Article

An emic-etic-emic research cycle for understanding context in under-researched countries

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Abstract
Given the importance of understanding the context of management issues in the world, this article discusses the role of both emic (developing culture-specific concepts) and etic (applying concepts across cultures) research in the international management literature. This paper proposes a more comprehensive mixed methods research cycle that can provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the context in under-researched countries. Using a decolonial lens, this theoretical paper proposes that an emic-etic-emic cycle is the best way to disaggregate contextual issues in organizational research, particularly when dealing with human issues in management. By examining a research project on leadership in Africa and the African diaspora from decolonial perspective, our proposed emic-etic-emic cycle (1) stresses the importance of using an emic approach in addition to the dominant etic approach in cross-cultural management; (2) provides researchers with a deeper understanding of context in under-researched countries; and (3) contributes to decolonial approaches to management, which call for a symmetrical dialogue across borders which decentralizes the dominant Western approach, and provides a deeper understanding of management from an indigenous and local perspective. Contextualizing research using the emic-etic-emic cycle can enhance rigor and relevance of the research.

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Introduction

Increased globalization underscores the importance of understanding the role of the context when conducting organizational research. This is particularly true because of the shift in business from the United States and Europe toward more under-researched regions, including Asia, Latin America, and Africa. While these emerging regions have more pronounced differences in business and cultural environments, these contexts are often less examined. Unfortunately, the literature does not sufficiently address contextual factors (Tung and Stahl, 2018) in these emerging economies. Teagarden et al. (2018) argue that it is still unclear how models and theories developed in traditional Western contexts are relevant or apply to these under-researched regions.

Similarly, Härtel and O'Connor (2014: 417) urged scholars to "take up the challenge of putting context back" into organizational research and find new research directions for contextualizing organizational research. More recently, Jackson (2019: 247) asserted that, "the context is our content" in cross-cultural management. Some researchers (e.g., Arnaud and Schminke, 2012; Chattopadhyay and Choudhury, 2017) have highlighted the role of context, as predictions are tested to better understand organizational phenomena, while others have used an inductive approach to explore the conceptualization of constructs in other settings, such as a non-Western context (e.g., Zhu and Hildebrandt, 2013). Responding to this call to action in the literature to contextualize organizational research, this paper proposes a more comprehensive research cycle that can provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the context in under-researched emerging regions, including Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

When discussing context in under-researched countries, it is especially important to recognize the aspect of coloniality in organizational research. Coloniality is the process of domination and exploitation of the West over the rest of world (Naude, 2017). More recently, decolonial approaches have been used in management and organizational research (e.g., Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006; Nkomo, 2011; Ruggunan, 2016). Decolonial approaches have called for the liberation from economic and knowledge domination from the West (Nkomo, 2015).

Using a decolonial lens, we propose that combining emic and etic research approaches, in an emic-etic-emic cycle, is the best way to disaggregate contextual issues in organizational research, particularly in under-researched locations. Morris et al. (1999) provide an interesting discussion and contrast between emic and etic research perspectives. These authors note that the *inside* perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, is usually designated as the *emic* perspective. Alternatively, the *outside* perspective of comparativist researchers, who strive to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general external standard, is usually designated as the *etic* perspective. As such, emic researchers tend to assume that a culture is best understood as an interconnected system or whole. On the other hand, etic researchers are more prone to isolating particular components of culture and making predictions using hypotheses about their antecedents and consequences (Morris et al., 1999).

In line with Jick (1979: 602) who suggests "triangulation in action," we advocate that scholars employ a cycle of emic-etic-emic research, which is often associated with both qualitative (emic) and quantitative (etic) methods. Emic and etic approaches are not always associated with qualitative versus quantitative methods; for example, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) define emic as developing

categories from the data, while etic uses predefined categories. We use both of these ideas, associating predefined categories largely with more quantitative research and developing categories from the data with more qualitative research. The purpose of this theoretical paper is to explicate this emic-etic-emic research cycle and to illustrate the approach using an on-going international project in Africa and the African diaspora. This paper is primarily intended for a scholarly audience interested in undertaking international and cross-cultural research. An earlier short article appeared in AIB Insights; the current paper expands on the ideas outlined briefly in Insights ((Punnett et al., 2017) anonymity and to be provided before publication).

By taking a decolonial approach, we are able to understand management from an indigenous and local perspective and recognize the history of colonialism. Our research cycle is able to decentralize the importance of the dominant Western approach and acknowledge other perspectives that are often overlooked. For example, the *ubuntu* philosophy from South Africa, a humanistic view of the individual (Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; Swartz and Davies, 1997), often remains unnoticed in the West. The *ubuntu* philosophy is taken from a Nguni (isiZulu) aphorism: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which can be translated as "a person is a person because of or through other people." This philosophy is illustrated in the words of Desmond Tutu when he said, "none of us come into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned from human beings. We need other human beings to be human" (Molefe, 2018). While this perspective was developed in Africa, Molefe (2018) argues that the *ubuntu* philosophy should be the focus of organizations today as they strive to become more inclusive and purpose-driven. This philosophy is often seen in open innovation platforms allowing employees to engage in external co-operation and idea generation to navigate through this fast-changing environment and/or the recent push for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies to attract and retain talent. By examining African concepts, such as *ubuntu*, in the West from an emic perspective, management scholars would be able to re-examine the current Western theories, which are associated with the individual rights rather than the collective.

Birkinshaw et al. (2011) noted that the international business (IB) field was founded on studies employing rich qualitative research (e.g., Bartlett, 1979; Prahalad, 1975). More recently, the broader trend toward positivistic empirical methods has led to quantitative methods becoming more the standard in the field. Scholars who have studied management in emerging markets/developing countries have largely adopted an etic approach and used quantitative methods (e.g., Acquaah, 2012; Kantabutra, 2012). Fatehi et al. (2020) explain that the etic approach to studying culture has become more popular since quantification of any construct makes comparisons easier. Researchers often use the application of cultural dimensions of the etic approach (e.g., Hofstede, 1981) since it lends itself to quantification. In Shackman's (2013) review of the IB literature, he found structural equation modeling to be the best and most widely used path modeling technique, given its ability to compare models across groups—a useful feature in studying samples from multiple countries or cultures.

Despite the benefits of quantitative methods, Birkinshaw et al. (2011) argued that the evolution of the field has resulted in missed opportunities to better understand processes and contexts. Since many researchers have become "partial and rudimentary translators of contextual differences," qualitative methods can provide the field with a grounded and deeper perspective of the micro-processes and the relationship between culture and context (Birkinshaw et al., 2011: 575). Buckley et al. (2014) noted that emic approaches and qualitative methods can generate new conceptualizations and interpretations that will enable a better understanding of the differences and complex contextual factors involved in research and practice, especially in emerging economies. For example, Feitosa et al.'s (2018) review on the role of culture in understanding

teams calls for more emic approaches in capturing culture-dependent cognitions and behaviors in team interactions.

Rather than viewing the emic/etic or the quantitative/qualitative approaches from a dichotomous perspective, there are several advantages of using a combined emic-etic, mixed method approach (Halbesleben et al., 2004; Woodside et al., 2012). It has been noted that a combined emic-etic approach can help with theory development (Halbesleben et al., 2004; Woodside et al., 2012). Halbesleben et al. (2004) argue that a grounded theory methodology can provide the richness of the qualitative data, which can help in the development of common themes, which can later be integrated in a theory and tested empirically. Morris et al. (1999) suggest that the combination of perspectives can help in developing a rich and descriptive theory that can have an impact on future studies. Other benefits of mixed methods include the potential to compensate for biases of using a single method and the opportunity for corroboration, or triangulation of findings (Denzin, 1989; Erzberger and Kelle, 2003; Thurmond, 2001).

