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Chin, June G.; Lee, Yi; Nissen, Mark E.

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Accelerating acculturation through tacit knowledge flows: refining a grounded theory model

June G. Chin Yi Lee and Mark E. Nissen

US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Intercultural knowledge flows are critical to global enterprise performance, but the impact of knowledge management theory on such intercultural flows remains limited. This paper seeks to address this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – The present investigation builds on and partially validates two prior studies: research to integrate institutional theory with knowledge flow theory, which provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding how tacit knowledge flows across cultures; and recent qualitative research, which has employed this framework to develop a theoretical model of acculturation. The present investigation refines this model by drawing in particular from the mergers and acquisitions literature to characterize both accelerators and decelerators of acculturation.

Findings – The paper is able to identify theoretical dimensions to measure acculturative stress, a concept that proves to be useful in terms of validating, refining and simplifying the basic acculturation model.

Research limitations/implications – The refined acculturation model maintains the essential structure and many elements of the basic model, but it links more closely with extant theory as characterized by the mergers and acquisitions and trust literatures; hence it is more broadly generalizable. The refined model also links well to institutional theory and explains how to increase or decrease the tacit knowledge flows underlying acculturation to affect organizational outcomes.

Practical implications – The refined acculturation model provides the practicing leader and manager with clear insight into the kinds of promoters and inhibitors of intercultural knowledge flows, and identifies key actions that can be taken to affect such flows and the corresponding organizational outcomes.

Social implications – This paper elucidates both difficulties and opportunities associated with intercultural knowledge flows in today's global economy – difficulties and opportunities that will likely gain prominence as the world becomes increasingly global.

Originality/value – The refined acculturation model makes both theoretical and practical contributions.

Keywords Acculturation, Culture, Knowledge management, Acquisitions and mergers

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

It is well-established that knowledge is key to sustainable competitive advantage (Cole, 1998; Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). For instance, Nissen (2006b, ch. 1) explains how knowledge enables effective action; effective action drives superior performance; and superior performance supports competitive advantage. However, many scholars continue to overlook the implications of knowledge not representing a single, monolithic concept (Nissen and Jennex, 2005). Different kinds of knowledge (e.g. tacit, explicit, individual, group, created, applied) have different properties and behaviors and hence affect action, performance and competitive advantage differently (Nissen,

2006a). Although explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) is emphasized in particular by a myriad knowledge management programs to provide a basis for competitive advantage (Grant, 1996), such advantage is unlikely to endure (i.e. it is ephemeral) unless the corresponding knowledge can be kept secret; that is, competitors are likely to acquire it, to imitate the knowledge-based actions that enable performance superiority, and hence eliminate any competitive advantage based upon such knowledge (Dierickx and Cool, 1989). Alternatively, tacit knowledge is neglected by myriad knowledge management programs, but it is more appropriable than explicit knowledge is; hence the knowledge-based actions that it enables are more difficult for competitors to imitate. Speaking generally, the more explicit that knowledge becomes, the lower its competitive potential becomes (Saviotti, 1998).

This has immense implications within the current competitive environment of increasing globalization. Drawing from Nissen (2007), we understand how organizations from around the world compete actively now, across numerous, diverse markets and in a multitude of domains. In some cases, knowledge is highly explicit and held broadly (e.g. articulated expressly via work rules, safety regulations and enforcement mechanisms), whereas in others, it is tacit and situated (e.g. understood only through direct experience with city officials, regional workers and the local population; see Mahalingam *et al.*, 2005). Although numerous actions required for effective global competition are based upon explicit knowledge (e.g. international law, canonical engineering practice, specialized computer systems), the more embedded that an organization becomes within a particular cultural context (e.g. foreign country, different organization, unfamiliar religion), the more critical that situated, tacit knowledge (e.g. how to compete in local markets, how to motivate influential leaders, how to perform effectively in multicultural project teams) becomes (Orr and Levitt, 2006). Said differently, where an organization interacts at the boundaries or edges of a particular culture, explicit knowledge may enable appropriate actions often, but where such organization seeks to integrate its activities with those embedded within this culture, explicit knowledge becomes inadequate, and tacit knowledge becomes essential.

