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## **Organizational Culture and Identity Strategies in International Management: an interdisciplinary review.**

**Olivier Irrmann**

INSEAD, Strategy and Management Area  
& Helsinki School of Economics, Department of International Business

Correspondance to:

INSEAD, Strategy and Management Area,  
Boulevard de Constance, 77305 Fontainebleau – France  
Telephone: +33-1-60724000 extension 4730  
e-mail: [olivier.irmann@insead.edu](mailto:olivier.irmann@insead.edu) / [olivier.irmann@hkkk.fi](mailto:olivier.irmann@hkkk.fi)

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The notion of organizational culture has raised a considerable interest during the past two decades in the field of International Management for being a factor playing an important role in the various organizational processes leading ultimately to performance. However organizational culture is generally presented as a set of values and ideas that would be homogeneously shared by the entire organization, a monolithic vision generally rejected by most social scientists and psychologists. This paper examines how different disciplines have conceptualized organizational culture and identity, progressively revealing its complex and multidimensional nature. We argue that there is a considerable discrepancy between the claimed organizational culture expressed and promoted by the top management as an indirect control mechanism and the sub-cultures and identities coexisting in a firm. Using the example of research on identity and culture in Mergers and Acquisitions, we show that the shift from the traditional “monolithic culture” analysis to the more complex “multiple culture” perspective requires major change in the approach of human interaction in International Business and Management.

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## **1. Organizational Culture: the single culture perspective .**

The notion of corporate culture – later designated under the broader label of organizational culture - appeared in the managerial discourse during the 70's in the United States and a decade later in Europe. The theme of corporate culture was a way to stress the importance of the human factor in economic production and it rapidly encountered a great success. Organizational culture has been presented as a factor influencing performance, integration process of mergers, knowledge transfer, shareholder value, competitive advantage, adoption of the marketing concept by firms, export performance and internationalisation process, to cite a few. The increasing number of Mergers and Acquisitions during the past decade gave an extra credibility to the idea of corporate culture, as the choc of mentalities and cultures experienced by the members of the new organizations led to rethink about the way companies do work.

In early works in organization studies on the topic of organizational culture, organizations are viewed as the carriers of a single and unique culture (Deal & Kennedy 1982, Ouchi 1981, Peters and Waterman 1982, Pettigrew 1979, Schein 1983, 1985). Organizational culture is generally presented as a set of values and ideas that would be homogeneously and unanimously shared by the entire organization. Reference is made to the “culture of the organization”, as if the organization would be a closed, homogeneous and well-defined universe whose superordinate culture would dictate attitudes and behaviours to the individuals. In this acceptance of the term, organizational culture does not depend on employees, but is pre-existing and imposed upon them.

This monolithic approach of culture led researchers to define normative typologies of organizational cultures, with the rationale that any given organization could be identified by one specific type of culture. An example of this approach is found in the work of Deshpande, Farley and Webster (1993) who classify organizational cultures into four categories: (1) market culture, characterized by its emphasis on competitive advantage and market superiority; (2) clan culture that emphasizes internal maintenance in terms of commitment, cohesiveness, and morale; (3) hierarchical culture representing a bureaucratic structure, orders, rules, and uniformity; (4) adhocracy culture, characterized as an entrepreneur, creative, and adaptable culture that emphasizes innovation, profitability and growth. Their construct of organizational culture is operationalized through four organizational dimensions: kind of organization, leadership practices, cohesiveness, and the focal point of the organization's existence. A 16-statement questionnaire was developed accordingly, and respondents' level of agreement on a seven-point scale about those statements would define the kind of culture representative of the organization studied.

The single culture perspective is generally considering corporate leaders as the main sources and shapers of culture in organization. In his first works on the topic, Schein (1983, 1985) considered that organizational cultures were created by company founders and leaders and therefore that “culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin.” (Schein, 1985:2). This reference to Edgar Schein’s early works is generally used to justify the widespread practice of administering organizational culture questionnaires solely to top managers. Though they may have an important role in establishing and shaping official corporate policies, structures as well as control and reward mechanisms, the assumption that top-management team values and norms are to be applied to the whole firm is probably excessive and possibly fallacious, calling for caution in the manipulation of terms and concepts.