Arguably, the emic-etic, mixed method approach has several advantages. Building on the limited literature that adopts both emic and etic approaches to understand management in under-researched countries (e.g., Cao et al., 2013; Zhu and Hildebrandt, 2013), an emic-etic-emic cycle provides an even more comprehensive perspective to further contextualize research. This paper not only argues that cross-cultural studies must take up the challenge and combine these approaches to better understand the context in under-researched emerging economies/countries, we also go beyond the emic-etic perspective and expand upon the previous literature by completing the research cycle with an emic approach. Researchers can gain both depth and breadth in understanding the research context by further adding another step to the process in order to further integrate the mixed method approach. The purpose of this paper is to fill a gap in the literature by describing a research methodology that can provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the context, especially in under-researched countries.

Understanding the context of under-researched locations

Researchers are beginning to fill the literature gap by undertaking research in all parts of the globe, particularly in those areas identified as under-researched (Steers et al., 2012). While there have been some studies that have attempted to address this gap by examining management in emerging economies (e.g., Acquaah, 2012), the literature has largely adopted a dichotomous approach—either emic (Ozcan and Santos, 2014; Uzo and Mair, 2014) or etic (Acquaah, 2012; Meyer et al., 2009; Nguni et al., 2006)—rather than a combined emic-etic, mixed methods approach.

Some researchers (e.g., Greenfield, 1996) have recognized that selecting an approach depends on the stage of research. That is, the emic approach serves best in exploratory research and the etic approach is best for hypothesis testing. While these studies have advanced the field by examining management in emerging economies, the adoption of a dichotomous approach can still limit our understanding of a research phenomenon. We argue that the interplay between perspectives within the research process is especially valuable; for example, Zhu and Hildebrandt's (2013) combined emic and etic approach uses a variety of data collection techniques and contributes to a greater cross-cultural understanding of effective persuasion strategies in China and New Zealand. In this paper, researchers are encouraged to consider using an emic-etic-emic research cycle to further enhance contextualization of research. Our proposed cyclical research approach can provide a richer and deeper understanding of the context compared to the traditional mixed method approach. Table 1 discusses the design features of a sample of studies that focus on management in under-researched economies.

Table 1. Summary of the design features in a sample of studies on management in emerging economies.

Design features of studies	Nguni et al. (2006)	Meyer et al. (2009)	Acquaah (2012)	Zhu and Hildebrandt (2013)	Ozcan and Santos (2014)	Uzo and Mair (2014)	Jiang et al. (2011)	Zhao (2015)
Participating organizations	70 schools in Tanzania	Local MNE subsidiaries in India, Vietnam, South Africa, and Egypt	106 organizations in Ghana	International trade companies in New Zealand and China	Organizations in the telecommunications and financial services in North America, Europe, and Asia	4 organizations in the movie industry in Nigeria	121 organizations in China with partnership experiences with overseas Chinese and non-Chinese companies	433 Executive—external contact dyads from Chinese firms
Data collection approaches	Survey instrument	Field case studies pilot study; survey instrument and archival data	Survey instrument: 2 waves of data collection	80 sales letters; survey used to best case example; interviews, focus groups	In-depth semi-structured interviews; observational data; archival data	Semi-structured interviews; observations; archival data	Semi-structured interviews; survey instrument	Mail surveys; archival data
Research participants	545 school teachers	336 top-level managers (usually the CEO)	206 seniors executives in the two time periods	23 interviews with manager; 2 focus group interviews	40 executives	52 CEOs, movie producers, scriptwriters, actors, editors, copyright lawyers, industry regulators, and industry association members	121 Chinese Executives	149 Chinese executives and two confidants each
Data analysis	Regression analyses	Regression analyses	Regression analyses	Qualitative analyses	Qualitative analyses	Qualitative analyses	Regression analyses	Regression analyses

Several of the studies summarized in Table 1 used a mixed methods approach that involved both qualitative methods (interviews, observations, archival data collection, and focus groups) and quantitative methods (survey questionnaires and regression analysis). Jiang et al. (2011) studied Chinese executives' trust in their overseas business partners and collected data via semi-structured interviews and a survey instrument. This study was an example of the use of qualitative and quantitative data both analyzed quantitatively, with the qualitative data playing a very minor role. Likewise, Zhao's (2015) study utilized mail surveys and archival data about the Chinese firms. In both studies, the qualitative and quantitative data were collected sequentially, and the data were analyzed quantitatively. While the use of the mixed method approach in these studies provided an opportunity to triangulate the findings and further develop theory, we argue that an additional emic cycle would have even further contextualized research. For example, Jiang et al. (2011) uncovered an unexpected finding in their study on the effects of cultural ethnicity, firm size, and firm age on senior executives' trust in their overseas business partner. Contrary to their prediction that firm age would reduce affect-based trust in overseas partners in firms, Jiang et al. (2011) and his colleagues found that executives from older firms had greater affect-based trust in partners who share their cultural ethnicity. In their discussion at the end of the paper, the authors suggested that the un-expected finding might only be seen in the Chinese empirical context and proposed that the reliance of personal ties or *guanxi* ties often involving people from the same village or province (Tsui and Farh, 1997) may have impacted the results. In other words, it is possible that Chinese senior executives at older firms may have more likely followed traditional *guanxi* principles during their interactions, and therefore started business partnerships with overseas Chinese whose ancestors originated in the same province as their own family. Our proposed emic-etic-emic approach would have further shed light on this unanticipated finding and developed our understanding of inter- and intra-cultural trust in overseas partners in China.

In the following discussion, we briefly look at the literature on emerging regions and multi-method approaches in various countries across the globe in order to demonstrate the applicability of the emic-etic-emic research approach to various contexts. In order to illustrate the depth of the proposed emic-etic-emic cycle, there is a focus on the African context and the Leadership Effectiveness in Africa and the Diaspora (LEAD) project is discussed. We conclude with the managerial implications of this methodology.

Literature on under-researched countries

Over the past 15 years, management researchers have argued that management knowledge is severely biased toward Western perspectives (Bruton 2010; Tung and Stahl, 2018). Bruton (2010) argues that management researchers have been delayed in reacting to the calls of business leaders to address important issues regarding poverty in emerging economies of the world. Similarly, Das et al. (2009) found that research papers published in mainstream economic journals were linked to level of development. Namely, countries with the lowest incomes and weakest economies received the least attention. This is perhaps not surprising, given that most active management researchers are from North America and Western Europe (Punnett, 2008), but it still leaves a major knowledge gap.

Scholars have also advocated the need to understand management from an indigenous or local perspective as well as within the global context (Jackson, 2013) and to develop locally driven management concepts and measures (Holtbrugge, 2013). Despite the calls for more research in non-Western countries, management literature remains dominated by research from the West, particularly the United States. Xiaojun et al. (2012) noted leadership practices in China often focus on Western perspectives and use Western-built instruments, which generally do not take into account

the perspectives and practices of leadership in non-Western contexts. Similarly, Zecca et al.'s (2012) study on the Five-Factor Model of personality in four African regions and Switzerland found a lack of scalar invariance suggesting that the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), a Western-developed instrument, did not sufficiently measure cross-cultural mean differences of personality profiles. It seems clear that it is the context that differentiates international research from domestic research (Buckley, 2002; Child, 2009; Oesterle and Wolf, 2011).

In line with the colonial approach, it is also important to recognize the continuity of "colonial forms of domination" produced by colonial cultures and structures (Grosfoguel, 2007: 219) in international management research. From a decolonial perspective, there have been calls in the literature to decentralize the importance of the dominant Western approach and acknowledge other perspectives that are usually disregarded. A decolonial perspective enables us to recognize impositions of the modern/colonial world and their consequences in the international management literature (Imasato, 2010). Barnard et al. (2017) provide an example of how the Western-based management theories do not recognize the recent history of colonialism. The researchers argue that Theory X and Y (McGregor, 1960) and humanizing leadership (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015), which emphasize the view that humans are at risk of being reduced to machines in Taylorist approaches, fail to recognize Africa's history of colonialism and slavery, whereby people were "presumed by colonial powers to be animal-like and spoken of as chattel, savages, or primitives" (Barnard et al., 2017: 487). When conducting international management research, it is important to acknowledge the context and be mindful of the history.

