

# Leveraging Values in Global Organizations: Premises, Paradoxes and Progress

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Published online: 26 January 2016  
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**Abstract** In this focused issue on the theme of “Leveraging Values in Global Organizations”, we highlight several prevalent themes on national, organizational and individual values in the literature. We argue that many premises in the literature have been accepted as fact; yet there are still many avenues open to exploration. We present several paradoxes that are often overlooked or lead to inconsistencies in the literature on values. The five articles in this focused issue address these premises and paradoxes, presenting new challenges and opportunities, providing progress and paving the way for future research on leveraging values in global organizations. The selected articles explore values with respect to international alliances and subsidiaries of multinational organizations at the organizational level, among global managers at the group level, and among employees and inpatriates at the individual level of analysis. We trust that readers of this issue will agree that the articles provide novel insights into key issues in the established, yet dynamic, field of research on values in the context of global organizations.

**Keywords** Global organizations · Values · Organizational values · National culture · Paradoxes

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## 1 Introduction

The topic of values, so crucial in organizational life and central to corporate culture, leadership and performance (Jonsen et al. 2015; O'Reilly and Chatman 1996; Schein 2004), and so relevant and complex in the context of multinational organizations, is rebounding as a scholarly and organizational focus of attention (Bourne and Jenkins 2013; Giorgi et al. 2015). The aim of this focused issue is to bring together contributions on values in global organizations. We sought to include novel forward-looking research offering fresh insights at various levels of analysis, and with different methodological approaches that offer new or critical perspectives into values in global organizations. Our call for papers for this focused issue welcomed works from various strands of international management research, including, but not limited to, cross-cultural management and international human resource management, where our specific interest was in the myriad of ways in which global firms can leverage values to attain organizational, group and individual benefits and rewards. As part of the process the guest editorial team also met with the authors in Sigtuna, Sweden, for a two-day prepublication workshop, where we engaged in intensive exchange of ideas and insightful feedback, which together with further rounds of reviews helped develop the papers.

We are immensely pleased with the outcome of this process and we feel that the collection of articles that we have assembled for this focused issue reflects a diversity of perspectives and the complexity not only of managing, but also of leveraging values. Together, we invite our readers on a journey toward disentangling the concept, meaning and multilayered nature of values. As editors of this issue, we would like to offer our own perspective on leveraging values in global organizations, its premises and paradoxes, before introducing the five contributions to the field.

We first outline the premises and present the paradoxes we have encountered in the extant literature on values in global organizations to set the stage for the scholarly contributions in this issue. We present these contributions in respect to the context of global values and levels of analysis. The first two articles, both qualitative studies, address values at the organizational level, followed by one conceptual article at the group level and two quantitative articles about values at the individual level of analysis. We conclude with our reflections and acknowledge the individuals who have contributed their time and expertise with the goal of adding to our understanding about leveraging values in global organizations.

## 2 Premises

### 2.1 *Raison d'être* of Values in Global Organizations

The *first premise* is that organizational values lead to positive outcomes in the form of superior performance in global organizations (irrespective of the earlier literature being tainted by a success bias). Values serve as a coping mechanism that makes it

possible to deal with persisting areas of relevant uncertainty (Emery and Trist 1963). Values have been linked to the study of people; they are embedded in the very definition of culture (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Geertz 1973; Giorgi et al. 2015). Values are essential to the functioning of both individuals and organizations (Rokeach 1979), and are a defining component of organizational culture (Pettigrew 1979; Schein 2004). Values generally influence attitudes and behavior and can be defined as beliefs upon which one acts by preference (Allport 1961; Rokeach 1979). Throughout the decades, scholars and practitioners have and are still expending effort in investigating the meaning of values; values have hence become a central construct in the social and managerial sciences. This has an impact on how we think about cross-cultural management (Guthey and Jackson 2011).