What is observed with this type of methodology is the organizational culture perceived or claimed by top managers. This “declared managerial culture” is probably presenting a very strong correlation with the managerial style and the official ideology promoted by the organization leaders. However an organization is not composed only of top-managers and there is a considerable discrepancy between the claimed organizational culture promoted by the top management as an indirect control mechanism (see by instance the view of O’Reilly (2000) about the topic) and the sub- cultures and identities coexisting in a firm.

The appearance of a cohesive identity all through an organization can be luring. As Welch and Welch (1997:681) argue: “The mere fact that senior management articulates and actively promotes a certain set of corporate values, reinforced through actions, particularly those relating to promotion and reward, will almost automatically ensure that the majority of personnel will at least overtly espouse adoption and even engage in appropriate behaviours”. However the degree of commitment to the organization’s articulated values – sometimes codified in corporate creeds, such as the “ABB

book of values” – is deemed to vary among members of the organization, despite what overt behaviour displays and verbal utterances might indicate. For Welch and Welch (1997), there is a wide range of possibilities, from individuals strongly believing and promoting the official corporate values (zealots) to individuals highly uncommitted and even openly challenging the claimed corporate values (heretics). Arnott (1999) identified some cases where the pressure to subsume employees identities and pledge unconditional obedience to leaders was so strong that the companies had all the characteristics of a “corporate cult”. However this seems to be the exception and in many cases there will be only a selective and calculative compliance to corporate values, rather than a deep identification with them (Willmott, 1993:537).

This monolithic vision of organizational culture may be possibly viewed simply as an ideological manipulation of the ethnological and sociological concept of culture, only aimed at legitimising the way work is organized within companies (Cuche 1996). It is important to realize that the notion of and the discourse about corporate culture has not emerged solely from social science, but has been considerably shaped by the managerial world. Barley, Meyer & Gash (1988) showed how, between 1975 and 1984, the academic discourse (mainly North-American) about organizational culture adopted progressively most of the normative themes present in early practitioners’ texts, particularly the possibility to rationally control culture and the economic value ensued by this control. Barley et al. (1988:42) summarize the promise of the “strong” organizational culture proponents as follows: “culture enhances social integration, social integration increases performance and productivity; therefore if one can enhance social integration by manipulating culture, then, substantial increments in performance and productivity should ensue”.

It is also significant that the popularity of this particular cultural rhetoric appeared during a time of economic crisis, marked by important industrial restructuring programmes and layoffs. The

discourse around corporate culture was a way to regain employees' motivation and support for managerial objectives in a time of doubts and uncertainties (Cuche 1996). In the US periods of economic contractions have been shown to generally coincide with the surge of rational and normative theorizing in managerial discourse, leading to managerial ideologies of control (Barley & Kunda, 1992).

## **2. Organizational Culture: the multiple cultures perspective**

Sociologists who studied the question of culture in organizations found evidences of heterogeneous universes, comparable to the social heterogeneity of different categories of workers. Individuals carry along with them professional cultures (occupational cultures), sometimes cultures of classes (e.g. working class), which are not specific to the organization. Organizational culture does not exist independently of the company employees but is constructed by them, as the result of cultural confrontations between the different social groups existing within the company.