This lack of knowledge about the context in non-Western countries suggests a limited understanding about management from a global perspective. In order to truly talk about management, researchers need to be able to understand the similarities and differences that exist across countries and cultures, that is, the contexts in which business and management take place. By conducting research in under-researched countries and including indigenous concepts and measures into our global research undertakings (Tung and Aycan, 2008), researchers can achieve a greater understanding of the context and explain what is unique to the context in some countries, as well as how countries compare on variables of interest.

The African continent and the African diaspora provide a good illustration of how little we know about management in many countries and regions. Even in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004), African countries were not well represented, and there is little discussion of the results from Africa. Similarly, the African diaspora has been essentially ignored in most studies (Galperin et al., 2014). Kamoche (2011) argues that Africa remains relatively under-researched in the fields of management; nevertheless, the opportunity for further research is far reaching. This supports earlier calls for research on management in Africa (*Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2009) and Bolden and Kirk's (2009) suggested need for grounded conceptualizations of leadership drawn from research within Africa, using a variety of methodological approaches. Similarly, in their systematic review, Kolk and Rivera-Santos (2018) stated that scholars need to better understand the African context in the broader management literature.

Scholars who have studied management in African countries have questioned the effective implementation of Western management and practices (James, 2008; Kamoche et al., 2004), but only a few researchers have looked at the role and impact of culture on management in the African context (Ford et al., 2013; Jackson 2013; Jackson et al., 2008; Zoogah and Nkomo, 2013), or indigenous concepts such as *ubuntu*, the philosophy from South Africa that provides a humanistic view of the individual that recognizes "a person is a person through other people" (Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi and Maree, 1995), *kgotla*, a public forum in Botswana where people would meet with chiefs or leaders (Beugré, 2016), *spirituality and connection to one's ancestors* (Smith, 2002), and the

Tree of Talking (Wambo and Githongo, 2007). A particular question that arises in post-colonial societies is "how do we decolonize the research and the research process?" That is, how can we ensure that researchers from countries that have colonized do not simply repeat the earlier process of studying the other. The research cycle that we propose goes some way toward ensuring that this does not happen.

We believe that in under-researched areas, the emic-etic-emic research cycle is particularly valuable. In the next section, the emic and etic research designs are discussed to provide a background for understanding the proposed cycle rather than highlighting the research findings.

Emic versus etic research

According to Headland (1990), Kenneth L. Pike was the person who first coined the terms *emics* and *etics* in anthropology and linguistics, and who first used them in print in 1954 (Pike, 1967). Pike's use of the concepts "etic" and "emic" was derived from the words phonetic and phonemic, respectively. Pike saw the terms as analogous references to raw generalized classification (etics), on the one hand, and more specific and systemic analysis (emics), on the other. In tagmemics, a theory of language, the two terms are something of a "root-metaphor" with philosophical implications (Pike, 1987: 81), although this metaphor would collapse if it were to treat units as existing autonomously, without context (1987: 93). Pike's original definitions of emics and etics, however, vary from their usage in other disciplines.

By the 1980s, the terms were being used in unrelated disciplines including management and IB. An examination of the Academy of Management Journals identifies a number of papers in the 1990s that discuss emic and etic research issues and focus on which is the "better" approach (Elsbach et al., 1999). In this paper, we contend that such arguments are misleading because both approaches used together are "better"' than when used individually, where context is important and when a phenomenon has not been studied.

For our purposes, we describe our "emic" approach as beginning with a "blank page" and allowing research participants to define and explain the concepts of interest in their own words. In contrast, our "etic" approach uses definitions and explanations, drawn from all the countries included in the research. These are incorporated into a survey instrument that can be used in a large-scale study across cultures and countries. This allows for statistical tests for similarities and differences both within cultures and countries, as well as between cultures and countries. This approach is in line with Peterson and Ruiz-Quintanilla's (2003) perspective that advises researchers to address both universal and local, tacit and explicit, aspects in organizational studies.

While the emic and etic multi-method approaches have been accepted in the literature (e.g., Kramer, 1992), there are on-going debates over emic research versus etic research. Each has its proponents and defendants, and each has its opponents and detractors (Brannen, 1996; Jahoda, 1983; Sinkovics et al., 2008). A concern with emic research in management has been that it is "unscientific" or "subjective knowledge", as noted earlier by Headland (1990).

The emic versus etic arguments are similar to those that revolve around quantitative and qualitative research, and they are in fact closely linked. Emic research is often qualitative, and etic research is often quantitative. However, emic and etic approaches are not always associated with qualitative versus quantitative methods. As noted earlier, some researchers have defined emic as developing categories from the data, while etic uses predefined categories (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). Morris et al. (1999) also stress that the relationship between perspectives and methods is not rigid. It is possible that emic studies of indigenous constructs and data are collected with survey methods and analyzed using quantitative techniques (Farh et al., 1997; Yang, 1986). Similarly,

ethnographic observation and qualitative data are sometimes utilized in the development of arguments from an etic approach (Nelsen and Barley, 1997).

Given etic and emic approaches have traditionally been associated with differing research methods (Morris et al., 1999), some scholars see quantitative research as superior to qualitative. However, a poorly designed quantitative study can be even less effective and misleading compared to a well-designed qualitative research study. Based on Pike's (1967) concepts of emic and etic, Triandis et al. (1971) argue that either an emic or etic approach is preferable to a pseudoetic approach, an emic approach developed in a Western culture (often the United States) that is assumed to work as an etic approach. In other words, researchers who adopt a pseudoetic approach use instruments that are based on American theories, and the instrument items mirror the American context. The items are simply translated and used in other cultures. The key is to use each approach appropriately, to choose the best approach for a given research question, to design the research well, and where possible to use both approaches, as each complements the other. For example, Cheung et al. (2011) propose a combined etic and emic approach to provide a more culturally inclusive understating of personality. Using illustrations of Chinese and South African cultures, the authors combine the methodological rigor of the etic approach and the cultural sensitivity of the emic approach. For a discussion on how to use emic-etic approaches effectively, see Buckley et al. (2014), and for a comprehensive review of the research methods in cross-cultural management, refer to Szkudlarek et al. (2020b).

Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela (2006) have provided a topology of mixed methods studies of IB research conducted between 2000 and 2003 in four IB journals (*Journal of World Business*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Management International Review*, and *International Business Review*). Their definition of a mixed method study is one that combines qualitative data collection and/or analysis with quantitative data collection and analysis in a single study.

That is precisely the case for our proposed emic-etic-emic research cycle. As Shah and Corley (2006) have noted, when qualitative inquiry follows quantitative analysis, this might be especially useful when the researcher wishes to attempt to explain the existence of an unexpected pattern in the data or attempts to uncover the mechanisms that create the unexpected pattern. As such, our emic-etic-emic research cycle goes beyond being a mere mixed methods research approach. It becomes a "specialized" mixed methods longitudinal research design where each stage is informed by the results of the prior stages of the study. These approaches are discussed in detail in Cresswell (2003).

These arguments are especially relevant to organizational research, where using both emic and etic research approaches allow researchers to identify the contextual issues that affect the research and the concepts under investigation. Senior academics will often say that it is harder to publish qualitative or emic research than it is to publish quantitative or etic research, and Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela (2006) noted that editors and reviewers may not find innovative research designs attractive. This bias toward etic and quantitative research is limiting our ability in the IB field to develop a global understanding of the context in which management takes place and confining our knowledge of under-researched locations. It is vital to do both kinds of research in under-researched areas, especially if researchers are to gain a better understanding of the context.

