge from the confluence of industry, corporate and national contexts, resulting in unique, locally situated work practices or distinct socially negotiated realities that ultimately impact behavior in these settings. We illustrate this approach of situating culture through examples from the workplace cultures of US multinational IT firms operating in Ireland along the dimensions of managing knowledge workers and managing diversity. Through these examples we show how a new, situated culture was emerging from the interactions among the various (national, industry and corporate) cultures.

This approach to negotiating multiple cultures in a cross-cultural IT workplace has practical application for multinational management. This paper contributes to the cross-cultural IT management literature by highlighting the connections among culture, context and behavior in IT organizations. It provides texture to broad cultural generalizations that are commonly used in cross-cultural IS research. This view advocates for a shift in focus from generalizations to situated learning about local cultures.

Notes

1. Both of the terms "information systems" or IS and "information technology" or IT are used in this paper. In keeping with current usage, the latter term is used to refer to the world of practice whereas the former term is used to refer to the world of research.
2. That is, to consider and review the procedure for its appropriateness.
3. See Trauth (2000, pp. 188-93) for further discussion of post-colonial attitudes and (pp. 254-69) for further discussion of attitudes toward authority.

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