Francfort, Osty, Sainsaulieu & Uhalde (1995) led a vast programmatic study of 262 organizational units, conducting 4000 interviews between 1986 and 1994 in order to map the forms of social integration and collective identities in contemporary public and private organizations. Their survey found that in the vast majority of cases organizations are the theatre of several coexisting models of identification. They identified six forms of collective identities existing at various degrees in organizations, discriminated according to the type of socialization patterns at work (from minimum to maximum interaction with co-workers) and the type of integration (from rule-led integration to strong involvement with the activities). Only 34% of their sample could be defined as having a

unifying organizational culture (unifying, which does not mean homogeneous), generally in firms having limited professional identity differentiation, such as SMEs exposed to strong market uncertainties or MNC promoting a discourse of collective challenge rewarded by promotion. In 42% of the cases there was several collective identities present within the same organization, often strongly defined but with no symbolic link between them, labelled cultural duality by the researchers. That was often the case in Taylorian type of industries dominated by a small group of professionals faced to a mass of executors with a purely instrumental relation to work. The case of cultural disintegration was found in 24% of their observations, corresponding to an old and very cohesive culture that was progressively disintegrating due to important changes in the socio-economic context, scattering the original communitarian references. There were generally more conflicts in these types of firms, as newcomers challenged the legitimacy of older groups in organization.

For sociologists there is no doubt that there is multiplicity of professional identities coexisting in organization. For them the term culture refers to the link between groups and the confrontation between social groups, not to any homogeneous characteristic of organization. Therefore a unifying culture as well as a disintegrating culture can exist in performing companies.

In very much the same line and using similar methodology than organization sociologists, a small group of organization researchers engaged in inductive research and started to find ample evidences of the simultaneous existence of multiple cultures in organizations (Gregory, 1983; Martin & Siehl 1983; Martin, Sitkin & Boehm, 1985; Sackmann, 1992; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). Their field studies testified that an organization is best viewed as an heterogeneous, pluralistic system whose members may develop shared set of assumptions within the organization setting, but also bring with them their various sets of assumptions acquired outside the organization. This “multiple cultures

perspective” formed a strong counter-current to the once dominant monolithic culture school of thinking. For proponents of this multiple cultures perspective, the organization is viewed as the “potential carrier of a multiplicity of separate, overlapping, superimposed, or nested cultures, with the organization’s participants maintaining simultaneous membership in any number of these cultural groups” (Sackmann, Phillips, Kleinberg & Boyacigiller, 1997:33).

The review led by Sackmann and colleagues (1997) reveals the complexity of cultures in organizational settings. Researchers identified cultural boundaries at different level (supra-organizational, organizational, trans-organizational and sub-organizational level) across a long list of differentiating factors (function, functional domain, tenure and hierarchy, ethnicity, gender, role, plant site, countermovement, single business, global enterprise, conglomerate, family firm, profession or guild, nation, geographical region within a country, economic region, industry, ideology), as shown in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1]

It is revealing that in his more recent works Edgar Schein (1996, 1996b) seems to have adopted the multiple cultures perspective in his analysis of learning processes within organizations (“organizational learning”) by focusing on the often dysfunctional interaction between three generic occupational communities: the operator culture, the engineer culture and the executive culture. He states that “in most organizations there are three different major occupational cultures that do not really understand each other very much, and that often work at cross-purpose” (Schein, 1996b:11).



At this stage we may realize that the notion of the single culture in organizations may just be an artefact of the research methodology. Researchers are driven primarily by the practicality of the research situation, that is to what kind of data do they have access and what skill set or research model do they have. The monolithic culture perspective was driven mainly by a strong positivist tradition interested mainly by operational definitions and the gathering of questionnaire data easily amenable to quantitative analysis. Therefore the concept of the leader as holder of culture offered a practical tool for empirically testing deductive models on large samples of top managers. Revealing the cultural groupings in organizations is a more difficult and time-consuming task as it implies an emic perspective, infiltrating an organization with inductive methods and field data collection using ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methods. As Schein (1996:239) puts it:

*“My own insights have only come after I have spent hours and hours immersed in a given phenomenon, after I have identified and dealt with all my own prior expectations and stereotypes, and I have gradually come to see what is really out there. (...) Particularly in relation to culture, when I see my colleagues inventing questionnaires to “measure” culture, I feel that they are simply not seeing what is there, and this is particularly dangerous when one is dealing with a social force that is invisible yet very powerful”*

This perspective on the inherent complexity of organizations invites researchers to adopt a dynamic approach of intercultural interaction in organizational studies. Accepting the premise that organizations do not operate within a specific cultural context changes the focus of investigation in cross-cultural studies. The two main questions become “when and under what circumstances do certain cultures become salient and more relevant than others” and “how do the various cultures interact in different circumstances?” (Sackmann et al, 1997).