Cross-cultural research has generally relied on values as a central paradigm to explain national, organizational and individual differences (Gelfand et al. 2006). In fact, values have become the *essence* of cross-cultural management. But they are also the subject of notable criticism insofar as they have, over the years, become rather “mainstreamed.” That is, there has been a visible trend in “mainstream” research focusing on “mainstreamed” topics that serve “mainstream” international corporations and employ “mainstreamed” methodological approaches. As a result, this *mainstreamification* has resulted in the corralling of important voices and deep aspects of cultural life to the sidelines or ignoring them altogether (Holden et al. 2015).

Shared values, on the other hand, have been steadily linked to studies on organizational culture (e.g., Deal and Kennedy 1982; Schein 1985), and it is widely believed that organizational values can transform giants. It has long been argued that the key to the success and high performance of multinational organizations is the use of values in “winning the hearts and minds” of their employees. This is no surprise, as those organizations that have survived for hundreds of years all seem to have a strong sense of values (De Geuss 1997). Values-driven management (and strategy) has the potential to be universally accepted if only one could detect, convincingly, the values that lead to higher performance and the conditions under which they do so. Countless studies and books with this very claim gained popularity in the 1980s (e.g., Deal and Kennedy 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982). However, many of them suffer from “common success bias” in their design and sampling; that is, studying a successful firm without comparing it to less successful firms cannot truly inform us about what actually leads to success (see e.g., Denrell 2003; Rosenzweig 2007).

The 1990s was no exception to this values-driven performance focus (e.g., Blanchard et al. 1997; Collins and Porras 1998). Yet here more scholars began applying conditional and/or critical approaches, by contending, for example, that values need to be both strong and adaptable (Denison 1990; Gordon and DiTomaso 1992). Generally speaking, this stream of more cautious and conditionally-oriented research inferred that patterns of values or certain characteristics, such as adaptability, may enable better performance at various levels, for example, by directly measuring the influence of organizational values on firm performance (e.g., Kotter and Heskett 1992; Naor et al. 2008). Despite the popularity of this approach among practitioners, especially for their company success story books (many of

which only a decade later were proved wrong), and despite the emergence of more carefully crafted studies about the role of values in global organizations, scholarly engagement in this stream seemed to wane as we moved into the twenty-first century.

Contemporary scholars have stated that values studies have indeed experienced a ‘second wave’, with a shift in focus on agency and contexts (e.g., Weber and Dacin 2011; see also Giorgi et al. 2015). Jonsen et al. (2015) found that the number of values a firm espouses has a significant and positive influence on its profitability; and organizations that demonstrate stable espoused values perform worse than those that change them over time. These authors recommend that international managers should not naively believe that corporate values will necessarily reflect exactly what people in the organization do. There can be advantages in actively articulating values as part of corporate communications strategies. Organizational culture can be a distinct advantage in itself that may lead to superior performance (e.g., Kotter and Heskett 1992).

Consider the example of global manufacturing firm Hilti Corporation, a recipient of the Carl Bertelsmann Prize for excellence in corporate culture, whose management affirms that they “live their values.” They see values as the only differentiating factor of a global enterprise in a marketplace where so many other facets between competitors are analogous (Ward and Lief 2005). Michael Hilti notes, “I view corporate culture as a very significant, if not the most significant, driver of corporate success” (De Witt and Meyer 2010, p. 178). Such a view corresponds to thinking of values as guiding principles for how we prioritize and live our lives, or an enduring preference for a mode of conduct (Rokeach 1973), and something for which people and managers ought to strive (Dewey 1939; Schein 1985). Jonsen et al. (2015) found that value differentiation was linked to economic success, suggesting that organizational values as such can be seen as instrumental not only to short term organizational outcomes but also to the longevity of organizations, if managed well.