Using a combination of these research approaches allows one to triangulate on the concepts of interest, thereby gaining more confidence in the emerging results of the study. The combined emic-etic-emic cycle answers the calls for indigenous research in under-researched areas of the world (see, for example, *Management International Review*, special issue on indigenous management, published in February 2013) while also addressing researchers' concerns to be able to compare and contrast management in different locations.

Where little empirical research has been done, emic research is critical. We need to know how people in under-researched places view the constructs of interest; otherwise, researchers impose a view, developed elsewhere. In post-colonial locations, this is particularly important. At the same time, we want to be able to understand how countries around the world are similar or different on variables being researched. While valuable, knowledge based on emic research alone does not allow for large-scale comparisons among groups which helps more clearly understand similarities and differences. Etic research is necessary for such comparisons.

The LEAD project focuses on countries in Africa and groups that comprise the African diaspora. These are clearly under-researched countries and groups; thus, an emic approach was appropriate to begin with. The research was better facilitated by having a cross-cultural team to carry out this type of research and to avoid, as much as possible, researcher-imposed biases. The initial focus was on countries where English was commonly used (although the intent is to expand this sample). The entire cross-cultural team consisted of researchers from Canada, the English-speaking Caribbean, the United States, and six African countries where English could be used (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda; Morocco was later added with a French translation of the questionnaire). Country teams were established to complete the in-country research as they had context-specific knowledge and it was expected that respondents would be comfortable working with them. In the following section, we briefly discuss this project to illustrate the research cycle proposed in this paper.

Putting an emic-etic-emic cycle into practice: The LEAD project

We do not present details of the research project, because our intent is simply to use this project to illustrate the proposed emic-etic-emic cycle, which provides deeper understanding of the context in under-researched countries (refer to Figure 1). A more complete discussion of the development of the survey instrument can be found in (Michaud, Lvina, Galperin, et al., 2020).

The research began with an emic approach, or what we termed a "blank page." While there are many emic approaches to use when conducting international management research, the Delphi technique (Linstone and Turoff, 1975; Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004) was first used because this perspective provided participants with the opportunity to define concepts used in the project. The Delphi technique is an effective method to organize a group communication process and enable a group of individuals to deal with a complex issue (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). Typically, the Delphi technique can involve a series of rounds in which information is collected from panelists, analyzed, summarized, and reported back to the group for participants to review their judgments until participants reach a consensus. Participants were asked open-ended questions related to concepts investigated in the study including, culture and leadership. Sample open-ended questions included (1) What three to five words/phrases best describe your ethnic or cultural background? (2) What three to five words/phrases describe what an effective leader does? (3) What three to five words/phrases best describe your culture? While the open-ended questions were asked in English, the participants were free to ask questions in their respective languages. The responses were then collated and shared with all participants until consensus was achieved.

Participants in the Delphi technique were knowledgeable individuals in leadership positions who were considered "experts" in each country and were selected by each in-country team. Knowledgeable people were members of the following groups: (a) academics, (b) private sector, (c) public sector, and (d) other—religious leaders, leaders in nongovernmental and charitable organizations, and community leaders. For example, participants in the Delphi technique in Africa (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda) included religious leaders (pastor/priests), university professors/
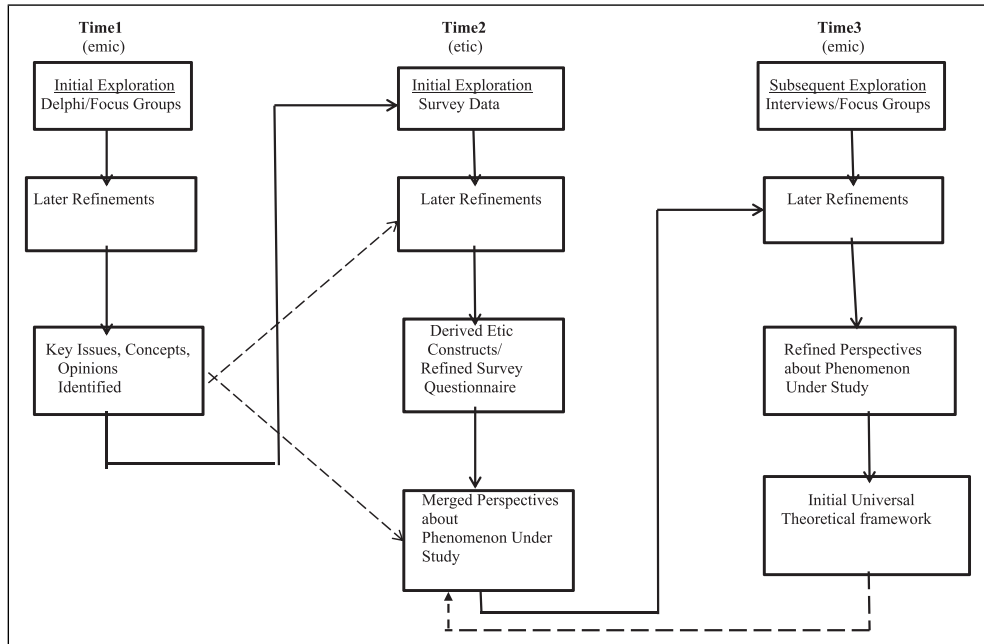
Figure 1. Model of iterative research process.

lecturers, civil servants, lawyers, engineers, managers, bankers, directors, business people, re-searchers, journalists/mass media professionals, and retired individuals who had a higher education qualification.

After the Delphi technique, focus groups were conducted to discuss the equivalent open-ended questions in order to get feedback from individuals who were not considered experts. Focus groups were selected as the best approach following the Delphi technique since it is considered an effective method in collecting qualitative data through group interaction (Morgan, 1996). During the focus groups, the participants discussed the same open-ended questions that had been used in the Delphi technique. After the group discussed the open-ended question and some agreement was reached, each participant was asked to rank the top five most important responses.

Overall, the findings from the Delphi technique and focus groups suggest that there was a preference for the *ubuntu* approach to leadership (Senaji, Metwally, Sejjaaka, et al., 2014). Ac-cording to Ncube (2010), there are six steps to the *ubuntu* leadership philosophy: (1) setting the example and demonstrating the way; (2) inspiring a shared vision among followers that offers direction for others in a communal approach; (3) seeking opportunities to promote change through people and the use of consensus-decision making; (4) building relationships with others that promote interconnectedness and interdependency; (5) possessing a collectivist mindset that focuses on teamwork and a noncompetitive environment; and (6) building innovation and empowering others through continuous development of human potential, mentoring, and building relationships.

In line with the *ubuntu* leadership philosophy (Ncube, 2010), the data showed that leading by example, articulating a vision, building a team spirit, achieving the objectives of the team, taking care of others are central aspects of effective leadership in Africa. For example, when asked to describe "what an effective leader does" during the Delphi technique, participants from Ghana and

Uganda emphasized the importance of setting an example and demonstrating the way, the first *ubuntu* philosophy principle. Participants from Ghana agreed that an effective leader "leads by example" and "walks the talk." Similarly, the participants from Uganda noted that an effective leader "guides/leads/coaches/directs" and "takes action." Second, participants from Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda highlighted the importance of inspiring a shared vision among followers and offering direction to others. In Ghana, participants noted that an effective leader "inspires" and "setting standards/goals." Similarly, participants in Kenya stated that an effective leader "inspires," "is goal oriented/achieves the goals of the team," and "articulates/communicates goals/vision." Participants in Uganda also stated that an effective leader "inspires" and has a "vision." Third, participants from Ghana also stated the importance of "building a team spirit." Finally, participants from Egypt, Kenya, and Nigeria agreed that it was important that leaders work with and take care of other people including employees and members of society (Senaji, Metwally, Sejjaaka, et al., 2014). The role of spirituality and connection to one's ancestors, aspects of the *ubuntu* philosophy, were also discussed.