### **3. From Culture to Identity: social and organizational identity.**

#### *3.1 Social, cultural and ethnic identity*

The analysis of organizational behaviour and psychology has recently been enriched by a growing body of works using social identity principles, starting from the seminal paper of Ashforth and Mael (1989). The concept of organizational identity and identification is progressively gaining legitimacy as confirmed by the special topic forum in the Academy of Management Review (2000; see Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000). The social identity approach is based upon the work of Tajfel and Turner who formed the basis of two theories: social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). Social identity theory is concerned with the psychological underpinnings of intergroup relations and social conflicts. Self-categorization theory focuses more on the role of social categorization processes in group formation and action. Social identity is also a central notion in recent advances in social and organizational psychology (Gilbert, Fiske & Lindsey, 1998; Haslam, 2001).

The starting point of social identity is not anymore how values or norms are internalised, but how the individual identifies with a group category, and starts to think and relate accordingly. This does not necessarily means that the values associated to this category are internalised by the individual. As Alvesson (2000:1105) puts it nicely, “One may feel as a corporate member, a woman or a Italian without necessarily internalising all the values assumed to be typical for the category. As experiments have shown, people may easily adopt a particular social identity without any distinctive ideas, value or emotions being involved”. In social identity theory, social identities are based on the

groups in which one participates, and an individual may have as many social identities as he or she has group membership.

The concept of organizational identity is not referring anymore to the individual identity, but to the conceptualisations and categorization made by organization members of “who are we” as an organization. Albert and Whetten (1985) define organizational identity as comprising those characteristics of an organization that its members believe are central, distinctive and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1996). Much of the work on organizational identity considers the existence of multiple identities as the norm, recognizing that there are plenty of potential benefits as well as costs associated to multiple identities. Those multiple identities can be associated with different collectives that exist in the different parts of the organization (ideographic multiplicity) or in some cases all organizational members recognize the existence of different identities (holographic multiplicity) (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

At a different level of analysis, ethnic and cultural identity refers to the same logic of self-identification and definition of “who are we”. The difference between culture and ethnicity is subtle. While any subjectively identifiable group might share a common culture, ethnicity is a conscious awareness of that sharing. It is common for people to categorize themselves into distinct ethnic groups in spite of having, from an outsider’s perspective, a great deal of shared culture in common (O’Reilly, 2001). Ethnic identification is also a way to exclude those who are not members of the group. On the other hand shared cultural traits are often acknowledged across ethnic groups. There is by instance frequent reference to a common European culture, while the ethnic diversity within the region is acknowledged.

The works of Barth (1969) showed how an ethnic group could be seen as an ascriptive category that is best understood in the context of group boundary formation and maintenance. In situations of social interactions between or among members of different groups, what is important is not the cultural traits one could define to isolate the group from others, but rather where is the border drawn by the group and how differences are coded, expressed and interpreted.

As one can enact different social identities, all individuals have many potential cultural identities. We learn how to become members of different groups and how to properly behave in each of these groups. For Collier (1994) identities are co-created in relationships with others. Rather than referring to a cultural or ethnic identity in terms of fixed and absolute dimensions, we should think in terms of “cultural identity enactment”. This means that “who we are and how we are differs and emerges depending who we are with” (Collier, 1994:40). Identities of all sorts – social, ethnic, organizational – can shift depending on the context in which we are.

