

The impact of individualism-collectivism orientation and communal orientation on employees' attitudes toward intercultural communication

The case of Chinese employees in an MNC

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Abstract

This study explored relationships between an individualism-collectivism orientation as well as communal orientation and the perceptions of Chinese employees ($n = 20$) from an MNC of intercultural communication. On the basis of previous research, we hypothesised that this group of employees would display a tendency to focus their attention on the actions, knowledge and needs of their co-workers. To verify this hypothesis, the employees were surveyed in a Chinese subsidiary of a European top manufacturing company. We administered Individualism and Collectivism Scale, Communal Orientation Scale and an original questionnaire survey collecting data about participants' opinions of cultural diversity, communication problems, and stereotypes in intercultural interactions. A correlation analysis showed that although collectivists expressed positive attitudes to cultural diversity, they accentuated a need for respecting their own cultural values. Both collectivists and communally-oriented employees were not emotionally involved in communication with co-workers from other cultures. Whilst collectivism was moderately associated with focusing on norms at a workplace, communal orientation was proven to be related to maintaining and regulating relationships within a professional group.

Keywords: *Chinese employees; communal orientation; communication awareness; individualism-collectivism; intercultural communication; perspective-taking*

Introduction

A number of psychological research shows that in collectivist cultures, individuals subordinate their personal goals to the goals of their group, e.g. family, work team, etc., which translates into the behaviours that are consistent with those collective goals and with a high level of cooperation within those groups (Triandis *et al.* 1998). This aspect of collectivist cultures is strongly linked to a specific understanding of the self defined in relation to others. The interdependent self induces a tendency to focus one's attention on others' actions, wishes, knowledge and needs (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Because collectivism and interdependent self-construal have been recognized as dominant among Eastern cultures (Hofstede 2001; Robertson *et al.* 2001) as opposed to Western cultures characterized by strong individualism, the participants in our study—a group of Chinese employees—are assumed to present collectivistic behaviours, i.e. they take into account their co-workers' welfare. This assumption is in accord with the literature. For instance, Lin (2008) points out that collectivism is one of three value systems on which Chinese leadership practices are founded (besides Confucianism and Communism). Tsang (2007: 281), in turn, indicated collectivism as embedded in China's Confucian tradition and modelled by the command economic system and the socialist market system. Also, past and recent cross-cultural research shows that China is still high in collectivism (Hofstede 1980, 2001; House *et al.* 2004).

Previous cognitive research into the effects of cultural factors on perspective-taking suggests that collectivist societies uniquely appreciate others' viewpoints and display a tendency to focus their attention on others' actions, knowledge and needs (Keysar, Lin & Barr 2003; Wu & Keysar 2007). Moreover, Mattingly, Oswald and Clark (2011), who examined the extent to which communal strength mediates friendship maintenance behaviours, found that communally-oriented individuals tend to prioritize their partners' preferences and to sacrifice their self-interests more often than individuals with a low level of relational-interdependent self-construal. This, however, does not mean that such individuals can be expected to take into account others' welfare even more than their own; a higher motivational status of the individual self (i.e. the primacy of the individual self) over the collective self has already been established in the literature (see, e.g., Gaertner *et al.* 2008; Sedikides, Gaertner & O'Mara 2011).

Drawing on the fact that 'cooperation is high in in-groups but is unlikely when the other person belongs to an out-group' (Triandis *et al.* 1988: 325) and that the basic values for collectivists are benevolence, conformity and tradition (Ralston *et al.* 2012; Schwartz 1994), we predict that the Chinese employees will (i) demonstrate strong communal orientation, (ii) recognize culture as a primal factor affecting the process of building relationships in their multicultural workplace, and (iii) express a willingness to have their culture respected in communication interactions with co-workers from other cultures. Accordingly, we hope to show how influential attributes of collectivist cultures, interdependent self-construal and communal relationships are for (meta) communication processes. Importantly, combining the measurement of an individualism-collectivism orientation and a communal orientation with a questionnaire survey that requires controllable and conscious answers, we will be able to show that such specific cultural factors as collectivism and interdependent self-construal (which determine a particular perspective-taking) and communal orientation become manifest at the level of metacognitive processes triggered by the questionnaire items used in this study.

