Acculturation In Organisation: A Critical Review

Reema Das, Dr Chandranshu Sinha

Abstract: Literature indicates that so far acculturation studies have focused on change in cultural values of an individual over a period of time, while acculturation in organizations as defined by Selmer (1993) refers to changes in the work values of host country employees in a foreign subsidiaries. This paper seeks to understand the importance of acculturation in the organizational context and critically reviews the studies done in this area. At the outset, the paper comprehensively traces the path of acculturation studies, explored in the context of organizations and later critically reviews the contributions made by acculturation studies in the context of employees, employers, management, and organizations. The paper further talks about the contribution, which the process of acculturation contributes in giving an insight to both employees and employers for retaining diverse talent and engaging them to work. The concluding section identifies the gaps present in relation to acculturation in organizations and indicates the emergence of a need to understand how organizations in the Indian context acculturate their employees and are acculturated themselves.

Keywords: Acculturation, Artifacts, Culture, Multinational, Organisational Acculturation, Organisation, Work Values

1 Introduction

The construct of acculturation revolves around the concept of culture and its effects on the functioning of the overall system. The origin of acculturation goes long back to the immigration process when people from different cultures meet each other. In literature, acculturation has been studied extensively with respect to life and work domain however, the concept has not been studied much with respect to the contemporary work environments and organizations. This paper traces the concept of acculturation from its origin and further reviews it in the context of organisations. Literature indicates that few studies on acculturation have been reported on mergers, and acquisition and while the concept has also been explored from the perspective of consumer behaviour. Further a detailed review of literature indicates that acculturation studies have majorly focused on individuals and groups likes migrants, expatriates, and sojourners. The concept of acculturation has important linkages with the issue of cultural diversity of the workforce, which involves employees that includes: native employees and both internal & external migrants. Further studies have also indicated that acculturation has contributed towards the management of individuals in multi-national and multi-cultural based organizations. However, ironically, literature does not report many studies that focus on the host country employees passing through the process of acculturation, due to exposure to foreign/ alien culture. (Berry, 2009, 2010). Further the organization, which operates as multinational, exhibits the values and the culture of its origin country, and value system. Literature indicates that this is partially influenced by the proprietor/promotor/head/leader’s individual cultural orientation, beliefs, and value system as well. (Laurent, 1986). As a result, the cultural orientation of the employees from the headquarters and the subsidiary organizations needs to be included from both parent and the host country perspectives. The conflict arises when the culture prevalent in the organization and of the employee are different. In India, multinational organizations broadly face two diverse cultures (i.e. of native’s employees and both internal & ex-ternal migrants) other than the unique contextual reality of the land. In such a scenario, the process of acculturation becomes the only medium in letting the employees inculcate the culture of acculturating with workforce diversity, which further helps in creating a paradigm for diversity management for retention and better performance of the employees. This would also help organizations to create and implement specific acculturation strategies to understand employees’ behaviour who have predominantly been exposed to culture (through work environments) and not by means of direct interaction with other cultures (Selmer & De Leon, 1998). This paper proposes to utilize this construct of organisation acculturation after identifying the gaps from literature for managing the multicultural workforce comprising of both natives employees and internal & external migrants comprising of different cultural orientations in the Indian context.

2 Acculturation

2.1 Origin of Acculturation

Acculturation occurs when two independent cultural groups come into continuous first-hand contact over an extended period of time (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Literature indicates that during the process of acculturation, a range of biological, cultural, physical, psychological, and social changes may occur (Berry, 1990; Berry et al., 1989; Berry et al., 1992; Berry, Kim, and Boski, 1988, Berry 2010). The term was coined and used for the first time in 1918. The objective or people over which the acculturation was designed were immigrants, refugees, sojourners, and travellers. There were few other similar terms, that were defined along with acculturation in between 1930 and 1950 were: culture shock, reverse cultural shock and occupational disease. Acculturation has been studied with respect to group and individual levels from various social

