

Examining Intercultural Competency Through Social Exchange Theory

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Intercultural competency (ICC) has been an extensively researched area within the past decade, given the broad consensus that this trait constitutes one of the key competencies of the 21st century manager. However, somewhat under-explored are aspects including the implications and effects that pedagogies such as blended learning have on the inculcation of ICC traits, specifically within the context of multicultural, multi-ethnic university level student groups in Australia, within which this research has been conducted. Drawing on social psychology, this exploratory study examines perceptual data on blended learning experiences within a cross-cultural higher education setting. Results suggest that intercultural competency is best learned through social exchanges, such as face-to-face rather than blended learning. Our findings provide support for the importance of context, which is significantly related to cross-cultural studies and curriculum development and design.

The debate on whether online or face-to-face is the better of the two learning and teaching modes has been ongoing and long drawn out (Meyer, 2007; Redpath, 2012). Gaining ground, in the meantime, is the third option, blended learning, with its purported ability to combine the “best of both worlds” (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004, p. 3), harnessing the efficacies of the Internet and communication technologies (ICT). Blended learning is described as a thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). The literature highlighting the proliferation and benefits of the blended learning mode of delivery is rich (Bailey & Morais, 2004; Getty & Getty, 2003; Goodyear & Ellis, 2008; McDonnell, 2000). This trend towards the increased adoption of blended learning holds true in the context of Australia, the country within which this research was conducted, given the country’s reputation for being an early adopter of technology (Barwick, 2011). However, while it appears that the efficacies of blended learning cater to several needs of present day university students (Dziuban et al., 2004; Graham, 2006), such as the enhanced need for flexibility and asynchronous learning, to name a few, one critical element remains underexplored, and that is the development of intercultural competency (ICC) traits.

Described increasingly as the key competency of the 21st century manager, ICC is broadly defined by scholars as being the ability of individuals to change their knowledge, attitudes and behavior, in terms of their openness and flexibility to other cultures, to survive in today’s modern globalised society (Azriel, Erthal, & Starr, 2005; Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2009; Freeman, 1995; Leask, 2009). Building on the case for ICC further are several others who associate the sustainable, long-term success of firms in a global economy with the need for adaptable, sensitive employees responsive to global trends and with the ability to communicate across cultures (Kittler, Rygl, &

Mackinnon, 2011; Wong, Etchells, Kuper, Levinson, & Shojania, 2010).

Several scholars maintain that ICC traits are best taught and learned at universities and educational institutions, especially given the growing diversity existing within such establishments. Interestingly, and consistent with this line of reasoning, are the initiatives of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) which identified multicultural and diversity understanding as important knowledge in undergraduate business programs, with accredited schools being required to support the concept of diversity and to show that their curricula prepare students for careers in global contexts. The AACSB directive required business schools to “prepare their students to work in an environment of strong global economic forces, wide differences in organizational and cultural values, and growing cultural diversity among employees and customers. The personal competencies responding to these requirements include flexibility, resourcefulness, tolerance for ambiguity, and vision, as well as cultural self-awareness, cultural consciousness, and multicultural leadership (Egan & Bendick, 2008; Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

Ironically, while the foregoing supports the view that competing and survival in a globalized environment demands that international managers be interculturally sensitized, research (Leask, 2009) indicates that, whereas Australian universities registered a significant increase in their international student intake in the past decade, the same period failed to witness a corresponding increase in engagement between domestic and overseas students. A question that perhaps flows logically from this situation is whether this lack of engagement equals to a lack of ICC awareness and development within Australian universities. Some studies which address this potential issue (Montgomery, 2009; Summers & Volet, 2008) attempt to link teachers’ pedagogic interventions, such as the use of group work in

culturally diverse cohorts, to students' enhanced cross-cultural capability and their sense of belonging.