## **2.2 Organizational Values as Means for Unifying People and Units in Globally Dispersed Organizations**

The *second premise* is that values can be managed to improve coordination and integration by acting as a glue in global organizations. Values are seen by many as an instrumental management tool and also as a change tool (see Ogbonna and Harris 2002, for a critical review). Modern global organizations frequently express and emphasize their way of doing things via values in the belief that they can guide employees’ work and link behavior to positive organizational outcomes (Jonsen et al. 2015). The motivation for such articulation has taken on many guises over the years. Early on, organizational culture was argued to “glue” geographically dispersed global organizations together (Hedlund and Kogut 1993; Collins and Porras 1998; Van Rekom et al. 2006). The emphasis was on coordination and global integration. There is also a body of literature that supports the use of organizational culture to unite organizational units across national and cultural borders through commitment to, and behavior built on, shared values (Welch and Welch 2006). The

authors stress that corporate values are one of the pillar stones of the successful inculcation of organizational culture. Collins and Porras (1998, p. 222) state that core values are “the organization’s essential and enduring tenets.” Pant and Lachman (1998) go as far as to say that organizations’ top management would have a hard time implementing strategies that are incompatible with corporate core values. Van Rekom et al. (2006) argue that firms can strengthen the relationship between the ideologies of top management and the values enacted within the organization by identifying the central values that are important for and motivating to those who work there. Such global sharing of corporate values could thus be seen as a management tool aimed at unifying people and units in a globally dispersed organization (Welch and Welch 2006).

### 2.3 Organizational Values and National Culture

The *third premise* is that organizational values are influenced by national culture. Firms are shaped by the home context from which they originate. The local context of corporate headquarters is argued to have a strong influence on organizational practices (Meyer et al. 2011). Notably, many researchers argue that there is a direct link between corporate culture and national culture (for an early review see Trice and Beyer 1993). Indeed, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) challenged us by stating that a nation-bound administrative heritage, defined as “ways of doing things”, characterizes firms emerging from the same country. Importantly, they emphasize that there is no hiding from the administrative heritage that firms carry with them throughout their lifespan. National culture, as a part of the societal environment, influences the firm’s organizational culture, but so do individuals, who act as national “culture carriers” within the organization (Zander 2012). The emphasis here is on how individuals in key roles as founders, members of upper echelons or managers, model, maintain and reinforce national cultural values in management practices and firm culture.

To some extent organizations must conform to the expectations or norms of the society in which they are embedded (Sagiv and Schwartz 2007). Otherwise a conflict ensues based on societal values and the way things are done within the organization, with consequences for the organization. Trice and Beyer (1993) agree that organisational structures and practices reflect their surrounding national cultures and see pressures toward conformity as one of the main reasons. In their view, organizations “adapt to the demands of the national culture” by aligning to accepted values and norms in a society in order to be seen as legitimate actors (organizations) in their particular environment. An implication of this is that an organisational culture, which goes against the national culture, places high demands on management. Yet organizations are also shaped by their industries, ownership type, and the values of their top management team or founders, as well as the individual members of the organization (Leung et al. 2005). This adds an extra layer of complexity to the process of disentangling organizational and national cultures. Attempts have been made at sorting out the relationship between national culture and organizational culture (see e.g., Sagiv and Schwartz 2007; Zander 2012). As noted by Sagiv and Schwartz (2007) these endeavors are further complicated by the

lack of agreed-upon theory or taxonomy of organizational values enabling the comparison of organizations in this regard.

## 2.4 Organizational Values as “Soft Management” in Leveraging Diversity

The *fourth premise* is that organizational values are used as “soft management” tools in attempts to leverage or manage diversity. It is recognized that diverse organizations perform better; diversity is associated with creativity, innovation and organizational competitiveness (Cox and Blake 1991). However, there is little empirical support that diversity actually leads to improved business performance (Post and Byron 2015; Stahl et al. 2010b). Although there is truly a dearth of research on the link between organizational values and diversity management, Nishii and Ozbilgin (2007) argue that an organization’s culture will in part determine how it manages diversity. Global organizations that create a working environment and policies and practices that instill a sense of belonging as well as aim to leverage the full potential of their employees, incorporating global differences, should be more successful. These organizations will reap benefits from global learning, knowledge sharing, coordination and communication across culturally diverse units and groups.