- Reema Das, Research Scholar, Amity Business School, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Noida, Email: reema311@gmail.com
- Co-Author Name: Dr Chandranshu Sinha, Professor, Amity Business School, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Noida, Email: chandranshu.sinha@gmail.com
science disciplines like sociology and psychology. The concept has been viewed and tried to be understood from various perspectives. In the domain of psychology, acculturation has been referred to as changes in the individual’s overt behaviour and covert traits, when the individual’s cultural group is experiencing acculturation collectively (Graves, 1967). In brief, acculturation as a process has been studied from the perspective of migrants, ethnic group people, sojourners, refugees, and indigenous people, focusing majorly on mobility-based groups.

2.2 Organisation Acculturation Research
The term ‘organisation acculturation’ was coined by A.J.Mills (1988) and its present understanding was developed by through the works of John Berry (1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 2010 and Selmer (1993). They studied the effect of cultural change on employee behaviour due to prolonged exposure to foreign or alien culture. In the beginning, the concept of acculturation was developed and studied from the perspective of groups whereas later the both the perspectives were used (i.e. individual and group perspective). Later the effect of culture on people and their mind-set have also been extensively studied in Hofstede’s studies and experiments. The approach towards understanding the concept of organisation acculturation requires a multifaceted understanding comprising of views from its headquarters and/or its subsidiary, as well. The effect on the organisation comes from the culture of the organization's nation of origin and its founder’s cultural beliefs and influence.

3 Definition of Organisation Acculturation
The term was coined long back by Albert J.Mills (1988) in his seminal work related to gender discrimination. Mills defined the concept as “co-cultures adapting to cultural patterns of the dominant culture without losing their unique customs, values, or traditions”. The concept of acculturation has been studied extensively by researchers and there focus has been on a range of variables and issues like culture, diversity, multicultural management, work related acculturation stress and work values of expatriates and sojourners. Selmer (1993, 1996) who has been a pioneer in the area of organizational acculturation (see table 1) and has majorly focused on Hofstede work values scales. He has emphasised that positioning an expat in the top management role would not only result in physical distance but also in cultural distance, which would leads to degradation of organisation efficiency (Selmer, 1993; 1996). However, these distances are diminished by the concept of organisation acculturation. He further advocated that combining organisation socialization and acculturation might lead to organisation acculturation (Selmer, 1996, 2006).

![Culture Paradigm](image)

**Figure 1: Culture Paradigm**

**Review of Selmer’s contribution: Organization Acculturation Table: 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Construct /Variables</th>
<th>Measurement Tools</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Organisation Values</td>
<td>VSM model, Hofstede’s four cultural Dimensions</td>
<td>Relations between Values and managerial behaviour. informality, security, and teamwork(Work Values Dimension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Work Values</td>
<td>VSM Model, Hofstede’s four cultural dimensions of Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, and Masculinity(Hofstede, 1990)</td>
<td>Organisational Acculturation in terms of work value measured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Work Values</td>
<td>Managerial behaviour and work values relations</td>
<td>Organisation Behaviour evaluation –work values basis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature further indicates that since the multinational companies have also brought their own cultures, value systems, and styles of management (Kumar, 1980) hence organisation acculturation should also involve cultural artifacts, language, media, social networking sites, ethical identity, education etc. other than work values. This requires measurement of the concept for which instruments are needed. However, the instruments available measure the concept at national level and not at individual, group, and most importantly organizational level. Thus whatever generalisations are available are based on these scales which have been validated at national level and certainly not at organizational level. A review of measurement tools on acculturation in organizations indicates that so far very less number of multicultural scale have been constructed for measuring acculturation in organizations.