The article is structured as follows. First, we present theoretical considerations concerning such cultural constructs as individualism-collectivism orientation and communal orientation. Then, we show the results of correlation analyses of respondents' answers to both individualism-collectivism scale and communal orientation scale as well as to individual questionnaire items checking Chinese employees' personal opinions of cultural diversity and its influence on professional intercultural communication, on participants' well-being, on fulfilment of their psychological needs and their everyday professional responsibilities, and on their suggestions about the possible means to avoid communication problems founded on cultural differences. Next, we will discuss the results with reference to the hypotheses stated and present some implications for further intercultural communication research.

Theoretical background

Individualism-collectivism orientation

The constructs of individualism and collectivism have broadly been explored and linked to behaviour, cognition, motivation, emotion and personality of individuals and groups, and communication (Hofstede 2001; Kuo 2013; Li, Kalyanaraman & Du 2011; Markus & Kitayama 1991; Merkin 2015; Triandis 2001). An individualism-collectivism orientation (I-CO) constitutes one of six cultural dimensions—besides power-distance, uncertainty avoidance vs. anxiety, masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede 1980), long-term vs. short-term orientation (proposed by Hofstede & Bond [1988] and recalculated by Minkov [2007]; see also Hofstede & Minkov [2010]; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov [2010]), and indulgence vs. restraint (Minkov 2007). It serves to account for the behaviours of individuals toward themselves and their in-group members and to explain differences between societies and nations. The I-CO has been recognized to have much explanatory power in accounting for cross-cultural differences (Luo *et al.* 2014; Triandis 2001; Sia *et al.* 2009).

Collectivism differs from individualism with respect to social relationships between an individual and his in-group members. Collectivism is characterized by an individual's interdependence with his in-group members and regarding their (collective) goals above his own goals (Cho & Yoon 2001: 77). Individualism is characterized by being autonomous and independent from his in-groups, prioritizing

personal goals over their goals, and acting on the basis of one's own attitudes rather than in-group members' norms (Triandis 2001: 909). As concisely stated by Cho *et al.*, collectivism—as opposed to individualism—is ‘the degree to which employees emphasize a basic cultural element that focuses on other people and family rather than individuals’ (2012: 12).

Triandis *et al.* (1998: 325) stress that in collectivist cultures, most common are unequal power relations (typical of the vertical aspect of the I-CO) being maintained in childhood by socializing and frequent parental guidance, whilst in individualist cultures these relations are equalized by children's independence and emotional detachment (what is typical of the horizontal aspect of the I-CO). Accordingly, there are two main aspects of the I-CO recognized on the basis of a different emphasis put on equality and hierarchy: vertical vs. horizontal (Singelis *et al.* 1995; Triandis 1995, 1996). In vertical social relationships, hierarchy is emphasized and individuals see themselves as different from other in-group members to whom they feel a sense of service and sacrifice, whereas in horizontal ones, an equal status and similarity are valued so individuals perceive themselves to be like others within the group (Triandis 1995, 2001; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Communal orientation

The findings delivered by a research program examining links between interpersonal relationships and cultural factors (Clark & Wadell 1985; Clark *et al.* 1987; Mills & Clark 2001) show that communal orientation (CO), manifested in the need of belonging to a group and sustaining the membership, is involved in managing and maintaining social interactions between individuals and their community. For instance, CO has been proven to help establish satisfying relationships important to individuals' mental health, personality, identity development and psychological stability (Diehl, Owen & Youngblade 2004), and has been found to positively correlate with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae 1992). Individuals in communally-oriented relationships tend to assist others without expecting to be given something in return because not only are they oriented to their own needs but also to the needs of others, or—in general—to others in their social interactions (McCall *et al.* 2000: 301). They feel a sense of responsibility, sensitivity and responsiveness to others' needs (Clark & Finkel 2005; Thompson & DeHarpport 1998), which has even been reported to be an individual's own ‘irrational’ need to gain approval of others (Watson, Morris & Hood 1993; Watson & Morris 1994). On that basis, a distinction has been made between exchange and communal relationships differentiated by the level of concern for the other's welfare. Because communal relationships exist between friends, family members, partners, etc., whereas exchange relationships exist between them and people considered as outsiders, such as strangers, business partners, etc., communal relationships are characterized by a higher degree of concern and responsibility for the in-group members, which is manifested in higher responsiveness to communal needs (Clark *et al.* 1987: 94) without expecting something in return.

Relationships in a team group

Although both individualists and collectivists are mindful of social connection and the need of belonging, collectivists put more emphasis on the relationships in the group. This is why they ‘seek jobs that will enhance the quality of their relationships with other people, and their satisfaction with their work depends on the quality of their relationships with their co-workers’, whilst individualists seek jobs that are ‘personally fulfilling and that offer them opportunities for advancement’ (Forsyth 2010: 68; see also Brewer & Chen 2007; Leary, Wheeler & Jenkins 1986; Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier 2002).

Collectivists appreciate rewards for collective work (Haines & Taggar 2006) rather than for individual successes, and they express more positive attitudes toward collaboration rather than competition (Leung 2008). They perceive themselves relationally and claim to be more self-sacrificing than other people (Forsyth, 2010: 68; Sedikides, Gaertner & Toguchi 2003). Collectivists are more embedded in their communities, and hence, they move less often than individuals (see, e.g. a study by Oishi, Lun & Sherman 2007). By contrast, individualists favour individual rewards more than group-rewards as well as value competition more than collaborative work.

Individuals and collectivists differ in their attitudes toward relations within the group: i.e. individuals are oriented toward exchange relations which they perceive as a ‘strictly economic exchange’ (Fiske 1992: 702), ‘one-for-one exchange’ (Forsyth 2010: 69), whilst collectivists orient on communal relations.

Individuals monitor and balance the amount of resources they offer to the group and are disappointed when resources are too costly; they expect personal rewards for their contribution—if they see no potential personal benefit for investing their personal resources such as time, effort, attention, etc., they will offer no help (Ratner & Miller 2001). Collectivists, in their communal inclination, are focused more on the group outcomes rather than their personal benefits. They perceive their own contribution to the group as a collective effort and feel disappointed if other members expect rewards for their personal contribution (Clark *et al.* 1987). They put much emphasis on making sure the needs of other members have been fulfilled (Mills *et al.* 2004). In communal relationships, individuals do not necessarily have to invest their personal resources to the group as the very membership suffices to entitle them to benefit from the group's resources. Communally-oriented individuals are not concerned with the norm of reciprocity, which means that a 'person does not need to give something in order to get something in return—simple membership to the group is sufficient to entitle one to the use of whatever resources the group controls, and long-run imbalance is not a violation of the relationship' (Fiske 1992: 693). Rather, they follow the equality norm according to which 'all group members, irrespective of their inputs, should be given an equal share of the payoff' (Forsyth 2010: 69). It should be emphasized here that—unlike individualism vs. collectivism—communal and exchange relationships represent two distinct concepts, not a continuum (Matook, Cummings & Bala 2015: 283), and this is why only communal orientation will be considered as a variable in our study (as a result of the abovementioned collectivists' inclination to that orientation).

Research hypotheses

This research is designed to establish a relationship between the constructs of individualism-collectivism and communal orientation with Chinese managers' perceptions of their communication practices with co-workers of a different cultural background and their willingness to enter into communication interactions with such co-workers. The secondary objective is to determine whether or not the results of our analyses fit a general prediction, drawn on the previous research, according to which Chinese employees will be higher in collectivism than in individualism and—in order to pursue harmony via friendly in-group relationships—will seek to establish satisfactory communication contacts for the sake of their wellbeing and the welfare of their group rather than because of the willingness to attain personal goals.

We will verify the following hypotheses in order to establish a relationship between the I-CO, CO and Chinese employees' perceptions of cultural diversity and its impact on intercultural communication, their well-being, fulfilment of their psychological needs and their suggestions about the possible means to avoid communication problems founded on cultural differences:

H1: Employees who construe themselves interdependently (collectivists) express more sensitivity to the issue of cultural diversity than employees who construe themselves independently (individualists) and, as a result,

H1a: Collectivists (vs. individualists) are sensitive to satisfactory intercultural communication interactions,

H1b: Collectivists (vs. individualists) perceive cultural stereotypes as a source of intercultural communication problems,

H2: Collectivists (vs. individualists) favour institutionalized ways of dealing with intercultural communication problems at their workplace,

H3: Communally-oriented employees are sensitive to satisfactory communication interactions with co-workers from other cultures.