This type of phenomena is not new to social scientists, particularly to modern anthropologists. Bastide (1955, cited in Cuche 1996) considered that people living in multicultural societies frequently cut their social spaces in a series of “water-proof compartements” in which they have different type of participations. Bastide (1955) observed this phenomenon he sketched as the “principle of separation” (*principe de coupure*) in afro-brazilian groups that were simultaneously fervent adepts of cults and extremely well adapted to a very rational economic world. The apparent contradiction between the two mental and social universes is not of any consequence, as the individual lives in both universes without making them communicate. Another illustration is presented by Renault (1992, cited in Cuche 1996) who observed African immigrant in France coming from very strict muslim communities and working as respected professionals in pork

slaughter-houses. The daily contact with pork meat is considered as a necessity of industrial work and does not alter in any way their identities as Muslims.

One should be careful not to attribute too much importance to the separation between ethnic and organizational identity. Ethnic and cultural identities are also parts of organizational life, particularly in large scale and diversified organization (see the constitution of national “mafias” in the European Commission, or national “homophile attraction” in MNCs). Koot (1997) goes even to suggest that ethnic rivalry is a much more appropriate tool to use in organizations than the building of cultural synergy. He argues that ethnicity is a good way to transcend ranks and ages and is a vehicle of social mobility, as well as an efficient way to mobilize workers as he shows in his study of two Dutch plants abroad.

In very much the same way that calling upon a particular social identity does not imply the internalization of particular values, cultural identity may or may not be congruent with ethnic identity (Roosens, 1995).

### *3.2. Identity strategies or the strategic use of cultural identity*

Identity – would it be cultural, national, ethnic, organizational or social – is multidimensional and dynamic. Identity varies, can be reformulated, even manipulated. Some authors consider that identity may be used as a mean to an end, leading to a sort of identity strategy. Ethnicity and ethnic identification can be used as the basis of effective political and economic strategy (Bell 1975; Roosens 1989 with his concept of ethnogenesis). Identity is not absolute and is constructed through social actors, according to the social situation and the respective power relationships between social

groups. Seeing identity as a strategy means that every social and economic change may lead to different formulation of identity.

Francoise Morin (1990) illustrates this very well in her analysis of the recomposition of Haitian immigrant identity in New-York through times. In the 1960's the first wave of emigrants was issued from the Haitian "mulâtre" (metis) elite and opted for the assimilation to the American nation. Everything was done to evoke "whiteness" and distinction, in order to avoid being categorized to socially outcasted African-American groups. The second wave of immigration in the 1970's was mainly composed of middle class black families. Faced to the difficulties of integration, they chose the strategy of being recognized as a specific ethnic group – again in order not to be confounded with African-Americans - by enacting an Haïtian identity and using the French language as a distinctive sign. In the 1980's the Haïtian identity in the US was devalorized, following the dramas of the boat-people stranded on the coast of Florida and the classification of Haïtians as a risk- group in the spreading of AIDS. As a consequence the young Haïtian – "second generation" born or grown up in the US – rejected the Haïtian identity and claimed a transnational caribbean identity, exploiting the fact that New -York became through immigration the city with the highest caribbean population in the world.

In organizations, different identities can be enacted according to the particular goal a group is aiming at and the kind of common cultural referent that are available and can be exploited. Dahler-Larsen (1997) analyzed several strikes that occurred in the Scandinavian airline company SAS, recknowned for being a company with a strong unifying corporate culture, and showed how strikers referred alternatively to four different "we-typifications" at different time: we as cabin attendants, we as SAS members, we as employees (opposed to managers), we as Danes.

If identities are shifting and malleable, they are also prone to be instrumentalized. Pratt and Foreman (2000) consider by instance that multiple organizational identities can be managed - altered by individuals within the organization – and present four major types of possible managerial responses (compartmentalization, deletion, integration, aggregation) that may be more or less appropriate in certain conditions. The mechanisms that can be used to change identities are many. Pratt & Foreman (2000:36) list the following possibilities: symbolic manipulation, change in personnel, physical or temporal separation of distinct subgroups, sequential attention to multiple identities, creation of “anti identities”, use of rhetorical tactics, socialization of members to mediatory or other myths. Other social and structural mechanisms can be implemented such as the use of compensation schemes, political maneuvering, training programs, or restructuring to influence members’ beliefs about what is central, distinctive and enduring about their organization. Rhetorical tactics and socialization of members can often be the occasion to promote the official vision of corporate culture, whether the official values and goals are really a unifying glue or just a corporate ideology justifying the ways work is organized in the particular organizational setting.