It is important to incorporate global differences; but rather than a focus on managing diversity, organizations should consider the idea that cultural and values diversity be treated as an asset, rather than something that must be managed. This idea has been brought forth by scholars studying diversity in teams, for example (e.g., Stahl et al. 2010a), who argue that values should not just be managed, but that organizations should work to glean the positive aspects from differences in national cultural, organizational and individual values. Although there is much literature about overcoming the negative effects of cultural differences, we do not have much to go on with respect to turning differences into something positive in global organizations. In contemporary global firms top managers formulate values intended to bring about certain behaviors from the employees, but for these to take effect individuals need to be receptive and to internalize the values (Michailova and Minbaeva 2012). Moreover, “value fit” between people and their organizations is associated with numerous positive effects, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and performance (Minbaeva et al. 2013). Additionally, as a response to the assertion that corporate culture is often used to “counteract hindrances in local cultures” (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2010, p. 20), the premise in the literature is that strong global cultures of firms can mitigate cultural differences by expecting people to perform and adhere to several (Beer, cited in The Economist Intelligence Unit 2010) and not just to one, typically Western, set of values.

## 2.5 Dissemination, Transfer and Implementation of Values Within the Global Organization

The *fifth premise* is that organizational values need to be adjusted, adapted, translated or matched to be successfully implemented in another cultural context. According to Leung et al. (2005), culture is a multi-level construct. The discussion

of transfer of values within the global organization must necessarily take into consideration the aforementioned connection to national culture, but also the deeper level of values, which must be agreed upon by consensus of organizational members. It is, in fact, individuals who transfer values throughout organizations, be they founders, top managers or employees (Zander 2012). Individuals are carriers of national culture. Both national cultural values as well as organizational values are transmitted to them through processes of socialization (Leung et al. 2005).

Through bottom-up processes of “aggregation of shared values” (Leung et al. 2005, p. 363), individuals create group-level cultures. That is, the belonging to groups within the organization is based on the sharing of certain values that distinguish one group from another. Organizational units might share certain core values based on their professional focus or expertise, and these values might (or might not) align with the core values of organizations which might (or might not) align with the national cultural values in which the firm is embedded. According to Wenger (1998), individuals with the same type of work (occupations and/or professions) but across different organizations have common ways of structuring work based on shared routines, symbols and stories. The process of transferring and translating organizational values to organizational units located in different national contexts throughout the international organization is more complex than appears. Culture is shaped and reshaped at multiple layers throughout this process, and the values transferred to and held within organizational units are also shaped by and help to reshape organizational values.

International organizations might engage in top-down processes of training and educating the workforce of, for example, a newly acquired firm. Studies that have considered culture change through mergers and acquisitions provide examples of top-down change by training to first change employee behaviors. Younger organizations, the values and norms of which are still in a state of flux, are more susceptible to these influences (Sagiv and Schwartz 2007). However, over time the establishment of accepted norms will also be transferred and translated to new or modified organizational-level values (Erez-Rein et al. 2004).

Although socialization is seen as a primary means for the formation and dissemination of organizational values, the role of individuals in facilitating this process cannot be underestimated. All members of the organization are involved in the process, though not all members influence cultural values in organizations to the same extent (Sagiv and Schwartz 2007). We have already touched upon the role of upper echelons in the organization as key shapers of organizational values. However, individuals at lower levels of the organization are important facilitators of culture change. According to the literature expatriates, for example, through their role as disseminators of organizational culture, network builders, or even agents of control (Harzing 2001) are one important source of transferring organizational core values to subsidiaries. However, the assumption is that expatriates are primarily used to reinforce the organizational values of the home country. We must also draw further attention to the important roles played by individuals from third cultures, individuals who are carriers of more than one culture (such as biculturals) (e.g., see Brannen and Thomas 2010), as well as the role of inpatriates in aligning, shaping or realigning values in global organizations. A related yet distinctly different group on

the rise, and of considerable interest, is the ex-host country nationals, who after being educated and living long spells, some since childhood, in other countries return to their home-country to live and work there (Tung and Lazarova 2006). Thus, the question is raised as to whether traditional views of cultural values transfer are still relevant given the rise of these employee groups, representing values that are different to those of the parent organization's home culture.