Method

Data collection and procedure

In May 2014, we surveyed through questionnaires 20 high-level white-collar Chinese from a Chinese subsidiary of a European top manufacturing company (the name is not given for reasons of

confidentiality). This MNC has around 70 factories worldwide and employs over 100,000 people. We administered Individualism and Collectivism Scale, Communal Orientation Scale and an original questionnaire survey collecting data about participants' opinions of cultural diversity, communication problems, and stereotypes in intercultural interactions (for other results of our studies, see Gut, Wilczewski & Gorbaniuk 2017). The respondents gave their reactions to each item on a standardized answer sheet. All the data were computed and associations between individual items in the two scales and their relationships with all the items in the questionnaire survey were calculated.

Participants

The study samples 20 Chinese high-level white-collar workers (7 males and 13 females) working in the same global company for 2–17 years ($M = 7.50$; $SD = 4.97$); 10 were specialists, 7 were managers and 3 were administrative workers, of whom 9 worked for support service department, 6 for production department, and 5 for communications department. The participants were selected according to two criteria: (1) they were Chinese, and (2) they had worked in a multicultural environment, which means that they had encountered communication interactions with non-Chinese co-workers.

All participants were native Chinese from north-eastern China with Shenyang as the provincial capital and commercial centre of Liaoning Province. They all had completed their university education in China and gained their professional career in both Chinese and non-Chinese MNCs located in China. These employees belong to the upper middle class.

All the questionnaires were conducted in English, which was possible because of the employees' sufficient knowledge of English—all of them declared a regular use of English in the workplace for 50% up to 80% of their time ($M = 49.25$; $SD = 16.56$) and a regular use of Chinese up to 80% of their time spent at work ($M = 47.25$; $SD = 20.22$).

Measures

Individualism and collectivism (IC)

Participants' levels of horizontal individualism and collectivism were measured with a shortened version of a 32-item questionnaire using a 5-point scale (1 = definitely no, to 5 = definitely yes) by Singelis *et al.* (1995) and later modified by Triandis (1995) and Triandis and Gelfand (1998). The scale comprises four sub-scales, each featuring eight items measuring horizontal individualism (HI), horizontal collectivism (HC), vertical individualism (VI) and vertical collectivism (VC). Participants were given a 16-item list of statements that only measure HI ($\alpha = .67$) and HC ($\alpha = .74$), e.g., 'I often do "my own thing"' or 'The well-being of my co-workers is important to me', respectively, because the focus of our interest was the horizontal dimension for it serves as a predictor of relationships enacted between employees at the same rank. A higher degree of HI presupposes an employee's tendency to be unique and distinct from other employees (but not desiring special status), whereas a higher score in HC implies that employees construe themselves interdependently, putting more emphasis on similarities between themselves and other co-workers and sharing their goals (cf. Triandis & Gelfand 1998: 119).

Communal orientation scale (COS)

A 14-item COS (Clark *et al.* 1987) measures individual differences in CO toward relationships by exploring the extent to which subjects endorse such statements as 'It bothers me when other people neglect my needs' or 'People should keep their troubles to themselves' ($\alpha = .67$). Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me, to 5 = extremely characteristic of me).

Cultural diversity, communication problems and stereotypes in intercultural interactions

Participants completed a questionnaire survey gathering data at cultural, sociocultural, and psychocultural levels: (1) *Cultural diversity, communication problems and stereotypes in intercultural*

interactions (an altered and developed version of Ablonczy-Mihályka's [2009] questionnaire)—here, participants rated such items as 'I like working with people from different cultural backgrounds', (2) *Employees' views of cultural stereotypes in intercultural communication*—containing such items as 'Some workers do not want to communicate with me because of my cultural background', and (3) *Cultural diversity in in-group relations*—consisting of items such as 'I notice cultural differences when I talk to my co-workers'. All items (see Table 1) were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree).

