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VIEWS FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: INTEGRATING EMIC AND ETIC INSIGHTS ABOUT CULTURE AND JUSTICE JUDGMENT

MICHAEL W. MORRIS
Stanford University

KWOK LEUNG
Chinese University of Hong Kong

DANIEL AMES
University of California at Berkeley

BRIAN LICKEL
University of California at Santa Barbara

We analyze forms of synergy between emic and etic approaches to research on culture and cognition. Drawing on the justice judgment literature, we describe dynamics through which the two approaches stimulate each other's progress. Moreover, we delineate ways in which integrative emic/etic frameworks overcome limitations of narrower frameworks in modeling culture and cognition. Finally, we identify advantages of integrative frameworks in guiding responses to the diverse justice sensitivities in international organizations.

In the study of cognition in organizations, and in social science more broadly, there are two long-standing approaches to understanding the role of culture: (1) the *inside* perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, and (2) the *outside* perspective of comparativist researchers, who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general, external standard. Pike (1967) designates these approaches the *emic* and *etic* perspectives, respectively, by analogy to two approaches to language: phonemic analysis of the units of meaning, which reveals the unique structure of a particular language, and phonetic analysis of units of sound, which affords comparisons among languages. The emic and etic perspectives are often seen as being at odds—as incommensurable paradigms. In this article we argue that these two approaches to culture are complementary. Drawing on the justice judgment literature, we delineate forms of synergy between the two research perspectives that go beyond those identified previously (e.g., Berry, 1990; Brett, Tinsley, Janssens, Barsness, & Lytle, 1997). We first analyze ways in which emic and etic research programs have stimulated each other's progress. Then we analyze advantages of frameworks integrating emic and etic accounts—both as middle-range theories of culture and cognition and as applied guides to responding to diverse justice concerns in international organizations.

EMIC AND ETIC PERSPECTIVES

The emic and etic perspectives have equally long pedigrees in social science. The emic or inside perspective follows in the tradition of psychological studies of folk beliefs (Wundt, 1888) and in cultural anthropologists' striving to understand culture from "the native's point of view" (Malinowski, 1922). The etic or outside perspective follows in the tradition of behaviorist psychology (Skinner, 1938) and anthropological approaches that link cultural practices to external, antecedent factors, such as economic or ecological conditions, that may not be salient to cultural insiders (Harris, 1979).

The divide between these two approaches persists in contemporary scholarship on culture: in anthropology, between interpretivists (Geertz, 1976, 1983) and comparativists (Munroe & Munroe, 1991), and in psychology, between cultural psychologists (Shweder, 1991) and cross-cultural

psychologists (Smith & Bond, 1998). In the literature on international differences in organizations, the divide is manifest in the contrast between classic studies based on fieldwork in a single culture (Rohlen, 1974), as opposed to surveys across many (Hofstede, 1980). Likewise, in the large body of literature on organizational culture, there is a divide between researchers employing ethnographic methods (Gregory, 1983; Van Maanen, 1988) and those who favor comparative survey research (Schneider, 1990).

The conceptual assumptions with which Pike (1967) defined the emic and etic dichotomy are summarized in Table 1. Emic accounts describe thoughts and actions primarily in terms of the actors' self-understanding—terms that are often culturally and historically bound. For example, emic studies of justice perceptions in North American organizations today might center on such constructs as "age-ism" and nondiscrimination, whereas studies of Japanese workplaces might be couched in qualitatively different constructs, such as *amae* and *gimu* (see Kashima & Callan, 1998). In contrast, etic models describe phenomena in constructs that apply across cultures. For example, a country's level on the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism might be linked to the prevalence with which managers reason about justice in terms of the *equity* rule (i.e., rewards received should be proportional to contributions).

Along with differing constructs, emic and etic researchers tend to have differing assumptions about culture. Emic researchers tend to assume that a culture is best understood as an interconnected whole or system, whereas etic researchers are more likely to isolate particular components of culture and state hypotheses about their distinct antecedents and consequences. Although, of course, the emic/etic contrast is, in practice, a continuum, this dichotomy has played a central role in the metatheory debates in many social science disciplines (see Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990).[1]

Etic and emic approaches traditionally have been associated with differing research methods. As Table 1 summarizes, methods in emic research are more likely to involve sustained, wide-ranging observation of a single cultural group. In classical fieldwork, for example, an ethnographer immerses him or herself in a setting, developing relationships with informants and taking on social roles (e.g., Geertz, 1983; Kondo, 1990). Yet, emic description also can be pursued in more structured programs of interview and observation (e.g., Goodenough, 1970).

