The journal *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* has a Call for Papers for a Special Issue on "Social Norms and Cultural Dynamics". Guest Editors: Michael W. Morris (Columbia University), Ying-yi Hong (Nanyang Technological University), Chi-yue Chiu (Nanyang Technological University). Submission Deadline: December 30, 2012.

Why do the people in a group—a corporation, profession or nation—tend to behave in similar, characteristic ways? Why do they respond to situations and approach problems differently than do the people in other groups? Cultural differences are seen even between firms in same industry, between occupations that overlap, and between adjacent countries —groups that essentially share the same environment—so cultural patterns are not simply adaptations to different environments. Humans differ from other social animals in this tendency of groups to accumulate cultural patterns, and this may explain how we broke away from other primates in developing more complex social organization (Baumeister, 2005). To understand culture and its role in organizational behavior, researchers have grappled with two related problems at different levels of analysis. First, what psychological mechanism causes individuals to behave in culturally characteristic ways? Second, how do these processes keep a population behaving in a certain set of ways (even as the individuals in one generation are replaced by a new generation), or, in other cases, generate cultural change over time? The first problem—cultural influence—arises in traditional organizational behavior research examining the extent to which national, corporate, or occupational traditions constrain a person’s judgments, decisions, or behaviors (e.g. Earley, 1989). The second problem—cultural persistence and evolution—arises in research investigating how collective-level patterns reproduce themselves over time (e.g., Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Harrison & Carroll, 2006; Weick & Gilfillan, 1971).

The most studied psychological mechanism in cross-cultural research has been personal values (Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 1990). By this account, value-orientations, such as individualism or egalitarianism, are programmed by early socialization—formative experiences such as childrearing, schooling, or employee training. Once these values are inculcated, individuals, driven by their values, reproduced the culture’s characteristic patterns of behavior. Personal values operate cognitively like the self-concept, as chronically accessible, unwavering lenses that shape the person’s choices. This account has been critiqued for its reductionism—it portrays cultural patterns as emanating from each individual’s internalized value-orientation rather than as arising from their identifications with groups or their interactions with fellow group members. Further, empirical evidence suggests that very little cultural variation in behavior can be accounted for in terms of values (Oyserman & Coon, 2002).

An alternative account emphasizes the role of social norms in carrying cultural patterns. Whereas personal values are beliefs about one’s self, social norms are beliefs about other people. While the term is used variably in the social sciences, norms refer to what one’s fellows typically believe and do and expect of each other. Descriptive norms refer to what is—what prevails in the group; injunctive norms refer to what ought to be—what elicits approval in the group. Much research has highlighted how perceived norms affect workplace behaviors, such as absenteeism, conflict resolution, negotiation decisions, charitable giving, resource decisions, deference to authority, and so on (Bamberger & Biron, 2007; Fu et al., 2007; Kahneman, 1992; Miller, 1999; Pillutla & Chen,
Unlike ever-present values, perceived norms operate when contextually activated, when situational cues make them salient (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). Further, compared to personal values, perceived norms are more malleable. They are assumptions that get updated as an actor observes or experiences new people and new situations. The cue-ability and malleability of norms may help answer some questions about culture that have eluded value-based accounts, such as:

Why do people’s cultural affiliations shape their behavior so dramatically in some contexts but not at all in others? Why are some individuals from a culture more adherent to its characteristic patterns than are others? Why do some cultural patterns persist unchanged across many generations, whereas others shift dramatically within a generation?

Although norms have the potential to shed light on these dynamic aspects of culture, norm-based accounts of cultural influence and evolution remain complex and under-studied. To influence an individual’s thinking, a norm first has to be learned, either induced from everyday observations or imposed by authorities. Next, it has to be cognitively activated by cues in the situation. Even then, whether it is used to guide behavior depends on the person’s motivational dispositions and states. However, research is just beginning to delineate the variety of motives that impel people to use their knowledge of norms to guide their behavior. Traditionally, sociologists have theorized that people follow norms to avoid sanctions, yet norms may provide repertoires as well as restrictions, resources as well as constraints. A wider range of motives, which may correspond to different ways of using one’s knowledge of norms, are worth investigating for a fuller understanding.

Further, a fuller understanding of the role of norms in cultural influence and, ultimately, cultural evolution requires focusing more widely than a single actor. Norms are maintained in an actor’s interactions with other people and in public representations such as discourses, texts, and institutional rules (Sperber, 1996). For example, a person heading to a formal dinner without wearing shoes might be discouraged by disapproving glances from dining companions, stares from strangers, and a recitation of restaurant policy from the maître de. However, this collusion of many actors to maintain social norms is not inviolate, as cultures sometimes change dramatically within a generation. These changes can also be accounted for in terms of norm-based processes.

Recent research has yielded many insights about these individual- and collective-level dynamics; however, they are scattered across the literatures of organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, economics and political science, and needs better integration (Hechter & Opp, 2001).