As global organizations engage in increasing levels of intercultural interaction (e.g. across continents, nations, organizations, races, religions, norms and customs), intercultural differences impede knowledge flows pathologically. The sets of norms and beliefs that are taken for granted largely within a monocultural setting – and which give rise to institutional regularity and predictability within such cultural setting – can become sources of conflict and uncertainty in multicultural contexts. Because knowledge enables effective action, one must know such norms and beliefs in order to act appropriately and hence to compete effectively. Indeed, failure to conform to the requisite norms and beliefs can degrade competitive performance immediately.

Cultural knowledge is deeply rooted and highly tacit; hence its flows are critical to global enterprise performance and can enable sustainable competitive advantage (Nissen, 2006a). The problem is, knowledge – particularly tacit knowledge – clumps noticeably and is known well to flow both slowly and narrowly (Nissen, 2006b). Such clumping and flowing are exacerbated when knowledge is required to flow across cultures. Unfortunately, knowledge management (KM) theory on intercultural knowledge flows remains limited (Nissen, 2006b).

Alternatively, research to integrate institutional theory with knowledge flow theory (Nissen, 2007) provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding how tacit

knowledge flows across cultures and helps to elucidate important intercultural aspects of globalization. Such aspects include insight into interactions between rules, norms and beliefs, as well as mechanisms for inducing intercultural change. Further, recent qualitative research (Adams *et al.*, 2010) – through a combination of grounded theory building (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and multiple case study (Yin, 1994) – has employed this framework to develop a theoretical model of acculturation. The present investigation draws from the mergers and acquisitions literature to build upon, partially validate and refine this model to integrate important factors to characterize both accelerators and decelerators of acculturation better. Results serve to inform theory and practice alike.

2. Background
In this section we draw heavily from Nissen (2007) to summarize the integration of institutional theory with knowledge flow theory.

2.1 Institutional theory
As Campbell (2004, p. 1) summarizes:

> Institutions are the foundation of social life. They consist of formal and informal rules, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and systems of meaning that define the context within which individuals, corporations, labor unions, nation-states, and other organizations operate and interact with each other.

A more succinct definition (Mahalingam *et al.*, 2005) contains the same, key ideas:

> A set of rules, norms and values that help generate a regularity of behavior.

Institutions promote some organizational decisions and behaviors, and they constrain others, through various, path-dependent processes (Campbell, 2004, p. 65). As such, Institutional theory is more fundamental than organization theory is – with institutions serving as carriers of organizations (Scott, 2001) – hence it provides deep insights into organizing and informs a great variety of organizational arrangements, including those in global, multicultural contexts.

Scott (2001, p. 51) characterizes institutions in terms of three "pillars": regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. Briefly, regulative processes center on rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities, with national laws, inspection routines, police and courts – along with organizational counterparts such as workplace rules, monitoring scripts and incentives – playing primary roles in our context of global competition. Through this institutional approach, the basis of regular behavior stems from imposition, acceptance and enforcement of rules, laws and sanctions. Coercive mechanisms govern institutional behaviors, and the basis of legitimacy rests upon legally sanctioned actions. International definitions of "war crimes," corporate rules for dismissing employees, and "quiet time" rules within housing communities provide contemporary examples across several units of analysis.

Normative processes center on values and norms that provide bases for prescription, evaluation and obligation in terms of decisions and behaviors. People within some kind of collectivity (e.g. nation-state, organization, culture, religion, family) share a common set of goals (e.g. world domination, profit maximization, ethnic discrimination, salvation, education) and acceptable means (e.g. non-nuclear warfare,

bogus accounting, repression, evangelism, private schools) to pursue them. Through this institutional approach, the basis of regular behavior stems from broad social agreement – often implicit – on what binding expectations apply to members of the collectivity. Normative mechanisms govern institutional behaviors, and the basis of legitimacy rests upon morally governed behaviors. National conventions for "acceptable" warfare practices, corporate promotion of lifetime employment, and mutual consideration of neighbors provide contemporary examples across several units of analysis.