Methods in etic research are more likely to involve brief, structured observations of several cultural groups. A key feature of etic methods is that observations are made in a parallel manner across differing settings. For instance, matched samples of employees in many different countries may be surveyed to uncover dimensions of cross-national variation in values and attitudes (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), or they may be assigned to experimental conditions in order to test the moderating influence of cultural setting on the relation among other variables (e.g., Earley, 1989). In sum, although the two perspectives are defined in terms of theory, rather than method, the perspectives lend themselves to differing sets of methods.[2]

Given the differences between emic and etic approaches to culture, it is not surprising that researchers taking each perspective have questioned the utility of integrating insights from the other tradition. A common tendency is to dismiss insights from the other perspective based on perceived conceptual or methodological weaknesses (see reviews of this tendency in particular research areas by Harris, 1979, and Martin & Frost, 1998). On one side, emic accounts based on ethnographic observation are often discounted on the basis of inconsistency across

[1] Some scholars have used the terms *emic* and *etic* in ways that depart from Pike's definitions (see Headland et al., 1990). A narrower usage refers to the contrast between culture-specific versus culture-general constructs. This misses the essence of the distinction, because culture-specific constructs do not necessarily resonate with cultural insiders' self-understandings. A broader usage refers to the underlying interests of understanding versus control (Habermas, 1971). Although there may be a correlation in some research areas between the emic versus etic perspective and orientations toward control (e.g., in studies of "organizational culture"; Martin & Frost, 1996), there is no necessary link and no strong correlation in the literature on national culture—our focus.

[2] The association between perspectives and methods is not absolute. Sometimes, in emic investigations of indigenous constructs, data are collected with survey methods and analyzed with quantitative techniques (Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997; Yang, 1986). Likewise, ethnographic observation and qualitative data are sometimes used to support arguments from an etic perspective (Nelsen & Barley, 1997; Sutton, 1994).

TABLE 1
Assumptions of Emic and Etic Perspectives and Associated Methods

Features	Emic/Inside View	Etic/Outside View
Defining assumptions and goals	Behavior described as seen from the perspective of cultural insiders, in constructs drawn from their self-understandings	Behavior described from a vantage external to the culture, in constructs that apply equally well to other cultures
	Describe the cultural system as a working whole	Describe the ways in which cultural variables fit into general causal models of a particular behavior
Typical features of methods associated with this view	Observations recorded in a rich qualitative form that avoids imposition of the researchers' constructs	Focus on external, measurable features that can be assessed by parallel procedures at different cultural sites
	Long-standing, wide-ranging observation of one setting or a few settings	Brief, narrow observation of more than one setting, often a large number of settings
Examples of typical study types	Ethnographic fieldwork; participant observation along with interviews	Multisetting survey; cross-sectional comparison of responses to instruments measuring justice perceptions and related variables
	Content analysis of texts providing a window into indigenous thinking about justice	Comparative experiment treating culture as a quasi experimental manipulation to assess whether the impact of particular factors varies across cultures

reports (Kloos, 1988) and for inheriting misconceptions from cultural insiders (Marano, 1982). On the other side, etic accounts based on survey data are often dismissed because researchers remained at a distance from respondents, potentially insensitive to how respondents were affected by their questions (Geertz, 1983).

Yet, not all arguments against integration are staked on critiques of either approach. Separatism has been defended as a means to protect less well-institutionalized traditions from being assimilated by mainstream traditions. Writing about organizational culture, Martin argues that "pressures toward assimilation would undermine a perspective's inherently oppositional stance . . . threatening its conceptual and political integrity" (1992: 187). In sum, both partisan and protective agendas have led scholars to advocate keeping emic and etic insights about a phenomenon somewhat separate.

However, not all previous scholars hold that emic and etic approaches should be kept apart. Some have suggested that researchers should select between approaches, depending on the stage of a research program. For example, it has been argued that an emic approach serves best in exploratory research, whereas an etic approach serves best in testing hypotheses (e.g., Greenfield, 1996).

In a more explicit selectionist proposal, Berry (1990) endorses a three-stage sequence. In the first stage, initial exploratory research relies on "imposed-etic" constructs—theoretical concepts and measurement methods that are simply exported from the researcher's home culture. In the second stage, emic insights about the other culture are used to interpret initial findings, with an eye to possible limitations of the original constructs, such as details that are unfamiliar or meaningless outside of the home culture. On this basis, then, the constructs in the model are *filtered* to eliminate details that cannot be measured with equivalence across cultural settings. The factors that survive this filter—"derived-etic" constructs—are culture-general dimensions of persons, such as value orientations, or of their environments, such as economic or ecological factors. In the third and final stage, the researcher tests an explanation constructed solely of derived etic constructs.

Brett and colleagues (1997; Lytle, Brett, Barsness, Tinsley, & Janssens, 1995) describe another proposal based on a three-stage sequence. These scholars differ from Berry in sharply dis-