Statistical analysis

To determine the relationship between the measures, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated. As one-side hypotheses were formulated, one-sided tests were applied. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$.

The results of analyses of respondents' answers will be presented in the form of means, standard deviations, and correlations calculated individually for each question. For the purpose of clarity, only the items that correlated significantly with the constructs of HI, HC, and CO will be demonstrated and discussed.

Results

The Chinese employees reported a relatively low level of HI ($M = 3.09$; $SD = .49$). A symmetrical distribution (skewness = $-.08$) indicates that the number of subjects manifesting a tendency to be unique and distinct from their co-workers was the same as the number of subjects manifesting something opposite. In turn, the level of HC ($M = 3.87$; $SD = .48$) and a negatively skewed distribution (skewness = $-.46$) suggest that Chinese participants construed themselves interdependently with regard to other employees, putting more emphasis on similarities between themselves and other co-workers as well as sharing their goals. The results for CO ($M = 4.92$; $SD = .59$) show that participants were high in CO.

Table 1 shows the correlates between the constructs of I-CO (horizontal aspect) and CO and participants' opinions of cultural diversity, sources of communication problems and means to avoid them, stereotypical perception of intercultural communication, and the influence of cultural diversity on communication relations.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of HI, HC and CO with participants' perceptions of cultural diversity, communication problems, and stereotypes in intercultural interactions

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	HI	HC	CO
<i>Cultural diversity, communication problems and means to avoid them</i>					
Culture is important to me	4.45	.69	-.031	.423*	.126
I feel well when my co-workers respect my cultural values	4.80	.52	.109	.388*	.042
I like working with people from different cultural backgrounds	4.25	1.02	-.097	.236	.146
<i>Communication problems caused by cultural differences can be avoided in the future when...</i>					

Some trainings on different cultures are organized	4.47	.51	-.487**	.370	.039
All the workers in my company are given instructions about how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds	4.05	1.03	-.020	.524**	.176
My cultural background is respected	4.68	.58	-.000	.441*	.066
Workers from the same department have regular meetings during which they can talk about their problems	4.21	1.03	-.009	.474**	.085
<i>Employees' views of cultural stereotypes in intercultural communication</i>					
<i>Due to cultural diversity at my workplace...</i>					
The atmosphere at work is bad	2.25	1.33	.412*	-.406*	.334
Some workers do not want to communicate with me because of my cultural background	2.25	1.16	.396*	-.236	-.478**
I do not want to communicate with people from other cultures	1.65	1.14	.304	-.411*	-.361
Some people do not respect my beliefs and cultural values	2.10	1.37	.162	-.258	-.536**
<i>Cultural diversity in in-group relations</i>					
<i>I notice cultural differences when...</i>					
I talk to my co-workers	4.50	.51	-.158	.088	.453**
I talk to my superiors	4.05	1.19	-.223	-.138	-.387*
I have a break at work	3.55	.410	-.276	.273	.410*
I argue with my superiors	2.60	1.54	-.135	-.292	-.447**
I work	4.15	.81	-.382*	-.077	.047
I meet with my co-workers after work	4.00	1.17	-.210	.274	-.071
<i>As a result of a communication problem because of cultural differences...</i>					
I felt badly and did not feel like working	2.30	1.22	.455**	-.046	-.391*

I felt guilty	2.05	1.32	-.095	-.397*	-.593***
I was personally offended by the person I talked to	2.50	1.43	.511**	-.438*	-.254

Note: one-tailed tests Significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .01$

Cultural diversity and basis for communication problems

First, we checked how important the concept of culture was for participants. After rating the statement ‘Culture is important to me’, it turned out that the importance of culture was not associated with HI ($\rho = -.031$), but moderately and positively associated with HC ($\rho = .423, p < .05$). Furthermore, the correlation was again confirmed in participants’ responses to the statement ‘I feel well when my co-workers respect my cultural values’, which shows the importance (for employees high in HC) of the issue of respecting their cultural values (HC: $\rho = .388, p < .05$). Those employees also expressed a moderately positive attitude to working with people from different cultures. Accordingly, H1 was supported.