This latter aspect resonates well with social exchange theory (SET), which postulates that human behavior, or social interaction, is an exchange, with exchange defined as social interaction characterized by aspects including reciprocal stimuli and enduring long-term social relations (Buchan, Croson, & Dawes, 2002; Zafirovski, 2005). A study by Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) revealed that 73 intercultural competencies are required for successful international managers. Some significant skills and abilities identified in their study included interpersonal skills, ability to use humor, interaction management, relationship building, and cultural empathy. Could the foregoing, therefore, when extended to the context of a highly international and multi-cultural student group with a strong digital divide (Prensky, 2001), be construed to mean that more face-to-face interactions, and hence reduced BL, is the way forward to allow for more social interaction and more reciprocal stimuli and, therefore, more ICC learning? In this article we attempt to address this through our research question: How do face-to-face and blended learning mode of learning compare in a highly cross-cultural setting where the main objective is to develop skills in ICC? Following from this research question, perceptual data was extracted from within an international, multi-cultural, post-graduate student cohort in an Australian university. Findings are supported with the key tenets of SET, an approach not particularly evident in the extant literature comparing the efficacy of face-to-face and blended learning, thereby giving this study its element of uniqueness.

We initially touch upon the broader elements of blended learning and face-to-face modes of delivery, followed by the increasing trend towards adoption of blended learning by the higher education sector the world over, and finally the growing importance of ICC and the critical need for inculcating these traits within student communities. Following this, we develop our argument that face-to-face is a more effective method than blended learning to develop ICC within cross-cultural student groups while simultaneously discussing and integrating elements of SET to inform our arguments.

The Case for Blended Learning

The extant literature is rife with statistics detailing the proliferation of technology enhanced non-traditional instructional methods in the higher education landscape, often referred to as technology-mediated learning (TML). Characterizing these institutions are ongoing investments aimed at enhancing integration of technology components into courses ranging from information sciences and technology and

communications to chemistry, nursing, and tourism and hospitality management (Alavi & Gallupe, 2003; Bailey & Morais, 2004; Brower, 2003; Christianson, Tiene, & Luft, 2002; Dziuban et al. 2004; Getty & Getty, 2003; Ladyshevsky & Flavell, 2012; Meyer, 2007; McDonnell, 2000; Paulisse & Polik, 1999; Sigala & Christou, 2003; Simkins, Coldwell, Close, & Morgan, 2009.). Although some studies, such as those of Bailey and Morais (2004) and Dziuban et al. (2004), appear to be American-centric, the significance of their research is arguably applicable to other developed nations, such as Australia, given the proliferation of computer mediated learning in recent years.

The blended learning delivery option, according to its proponents (Bailey & Morais, 2004; Dziuban et al., 2004; De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010), allows for retention of the face-to-face element and the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom while combining with the technologically enhanced learning environment, thus affording the best of both worlds. In order to ensure quality of learning environments, it is important to consider the design of, and students' engagement in, the learning environment (Duffy & Kirkley, 2004). Learning environments which are ineffectively designed could potentially lead to unsuccessful or unsatisfactory educational experiences. To address this concern, the community of inquiry (CoI) framework, developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), has been widely accepted and adopted (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The CoI framework, with its emphasis on critical thinking and collaboration, provides a well-structured model and a set of guidelines to create effective learning communities in online and blended learning environments (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Face-to-Face and ICC

An interesting parallel development is the growing organizational demand for cross-culturally capable employees who work within increasingly multi-cultural workforces (Goltz, Hiatapelto, Reinsch, & Tyrell, 2008; Pillay & James, 2013) to be equipped with skills including problem solving and advanced interpersonal skills (Avery & Thomas, 2004; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Specifically, within the Australian context, the recent White Paper released by its government (Australian Government, 2012) clearly details the need for the nation to broaden and deepen its understanding of Asian cultures and languages as a route to becoming more Asia capable and literate. Some scholars argue that an effective solution to meeting ICC relevant demands is through universities training students prior to their entering the workforce (Freeman, 1995). Supporting such thinking are others who maintain that

the increasing cultural, socio-economic and age-related diversity seen within universities (resulting from a greater demand for education) make them a valuable resource and an ideal training ground for imparting intercultural competence and allied skills within a low-risk environment (Azriel et al., 2005; Leask, 2009).

However, flowing from the aforesaid is a somewhat interesting and what appears to be an ironic scenario wherein universities on the one hand are being pressured to mold students into interculturally competent employees of the future, while on the other hand they are being required to do so with reduced face-to-face contact given the exponential increase in the adoption of online, technology-enhanced delivery modes. It is possible to reason that this sustained push towards the adoption of blended learning reflects a *one size fits all* mentality that somewhat disregards the fact that individuals from different cultural backgrounds have different learning style preferences (Holtbrugge & Mohr, 2010; Kayes, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). This potentially creates a contentious situation with tensions and, arguably, a trade-off, in that a reduction in face-to-face delivery equates with diminished ICC development of students. Implicit within this contentious scenario, and observable in its violation, is the assertion of Dewey (1916) that there is an inextricable link between what is taught and the method of teaching it. While extending this premise further in the following sections, we argue that the case for maintaining the principles of SET and developing students' ICC traits, and harnessing the benefits of the diversity available within university student communities, is as strong as is the case for enhanced face-to-face contact to facilitate the nurturing of these traits.