Cultural-cognitive processes center on shared conceptions of social reality and frames for meaning. People within some kind of collectivity share a common set of beliefs (e.g. their nation is suited to rule the world; their organization offers the best products; their ethnic culture is superior to another; their religion offers "truth"; their children deserve the best education possible). Through this institutional approach, the basis of regular behavior stems from shared beliefs and taken-for-granted modes of behavior. Mimetic mechanisms govern institutional behaviors, and the basis of legitimacy rests upon comprehensible, culturally supported behaviors. Broad perception that war represents a way of life, that lifetime employment should be expected, and that late-night parties are unacceptable provide contemporary examples across several units of analysis.

Clearly, these three institutional pillars interact, sometimes in mutually reinforcing, sometimes in mutually opposing ways. Where a set of new laws, rules or regulations, for instance, conflicts with the values and norms shared by a collectivity of affected people, or where they violate people's beliefs regarding appropriate decisions and behaviors, such people may be reluctant to accept or abide by such laws, rules or regulations. Where organizational change, for instance, is desired, one must look to address all three pillars – together – as an integrated change program. Where cultural integration, as another instance, is expected, one must consider how regulatory, normative and cultural-cognitive aspects of such integration will be affected. Where one is interested in promoting multicultural knowledge flows, as a third instance, one should examine how the rules, norms and beliefs of the associated collectivities and people would be affected.

2.2 Institutional knowledge flows

Drawing from Nissen (2007) we illustrate the recent integration of institutional theory with knowledge flow theory (Nissen, 2006b) to develop a framework for understanding institutional knowledge flows. First, recall the three institutional pillars described in the previous section: regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive. Each addresses a different but interrelated aspect of institutional processes. For instance, regulative processes center on rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities. In a roughly hewn characterization, the associated rules, scripts and sanctions tend to be articulated expressly (e.g. via laws, regulations, enforcement charters, and legal judgments), distributed broadly (esp. via books), and sanctioned legally (i.e. through established authority). In terms of the knowledge corresponding to such rules, scripts and sanctions, it is largely explicit. As such, one would expect for explicit, regulative knowledge to flow broadly and quickly but to be relatively diluted with respect to the tacit knowledge possessed by regulative actors (e.g. lawmakers, policy makers, executives, police, judges; see Nissen, 2006b). Hence one would anticipate that

formalization and distribution (e.g. writing and disseminating laws and regulations) would involve relatively rapid and broad knowledge flows but to lack power with respect to influencing actions of regulative actors (e.g. the people under jurisdiction of such laws and regulations).

In some contrast with the regulative pillar, normative processes center on values and norms that provide bases for prescription, evaluation and obligation in terms of decisions and behaviors. In a roughly hewn characterization, the associated goals and acceptable means of achieving them tend not to be articulated expressly. Notwithstanding codes of conduct, codes of ethics, codes of best practices, and like formalizations of norms – which make explicit only a tiny fraction – the great majority of values and norms governing collectives are not formalized as such. Rather, they tend to be internalized via established organizational routines and the scripts that people act out through their daily lives, the "codes" of which many people would find difficult to articulate. Moreover, although such routines and scripts may be observed and practiced broadly, few are sanctioned legally. Rather, they tend to emerge, adapt, and persist over time through long-term, path-dependent processes. In terms of the knowledge corresponding to normative routines and scripts, it is largely tacit. As such, one would expect for normative knowledge to flow more narrowly and slowly but to be powerful with respect to influencing actions of normative actors (e.g. the people embedded within a particular collectivity).

In even greater contrast with the regulative pillar, cultural-cognitive processes center on shared conceptions of social reality and frames of meaning. In a roughly hewn characterization, the associated beliefs tend not to be articulated at all. Notwithstanding corporate value statements, religious scriptures, cultural folklore, and like formalizations of beliefs – which make explicit only a tiny fraction – the great majority of beliefs held within collectives are not formalized at all. Rather, they tend to be learned and reinforced via a complex, subjective, social construction process that people employ – unconsciously for the most part – through their everyday interactions with the world around them, the "beliefs" of which many people would find difficult to articulate. Moreover, in contrast to the normative pillar, such beliefs may not be shared broadly, and aside from religious orders, few are sanctioned even quasi-legally. Rather, individual people develop their own belief systems, and to the extent that they are even aware of such belief systems, the sharing of them with others is often through actions (e.g. a man mistreats a particular group of people) as opposed to explicit articulation (e.g. a man declares that he feels superior to a particular group of people). In terms of the knowledge corresponding to cultural-cognitive beliefs, it is highly tacit. As such, one would expect for cultural-cognitive knowledge to flow exceptionally narrowly and slowly but to be extremely powerful with respect to influencing actions of cultural-cognitive actors (e.g. individual people and groups who share common beliefs).