A brief review of scales measuring acculturation are being presented in table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Type of Acculturation Measured</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Bourhuis et al.</td>
<td>Intergroup stereotypes, interpersonal communication, intergroup work team dynamics, and efficiency, job allocation, promotions, access to power, decision-making opportunities, responsibility to coordinate projects, and language use, acculturation strategy alignment (Consensual, Problematic, or Conflictual)</td>
<td>Immigrant and Host culture in Multicultural Setup, (Societal Level (national culture))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Hofstede, 1980</td>
<td>Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, and Masculinity</td>
<td>Cross Cultural Country based Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Elizur, 1984</td>
<td>(1) structure, (2) correlates, and (3) cultural differences</td>
<td>General work values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>M Stephenson, 2000</td>
<td>Language Knowledge, language use and preference, helps to identify the interaction with ethnic &amp; dominant societies and use &amp; preference for food &amp; media</td>
<td>Migrants, ethnic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Schneider, 1987</td>
<td>person-environment fit context</td>
<td>Person-national culture Fit Scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In brief, the review on acculturation in organizations has helped in identifying the gaps present in the existing literature on or acculturation in organizations. The gaps identified indicate that focus of future studies needs to be on work values and visible artifacts such that the complete acculturation process is captured in its entirety. This focus, which is missing needs to be explored as it, would act as a mediator or mode for providing insight to organizations to manage natives employees and both internal & external migrants better during retention, talent management and employee engagement in organisations.

Figure: 2
4 Factors Identified after the Review of Acculturation Literature:

1. Studies on acculturation has traditionally focused on changes in cultural artifacts, such as language proficiency, preferences for music, cuisine, media and clothing style (Rudmin 2009).
2. Considering correct dimensionality of the acculturation model specifically.
3. Domain of acculturation process in public and private domain of people's life.
4. Levels of Acculturation-Individual, Group & Organisation.
5. Categorization of Acculturation: Work based and/or life phase based acculturation.
6. The application of acculturation strategies proposed by J.W Berry's Four Fold Model fits the process of acculturation. Their application is dependent on the domain in which it has been applicable. Strategies like integration or fusion are more applicable in public domain while others are more effective in the private domain.
7. Development of Acculturation construct for the measurement needs to be contingent upon the purpose of the study undertaken
8. Acculturation in Organisation has seen the evaluation done through work values majorly (Selmer, 1993; 1996; and 2003).
9. Selmer has studied and evaluated the organisation acculturation only about work values based model.

5 Organization Acculturation in the Indian Context

India is a multicultural country where many ethnic groups coexist together and it has been a home to highly diversified societies since time immemorial. The cultural differences and differentiations present within India are enormous and hence needs to be taken into consideration. As a result, the understanding of concept of acculturation in organizations, without considering the internal cultural diversity would not represent a true picture of the Indian psyche and would be superficial. Further, in the Indian context in the last 70 years, jobs have been created in and around big metro cities and not around smaller towns. As a result, there has been continuous migration, which has happened from across the country as people with diverse language, values, cultures have moved from the remotest part of the country to metropolitan cities where there are jobs. The migrants, who move from other parts of India work in alien cities and cultures, form a major chunk of employees in contemporary India and become recipients of organisation acculturation strategies employed by organizations. Those who qualify as internal migrants are those set of employees who have moved from their respective native land for employment, education, better standards of living, marriage etc. The internal migrants who are employees are acculturated through direct and indirect influences in organizations. Further these organisations (multinationals and/or Indian, present at culturally distant locations) with a unique cultural reality acculturate the employees for creating healthier conditions to work and perform. However not always the ride is smooth as organizations face various kinds of challenges at individual, group, and organizational levels, thus triggering a need for culture management in organizations of groups primarily comprising of internal migrants with their unique set of cultural artifacts and values as part of their cultural construct and self. Further, this would also be instrumental in dealing with multicultural groups and individuals. Therefore, it becomes imperative to include bicultural and multicultural models along with sensitivities towards the diverse multicultural Indian reality would help in creating, implementing, and measuring the acculturation strategies used in the Indian context.

References: