

Chapter 1

Culture in Indian Organisations: Evidence-Based Research and Practice

Vijay Pereira and Ashish Malik

A Google search on the 29 November 2014 at 2200 h GMT inputting the words ‘culture in Indian organisations’ generated ‘about 18,000,000 results (0.38 s)’. Similarly the same words in Google Scholar yielded ‘about 89,300 results (0.06 s)’. These results are not surprising given the World Bank predicting that globally in the near future, India will be the second largest economy after China. The recent high growth rates reported by businesses in the Indian economy, whilst laudable from some perspectives (Cappelli et al. 2010), also need to be sustainable, especially amidst its high cultural diversity. As the world’s largest and most diverse democracy, the Indian society can be best described as a ‘cultural melting pot’ with a combination of multiple cultures, value systems and sociopolitical and institutional orientations. Further, India as one of the oldest civilisations is now regarded the second largest growing economy in the world. As such, there is growing international interest in understanding and unbundling the intricacies of Indian culture (Milner 1994; Nicholson and Sahay 2001), especially through empirical evidence.

This chapter outlines the importance of analysing aspects of Indian culture in organisations from a temporal as well as multidisciplinary theoretical lens. Though earlier studies have examined numerous topics on India such as specific management practices including human resource management (HRM) practices and Indian

V. Pereira (✉)

Department of Organisation Studies and HRM, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK
e-mail: Vijay.pereira@port.ac.uk

A. Malik

Newcastle Business School, The University of Newcastle, Ourimbah, NSW, Australia
e-mail: ashish.malik@newcastle.edu.au

firms' internationalisation strategies (e.g. see Human Resource 2010; Journal of World Business 2012), empirical studies on cultural aspects have been largely ignored. There is also evidence of a lack of wide-reaching research on 'culture in Indian organisations' globally or internationally. For example, the UK Association of Business Schools (ABS) Academic Journal Quality Guide (version 4, 2010) listed only one India-based research journal—the *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management*. This is a popular journal which publishes eight issues per year and predominantly includes research on 'culture in Indian organisations'. Further, it is only in the last decade or so that we have seen some renewed interest in empirical studies focusing on disparate aspects of culture in modern Indian services and manufacturing organisations (Deshpandé and Farley 2004; McMillin 2006; Pati and Kumar 2011; Singh and Khamba 2009; Upadhyya 2008). More recently there has been a call for a special issue in the journal *Culture and Organization* on research on culture in Indian organisations (Pereira and Malik 2013). However more is needed.

We envisage that this book will fill the gap identified as it is timely and topical. Moreover, quality contributions from domestic and international experts will increase the appeal of this edited collection. This book is thus an attempt to rekindle interest in understanding aspects of Indian culture in organisations. This edited collection offers a sound theoretical and empirical basis for understanding the evolving and changing nature of culture in Indian organisations. This timely collection incorporates contributions from Indian national and international academics with active interests of researching in organisational culture and management in domestic firms and Indian multinationals. In addition to covering topical issues on culture, this collection offers novel theoretical lenses to analyse and understand culture in Indian organisations.

Whilst there are numerous theoretical frameworks and explanations for understanding aspects of culture in nation states, including India (e.g. see widely used work by Hofstede (1983), House et al. (2004), Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), Trompenars and Hampden-Turner (1993), etc.), building a robust evidence base of research and practice (Gulati 2007; Ritchie et al. 2013; Tayeb 1994) for a culturally complex and dynamic nation such as India is extremely critical. This is particularly important as there are diverse influences, some of which are conflicting interpretations of the various cultural aspects in India. As the world's largest and most diverse democracy, there are numerous paradoxical challenges such as those arising from historical and post-colonial influences, integrating traditional values with the modern world and the attendant issues of intergenerational conflicts, thus presenting an interesting area for empirical investigations.

The purpose of this edited collection is to extend this interest by identifying key areas for empirical enquiry and thus presenting a coherent empirical base of research and evidence of *three* related and important topics of cultural understanding about India. *First*, historical roots and long upheld values in any context are always a good starting point for testing the strength of long-held values and belief systems in a nation state. *Second*, how such values and beliefs interact with the changing needs

and ideologies of the new and modern India is another promising avenue for empirical research. *Third*, with an increasingly pace of globalisation and demographic mobility, the interactions across cultures, as cultures collide and interact with cultural aspects of ‘Indianness’, are the third most promising area of enquiry. To this end, this collection offers novel theoretical lenses to analyse and understand culture in Indian organisations. Rich and reflective case study insights from practitioners and academic reviews balance and integrate the theoretical underpinnings and cultural practices in the transforming tapestry of Indian culture. The use of rich case studies including the high growth sectors such as the IT and health industries highlights some of the macro- and micro-level challenges faced by organisations in managing culture in the Indian context.