With this, we can characterize the interwoven theoretical concepts along the kind of knowledge flow continuum summarized in Table I. The first column includes the institutional characteristic or dimension of interest, and the other three columns summarize dimensional values for the three institutional pillars (i.e. regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive). The first group of three characteristics is institutional in nature, deriving directly from our description of institutional theory above (and borrowing heavily from Scott, 2001). Center refers to the principal focus of each pillar.

Characteristic	Regulative	Normative	Cultural
Institutional			
Center	Rules	Norms	Beliefs
Regularization	Coercion	Social agreement	Shared beliefs
Legitimacy	Legal sanction	Moral behavior	Cultural behavior
Epistemological			
Explicitness	Highly explicit	Largely tacit	Highly tacit
Reach	Broad: org/field	Moderate: group/org	Narrow: individual/group
Flow time	Fast	Slow	Very slow

Source: Adapted from Nissen (2007)

Table I.
Knowledge flow and institutional pillars

For instance, we note above that regulative processes center on rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities. For parsimony in the table, we focus on the rules, which represent the primary focus of such regulative activities. Regularization combines aspects of the basis of acceptable behavior in an institution and the mechanisms that govern institutional behaviors. For instance, we note above that the regulative basis of acceptable behavior stems from imposition, acceptance and enforcement of rules, laws and sanctions and that coercive mechanisms govern institutional behaviors. For parsimony in the table, we focus on coercion, which represents the primary tool to regulate prescribed institutional behavior. Legitimacy refers to the basis through which prescribed institutional behaviors become accepted within a collectivity. For instance, we note above that the regulative basis of legitimacy rests upon legally sanctioned actions. Table entries for the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars follow accordingly from our description above.

The second group of three characteristics is epistemological in nature, deriving directly from our description of institutional knowledge flows above (and borrowing heavily from Nissen, 2006b). The three dimensions, explicitness, reach, and flow time pertain, respectively, to the degree to which knowledge has been articulated (e.g. explicit: articulated; tacit: not articulated), how broadly knowledge is distributed (e.g. held by an individual, group or organization), and how rapidly knowledge flows (e.g. very slowly, very rapidly).

Notice how the three institutional pillars tend to vary monotonically across these epistemological dimensions. For instance, knowledge associated with the regulative pillar is the most explicit, has the broadest reach and the fastest flow time of the three. In contrast, knowledge associated with the cultural-cognitive pillar is the most tacit, has the narrowest reach and the slowest flow time of the three. Knowledge associated with the normative pillar is characterized at various points in between those corresponding to its regulative and cultural-cognitive counterparts, but they tend to be closer to the latter than to the former; that is, the knowledge associated with normative institutional processes tend to be more similar to those associated with the cultural-cognitive than with regulative ones. This characterization aligns well with Campbell's (2004, ch. 1) distinction between rational choice institutionalism – which tends to focus on the regulative pillar – and organizational institutionalism – which tends to focus on the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars – and it enhances our ability to understand intercultural knowledge flows.

3. Acculturation model

As noted above, we build upon prior qualitative fieldwork (Adams *et al.*, 2010) to understand how tacit knowledge flows required for acculturation can be accelerated across organizational cultures. Results of such qualitative research include a model of acculturation, which we summarize here and then refine in the next section. We begin by summarizing the qualitative method employed to develop this model, for it elucidates how such theory building can inform knowledge management research. The acculturation model is described in turn.