The *kgotla* practice of collaborative leadership also emerged in the data; however, it was less predominant. By tradition, *kgotla* has been a participatory process at the village or community level that stresses consultation, mediation, consensus building, and harmony (Beugré, 2016). Participants in the Delphi technique in Uganda described their ethnic/cultural background and culture as accommodative and collaborative. Similar to the *ubuntu* philosophy, *kgotla* also focuses on the common good and well-being of the community (e.g., tribe) rather than individual goals (Barnard et al., 2017). It is important for leaders to implement structures that are appropriate to the African context and inclusive of cultural, tribal, and religious differences, as reflected in the responses to the questions which asked the participants to best describe their ethnic or cultural background and their culture. Refer to Table 2 for the summary of the Delphi technique findings to a sample of questions highlighting the *ubuntu* leadership approach and the practice of *kgotla*.

In line with the decolonial lens, participants of the Delphi technique in Uganda used the terms "detribalized" to describe their ethnic/cultural background. Detribalization is the loss of tribal traditions and culture and the process when people who belong to a particular indigenous ethnic identity or community are detached from that identity or community through the deliberate efforts of colonizers and/or the larger effects of colonialism. Hence, the perspective of detribalization assumes that ethnic groups, ethnical consciousness, and identity limits national cohesion and progress (Ani et al., 2019). The group of participants in Uganda were the only country to recognize the history of colonialism, political occupation, and subjugation in the Delphi technique.

Next, the results of the Delphi technique and focus groups were used to develop a questionnaire, the etic phase of the research. The Delphi technique and focus group results were analyzed using qualitative software, and effective leadership characteristics were identified. Some of these concepts were reflected by already established constructs—for example, charismatic, visionary, servant leadership, and *ubuntu*. Established instruments that measured these constructs were reviewed and selected on the basis of their psychometric properties and evidence of previous cross-cultural/ international use. Other characteristics identified required the development of new questions—such as spirituality, community, tradition. Three researchers collaborated on developing a list of 60 items to measure these new culture-specific concepts. Questions were reviewed by team members, refined and further reduced to a list of 43 items. This final questionnaire, that was pre-tested, thus consisted of both existing measures and newly developed items. The questionnaire was further refined and condensed by two researchers and the final set of survey items were reviewed by a third researcher for accuracy and completeness. Examples of new items included: "an effective leader honors traditions," "is pragmatic," "is bold," "is wise," and "is spiritual." The questionnaire was then tested

Table 2. Ubuntu leadership approach and Kgotla in the Leadership Effectiveness in Africa and the Diaspora Project: Summary of Delphi technique findings in Africa.

Countries	Description of ethnic/cultural background	Sample questions	
		Description of an effective leader (what he/she does)	Description of the participants culture
1 Egypt (n = 12)	• Social relationships and interaction[a]	• Fair	• Forgiving and patient
	• Muslim	• Understanding	• Conservative
	• Arab	• Honest	• Diverse
	• Egyptian	• Commitment/dedicated	• Ethical
	• African	• Work with others	
	• Pharaoh	• Knowledgeable	
	• Religious beliefs and behavior	• Humor	
2 Ghana (n = 12)	• Respect for elderly/authority	• Respectful	• African
	• Love for God	• Rewards performance	• Black
	• Modesty	• Proactive	• Group cohesion
	• Moral behavior	• Building team spirit	• Sense of belongingness
	• Institution of chieftaincy	• Setting standards/goals	• Customs/Knowledge/ Language
	• Tradition (i.e., beliefs and practices)	• Leads by example	
	• Group cohesion	• Gives hope/inspires/motivates	
	• Matrilinear and patrilineal systems of inheritance	• Maintaining discipline	
	• Sense of belonging/being one's keeper	• Approachable	
	• Singing, drumming, and dancing	• Firm and fair	
	• Humility and respect	• Passionate	
	• Belief in after life/rebirth/ reincarnation	• Temperate/remains cool	
		• Delegates responsibility	
		• Walk the talk	
3 Kenya (n = 10)	• Ethnic group/tribe (e.g., Kikuyu, Luhya)	• Goal oriented/achieved objectives of the team	• Truthful
	• Hard working/survivors	• Vision	• Hardworking
	• Aggressive/go-getters/ dominant	• Waits for commendation of others	• Respect for elders
	• Social behavior, relationships, and interaction	• Inspiring	
		• Takes care of others	
		• Articulates goals/vision	
4 Nigeria (n = 10)	• Country of origin (i.e., country of birth, ancestors, and history	• Honest/trustworthy	• Unique dressing
	• Importance of community building	• Fair/impartial	• Sociable
	• Religious beliefs and behavior	• Perseverance	• Moralistic
		• Work with others/people	
		• Humor	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Countries	Description of ethnic/cultural background	Sample questions	
			Description of an effective leader (what he/she does)	Description of the participants culture
5	Uganda (*n* = 23)	• Language	• *Inspire/inspires*	• Respect
		• *Tradition(s)*	• Evaluates	• Beliefs
		• Welcoming/greeting	• Motivates/leads	• Norms
		• *Tribe/clan/detribalized/Ganda/ Langi*	• *Creative/innovates*	• Society
		• Foods/agriculture/cultivated land	• Communicates	• *Welcoming*
		• King/Kabaka	• Takes action	• *Clans/detribalized*
		• *Generous*	• Concerns/empathy	• Happy/happiness
		• *Accommodative*		• *Collaborate/ collaboration*
		• Uganda		• *Accommodative/ accommodate*

[a]Note. Italics represent aspects related to the *Ubuntu* leadership philosophy and the *Kgotla* practice of collaborative leadership.

with several samples in different locations and analyzed in terms of reliability and validity to provide evidence that it could be used across different countries.

The important contribution of this emic-etic approach is that the questionnaire includes Afrocentric concepts, based on the Delphi technique and focus groups, which are not represented by previously established theories or frameworks. New concepts included *Culture*—the role of gender, family, lineage and tribe, and religion; and *Effective Leadership*—the importance of honoring traditions and customs, education and knowledge, spirituality, wisdom, being bold and courageous, resilience, and having a strong personality.

In the emic phase of the research, "being bold and courageous" was mentioned by participants in some countries as important to effective leadership. Since existing measures of this aspect of leadership were not found in our review, questions related to being bold and courageous were developed for the survey instrument. In the etic phase of the research, these questions were included for all countries, and hypotheses were developed to test whether being bold and courageous would have a higher score in countries where this construct was mentioned during the emic phase.

In the etic phase, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) findings from measure refinement in Africa suggested that the data-driven factors were aligned with the concepts found in the initial qualitative research (emic) with respect to effective leadership. Even though there was some overlap with Western conceptualizations of effective leadership (e.g., being an effective communicator and interpersonal skills), culturally sensitive concepts (e.g., honoring traditions and being community-centric) were also uncovered. Based on the EFA, further refinements were then made to the survey. Specifically, 14 additional new items (e.g., "Is involved in the community" and "Works to improve the community") were added since some emic-derived factors had too few items. The final etic phase (measure confirmation stage), which further tested the measure using large samples in Africa and the Africa diaspora, confirmed that both African and African diaspora models in the Americas reached acceptable fit supporting the applicability of the measure in the multiple locations for African and Diaspora populations.