In addition to these internal structural and social processes, the use of marketing communication techniques offers a powerful technique to send a message internally, using the strategy known as “internal marketing” in the field of services marketing and management (Grönroos 1985, 1990 and Gilmore & Carson 1995 for a review of this concept). By instance an advertising campaign is not necessarily solely targeting external audiences but can also very much be a channel to communicate internally (via mass-media) about the type of service quality that should be achieved and delivered by employees and the image the company wants to project externally and that should be implemented by organizational members (George & Berry 1981). A marketing campaign can also be the occasion to promote – externally and internally – the image of the organization and reinforce

the organizational belonging pride as well as the positioning of the organization in the mind of its customers and employees.

#### **4. Culture and identity in Mergers and Acquisitions.**

According to social identity theory, people have different perceptions about the permeability of group boundaries and about the stability and legitimacy of their group's relative position on a dimension of social comparison. These perceptions impact upon the strategies pursued by members of low- and high-status groups in their attempts to achieve or maintain a positive social identity. As a consequence, social identity and identification have particular implications for the way in which people deal with social and organizational change (Haslan 2001:36).

Organizational mergers and acquisitions can have a considerable impact on the psychological bond between employee and organization. The recomposition of organizational identification after the change is not an easy process, particularly when the two –or more in the case of successive operations - merged organizations were direct competitors in the past.

Studies of organizational mergers and acquisitions taking a social identity perspective attribute a considerable importance to the perception of organizational status and dominance as a factor influencing post-merger identification. In acquisitions, the “acquiring” organization is generally more influential in shaping the new organization, leading to the perception of a dominating organization. In mergers, the case is not radically different despite frequent managerial discourse about “mergers of equals”. In most instances, mergers or acquisitions are psychologically perceived



by organizational members as a takeover, and one organization is generally dominating the other because of its larger size, amount of resources, profitability, access to power or influence (Rentsch & Schneider 1991). Van Knippenberg and associates (van Knippenberg, van Knippenber, Monden & de Lima, forthcoming) in their study of two merging organizations (government and education) argue that a dominant position in a merger is conducive of a sense of continuity between pre-merger and post-merger identification leading to an enhanced post-merger organizational identification. The dominated position was associated with discontinuity and led to a reduced organizational identification. But the processes leading to identification are rather complex and to a large extent difficult to predict. Anastasio, Bachman, Gaertner & Dovidio (1997) showed how in a case of a bank takeover the members of a large acquiring bank tended to accept a new superordinate corporate identity and believed this gave them enhanced personal opportunity, while members of the acquired bank collectively resisted this view and were more likely to act in terms of their old pre-acquisition social identity. Terry and her colleagues examined similar processes but in a different direction in the context of a merger between a high-status international airline and a low-status domestic airline (Terry, Callan & Sartori, 1996; Terry, Carey & Callan, 1997; Terry & Callan, 1998). Members of the low-status organizations more readily accepted the superordinate structure believing it offered them better prospects as individuals. The high-status group members believed that their group as a whole would lose status and resisted change, being more likely to seek to act collectively in terms of their pre-merger identity.

Taking a business strategy perspective, Laura Empson attributed the numerous instances of non-cooperative behaviors during the implementation phase of merged professional services firms to the twin fears of “exploitation” and “contamination” (Empson 2000, 2001). The fear of exploitation arised when individuals thought their knowledge was more valuable than that of their merger partner colleagues. Any cooperation would be detrimental as they believed they could not gain

anything in the exchange. The fear of contamination was related to the staff perception that the value embodied in their personal image (more upmarket than the other) and their organization's reputation would be diminished through the new association. Empson outlines that "often the reasons why individuals perceive their knowledge or image to be superior are hard to justify by any objective criteria, and individuals on both sides of the merger found reasons to look down on each other" (Empson, 2000:43).