3.1 Qualitative method

As explained by Adams *et al.* (2010), the prior investigation was informed and guided by an institutional theory lens, but the investigators remained quite ignorant about how tacit knowledge flows across cultures, and they lacked sufficiently rich KM theory to develop hypotheses for testing. Hence, they employed more of a theory building approach and followed the explicit guidance outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). For instance, they were very deliberate about theoretical sampling, eager to change the course of the study to follow promising avenues that emerged, and they maintained a rigorous practice of constant comparison along with iterative and overlapping data collection and analysis, continuing to collect and analyze data until theoretical saturation was reached. Further, they employed a combination of open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) to analyze the textual data of interview transcripts, and they sought to let the data speak for themselves to the greatest extent possible. This is particularly important where extant theory is inadequate and new theory is to be developed from and grounded in field data.
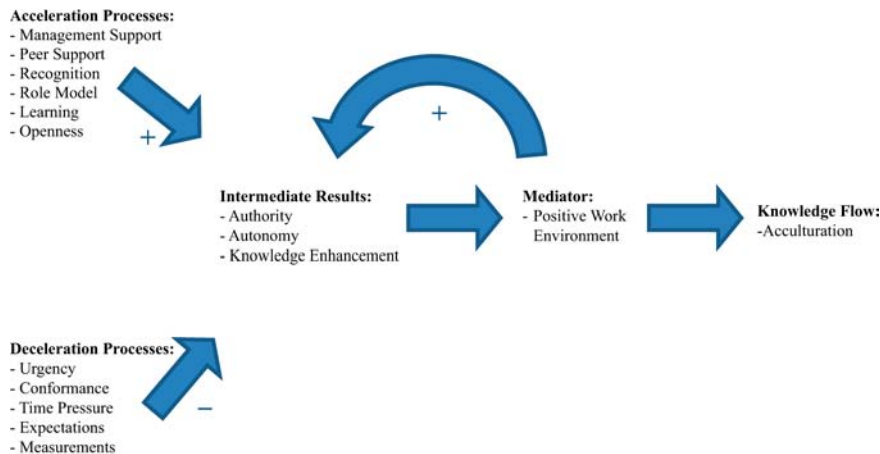
In combination with such grounded theory building, they also employed several techniques of multiple case studies (Yin, 1994). Theoretical sampling began with deliberate selection of interview subjects from distinctly different fields (i.e. warfare and healthcare) and backgrounds (e.g. think tank, warship, healthcare research, practice) and proceeded through cross-case analysis. This case study technique facilitated constant comparison and helped the researchers to generalize their findings beyond either field. Additionally, they pursued multiple data collection techniques – including archival review, semi-structured interviews and participant observation – and sought to triangulate findings as prescribed for case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In total, three military officers were selected for interviews along with two healthcare researchers and a commercial helicopter pilot. Each of these subjects had experienced the need for substantial organizational acculturation. In each case, interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis, with probing and snowballing techniques, and they were recorded and transcribed, resulting in many dozens of pages of transcription documents. Documents associated with each organization were reviewed for background information as well, and the researchers developed *emic* insights through participant observation. Extensive iteration between data collection and analysis resulted in the development of an acculturation model.

3.2 Model summary

Figure 1 summarizes the basic acculturation model. This represents a process model with five principal elements: acceleration processes, deceleration processes,

Acceleration Processes:
- Management Support
- Peer Support
- Recognition
- Role Model
- Learning
- Openness

+

+

Intermediate Results:
- Authority
- Autonomy
- Knowledge Enhancement

Mediator:
- Positive Work Environment

Knowledge Flow:
- Acculturation

Deceleration Processes:
- Urgency
- Conformance
- Time Pressure
- Expectations
- Measurements

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Source: Adams *et al.* (2010)

Figure 1.
Basic acculturation model

intermediate results, mediators, and knowledge flows. Each element includes a number of factors. For instance, acceleration processes (i.e. management support, peer support, recognition, role models, learning, openness) serve to accelerate acculturation through influence upon the set of intermediate variables (i.e. authority, autonomy, knowledge enhancement), which in turn affect the mediator (i.e. positive work environment) and hence increase the tacit knowledge flows required to accelerate organizational acculturation. As a converse instance, the deceleration processes (i.e. creating a sense of urgency, demanding conformance, exerting time pressure, expectations, measurements) work through the same intermediate results and mediator but have the opposite effect: they decrease the tacit knowledge flows resulting in decelerated organizational acculturation. The positive feedback loop between the mediator and intermediate results signals that increases in the positive work environment drive increases in intermediate results; conversely, decreases in the positive work environment drive decreases in intermediate results and vice versa.