The main objective of this research monograph is to unbundle several cultural complexities in the context of Indian organisations. When we sent out a global call for papers for this exciting book initiative, we knew we would receive a good response. We were however overwhelmed with enquiries and interests to contribute. As editors who envisaged this book, we were looking for contributions that had ‘world views’ of/on the topic. We wanted a holistic and rounded perspective from scholars from not only across the globe but also local Indian indigenous scholars. We shortlisted and invited nine empirical papers that are based on the following conceptual model (see Fig. 1.1 below). This book proposal and the chosen book chapters received very good external reviews. We reproduce quotes from two independent blind reviewers below.

With the focus on empirical evidence in order to advance theory, the book will provide rich insights into the cultural aspects within Indian organizations. The scope and coverage of the book is very well-defined, and covers all the important aspects within the topic area. In particular, the inclusion of topics such as role of religion, young Indians and globalization has been done in a remarkable manner. (Reviewer 1)

This is an interesting area to research into and the authors are timely in making a contribution in this field. Culture in Indian organisations for many years has been a topic that is both mysterious and elusive. I think this book series may provide some useful insights, useful to students, academics as well as general practitioners. (Reviewer 2)

Our conceptual model is based on three key intersecting areas that impact upon culture—the country/nation (i.e. India), the Indian organisations and the Indian people (employees). Also, there are multiple influencers on the three key areas. These are historical (colonial, post-colonial, modernity, mythology), global (internationalisation, liberalisation, foreign direct investment) and institutional (democracy, bureaucracy, rule of law). The other nine chapters in the book are structured accordingly, as is evident from the following Fig. 1.1.

As is depicted in the model above, the next three contributions, i.e. Chaps. 2, 3 and 4, are positioned within the intersecting areas of the nation/country and the Indian employees. The edited collection will begin with a contribution by Pramila Rao, University of Marymount, USA, that focuses on a pivotal aspect affecting culture in Indian organisations, i.e. the role of religion as a cultural aspect on HRM practices in Indian organisations. The main goal of this chapter is to understand how

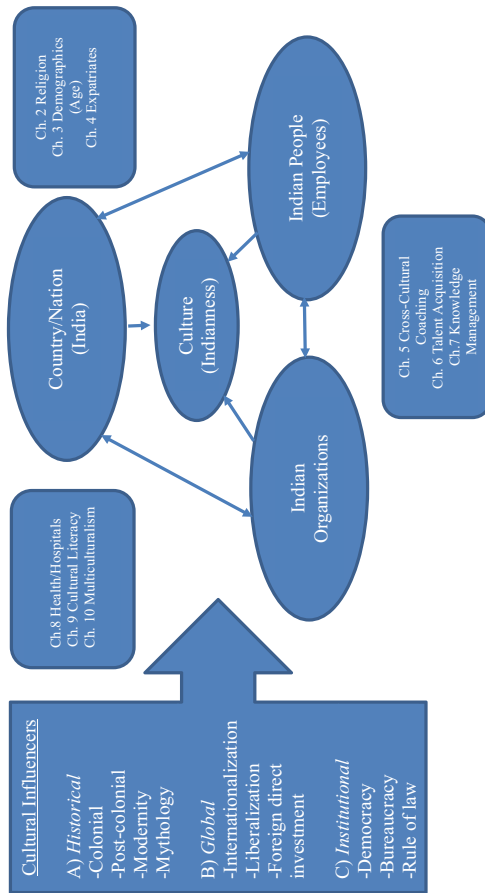


Fig. 1.1 Conceptual model: 'culture in Indian organisations' depicting the positioning of relevant chapters

religion impacts culture and HRM practices in India. India is a culturally diverse country with individuals from different religious (Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, among others) backgrounds (Nigam and Su 2011; Venkataratnam and Chandra 1996). In organisations, there are several areas of potential conflicts as the religious values and work norms clash (Grossman 2008; Trotman 2013). The predominant areas of contention begin in the recruitment phase as historical or conventional prejudices may discourage or encourage employers against certain applicant groups. These differences may occur in other areas of the work environment also such as training, work schedules, dress codes, job responsibilities and religious holidays among others. Employers are concerned how to balance different religious practices and those of HRM at the workplace (Bauza 2006; Ramsey 2007).