Employees with a higher individualist orientation more often felt badly and did not feel like working (HI: $\rho = .455, p < .01$) when they encountered a communication problem. Then, they more frequently reported to having been personally offended by the person they had talked to (HI: $\rho = .511, p < .05$; HC: $\rho = -.438, p < .05$). By contrast, collectivists less often regarded such situations as a personal attack (HC: $\rho = -.438, p < .05$) or less often felt guilty (HC: $\rho = -.397, p < .05$). These results indicate that individualists were more sensitive to satisfactory communication interactions and seemed to be personally engaged in them, whereas collectivists did not, which rejects H1a.

The next aspect of the influence of cultural diversity on communication problems is participants’ views of possible means to overcome them. Namely, employees with higher HC reported that such problems may be solved when (a) some trainings on different cultures are organized (HC = $.370, p < .05$; cf. HI: $\rho = -.487, p < .01$), (b) all the workers in their company are given instructions about how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds (HC: $\rho = .524, p < .01$), (c) their cultural background is respected (HC: $\rho = .441, p < .05$), (d) workers from the same department have regular meetings during which they can talk about their problems (HC: $\rho = .474, p < .01$). Accordingly, collectivists focused on norms governing the social structure and expected them in a workplace as a means to avoid communication problems, which supported H2.

Employees’ views of cultural stereotypes in business communication

In this section, participants were asked to rate the link between cultural diversity at their workplace with the statements (a) ‘the atmosphere at work is bad’, (b) ‘some workers do not want to communicate with me because of my cultural background’, (c) ‘I do not want to communicate with people from other cultures’. A correlation analysis showed positive correlation of HI and negative correlation of HC with employees’ perception of the negative effects of cultural stereotypes on communication, especially with regard to a bad atmosphere at work (HI: $\rho = .412, p < .05$; HC: $\rho = -.406, p < .05$) (contradicting H1b). Moreover, employees with higher HI scores perceived cultural stereotypes as a communication barrier and the reason for which some co-workers did not want to communicate with them (HI: $\rho = .396, p < .05$). Interestingly, all employees seemed to link cultural stereotypization with their own unwillingness to communicate with people from other cultures (although the results are not statistically significant for individualists) (HI: $\rho = .304$; HC: $\rho = -.411, p < .05$; CO: $\rho = -.361$), which indicates that collectivists and communally-oriented employees were open to communication with co-workers from other cultures even if, as shown above, they did not necessarily get emotionally involved in relationships with such co-workers.

Cultural diversity in in-group relations

A cultural factor was confirmed to be positively related to CO as communally-oriented employees noticed cultural differences at a workplace when they talk to (a) their co-workers ($\rho = .453, p < .01$), (b) their

superiors ($\rho = -.387, p < .05$), and (c) when they have a break at work ($\rho = .410, p < .05$). This suggests that intercultural interactions play an important role for communally-oriented employees (supporting H3), probably because they serve to maintain relationships within a professional group and perform a regulatory function in communication behaviours. However, the relationship between CO and attitudes toward co-workers from other cultures (see ‘I like working with people from different cultural backgrounds’) was not significant ($\rho = .146$), which suggests that there are no grounds for supposing that cultural backgrounds of their co-workers were a determinant of satisfactory relations within their work-team.

As for encountering communication problems arising from cultural differences, individuals with higher CO (a) less often spotted such differences when they argued with their superiors ($\rho = -.447, p < .01$), (b) less often felt badly about that ($\rho = -.391, p < .05$) and (c) less often felt guilty in such situations ($\rho = -.593, p < .01$). It appears that even if CO may be related to intercultural communication practices among co-workers, it does not need to be related to the efficacy of those practices as communally-oriented employees seem not to be emotionally involved in communication with co-workers with different cultural backgrounds.

When asked about the effects of culturally stereotypical perceptions of others on communication, it turned out that communally-oriented employees linked them with neither other’s unwillingness to communicate with them nor with respecting cultural values. Specifically, there was negative correlation of CO with both of the following statements: ‘*Due to cultural diversity at my workplace...*’ (a) ‘some workers do not want to communicate with me because of my cultural background’ ($\rho = -.478, p < .01$), and (b) ‘some people do not respect my beliefs and cultural values’ ($\rho = -.536, p < .05$).