Adams *et al.* (2010) point out an important aspect of this basic acculturation model pertaining to the nature of its elements: all of the acceleration and deceleration processes derive directly from the interview data and reflect terms that have meaning to the subjects and relate to well-understood aspects of organization and management. For instance, management support is acknowledged widely as important for KM (Bashein *et al.*, 1994), and likewise for peer support, recognition and the other factors. This means that, by using familiar terms, the model ties well into the extant literature. The same applies to the intermediate results and mediator: these concepts and terms are familiar. This represents a contribution to Knowledge Flow Theory by identifying the key concepts and interrelating them in a manner that informs accelerating acculturation through tacit knowledge flows.

This aspect offers an encouraging note in terms of practice also: since such concepts and terms are familiar in terms of the extant literature, it is very likely that they are familiar in terms of organization and management practice as well. Hence, the organizational leader or manager should be able to understand readily what actions in terms of process changes to take in order to affect tacit knowledge flows and hence

accelerate acculturation. This represents a contribution to KM practice. Thus, we offer a contribution that informs theory and practice alike.

Additionally, as noted above, we understand well how tacit knowledge flows slowly and narrowly. We understand also how tacit knowledge flows impact the normative and cultural-cognitive aspects of institutional life. This provides some contrast to their regulatory counterpart, which gains impact principally through explicit knowledge (Nissen, 2007). Hence this model helps to inform institutional theory as well, for we gain insight into the kinds of process changes that will influence shifts in organizational norms and beliefs (i.e. affected by tacit knowledge flows) versus rules (i.e. affected by explicit knowledge flows). Notwithstanding such theoretical and practical advances, however, the relevant literature also points to several aspects of this basic model that appear to be missing or incomplete. We draw from such literature to refine the basic acculturation model in the next section.

4. Model refinement

From the mergers and acquisitions (M&A) literature, the concept acculturative stress depicts the disruptive tension that is felt by members of one culture when they are required to interact with a second culture and adopt its ways (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Berry, 1983). Many investigators agree that the potential for acculturative stress is greatest when large differences exist between the cultures of buying and selling firms. Very *et al.* (1997) develop five theoretical dimensions to measure acculturative stress:

(1) Participation and cooperation.

(2) Personal and societal responsibility.

(3) Assertiveness and achievement.

(4) Autonomy and innovativeness.

(5) Performance and reward objectiveness.

Briefly, participation and cooperation measures the importance of teamwork, amount of communication in the work place, and level of explanations to subordinates within the workplace. Personal and societal responsibility measures the level of care for health and welfare, attention to individual's personal problem, and responsibility towards the environment. Assertiveness and achievement measures how much risk taking is encouraged, how much competition is encouraged among its members, and how much emphasis is placed on effectiveness rather than adherence to rules and regulations. Autonomy and innovativeness measures the level of rights delegation, how much responsibility is retained by upper management, and extent to which an individual is allowed to adopt his/her own approach to the job. Performance and reward objectiveness measures the degree to which one's performance is measured in a clear and understandable manner and the extent to which promotion is based on performance alone.

These five dimensions help to provide some basis for validation of our acculturation model developed through grounded theory. Because such grounded theory is developed necessarily from a limited number of cases, its generalizability beyond the specific cases is a question always. For example, participation and in particular cooperation (i.e. dimension 1 from above), which implies teamwork and in particular

communication, appears to be an accelerator of acculturation; greater cooperation and communication can speed the flows of tacit knowledge enabling acculturation. A refinement of the model depicted in Figure 1 could include cooperation and communication as accelerators, for instance. The same pertains to several other accelerators in the basic model above (e.g. management support, peer support, learning). In contrast, our review of the M&A literature did not reveal similar linkages to the other accelerators from our basic model (i.e. recognition, role model, openness); hence these are candidates to drop or replace as we refine the model – acknowledging, of course, that an alternate literature may provide support for them.

Assertiveness and achievement (i.e. dimension 3 from above), which implies an objective performance measurement and reward system and in particular high levels of control, provides a contrasting example; greater emphasis on assertiveness, achievement and control can retard the flows of tacit knowledge enabling acculturation. A refinement of the model depicted in Figure 1 could include control as a decelerator, for instance. In contrast, our review of the M&A literature did not reveal similar linkages to the other decelerators from our basic model (i.e. urgency); hence as above these are candidates to drop or replace as we refine the model – acknowledging, of course, that an alternate literature may provide support for them.

