Culture, Management and Feminist Perspectives

Feminist analysis informing cross-cultural management discourses and practices

Laurence Romani, Pia Höök, Charlotte Holgersson, Janne Tienari

International and cross-cultural management research, in its infancy, was said to be parochial (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991) since most research was building on the internationalisation experience of North American companies (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). In addition, it was almost exclusively dominated by the functionalist paradigm illustrated by the seminal work of Hofstede (1980) measuring culture with large scale studies and cultural dimensions (e.g., Individualism/Collectivism). For the last decades however, a larger variety of research (inspired by interpretive perspectives) has complemented the picture offered by North American scholars (see Primecz, Romani, Sackmann, 2009). Yet, qualitative and emic research on culture remains a minority.

Cross-cultural management training, likewise, has developed into a well established industry, resting on international institutions (such as e.g., SIETAR, an international network of cross-cultural trainers) and conferences. Multiple web forums promote dialogue between researchers and consultants. These communities participate to the spread of views on “how to do business” in different countries and across countries, for consultants, trainers and eventually managers in international corporations.

Recently, Postcolonial analyses of international and cross-cultural management have voiced the implicit imposition of a Western norm as normality (e.g. Kwek, 2003; Fougère & Moulettes, 2006), and the power imbalance between “the West and the Rest”, reproduced by management discourses (Westwood, 2006; Jack et al., 2008; Westwood & Jack, 2009). Yet, absorbed by the consideration of national or ethnic differences, international and cross-cultural management and their critiques are largely overlooking power imbalance due to gender. Gender is often “forgotten”.

In consequence, this stream endeavours to raise feminist critique of international and cross-cultural management research and education.

Problems

We believe that international and cross-cultural management tend to marginalise the impact of power relations in organisations. Thereby inequalities, and especially between women and men are continuously reproduced. In cross-cultural management, employees are foremost considered for their cultural background. Gender is overlooked and employees and managers are implicitly talked about as men. The unspoken norm is the white Euro-American man: when gender is addressed, it is often to pinpoint a deviance. In other words, gendered individuals (females) are “a problem”. For example, the case of female expatriates sent to an Islamist country is a classic of cross-cultural management education. Additional “problems” linked to women are their alleged lack of international
career aspirations, or specific challenges linked to their gender (e.g., Adler, 1984; Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998).

Feminist management studies has highlighted how gender is (re)produced in both management thinking, practice and training (see e.g. Wahl, 1992; Collinson & Hearn, 1995; Calàs & Smircich, 1996; Wajcman, 1998; Sinclair, 1998; Höök, 2001; Holgersson, 2003; Calàs & Smircich, 2006). Simultaneously, feminist management research still suffers from a dominant western and US perspective, resulting in a tendency of letting US, and to some extent UK studies, represent the general knowledge on managers. These biases have been pointed out and criticized by more recent postcolonial and intersectional studies (Acker, 2006; Calàs & Smircich, 2006). Within feminist management studies there is also a growing interest in research addressing management and national culture, ranging from cross-national comparisons of women managers (see e.g. Omar & Davidson 2001), studies of gender in cross-border mergers (see e.g. Tienari et al, 2005), comparisons of gender equality discourse and practice across societal settings (see e.g. Tienari et al 2009), cross-cultural studies on the gendered nature of particular fields of business (e.g. Meriläinen et al 2004), to critical studies on transnational organisations and business practices (see e.g. Hearn 2004, Reis 2004). However, it seems that cross-cultural management research and education is slow in integrating the feminist research perspectives.

Is the simultaneous consideration of gender, power and cultural differences too much for management studies? Gender is either overlooked in international and cross-cultural management or treated as an essential category having nothing to do with nationality, ethnicity and/or sexuality. On the other hand when hierarchy, gender and cultural differences are conjointly considered, cross-cultural management is pushed to a new intersectional level of analysis and reach conclusions of a strategic and political nature (see e.g., Janssens, Cappellen & Zanoni, 2006). This also entails the problematization of general understandings of difference. Differences are never just “differences”, as Mohanty (2004: 226) argues, but “in knowing differences and particularities, we can better see connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining.” We believe that intersectional studies, paying a special attention to power asymmetries related to gender and national culture can continue the critical effort started in cross-cultural management research and will contribute noticeably to cross-cultural management education.

We invite submission of papers’ abstracts-synopsis (max 1,500 words) on topics discussing feminist perspectives on international management and cross-cultural management. Empirical and theoretical contributions are welcome on the following (but not limited to) topics:

- Feminist/power analysis of international management, international business and cross-cultural management
To what extent are the concepts, tools and recommendations used in cross-cultural management developed with an implicit masculine norm?

Example of intersectional investigations in international or cross-cultural management, and their contributions

Feminist/power analysis of international or cross-cultural management education

Theoretical frameworks enabling feminist perspectives for cross-cultural management analyses

Please send your abstract no later than 30th November, 2010 to Laurence.Romani@hhs.se. Notification of decisions regarding acceptance/rejection will be sent by December 17th, 2010.

Stream organizers

Charlotte Holgersson is Ph D and researcher at the Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden. The aim of her research is to explore the complexities of gender ordering processes in organizations, in particular issues of management, work for change and sexuality. Her projects have mainly focused on management levels in organizations within private business. She is author and co-author of several books, book chapters and articles in Swedish and English, among others published in the journal Gender, Work & Organization. She has also recently co-edited a special issue on Diversity Management for the Scandinavian Journal of Management together with Prof. Marta Calás and Prof. Linda Smircich. Contact: charlotte.holgersson@indek.kth.se.

Pia Höök is assistant professor and senior assistant lecturer at the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. Her research centres on gender and organization and especially gender equality and diversity work, management, sexuality and critical/feminist pedagogy. She has published several books and book chapters. Her publications can also be found in Gender, Work and Organization as well as Equal Opportunities International. She has had several governmental assignments focusing on gender equality in private business and higher education. In 2007-2009 she worked as Diversity Director at AB Volvo. Contact: Pia.hook@itm.kth.se

(Lead convenor) Laurence Romani is a visiting assistant professor at the Rotterdam school of management, the Netherlands. Her research centres on multi-paradigm studies and critical perspectives on cross-cultural management. She investigates the imposition of implicit (Western, masculine) norms in cross-cultural management training. Her publications appear for example, in the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management, Organizational Research Methods, and several book chapters. Contact: Laurence.Romani@hhs.se

Janne Tienari works as Professor of Organizations and Management at Aalto University, School of Economics, Finland. His research interests include managing multinational corporations, cross-cultural studies of gender and organizing, media representations, critical discourse analysis, and the language of global capitalism. He is the current Editor-in-Chief of the Scandinavian Journal of Management. Tienari has published in leading international journals such as Organization, Academy of Management Review, Organization Studies, Journal of Management Studies, Gender, Work and Organization,

References