Several scholars argue that the benefits that accrue from effectively tapping into the diversity within today's higher education settings cannot be overemphasized (Bledsoe, Oatsvall, & Condon, 2010; Garcia et al., 2001; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). While claiming that institutions that deliver programs with a strong diversity benefit students, including enhanced cognitive and critical thinking skills, such scholars also maintain that students of such environments are more likely to recognize inequality and act on resolving it, and they are better prepared for life in an increasingly complex and diverse society and are more open to living in racially diverse neighborhoods after graduation. Others (Briguglio, 2006a; Briguglio, 2006b) maintain that time allocated within classrooms to aspects such as icebreaking, sharing expertise, and social interaction creates a climate of interaction which results in valuing cross-cultural skills and knowledge.

On the other hand, however, are forceful arguments (Anderson, 2008; Fincher, Carter, Tombesi, Shaw, &

Martel, 2009) that merely being part of a common campus or class does not make up for successful peer interaction. Perfectly mirroring this is the higher education tapestry in Australia, rich in the cultural diversity of its student population, with a dramatic increase in the absolute number of international students studying in its universities in the last decade; however, there has been no corresponding increase in terms of the interaction levels between local (Australian) and overseas students over the same period (Leask, 2009). Arguably, the key to the dilemma of optimizing the benefits of interaction lies in this being "planned and incorporated" within curriculum design, according to a research project examining the benefits and hindrances to interaction among students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds which was conducted in Australia between 2008 and 2010 (Arkoudis et al., 2010). Interestingly, this research found that while the potential obstacles on the teaching side included "limited time" available to foster interaction, a key barrier identified on the learning side was limited time spent on campus. It could be argued that both responses are clearly indicative of more, not less, face-to-face interactions needing to be planned and incorporated within curriculum.

While research by Ledwith, Lee, Manfredi, and Wildish (1998) suggests that diverse groups take much longer to become effective, Summers and Volet (2008) indicate six months as being the approximate minimum time necessary for culturally heterogeneous groups to work effectively. Viewed in this light, the case for the reduction of the face-to-face interface, via enhancement of blended learning, has worn thin. Intercultural competencies and understanding evolves through interactions with others (Barro, Jordan, & Roberts, 1998). According to Barro et al. (1998), "Culture is not something prone, waiting to be discovered but an active meaning-making system of experiences, which enters into and is constructed within every act of communication" (p. 83). Through interaction, individuals become more aware of (their) own cultural norms and make them explicit, a process that can be described as *making the familiar strange*.

Viewing Intercultural Competency through Social Exchange Theory

In addition to the argument above—and adding further credibility to the case for face-to-face being the better choice than blended learning, insofar as enhancement of ICC development is concerned—are several aspects of social exchange theory (SET) developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Social exchange theory is a broad approach used to explain and predict three dimensions to developing cross cultural skills:

- *Relationship maintenance* has a fundamental premise that human behavior is an *exchange of rewards* between actors, with exchanges (or *social interactions*) comprising enduring long-term social relations and with increasing social distance resulting in decreasing cooperation (Buchan et al., 2002; Zafirovski, 2005). Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) theory examines personal relationships in terms of costs versus benefits. What rewards do we receive from a given relationship, and what does it cost us to obtain those rewards? The theory takes into account how satisfied players would be with the relationships they choose to maintain. This, if juxtaposed with the findings of the scholars discussed earlier (Ledwith et al., 1998; Summers & Volet, 2008), would mean that lesser face-to-face interaction would result in lesser satisfaction (rewards) for players.
- *Exchange processes* are a function of reciprocal stimuli, with exchanges tending to breakdown if not reciprocated, that is, allowing an imbalance to permeate the exchange (interaction) process.
- *Social interaction* assumes that individuals establish and continue social relations on the basis of their expectations that such relations will be mutually advantageous. Such interaction allows for greater reciprocal exchanges (stimuli), and more opportunity for building enduring long-term social relations.