This special issue aims to bring together research on social norms as carriers of culture for the audience of organizational behavior and decision making researchers. We invite papers from management and other disciplines to advance the understanding of cultural norms, including but not limited to the following issues:

Norm Acquisition, Activation and Updating
How do people acquire knowledge of the norms associated with their cultural groups? Does everyday communication lead people to make assumptions about descriptive norms, whether accurate or inaccurate (Lyons & Kashima, 2003)? Can descriptive and injunctive norms be inferred from vicarious observation of one’s fellows? Can they be conditioned by the experience of positive and negative outcomes that follow one’s behaviors, including both intrinsic reactions and social sanctions? Can beliefs about norms be imposed by authorities? What aspects of situations, such as cultural symbols or types of people, activate cultural norms (Fu et al., 2007; Liu, Friedman, & Hong, 2012; Savani, Morris & Naidu, 2011)? What are the cognitive, emotional, and neural correlates of norm use (Jacobson, Mortensen & Cialdini, 2011; Mason, Dyer & Norton, 2009)? How can leaders shift perceived norms or increase norm enforcement in order to manage behavior?
Norm Motivations and Enforcement Mechanisms

Norm activation does not necessarily entail norm compliance. For instance, passing a speed limit sign may activate the rule in one’s head without inducing one to slow down. Do people develop personal attitudes that are aligned with culturally characteristic behaviors simply as a function of enacting those behaviors, or does the normative nature of the behavior inhibit self-attribution (Bem, 1972)? Recent studies have identified dispositional and situational characteristics that generally affect whether people follow salient norms, regardless of the content of the norm. Individuals dispositionally high in Need for Cognitive Closure crave consensus, and thus rely on descriptive norms while making judgments (Fu et al., 2007). The state of ego-depletion (depleted willpower) amplifies the force of salient descriptive norms, yet dampens the force of salient injunctive norms (Jacobson et al., 2011). What motives drive people to invert norms in creative ways, or join countercultures opposed to the mainstream culture?

When are norms enforced by others through ex ante threats, promises, and pressures, as well as ex post sanctions for norm violation? Sanctions range from emotional signs (what is “approved of” versus “frowned upon”) to economic sanctions (extending or withdrawing exchange opportunities). What kinds of norms rely on each type of sanction? Given that sanctions are often costly for these enforcers, do other audiences reward enforcers for upholding the standards? Are people with different motivations differentially sensitive to norm enforcers? Are people for whom the costs of noncompliance are lower more likely to become activists and other norm violators, or are they people for whom the benefits of noncompliance are higher? How do motives and norm enforcement behaviors differ as a function whether the culture is tight versus loose with regard to norm violation (Gelfand et al., 2011)?

Diffusion within and across Groups

How does an idea become normative? How does a belief or behavior spread from one individual to others and ultimately become consensual, descriptively normative? Research on rumors and storytelling suggests that it depends on aspects of the idea’s content, such as its memorability and congruence with pre-existing beliefs and practices, which make it appealing to adopt and transmit (Sperber, 1996; Heath, 1996). Also context matters: Is the belief or behavioral variant modeled by an individual who is prestigious, successful, or similar to oneself? Variants perceived as prevalent in the population will be adopted out of conformity motives, and those perceived as infrequent, out of anticonformity motives (Henrich & McElreath, 2003). When differing norms prevail within a population, what determines whether individuals adopt the patterns of the elite, the majority, or similar others?

Do injunctive norms arise, as sociologists hold, when collective action is needed in the face of social dilemmas? If so, how do we explain moralized norms that appear dysfunctional for the individual and the group (Kitts, 2003)? To what extent do norms emerge out of interactions? What is the role of dyadic and triadic interactions, as well as of more complex social network structures? In the case of diffusion of a practice across populations, how do these social learning and social network mechanisms combine with institutional and political factors (Weber & Dacin, 2011)?

Persistence and Change

What features of norms make them more likely to persist across generations? In classic laboratory paradigms, the arbitrariness (Weick & Gilfillan, 1971) and institutionalization (Zucker, 1991) of norms have been shown to matter. Can such constructs help in understanding real cultural norms?
Social change operates in nonlinear ways. In cases such as the Czech Velvet Revolution or the Arab Spring, long periods of cultural stasis are punctuated by dramatic shifts. This may reflect that some of the same mechanisms that contribute to persistence figure in cultural change. When there is a supply of activists who violate a norm, this creates the opportunity for an authority to play the role of a norm entrepreneur who stops enforcing the traditional norm. While norm entrepreneurs, such as a police officer who stops imposing a curfew, may lose the esteem of some audiences, they may be embraced by, opinion leaders such as journalists. More actors will adopt the new behavior seeing that activists go unpunished and that authorities approve. Are there tipping points at which the force of conformity suddenly tilts in favor of the new behavior rather than the old? The psychology of norms, in this way, can create cascades in what behaviors and beliefs are adopted. A norm analysis of cultural change calls attention to the attributes and needs of people in the activist, norm entrepreneur, and opinion leader roles. What kinds of people are drawn to each role in the process? Does change depend more on the supply of activists or the demand for them on the part of norm entrepreneurs and opinion leaders (Hechter & Opp, 2001)?

This list of topics is suggestive, not comprehensive. We are open to multiple perspectives on identifying new areas for enhancing the understanding the role of norms in cultural processes (both within and between cultures), and especially welcome interdisciplinary analyses. Priority will be given to empirical papers.

Submissions
Instructions for preparing manuscripts are provided at the journal website: http://www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp/authorinstructions

Manuscripts should be submitted on-line at the following page: http://ees.elsevier.com/obhdp/

The deadline for submission is December 30, 2012. Submissions will be accepted beginning December 1, 2012.

Questions about the special issue can be directed to any of the guest co-editors: Michael Morris (mwm82@columbia.edu), Ying-yi Hong (yingyi.hong@gmail.com), Chi-yue Chiu (cy.cychiu@gmail.com), or the Editor of OBHDP Xiao-Ping Chen (xpchen@uw.edu).

References


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