In addition to linkages to our basic model accelerators and decelerators, we find some basis in the M&A literature for model validation of the other basic model elements shown above. For instance, autonomy (i.e. from dimension 4 from above) matches the intermediate result element autonomy exactly, and innovativeness (i.e. from this same dimension) is connected strongly to the intermediate result element knowledge enhancement. Hence we find like support for these intermediate result elements in the basic model. Further, these elements appear to subsume the element authority, so we can increase model parsimony.

In terms of other intermediate results, the role that trust plays in the collaboration process appears to be overlooked, both by our grounded theory model and the M&A literature. Indeed, many literatures observe that a high level of trust is necessary to facilitate open communication, learning and collaboration (Dyer, 1995; Handy, 1995). Trust is also an important factor in promoting inter-group learning and knowledge flow on cultural differences. Although trust is implied in the context of autonomy and communication, given the level of importance surfaced by various literatures, it seems appropriate to incorporate it directly another intermediate result in the acculturation model.

Finally, the structure of the basic model above seems overly complex after reviewing the M&A and trust literatures. It appears, for instance, that the intermediate results as refined (i.e. consisting of trust, autonomy and knowledge enhancement) above describe the concept positive work environment adequately. Hence we can remove this mediator from the basic model and interrelate the intermediate results directly with outcome to simplify and refine the model further. The positive feedback loop from above would remain in our refined model but connect outcome with intermediate results directly. Drawing further from the M&A literature, the term outcome appears to represent a better end element for the model than knowledge flow (i.e. as depicted in the basic model above), and an outcome such as achievement would appear to represent the desired end state of accelerated acculturation better than acceleration for its own sake; that is, we accelerate acculturation in order to improve

organizational achievement and innovation. This provides another refinement that we can make to the basic model as informed by the M&A literature. This refined model is delineated in Figure 2.

Interestingly, this model can be linked back to institutional theory, implies that structures and processes that promote learning and communication will lead to accelerated acculturation. Structures and processes that are time sensitive and enforce conformances and control will lead to decelerated acculturation. For instance, the acceleration processes in our refined model align relatively well with the normative and cultural cognitive pillars of institutional theory, which are more tacit in nature. Similarly, the deceleration processes align relatively well with the regulative pillar, which is much more explicit in nature. Such alignment may appear counter intuitive to the reader, since we know that explicit knowledge flows faster and more broadly than tacit knowledge does; that is, on the surface one might expect for regulative aspects to align more with accelerators and their normative and cultural-cognitive counterparts to align more with decelerators. On deeper examination, however, we note above how culture involves highly tacit knowledge, and for such tacit knowledge to flow via acculturation, the corresponding behavioral changes required will have to take place at a deeper, tacit level (e.g. emphasizing norms and beliefs).

5. Conclusion

Knowledge is key to sustainable competitive advantage, but different kinds of knowledge affect competitive advantage differently. This applies especially to the environment of increasing globalization. Because cultural knowledge is deeply rooted and highly tacit, its flows are critical to global enterprise performance, but tacit knowledge clumps noticeably and is known well to flow both slowly and narrowly. Such clumping and flowing are exacerbated when knowledge is required to flow across cultures. Unfortunately, knowledge management theory on intercultural knowledge flows remains limited.

Alternatively, research to integrate institutional theory with knowledge flow theory provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding how tacit knowledge flows across cultures. We are able to observe how the regulative pillar of institutional theory corresponds most closely with explicit knowledge flows, for instance, which
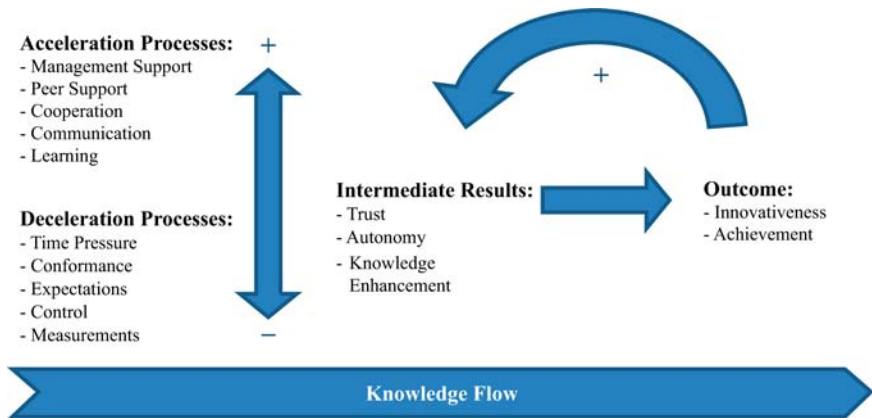