The final LEAD scale consists of eight factors: (1): Inspirational and supportive: for example, "fostering collaboration among work groups," "inspires others with his/her plans for the future," "seeks creative and innovative opportunities for the organization," "leads by example," "is a mentor," "coaches his/her followers," "gets the group to work together for the same goal"; (2) Effective communicator: for example, "has good communication skills," "is a good listener," "is wise"; (3) Interpersonal skills: for example, "is a team-player," "generally works well with others," "has a good sense of humour," "is charismatic"; (4) Organizational caretaker: for example, "is able to inspire others with his or her enthusiasm and confidence for what can be accomplished," "is able to articulate a clear sense of purpose and direction for his or her organization's future," "gives me the authority to make changes necessary to improve things"; (5) Knowledgeable: for example, "is intelligence," "is able to learn from subordinates who he or she serves"; (6) Gender: for example, "behaves in a traditional female way," "behaves in a traditional male way"; (7) Values tradition: "honours tradition," "is religious," "is spiritual," "embodies our culture", and (8) Community-Centric: for example, "community-oriented," "works to improve the community," "thinks about the community when making decisions."

This sequential combination of an emic approach with an etic one allowed us to incorporate ideas generated by groups of research participants in several under-researched locations, and to translate these ideas into a broad cross-country examination of the issues. For example, the principles associated with the *ubuntu* leadership philosophy (Ncube, 2010) that were uncovered during the Delphi technique and focus groups in the emic phase can be seen in the LEAD scale. The *ubuntu* principles correspond to the eight LEAD factors in the following manner: setting the example and demonstrating the way (Factor 1); inspiring a shared vision among followers that offers direction for others in a communal approach (Factors 1 and 8); seeking opportunities to promote change through people and the use of consensus-decision making (Factors 4 and 8); (4) building relationships with others that promote interconnectedness and interdependency (Factors 1 and 8); possessing a collectivist mindset that focuses on teamwork and a noncompetitive environment (Factor 1); and building innovation and empowering others through continuous development of human potential, mentoring, and building relationships (Factors 1 and 4).

A central aspect of *ubuntu* is the emphasis of the common good and the welfare of the community rather than individual goals (Barnard et al., 2017), which was reflected in the Community-centered factor (factor 8). Interestingly, while the African sample in the validation and testing of the measure saw a relation between Factor 7 (values tradition) and Factor 8 (community-centric), the sample from the Americas saw no relationship between the factors. According to the African sample, when one upholds traditions, one must be connected and concerned about the community. The findings also suggest that emic-developed items (e.g. "An effective leader is religious" and "An effective leader is spiritual"), part of the "Values tradition" factor, were found to have a decreased fit in the Americas (United States and Canada) diaspora sample. These findings further reinforce the view that while concepts of the community and tradition are relevant in the Western context given the acceptable model fit, the community and tradition play a more central role in better understanding perceptions of leadership effectiveness in Africa.

Another cross-cultural difference was found between the samples in Africa and the African diaspora in the Caribbean. The Africans saw religion and culture as being intertwined and part of the tradition. On the other hand, the Caribbean sample saw these constructs as distinct. That is, Factor 7: traditions did not have a good model fit in the Caribbean since items that related to religion or spirituality did not load onto the factor that related to respecting traditions. Similarly, differences were found between the African and Caribbean sample with respect to Factor 1: inspirational and supportive. While the African sample saw mentoring/coaching as conceptually similar to inspiring

employees and encouraging group cohesion, the Caribbean sample did not see these concepts as conceptually similar. The participants from the Caribbean may have seen a distinction between mentoring/coaching concepts related to the individual, while encouraging group cohesion as helping behaviors related to the community. On the other hand, the African sample saw a blurring separation between the individual and the community, a central aspect of *ubuntu*.

Further analyses were conducted to examine whether the respondents' gender and age had an impact on perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The results suggest that only the age of the African respondents was significantly related to differences in leadership effectiveness. That is, the older African respondents showed a stronger preference for an "other persons" orientation seen in Factor 1 (the inspirational and supportive factor). Post hoc analyses also suggest that the African and North American samples slightly preferred male leaders compared to female leaders; however, the differences were not significant.

Overall, these etic findings further reinforce the importance to rethink leadership models which have been biased toward a Western perspective and have largely placed individual needs over collective needs. By adopting a decolonial lens, one can recognize the prevalence of collectivism (Triandis, 1995) and an interdependent construal of the self (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Markus et al., 1997) often seen in emerging economies. Estrada-Villalta and Adams (2018) argue that many nations in the West (or *Global North*, term used to explicitly reference geopolitical power relations) often with affluent settings tend to promote and emphasize individual uniqueness and personal choice. On the other hand, many colonized nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (or *Global South*, term used to emphasize these nations have suffered from exploitation and expropriation and hence have inherited widespread poverty and instability) promote interdependent tendencies which promote a focus on the context, that stresses behaviors that honor obligations for material support, sharing resources, and burdens, and redistributing wealth through wide social networks, such as extended family and local communities (Kraus et al., 2012).

To further refine context-sensitive management/leadership theories and models that draw upon local knowledge, we propose that research should not conclude with the etic results but rather proceed to an additional emic stage. In the case of the LEAD project, we plan on conducting semi-structured interviews in the future to further explore etic findings. By adding another emic phase to the cycle, we would further pursue the relation between upholding traditions and one's connection with the community in Africa. Similarly, it would be interesting to better understand the role of the community in the African diaspora (United States and Canada) and valuing tradition and how it relates to leadership effectiveness. Research has shown the negotiation of the role of the community among women of North African (e.g., Morocco) and Turkish descent in the Western context (Essers and Benschop, 2009).

We would also explore the importance of the community by interviewing individuals from various countries, type of organizations (e.g., private, public, and not-for-profit), firm size, sectors, and positions. The semi-structured interviews would provide a greater understanding of the importance of the community among organizational members across various situational contingencies and explore how their view of the community may relate to an *ubuntu* leadership philosophy (Ncube, 2010) and a *kgotla* practice of collaborative leadership. For example, some research questions may include: "Are employees of not-for-profit organizations more likely to reference the importance of the community and adopt an *ubuntu* leadership philosophy compared to for profit employees? Do employees from larger organizations place less emphasis on the community compared with smaller entrepreneurial start-ups? Will healthcare employees more likely relate to the community compared with employees from other industries?"

Additionally, we plan to further explore how the participants' gender and age had an impact on perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Specifically, the etic results suggested that older African

respondents showed a stronger preference for more inspirational, supportive, and collaborative approaches of leadership. Our semi-structured interviews would further explore whether older Africans would prefer a *kgotla* practice of collaborative leadership compared with younger Africans. In addition, we would also explore whether there is a preference for male leaders compared to female leaders. It would also be interesting to further investigate the intersectionality of gender and multiple ethnicities (African and Western) and how they shape perceptions of leadership effectiveness.

Finally, in the illustration above, if being bold and courageous was considered an important variable in certain locations, we would pursue that finding with further emic research in the future, asking questions such as "how is being bold and courageous important to effective leadership?", and "what do you mean by being bold and courageous in a leadership context?"

The title of this paper uses the terminology "emic-etic-emic research cycle." We proposed a final emic phase because it allows one to achieve both depth and breadth in research. This approach is illustrated in Figure 1, which builds upon the discussions by Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) and Morris et al. (1999). Figure 1 shows that each subsequent phase of the research cycle is informed by the results of the prior phase, and the final emic phase will provide theoretical grounding for, and ultimately influence, the final set of merged perspectives from the etic and emic phases. The final emic phase will be undertaken by in-country teams. In the section below, we share some lessons learned in putting the cycle into practice.

Lessons learned

The emic-etic-emic nature of the project is more complex than most projects. Team members need to be comfortable with both approaches and able to carry out both types of research. Many researchers tend to specialize—doing research that is primarily either emic (more qualitative), or etic (more quantitative); thus, finding appropriate partners can be a challenge.