Further, the noted SET theorist Homans (1958) maintains that "the more one is likely to engage in an action, the more valuable its reward" (p. 600). While proponents of BL might argue that contact time and overall hours of faculty-student interaction are not necessarily negatively impacted, research by Meyer (2007) highlights three distinct advantages of face-to-face discussions in scenarios involving multicultural student groups: (a) the emotion, energy, fluidity, and ease of face-to-face exchanges, which capture very real advantages of face-to-face exchanges; (b) the ability to read nonverbal signs (body language, facial expressions) are seemingly critical to some students; and (c) immediate feedback (through nonverbal cues or verbal responses from their classmates), i.e., the students' points-of-view are immediately evaluated and in a way that is more memorable and also easier to respond and react to in the face-to-face discussion. Socially and emotionally, face-to-face oral communication is a rich medium as maintained by Garrison and Anderson (2003).

While SET and ICC are not meant to be interpreted as one and the same, they complement each other. The underlying premise of both SET and ICC is that social relations are a phenomenon permeating all aspects of behavior and social exchanges. The concepts of exchange and cultural competence are interdependent and closely intertwined.

Unit Description

The primary aim of the intercultural competency unit, of which the participants were a part, was to consider the issues of intercultural competence for people working in the area of international management and diversity. The unit takes the position that valuing differences and managing diversity is central to successful international management. In preparation of developing knowledge and skills of intercultural competence, the unit explores new and emerging developments that have changed what international managers are currently facing, and likely to face, in the coming years. Students successfully completing the unit are able to develop intercultural competencies and a global mindset which is demonstrated through experiential learning. The unit objectives include effectively managing people across cultures, being an effective team player in diverse environments, critically evaluating facets of international management, and appreciating the importance of managing change within a multicultural environment. To achieve the unit objectives, both the face-to-face and blended learning modes supported the need for course-based interaction. Well-structured interactions throughout the learning process encouraged the development of ICC skills through the adoption of the KOLB model.

Experiential activities were designed for both F2F and blended learning. Social exchange theory is based on the premise that behavior is an exchange of rewards between actors. The concept of exchange within the ICC context includes social gratification. As such, in order to develop ICC skills, tools such as the discussion board encourage students to experience, reflect, think and act in order to transform their experiences into active cross cultural learning. As experiential learning includes as one of its four pillars concrete experiences (CE), team-based activities were developed for both face-to-face and blended learning, to develop CE skills such as relationship building and understanding cross-cultural issues. Cross-cultural virtual team-based assessments, in-class assessments requiring cross cultural group formation, and case study analysis were some of the opportunities presented to students to encourage social exchanges, thereby developing their ICC. Cross-cultural groups were formed based on country background; for example, one group may have had four members from four different countries.

Method and Results

Participants

Participants included students enrolled in a unit of a postgraduate program at an Australian university. Questionnaires were administered by the authors during regular classroom time. Students were briefed as to the content and purpose of the survey. Participants were requested to place their completed surveys in a designated

drop-off box, which insured anonymity. The students in the sample come from 17 countries, with the majority (22%) being Australian born, followed by Chinese (21%) and Vietnamese (13%) students. Slightly more than half of the students (35 students, or 51%) were enrolled for a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management, followed by a Master's Degree in International Business (30 students, or 44%). A larger proportion of students (55 students, or 80%) had industry experience. We were interested in examining perceptual data of students' experiences after face-to-face and after blended learning. Like much survey research, this survey asked participants for their own perceptions of their experiences in relation to the unit objectives described earlier.

Instrumentation

We examined students' perception of blended learning and face-to-face in a cross-cultural context by way of a survey that included: (a) 20 items adapted from the studies of Bailey & Morais (2004), Lewis (2010), Meyer (2007), Orhan (2008), Skelton (2008), and Smart and Cappel (2006) (see Table 1); (b) eight demographic questions (see Table 2); and (c) two open-ended questions ("What are the advantages of studying in a blended learning mode for you?," and, "What are the disadvantages of studying in a blended learning mode for you?"). Students' responses to all 28 Likert-scale items typically ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The survey included two separate sections, one requesting perceptual responses to face-to-face experiences and one to blended learning experiences. In total, we collected questionnaires from 80 students, which was the total number of students enrolled for this unit. A number of questionnaires (12) were not included in our subsequent analysis, as relevant parts of the questionnaires were not filled in. After eliminating questionnaires that were not filled in correctly, we had responses from 68 students that could be used for empirical analyses. In line with the unit objectives, principles of SET and core skills required for ICC, the 20 items and the two open ended questions were examined against three dimensions: (1) social interaction, (2) relationship maintenance, and (3) exchange of rewards (see Table 3).