This kind of reticence to identify with the new organization is generally seen as one of the worst obstacles to a successful integration of acquisitions, leading to what has been coined the "us and them" syndrome (Morosini 1998:257). For Morosini (1998) the high failure rates of acquisitions observed over a long period of time by researchers are often due to company managers systematically overlooking the major cultural and organizational complexities involved in integrating the merging firms' operations and informal networks (Morosini 1998).

As the increasing number of cross-border acquisitions brought public attention to the clashes of management styles and philosophies, many scholars tried to test whether organizations could display a higher level of "cultural compatibility" for a successful acquisition. In very much the same rhetoric than the single culture perspective, the promise would be that companies with compatible cultures would be less problematic to acquire and generate higher value. In his recent review of the literature on the topic, Schoenberg (2000) showed that most of the research seems to indicate that the impact of cultural compatibility on subsequent acquisition performance is revolving around the form of post-acquisition integration and the relative attractiveness of the acquirer's culture. However he also noted that there is a clear lack of consensus and even a paucity of results regarding what form of integration and what aspects of culture would be most influential on performance.

If we are to consider the insights generated by the multiple culture perspective as well as social and organizational identity theory, the focus should be shifted to how categorization and identification are perceived, interpreted and managed by members of an organization and if that leads to either a welcoming of the new entity or a resistance. This could lead to an attempt to manage the “perceived border” and the “we-typifications” (Dahler-Larsen 1997). Though, it is unquestionable that there are antecedents to the type of we-typifications/categorization/identification generated by an acquisition or a merger. Attractiveness of the acquirer, dominance, form of acquisition, resources redeployment and divestment (including possible layoffs and restructuring) are elements that play an extremely important role in the possible formation of a “we and them” syndrom. Still, the existence of these antecedents is not automatically generating either acceptance or rejection of the new organizational order. In many cases the organization level may even become irrelevant for the analysis, as the work-group identity may become more salient than the identification to the organization as a whole (Van Knippenberg & van Schie 2000). In cross-border M&As considerations of nationality can also come to complicate further the issue, with a mix of national, regional and ethnic identities. National categorizations are used a substitute for describing the organizations at play (“the Swedes are buying us”) and the manipulation of national stereotypes is an easy way to distantiate itself from the acquirer (“You could hear the tramp of [German] jackboots in the corridors” – see Gertsen & Söderberg 1998:187). National interest can also be used as an anchor in order either to favour or to reject an acquisition bid, particularly in the case of specific industries such as airlines, banks or insurances (Morosini 1998).

**5. New research paths in the study of culture and identity: integrating research in sociology, psychology, and management.**

In two decades, research in social science has progressively revealed the complex and multiple nature of culture and identity in organizations. Surprisingly, the monolithic vision of organizational culture is still dominant in some areas. International Marketing and International Business in particular are still largely using the monolithic conception of organizational culture, using organization-wide classifications (one organization – one culture) and seeing top managers as the most reliable source of information on the topic. Recent advances in the study of cultural, social and organizational identity suggest substantial modifications in our approach of the topic.

The first necessary step is to shift from a single culture to a multiple culture perspective. In other words, we should not consider anymore that organizations are the carriers of a single and undisputed culture. Any work using Edgar Schein's early arguments (1983, 1985) about top managers as the mirror of culture in enterprises should be revisited in the light of what Schein himself (1996, 1996b) recently said about the multiplicity of occupational cultures in organizations. Researchers should not confound the "claimed culture" or "organizational ideology" presented by top managers with the reality experienced at different level of an organization. If the distinction between the two is not a burning issue for research looking only at discrete interactions within homogeneous groups - such as top-management negotiations in joint-venture formation – it becomes particularly important when the aim is to understand complex processes at company-wide levels, such as integration processes in Mergers and Acquisitions or knowledge transfer between or within organizations.