Discussion

This study contributes to research in different ways. First, the data indicate that the distinction between HC and HI offers advantages for predicting employees’ attitudes to the concept of culture and to the process of intercultural communication. Horizontal collectivists indicated that culture was important to them, which stays in accordance with previous data as collectivist societies put more emphasis on norms because ‘sanctions are likely to be imposed for deviant behavior’ (cf. Triandis *et al.* 1998: 324). Also, collectivists expressed relatively positive attitudes to working with people from other cultures, which implies that even if the values of some team members might be regarded as foreign to Chinese culture, the employees still present positive attitudes to them and accentuate the need of respecting cultural values as collectivist cultures are more focused on sustaining harmony as opposed to individualist cultures being focused on an individual’s autonomy (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 241-242; Kobayashi & Viswat 2011).

Second, the ramifications of cultural diversity in a workplace for emotions and construing the self were also revealed. In one of the sections of the survey, participants were asked about the consequences of communication problems arising from cultural diversity of their co-workers. The fact that individualist employees reported they had been personally offended (as a result of a cultural difference) by their interactant, which resulted in their feeling badly and not feeling like working, whilst collectivist employees did not take such situations personally and did not feel guilty afterward allows us to draw two general conclusions: (1) HI relates positively to an individual’s self-esteem, distinctiveness and autonomy which—if put at risk, e.g., by the feeling of being personally offended in a communication interaction—results in an individual’s bad mood that may influence his professional performance, and (2) the fact that the sense of guilt is negatively associated with HC suggests that collectivist employees might tend to be less emotional in communication interactions with co-workers from other cultures, or even perceive them as alien to their in-groups—which should be further investigated. That lack of emotional engagement was also confirmed in the employee’s perception of the negative effects of cultural stereotypes on communication as individualist employees regarded cultural stereotypes as a communication barrier and the reason for which some co-workers did not want to communicate with them, whilst collectivist employees did not.

Third, as for the relationship between the individualism-collectivism orientation and personal views of possible means to overcome intercultural business communication problems, collectivism was found to

be moderately correlated with focusing on norms governing the social structure, even at a workplace, which confirms results of previous research.

Fourth, the construct of communal orientation was shown to be related to maintaining and regulating relationships within a professional group. In this respect, this study also contributes to the understanding of multicultural in-group relations. The results showed that communication interactions play an important role for communally-oriented employees as they expressed sensitivity to cultural differences when communicating with co-workers at work time and during breaks. However, communally-oriented employees (similarly to collectivists) seemed not to be emotionally involved in communication with co-workers with different cultural backgrounds, which opens up space for further research to unravel possible reasons for that in the context of multicultural work teams (one of them, besides CO, may be orientation toward hierarchy).

Fifth, communally-oriented employees acknowledged the influence of cultural stereotypes on business communication practices, but they did not link them to others' unwillingness to communicate with them or to disrespecting cultural values. Moreover, they presented positive attitudes to co-workers from different cultures and accentuated the need of respecting cultural values. This stays in accord with previous studies showing that collectivists and communally-oriented individuals are more focused on sustaining harmony and promoting others' goals (as long as they are congruent with the group goals), and their individual behaviours are understood through the lens of the group (Felfe & Yan 2009: 436; cf. Cho & Yoon 2001: 77; Markus & Kitayama 1991: 241-242).

Conclusion

Although this study demonstrated relationships between the cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism, communal orientation and employees' expectations and perceptions of communication practices at their workplace, the area of intercultural business communication needs further research in this respect. The results show the need for research that would involve large groups of employees at various levels within the organisation and for cross-cultural investigations of the individualism-collectivism orientation, communal orientation and other cultural dimensions as predictors for employees' attitudes to co-workers from other cultures and to the very process of communication with them, and as predictors for their psychological needs, wellbeing in a work-team as well as expectations of such communication experiences.

Keeping the study's limitation in mind, which is a miniscule sample, we believe that our preliminary findings may provide some basic data as for the individualism—collectivism dimension and communal orientation being a predictor for participants' communication practices with culturally diverse co-workers.

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