Overall, the emic aspects of the project were particularly time-consuming. We found that it was difficult to get participants to complete the Delphi technique and to attend the focus groups. Both required substantial effort to arrange and complete. Emic research must be carefully designed to ensure that the data collected provides meaningful results. In order to comply with our own concept of indigenous research, we needed to make the Delphi and focus group questions as open as possible, so that we did not "lead" the respondents. While we would have liked to start with a blank page, we had to have something for respondents to respond to. This was by no means a simple task. As an example, in drafting the questions, the word "community" caused substantial debate, because one team member felt it should be included, while others felt it had specific meanings which would lead respondents too much.

Although we expected the etic aspects of the research to be less complicated than the emic, we found that our survey instrument needed substantial work to ensure that it would be reliable across cultures. Administration of the survey also raised issues regarding identification of participants (e.g., MNCs versus local companies), distribution and collection of surveys (e.g., electronic versus mail or in-person), and prizes for participation (e.g., a smartphone for a small number of participants versus a lottery ticket for all). Because of the nature of the research team, and the hope that indigenous concepts were included in the etic phase, substantial input was needed from all participating country teams.

The LEAD project has also been full of learning experiences for the authors. Since the LEAD project was composed of a large group of scholars from various countries, a lot of coordination between members was necessary. Some members corresponded frequently and responded quickly

to electronic communications, while others did not; some members used informal, "shorthand" for correspondence, while others wrote more formal, lengthy memos or letters. Despite these differences, our team functioned effectively.

It was also evident that different team members had different schedules, priorities, timelines, and access to resources. As a result, the project took longer than initially envisioned. In projects such as this, one must expect delays, but it is important for team members to agree on appropriate rewards and sanctions to ensure that delays do not mean that the project is not completed in a timely manner. We suggest that cross-national teams meet in person initially and agree to conditions. For example, if research funding is available, payments can be tied to completion of stages of the project. In addition, members may agree that team members can be dropped from the project, if they do not fulfill their obligations, and new members may replace them. This is not necessarily easy when one is working with colleagues, with whom you may have several working and personal relationships; therefore, a clear, written agreement among team members is critical.

Projects such as LEAD are necessarily time-consuming, lengthy, and expensive. There are several implications arising from these factors. First, in terms of time, team members need to recognize the time commitment that they are making, both in terms of on-going attention to the project and in terms of a long-term devotion to it. Second, team members need to be able to find funding to cover the necessary research expenses. With the LEAD project, we have found that many applications for relatively small amounts of money have been very helpful in covering actual research expenses. Of course, the hope is always that the team will receive major funding, but this involves investing more time to identify appropriate granting agencies and writing grant proposals.

The emic and etic nature of the project was very rewarding, but it was also challenging. From the perspective of doing research in under-researched areas, and ensuring that indigenous concepts and measures are included, this approach was most appropriate. Based on our experience with the project, we would encourage others to adopt this approach, but we would also warn them to be prepared to deal with the difficulties. While challenges will be encountered in emic-etic-emic research, and more generally, in any research in under-researched areas, scholars should not let challenges deter them from using research methods that are particularly appropriate in these locations. The research methods described in this paper can take the field of international management toward a more realistic contextual understanding of what effective management is, from a more global perspective.

Discussion

The literature often does not sufficiently discuss the contextual factors in organizational research, especially in under-researched countries. Hofstede's (1981) seminal work on culture and, more recently, Minkov et al.'s (2017) new way to measure culture and calculate individualism and collectivism (IDV-COLL) has led to a body of work on cultural values in different countries and the impact of cultural values on organizational phenomena. Some cross-country research has sought to identify similarities and differences in perceptions of leaders, the characteristics of leaders, and the fit between culture and leadership behaviors (Dickson et al., 2012; House et al., 2004). House et al.'s (2004) GLOBE study involving 62 societies around the world is particularly relevant. Despite this body of work, such studies remain relatively rare, and certain regions of the world continue to be largely ignored, or what we refer to as under-researched.

To fill this gap, we sought to speak to international management scholars directly with the argument that incorporating an emic-etic-emic research design in their studies is one appropriate approach when dealing with countries where little previous research has been done. The focus of

this paper is based on a methodological approach which provides both breadth and depth to organizational research. An emic-etic-emic cycle of research is particularly relevant for research in under-researched countries, where little is known of the context, and it is essential to incorporate indigenous concepts through emic research.

It is also important to make comparisons across groups and countries, using etic approaches so that we can better understand which concepts are in some sense "universal", as well as those which are more culture-specific. Thus, the research approach outlined herein dovetails quite nicely with prior international business research employing qualitative (e.g., Bartlett, 1979) and quantitative (Acquaah, 2012; Kantabutra, 2012; Shackman, 2013) methods, and contributes to prior research. For example, Jiang et al.'s (2011) unexpected finding regarding firm age and affect-based trust in partners who share their cultural ethnicity would have benefited from emic-etic-emic approach to further explore traditional *guanxi* principles during their interactions in order to better understand the inter- and intra-cultural trust in overseas partners in China. By beginning with emic research and incorporating emic results into the etic phase of the research, one reaps the benefits of both. Continuing the cycle with a further emic phase provides even greater understanding of the phenomenon under study. An underlying premise is that researchers avoid imposing their own biases while incorporating indigenous concepts and making comparisons across groups.

When conducting research in non-Western countries and understanding management from an indigenous and local perspective, it is important to recognize the history of colonialism. From a decolonial lens, researchers have argued for decentralizing the importance of the dominant Western approach and acknowledging other perspectives that are usually disregarded. Ndvolou (2016) explains that contemporary knowledge within colonized societies continues to have a Eurocentric and a colonizer perspective. By re-framing research, indigenous views may help inspire new theorizing in international management. Barnard et al. (2017) suggest that management scholars can examine African theories (e.g., *ubuntu* and *kgotla)*, which emphasize the common good and well-being of the community, and create new approaches to our understanding of organizations and their place in society rather than adopting traditional individualistic approaches found in most existing theories.

An example of the dominant individualistic approach found in Western theories is McClelland's popular theory on achievement motivation or need for achievement (McClelland, 1961). The notion of achievement motivation assumes that individuals are free agents and have control over their lives and environment (Weiner and Kukla, 1970). Estrada-Villalta and Adams (2018) argue that theorists who developed this concept found that marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, lower-income communities in the United States, and the largely Global South) possessed lower achievement motivation than wealthier groups (e.g., McClelland, 1961; Rosen, 1959). They interpreted this pattern as support that achievement motivation was a source of upward mobility and suggested prescribed interventions to promote individualistic tendencies (e.g., autonomy) as way to improve economic achievement.

This view is consistent with modernization theorists who argue that psychological tendencies of individual modernity, which emphasize individual choice and responsibility and preference for secular values (e.g., individual autonomy) over traditional values (e.g., religious or family authority) are associated with modernization and economic attainment. In other words, social progress is more in line with value orientations that focus on personal fulfillment, Western-style institutions, and economic growth (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

A decolonial perspective challenges the view and imposition of individualistic models of personal empowerment found in the Global North and highlights the importance of developing context-sensitive models (Estrada-Villalta and Adams, 2018). Rather than emphasizing individual

tendencies of motivation, indigenous models of the Global South stress the role of connectedness and emphasize the value of an interdependent self by focusing on the constraints and obligations associated with one's context (Escobar, 2015). For example, the concept of *sumac kawsay* or *"buen vivir"* ("good living") of the Quechua indigenous people of South America emphasizes reciprocity, complementarity, and relationality with others and the natural environment (Estrada-Villalta and Adams, 2018). The concept stresses the right of the community over the rights of the individual as a central aspect of well-being (Merino, 2016; Quijano, 2010).