In the same line of argument we should move beyond the vision of culture as a set of stable and static dimensions, a vision inherited from old mid-twentieth century anthropological notions. Modern anthropology and sociology see culture as the result of interaction and confrontation between groups, and not (anymore) as a set of defining traits and features of groups. Trying to

identify cultures in presence is only a starting point, useful for comparative purpose. The critical issue is to identify, among the multiple coexisting cultures in an organization, what parts of culture become salient and relevant in face of different conditions, contexts or events (e.g. corporate change or economic turbulences), keeping in mind the dynamic nature of identity and identification.

The social identity perspective has some intriguing implications for scholars in management. One could hypothesize that a critical cause of the high level of failures in cross-border Mergers and Acquisitions would be poor management of post-merger identification. Rather than focusing on the form and speed of integration, scholars could fruitfully study post-merger internal and external communication and the way they influenced perception of status and dominance and gave way to cooperative or non-cooperative behaviours. It is undeniable that the large media battle prior to the mergers of Total-Fina and Elf (France 1999) or Hewlett-Packard and Compaq (USA 2002) had profound influences in the subsequent integration processes. Measures reflecting the level and tone of media coverage of an alliance or an acquisition could be of great interests in models testing the antecedents of firms' performance.

Probably one of the most underestimated and understudied elements in the International Business field is the central role of individual perceptions. Taking the notion of perception into account could solve many of the difficulties one face when trying to understand the nature of international business activity. By instance Buckley and Chapman (1997) showed how transaction costs economics could solve the major problem created by the inability to precisely measure transaction cost by shifting its central precept from "transaction costs are always minimized" to "perceived transaction costs are always minimized". Even flows of Foreign Direct Investment can be influenced by perceptions of economic actors. Mauro Guillén (2000) showed how foreign multinational investments in Argentina, South Korea and Spain were strongly influenced and often

resisted by the way organized labour perceived the multinational's image. As a matter of fact perceptions are already at the heart of knowledge produced by academic research. In the absence of archival or accounting data, most of large-scale mail surveys are actually collecting the perceptions of specific organizational members to account for particular aspects of international business and corporate strategy and management. Recognizing the importance of perception in our understanding of international business activity forces us to enrich our research agenda by including notions we used to confine to other fields: multiple cultures, social and organizational identity, narratives, intercultural communication, mass-media, perceptual bias, cognitive dissonance.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Factors leading to cultural differentiation in a multiple cultures perspective**  
**(from Sackmann et al. 1997:37)**

Level of analysis	Differentiating factor	Authors
<b>Sub-organizational</b>	Function or functional domain	Handy, 1978; Sackmann, 1991,1992b
	Tenure and hierarchy	Martin et al 1985; Sarnin 1989;
	Ethnicity	Gregory 1983
	Gender	Blackhurst 1986; Symons 1986
	Role	Rusted 1986
	Plant site	Bushe 1988
	Countermovement	Dent 1986
<b>Organizational</b>	Single business	Pacanowski 1987; Pederson 1987; Rosen 1986; Rusted 1986, Schein 1985
	Global enterprise	Garsten 1990
	Conglomerate	Pettigrew 1985; Sackmann 1991; Tunstall 1985
	Family firm	Dyer 1986
<b>Transorganizational</b>	Profession or guild	Barley 1984; Dubinskas 1988; Gesit & Hardesty 1987; Gregory 1983
<b>Supra-organizational</b>	Nation	Hofstede et al1990; Kleinberg 1989; Meek & Song 1990;
	Geographical region within a country	Weiss & Delbeck, 1987
	Economic region	Hickson 1993
	Industry	Grinyer & Spender 1979; Kreiner & Schultz 1990; Pederson 1987; Phillips 1990,1994;
	Religion	Aktouf 1988
	Eastern vs. Western civilization	Westwood & Kirkbride 1989

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