Building on the first research agenda of this monograph, the next contribution (Chap. 3) by Grishma Shah, Manhattan College, USA, focuses on the changes happening in India as a result of the latest generational cohort 'Generation Z'. This interesting piece portrays the competitive demographic advantage of the current generational cohort in terms of the future in India. The title of Shah's contribution is 'Zippies and the Shift in Cultural Values in India'. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the impact of economic globalisation on work and family collectivism for young middle-class Indians. The study surveys more than 1,000 individuals living in globalised and lesser globalised cities in India. The data are analysed using factor analysis, independent sample *t*-tests and multiple regressions. Results suggest that in an increasingly globalising India, young Indians will strive to preserve traditional values of collectivity when it comes to family, but will loosen their reins on workplace collectivism. This chapter is limited to examining the educated middle class in India as they are at the forefront of globalisation. The intention of the study is not to assess national culture as a whole, but to predict cultural shifts in India. The results provide critical insight as to how values are changing in a nation that promises to be a prominent feature on the global economic map in this century. Such insight is not only useful to scholars who wish to predict behaviour within firms and organisations but also to policymakers, entrepreneurs and businesses, as it informs them of impending infrastructure needs which must be met via public, private and/or public-private ventures. Recently, there has been a vital recognition that large-scale intuitional changes, such as globalisation, call for a re-examination of not only values worldwide but also their changing dynamics. This chapter heeds the call for understanding the onset of value changes in India as a result of its rapid economic and social transformation.

In line with the second research stream identified by us, and moving from religion and demographics in the Indian context, the next contribution (Chap. 4) by Pallvi Arora and Neelu Rohmetra, both from the University of Jammu, India, focuses on Indian expatriates in China. This contribution covers an interesting and contextually under-researched domain of international HRM, the cultural similarity paradox of understanding the psychology and challenges of Indian expatriates across international boundaries. Rohmetra and Arora highlight the importance of how even similar cultural contexts can pose severe challenges for expatriate adjustment and adaptation. In response to the changing global business environment and its requirements,

international assignments form a significant component of the business operations as a consequence of which managers are sent abroad for taking up these international assignments. Such assignments rigorously pose pressure and create stumbling blocks for the expatriates abroad. Indian expatriates are sent abroad to come across this exigent situation wherein personal adaptation, spouse adaptation, job adjustment and other factors consistently come across them. Also, sometimes the Indian expatriates perceive that if sent to culturally similar countries, the stress and pressure would be comparatively less. However, research in the domain presents that it is not always so. Keeping in view, the successful completion of international assignments on one side and expatriate adjustment the other side, the present research attempts to highlight the cultural similarity paradox in context of Indian expatriates, whilst simultaneously presenting the challenges being faced by them and suggesting a way forward.

The next three contributions, i.e. Chaps. 5, 6 and 7, are positioned within the Indian organisations and the Indian employees. The first of these (Chap. 5) by Neha Chatwani, who is a practitioner executive coach in Germany and Austria, focuses on cross-cultural aspects of coaching in Indian organisations. As Indian firms join the race to globalise, leaders and managers need to develop sensitivities towards clients and employees from other cultures. The subject of this chapter is on the role of coaching in developing cross-cultural skills among senior managers in Indian organisations. Coaching is a popular HRM leadership tool in organisations working internationally. Consequently, the need for global coaches has evolved. Many authors have approached the topic of coaching across cultures from the point of view of a Western cultural ethos and have placed emphasis on differences and pitfalls. By contrast, this chapter focuses on how cultural and diversity aspects in the coaching process can be leveraged that goes beyond a Socratic dialogue of questioning and probing for learning. The opportunity lies in the ambiguous definition of coaching which allows for a multitude of roles for the coach and client. Specifically, aspects of Indian culture are blended into the coaching process giving it a cross-cultural character. Effective global coaches are highly aware and self-reflective of their own cultural make-up and experience. They equally need to keenly master the art of coaching by guiding the client whilst allowing the client to lead the process.

The next contribution (Chap. 6) by Yi Lui and Cecil Pearson, both from Curtin University, Australia, builds on the empirical base of studies on cultural aspects in Indian organisations and focuses on the influence of culture on talent acquisition in Indian organisations. Worldwide organisations have come to realise the importance of highly skilled and competent employees in the pursuit of corporate competitive advantage. Consequently, recruitment and selection practices have become a priority in the acquisition of talented personnel, but the effectiveness of these arrangements in the cultural marketplace is not well understood. The issue of talent acquisition as well as the evolving and changing nature of culture was investigated in a pluralist study design with indigenous managerial executives employed in Indian multinational corporations. The quantitative results, which demonstrated that the strength of culture influenced the relationships between talent acquisition and the organisations' global ambition, were substantiated with qualitative evidence

revealing the perceived influence of cultural forces on these connections. The findings show the relevance of cultural effects when the labour market is liberalised to strategically integrate organisational systems in the pursuit of global ambition.