Results

The 13 items of the overall learning experience scale, as depicted in Table 2, were subjected to a series of exploratory factor analyses using SPSS. Prior to performing the analyses, the suitability of the data for exploratory factor analyses was assessed using a principle components analysis. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of some coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Okin

value was .83, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974), and Barlett's test of sphericity (Barlett, 1954) reached statistical significance supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Students were asked to rank, on a seven-point Likert scale, their perception of blended learning specifically. The results revealed 63% broadly agreeing (*strongly agree* and *agree*) and 17% broadly disagreeing (*strongly disagree* and *disagree*) to the statement, "I enjoyed the blended learning environment," while 46% broadly agreed to the statement, "I prefer blended learning to face-to-face." This "convenience" factor surfaced in the open-ended responses. Participants broadly agreed (86%) that "time spent in the face-to-face class was worthwhile," while only 31% broadly agreed that "time spent learning through BL was worthwhile." The majority of participants (72%) broadly agreed that "having responsibility for my own learning was useful" and "having control of my own learning material was useful" (71%), while 47% preferred to take all courses in a blended learning environment. The discussion board was an active tool for both face-to-face and blended learning modes and contained activities which required different forms of engagement addressing various ICC skills.

Selected direct responses from the two open-ended questions ("What are the advantages of studying in a BL mode for you?," and, "What are the disadvantages of studying in a blended learning mode for you?") are summarized in Table 3.

Discussion

Implications of Findings

Perceptual data indicate that face-to-face learning is potentially more effective in a highly cross-cultural setting where the main objective is to develop skills in intercultural competencies. The principal objective of this exploratory paper has been to examine the influence of face-to-face learning as compared with blended learning on the development of ICC skills. This was done through the lenses of SET, a more ambitious sociological theory, which views human behavior and relations as a phenomenon permeating all facets of social life. We maintain that applying SET to areas of management, including cross-cultural management and management education, lends to SET's explanatory value, which has been felt in diverse disciplinary areas. Responses to the open ended questions indicate that social exchange and interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of constructing ICC skills. As knowledge is fluid and dynamic, it takes on new meanings relative to the activity and situations under consideration (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). We

Table 1
Face-to-Face vs Blended Learning

SET principles and ICC skills*	Item	After face-to-face		After blended learning		<i>p</i>
		Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	
ER	Discussion was in depth and comprehensive	4.00	0.87	3.31	0.90	.000***
ER,SI,RM	I remember details on the ideas in our discussion	3.75	0.78	3.43	0.87	.013*
ER,RM,SI	I learn more in this setting	4.03	0.88	3.04	1.28	.000***
ER,RM,SI	I learn better in this setting	3.94	0.98	2.90	1.27	.000***
ER,RM,SI	I remember who said what in our discussion	3.55	1.15	2.79	1.15	.000***
ER,SI,RM	I was able to communicate with other students during the semester using the discussion board	2.95	1.17	3.06	1.08	.472
ER,SI,RM	I was able to share learning experiences with other students using the discussion board	3.06	1.19	3.12	1.12	.522
ER,SI,RM	The discussion board created a sense of community with fellow students	3.11	1.24	3.09	1.15	.904
ER,SI,RM	The ability to use the discussion board enabled me to collaborate with the other students	3.16	1.17	3.07	1.21	.350
ER,RM	The instructor encouraged me to become involved in the learning experience	4.03	0.91	3.52	1.00	.000***
ER	I was able to interact with the instructor during the learning experience	4.06	0.96	2.80	1.21	.000***
ER	I was able to interact with the instructor outside the regular class time	3.64	0.99	3.00	1.17	.001**
ER,SI,RM	The supporting resources made available to me were helpful for my learning experience	3.91	1.00	3.59	1.02	.000***

Note. *SI-Social Interaction; RM-Relationship Maintenance; ER- Exchange of Rewards

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

acknowledge that in order for the learning experience to be integrated and holistic, the process of knowledge construction involves the learners, the interactions that the learners engage in, and the cultural tools that facilitate such interactions such as TML.

Limitations

Our results must also be interpreted in light of their limitations. One such limitation is the relatively small sample of students in this study. However, the adequacy of the sample should be viewed as a function of the institutional and academic variables and therefore cannot be generalized across different contexts. The Australian university, which our study is based on, is considered to be a small university with small class sizes. A second limitation is the use of our choice of survey to examine perceptions of blended learning and

face-to-face interaction to students' learning experiences. This type of research may be what Goodyear and Ellis (2008) term as "simplistic comparisons" (p. 141). To avoid such simplistic comparisons, studies may benefit from a more holistic approach. Despite these limitations, the current study gives preliminary evidence of the use of face-to-face and blended learning within cross-cultural settings.

Future Research

Our findings hold promise for researchers and educators alike in the area of cross-cultural management and management education in that our results provide support for the importance of context, which is significantly related to cross-cultural studies and curriculum development and design. In comparison to most management education topics, blended

Table 2
Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	37	54.4
Male	31	45.6
Age Groups		
20-29	51	75.0
30-39	13	19.1
40-49	4	5.9
Work Experience		
Yes	55	80.9
No	13	19.1
Enrolment Status		
International Student	49	72.0
Local Student	19	28.0
Type of Enrolment		
Full Time	52	76.5
Part Time	16	23.5
Discipline		
Masters of Commerce (HRM)	35	51.5
Honours (HRM)	1	1.5
Grad. Dip. Commerce (IB)	8	11.8
Masters of Commerce (IB)	22	32.4
Other	2	2.9
Prior Experience in Blended learning		
Yes	35	51.5
No	33	48.5

Table 3
SET, ICC, and Face-to-Face vs Blended Learning

SET & ICC	Unit Objectives	Responses	
		Advantages of blended learning	Disadvantages of blended learning
Social Interaction	Managing diversity through group work, team-based activities and experiential learning	Probably did not get to develop ICC but the flexibility was great; good for those who are shy to contribute in class	Little opportunity to get to know other cultures, love direct contact and group work, had good past experiences, learn a lot from other cultures
Relationship Maintenance	Valuing differences, developing intercultural competence	Need to get the unit completed; less interested in team work right now	BL makes difficult to embrace other cultures. Continued working with some of my class mates in other units because of my relationship with them; blended learning encourages stereotyping. Future international managers sitting in class, wanted to network with them also.
Exchange of Rewards	Managing effectively people across cultures and social interactions	No class time constraints; sometimes hard to get to classes because of work	Learned so much from contact classes. Face-to-face was worthwhile for me; wanted to work with other locals to learn about their culture; wanted the interaction so prefer face-to-face; face-to-face was more energetic, felt very real world; can't understand sometimes, need lecturer and classmates

learning, within the context of Australian cross-cultural management curriculum, is in its infancy. Any conclusions consistently supported by scientific methods add enormously to our understanding of innovative pedagogies. It is recommended that research continue to be undertaken on institutional, cultural and contextual influences on innovative pedagogies, specifically as it relates to technology. At the time of the study, the application of TML was not as sophisticated, which, while a limitation, also contributes to opportunities for future research. Interesting contributions in this regard (Garrison et al., 2000; Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez, & Mason, 2001; Goodyear & Ellis, 2008; Harasim, 2000) point to the benefits of investigating TML. Future studies will also benefit from examining Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which provides a theoretical base for examining students' perceptions and acceptance of computer mediated communication tools. Such studies may potentially provide a sound basis for examining factors that contribute to student acceptance, attitude, and behavioral intention of technology within different learning environments. Additional tests are needed, which include cross-cultural variables within other country contexts so that comparisons between studies can be made.

Conclusion

While researchers in management education have, in recent years, dedicated substantial scholarly efforts to understanding the dynamics of technology towards proactive pursuits of change in curriculum design, cross-cultural theorists and social psychologists have instead focused on topics such as diversity management, cross-cultural leadership, and entrepreneurship instead. From these perspectives, technology is either presented as an opportunity to ensure that institutions are keeping abreast with times or as something that has to be done and which individuals must cope with. We maintain that work in the area of technology and management education within highly multi-cultural settings is important for a broad understanding of the social psychological dynamics of change, but there is also a need for viewing individuals, in this case future international managers, as potentially active participants in the process. An integrative theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics can help to fill gaps because intercultural competencies are an important precursor for coping in a borderless society.

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