Figure 2.
Refined acculturation model

provides a contrast to the correspondence of their normative and cultural-cognitive counterparts with tacit flows. Such integration enables us to examine acculturation as an institutional problem centering on knowledge flows.

Further, recent qualitative research has employed this integrated framework to develop a model of acculturation through a combination of grounded theory building and multiple case studies. Theoretical sampling of interview subjects from distinctly different fields (i.e. warfare and healthcare) and backgrounds (e.g. think tank, warship, healthcare research, practice) facilitated constant comparison and helped the researchers to generalize their findings beyond either field. Additionally, triangulated findings through multiple data collection techniques led to the development of a basic model that includes both accelerators and decelerators of acculturation.

The present investigation builds upon, partially validates and refines this basic model. By drawing in particular from the mergers and acquisitions literature, we are able to identify theoretical dimensions to measure acculturative stress, a concept that proves to be useful in terms of providing some basis for validation of our acculturation model developed through grounded theory. Acculturative stress and its constituent dimensions also provide insight into how we can refine and simplify the basic acculturation model, and we draw from the trust literature as well to incorporate this key concept that did not emerge through our qualitative research. The refined acculturation model maintains the essential structure and many elements of the basic model, but it links more closely with extant theory as characterized by the M&A and trust literatures and hence appears to be more broadly generalizable. The refined model also links to institutional theory well and explains how to increase or decrease the tacit knowledge flows underlying acculturation to affect organizational outcomes.

Even such refined model has room for continued work, however, as additional literatures can inform further validation, generalization and refinement. Indeed, this represents the natural flow of qualitative research, as it develops new theory to which follow-on research can be directed. A natural next step beyond such further refinement would involve operationalization of the key model concepts to develop constructs that can be tested empirically, in what would constitute a natural transition from qualitative to quantitative research and from theory building to theory testing. Even without such transition, the refined acculturation model described through this research serves to inform theory, and by identifying both accelerators and decelerators of acculturation for the manager, this work serves to inform practice alike. We look forward to continuing this stream of research, and we welcome others to join us.

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About the authors

June G. Chin Yi Lee is a Major in the Republic of Singapore Navy and 2010
graduate of the US Naval Postgraduate School with an MS in Information
Systems Technology. She won the NPS Outstanding Academic Achievement
Award for International Students, along with the Rear Admiral Grace Murray
Hopper Information Technology Management Award, and was recognized for
her outstanding thesis. June G. Chin Yi Lee is the corresponding author and can
be contacted at: jlee@nps.edu

Mark E. Nissen is OASD-NII Research Chair Professor of Command and
Control, Director of the Center for Edge Power, and Professor of Information
Science and Management, at the Naval Postgraduate School. His research
focuses on dynamic knowing and organizing. He views work, technology,
organization and people as an integrated design problem, and he has
concentrated for some time on the dynamics of knowledge flows, culminating
in his second book, entitled *Harnessing Knowledge Dynamics: Principled
Organizational Knowing and Learning* (IRM Press, 2006). Currently he is pursuing a
multidisciplinary initiative to understand the potential and limitations of organization and
management through virtual environments. His publications span information systems, project
management, organization studies, knowledge management and related fields. In 2000 he
received the Menneken Faculty Award for Excellence in Scientific Research, the top research
award available to faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School. In 2001 he received a prestigious
Young Investigator Grant Award from the Office of Naval Research for work on Knowledge
Flow Theory. In 2002-2003 he was Visiting Professor at Stanford, integrating Knowledge Flow
Theory into agent-based tools for computational modeling. In 2004 he established the Center for
Edge Power for multi-university, multidisciplinary research on what the Military terms
command and control (esp. organizing, managing and knowing). Before his business and
information systems doctoral work at the University of Southern California, he acquired over 12
years' management experience in the aerospace and electronics industries.