Studying the Indian IT firms' knowledge management practices, in the next Chap. 7, Jeevan Jyoti, Sindhu Kotwal and Roomi Rani, all from the University of Jammu, India, provide an empirical account of the impact of knowledge management practices on competitive advantage and highlight the importance of having a culture of managing knowledge. They argue that in an information age, the economic value of knowledge is more than physical value of products. This knowledge becomes a key economic resource for competitive advantage. Hence, knowledge management has become a necessity for all organisations. Efficient management of knowledge requires a culture of investing in skill and capabilities of employees. The authors employ an *ex post facto* survey methodology for collecting data from employees working in Indian private telecommunication organisations. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to the respondents. Applying structural equation modelling to investigate the relationship between knowledge management processes and competitive advantage found a significant relationship between knowledge management processes and competitive advantage. Further, knowledge approach, knowledge protection and knowledge acquisition were found to be significant predictors of competitive advantage. The authors acknowledge the limitations of the study as data were collected only from employees in private sector telecommunication organisations.

Our last three contributions, Chaps. 8, 9 and 10, are positioned within the areas of the nation/country and Indian organisations. The first of these (Chap. 8), by Kajal Sharma, University of Portsmouth, UK; Poonam Sharma, Amity Global Business School, India; and D. M. Pastonjee, Albert Schweitzer International University, Geneva, Switzerland, focus on organisational culture in Indian private hospitals. The Indian private healthcare market is growing and several reports have indicated it to be the next big thing. Moreover, in the last few years, many new private corporate hospitals have also emerged in the healthcare market further augmenting the scale of investment and expansion within the private sector. Crafting productive organisational culture for such hospitals is challenging for the leadership as these healthcare delivery systems are complex and comprise of many subcultures. The empirical quantitative study presented in the chapter is conducted to examine the significant aspects of organisational culture in Indian private healthcare sector hospitals. The methodological approach for this paper was inductive, and survey method was utilised to gather data, comprising questionnaires aimed at employees working in the private, corporate hospitals. This chapter tries to explore the organisational culture patterns related to desired values in chosen hospitals and also explores whether clinicians and non-clinicians differ in their perceptions of hospital culture. The analysis of results leads to discussion on developing insight to enhance the present organisational culture.

Chapter 9, by Neelu Rohmetra and Pallvi Arora, both from the University of Jammu, India, makes a case for incorporating cultural literacy to make a difference to the changing face of culture in Indian organisations. Businesses in the global context have implicitly increased the need for global organisations to consider

incorporating cultural literacy into their training programmes that revolve around training managers to comprehend the need for acknowledging diversity and cultural differences. Such dynamism of inclusion of managers from diverse cultural backgrounds poses a challenge for Indian organisations too, thereby creating a sound need to regiment novel work settings wherein the development and efficient performance of managers shall be grounded upon ‘how’ and ‘what’ of ‘culture’, framing their cultural literacy programme as well as making them culturally intelligent. The authors thereby aim to present the changing face of Indian organisations in the era of globalisation, consequently highlighting the need and role of cultural literacy programmes for developing the requisite competencies for the success of these organisations, thus eliminating stress.

Chapter 10, by Sreelekha Mishra from the Indian Institute of Technology, Indore, India, and Sushanta Mishra, from the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, India, focuses on achieving sustainable competitive advantage through cultural transition by employing a multicultural perspective. With the advent of globalisation, organisations are crossing different geographical boundaries, and they are witnessing conflict among the cultures of different societies. The successful management of ‘diversity’ has become a key challenge for organisations (Chermers et al. 1995). In fact, the need to develop management theories that are effective and functional in multiple cultural settings is strongly argued by the researchers (Doktor et al. 1991). In this regard, Banerjee and Linstead (2001) suggested employing multiculturalism to manage the problematic consequences of cultural diversity. In spite of growing importance of multiculturalism in today’s organisations, there is little research exploring this topic. Of late, there are some discussions in leading journals of management including the call for papers on this important issue (Banerjee and Linstead 2001; Doktor et al. 1991; Spicer and Sewell 2010; Weeks et al. 2013). In the present chapter, the authors propose to explain the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ and highlight the barriers to the formation of multicultural organisations.

1.1 Conclusion

This chapter set the scene by highlighting the importance of studying aspects of Indian culture in an organisational context. We identify three encouraging areas of research that present an integrated and in-depth understanding of culture in Indian organisations operating in India and overseas. We further also identify three intersecting areas in terms of positioning of cultural research. The contributions in this collection point to promising avenues for future research as well as highlighting implications for policy and practice. We hope that the new learnings and knowledge about aspects of Indian culture generated through this collection will remain a useful reference for scholars and practitioners keen on understanding cultural aspects of Indians and Indian organisations.

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