The combination of emic and etic research approaches, in an emic-etic-emic cycle would provide an opportunity to disaggregate contextual issues to better understand concepts such as, *"buen vivir"* or well-being and how they can apply to an organizational context. For example, in the first emic phase, researchers would uncover variables related to the psychological well-being specific to the region, country, and group (e.g., Peruvian Andes) by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and asking interviewees to describe what makes them happy and unhappy. Qualitative data would be analyzed and concepts identified. By beginning with an emic phase, researchers would be able to re-examine the current theories of psychological well-being in the West, which assume well-being is largely associated with individual rights rather than the community. During the next phase, survey items would be developed based on the emic phase, and the questionnaire would be tested in other contexts using quantitative analyses (e.g., EFAs). One would expect that identified factors related to well-being during this phase would differ from the six-factor model of psychological well-being developed by Ryff (1989), an American academic and psychologist. Ryff's (1989) six-factor model includes self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, and positive relations with others. The conceptualization of well-being in this Western-developed measure focuses on the individual rather than the collective and an interdependent construal of the self (Triandis, 1995). In the final emic phase, researchers would have the opportunity to further explore the etic findings or investigate any unexpected results by conducting focus groups or structured interviews. Hence, the combination of emic and etic perspectives would inform a community-based theory of well-being.

The proposed emic-etic-emic cycle makes several theoretical contributions. First, the cycle stresses the importance of using an emic perspective compared to the dominant approach in cross-cultural management, which largely relies on an etic approach. For example, Szkudlarek, Osland, Nardon and Zander (2020a) argue that Hofstede's (1981) widely used etic approach to measure cultural values framework can be attributed to the greater ease of survey measurement. Despite the popularity and expediency in using an etic approach, the authors note that the survey method is limited since it only mirrors what the researchers used in the first place. When studies explore cultural-specific emic insights, researchers can gain rich and unique insights. For instance, concepts such as *ubuntu* in South Africa, *kgotla* in Bostwana, *guanxi* in China, can provide a deeper understanding of the culture and its impact on management. Szkudlarek et al., (2020a) encourage researchers to use various methodologies, such as narrative analysis, ethnographic field studies, and in-depth cases which can assist in better understanding the scope of the phenomena. Our cyclical approach using an etic approach along with two emic phases can further advance theory-building in international management.

Second, the cyclical approach can provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the context in under-researched countries. Teagarden et al. (2018) argue that context should be more emphasized in IB research. Despite the calls by thought leaders to better contextualize business research, current approaches in contextualization are largely limited since most international research relies on categorical data or concepts such as country or nationality (Shenkar and Von Glinow, 1994). Due to the increasing importance of emerging countries, there is less certainty in how

theories and models in Western contexts are relevant or apply to non-Western contexts. The current approach can enhance the contextualization in theory development.

Finally, the emic-etic-emic cycle approach contributes to decolonial approaches to management which call for the liberation from economic and knowledge domination from the West (Nkomo, 2015). Decolonial approaches in international management view globalization with the domination of the American model as a colonization of knowledge and an indication of what is considered good management (Youfi, 2021). International management theorists (e.g., Alcadipani and Faria, 2014; Alcadipani et al., 2012; Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006) have condemned the hegemony of American managerial literature, which views the American management knowledge as the only means to improve the economies of the Global South and increase the productivity of local businesses. Ibarra-Colado et al. (2010) discuss the role of a decolonial lens of a project (from a Latin American perspective) as requiring an epistemology grounded in the experiences and views of the colonies rather than the colonizer, thereby promoting a symmetrical dialogue across borders. Jack and Westwood (2009) also argue the importance of decolonizing international management's research methodologies in an effort to avoid American and European ethnocentrism (Dar, 2018; Gantman et al., 2015). Our proposed research cycle can facilitate this dialogue since we begin from the emic approach with a "blank page", enabling research participants to define and explain the concepts of interest in their own words rather than the view of the other, which can reduce Western ethnocentrism.

Contextualization has been viewed through many lenses, and contextualizing research enhances the rigor and relevance of research. The proposed emic-etic-emic cycle encompasses qualitative and quantitative methods and can provide a deeper understanding of context through the use of mixed methods. In the LEAD project, the Delphi technique and focus groups were the best way to gain an emic perspective. Other approaches, such as case studies, interviews, observations, and participant observation would be appropriate for different projects. In line with Von Glinow and Teagarden (2009), who argue that academic research teams should use a dialectic approach by design and can enhance the likelihood that the research will be rigorous and more relevant, we believe that the team should be comprised of researchers from all the countries involved to avoid research-imposed biases, and that all researchers should have substantial input into the design and administration of the project. Members of the team should be knowledgeable in both qualitative (emic) and quantitative (etic) methods. At the same time, the on-the-ground research needs to be carried out by in-country researchers. Most often with qualitative, inductive approaches and sometimes through quantitative, deductive approaches, researchers can achieve strength of inference by exploring, probing, blending, and synthesizing different perspectives to better understand a study's multiple contextual elements in order to achieve cross-cultural research rigor (Von Glinow and Teagarden, 2009).

The emic-etic-emic approach is very rewarding, but it is also challenging since this research is more time consuming and requires more resources. Not only does the research team have to be well versed in qualitative methods, methodological concerns in cross-cultural quantitative research must also be met, such as issues of structural and measurement equivalence and hierarchical structure of the data (Byrne et al., 2009; Van de Vijver and Leung, 1997). These factors should not prevent researchers from adopting an emic-etic-emic mixed method approach, which we believe can contribute to a better understanding of the context.

Using a combination of emic and etic approaches for research should be particularly appealing to practicing managers (Cao et al., 2013; Tung and Stahl, 2018) because it helps with the complexity and makes the context more understandable. Rather than only looking at quantitative data, qualitative studies can provide more of a story for practitioners, which adds a sense of completeness to the research. This is likely the case in the international business context. For example, a manager

may find it hard to interpret a score of 80 out of 100 on individualism, but when that score is combined with comments from emic, qualitative research that say something like, "it's very important to ask everyone their opinion when discussing changing a procedure," the score becomes more meaningful to the workplace. Similarly, knowing that a country is politically a parliamentary democracy provides only a simple contextual snapshot, while hearing that "the Prime Minister (of country X) makes most of the decisions having to do with approving investments" provides more practical guidance on how to interact in this political system.

Furthermore, coupling this approach with a decolonial perspective lens can be beneficial to practitioners. Organizations must be aware of the colonial history, when appropriate, and its impact on today's management practices since its business leaders can be central players in economic development (Igué, 2010) and actors of social change and social justice (Shell-Weiss, 2019). For example, colonial history may play a more important role in African countries compared to China. Mollan (2019) highlights how power structures formed by corporations are rooted in colonial repression, such as slavery, and have continued into the present (Cooke, 2003; Rosenthal, 2018). A recent example is the rebranding of the Aunt Jemima line of breakfast products by parent company PepsiCo in February 2021 after recognizing that the packaging was "based on a racial stereotype," given the more recent calls for racial equality (Tyko, 2021). Other discussions in the literature that outline colonial issues in organizations include imperial narratives in the internal discourse of the Hudson's Bay Company (Smith and Simeone, 2017), Eurocentric influences on the Brazilian advertising self-regulation system (Rodrigues and Hemais, 2020), and the corporate history of Pan Am as it relates to American imperialism (Kivijärvi et al., 2019; Paludi et al., 2019).

In conclusion, an emic-etic-emic research cycle provides benefits to both academic researchers and management practitioners. We advocate that cross-cultural studies should combine these approaches to better understand the complexities of under-researched countries. While most studies conclude with the etic phase, it is the final emic phase that enables researchers to meaningfully comprehend the intricacies and complexities of culture. During the proposed emic-etic-emic research cycle, practical managerial guidance can be developed based on research that asks those involved in business to explain from an insider-perspective how various concepts play out in the real world.

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