### 3 Paradoxes

In preparing this focused issue, in our own theoretical work on values as well as through our practical engagement with international organizations, we noticed a number of interesting antinomies, or paradoxes, with respect to values. We outline these in the following sections, and encourage scholars and practitioners to reflect upon the issues in the years to come. We identify five paradoxes: (1) espoused values cannot be seen as true representations of organizational values in global firms, yet they are argued to have a real impact; (2) the process of managing organizational values is a top down process, yet values emerge throughout the organization; (3) organizational values are argued to be unique to a specific global firm, yet can be similar across firms within the same country and/or industry; (4) organizations aspire to homogenize values as a soft control mechanism, yet simultaneously encourage cultural diversity, and (5) organizations aspire to be values-driven, yet values are hard to transfer and implement intact.

#### 3.1 The First Paradox: Espoused Versus Enacted

The first paradox concerns the array of literature that has pointed to the danger of accepting espoused values as “real” or “true representations” of organizational values (e.g., Argyris and Schön 1978; Wilson 1998). However, additional streams of literature consider espoused values to potentially have a “real impact,” such as in impression and image management (e.g., Khandelwal and Mohendra 2010) and in institutional theory, in which it is argued that values can add to corporate efficiency by reducing uncertainty (Friedland and Alford 1991). Several aspects of espoused values and fit have been deemed crucial to international alliances in achieving a successful integration and realizing the value of a merger or acquisition (Cording et al. 2014). When employees perceive congruence between espoused and enacted values, organizational commitment is enhanced (Howell et al. 2012). Thus, espousing values has become commonplace in corporations; scholars at the most prestigious management institutions in the world still embrace their potential (e.g., Kanter 2008; Khandelwal and Mohendra 2010), and nearly every organization holding the 100 first positions in the *Fortune Global 500* has on its website a statement articulating its values. Yet the caveat in accepting espoused values as all-encompassing is in not recognizing the diversity of actual values that relate to employee behavior and disentangling the forest from the trees in leveraging values to the organization's benefit. The *first paradox* is thus that espoused values cannot



be seen as true representations of organizational values in global firms, yet they are argued to have a real impact.

### 3.2 The Second Paradox: Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Values

Organizational values range from shared to imposed, and from those that are exhibited by top management (Bansal 2003) to those that are truly collective across subcultures. Values are meant to be disseminated to all levels of the organization in order to guide individual behavior. Yet, from anthropology we know that values emerge over long periods of time and cannot be managed in the same manner as price changes for potatoes or *le pain quotidien*, the dynamic nature of organizational values aside, as recently noted by Bourne and Jenkins (2013). This is complicated further by evidence of a disconnect between management's and employees' views of core values. As O'Reilly (1989) points out, top management's beliefs reflect how things ought to be, whereas at the lower levels of organizations beliefs reflect how things actually are. In fact, we question *who* is managing *whom* when it comes to values, and whether the prevailing view in cultural management is based on ever-changing obedience mechanisms and respect for authority (see also Courpasson and Dany 2003).

Organizational culture is not a unidirectional process; values come (emerge) from everywhere in an organization. As Gehman et al. (2013, p. 108) conclude in their analysis of values work: "Instead of a top-down process or something that might be taken for granted once and for all, (...it is) through discussions, negotiations, and ongoing network reconfigurations that values practices are performed." The *second paradox* is thus that organizational values are seen as a top down managed process, yet values emerge throughout the organization.

### 3.3 The Third Paradox: Similar Versus Unique Values

The third paradox stems from the claim often made by global firms (and domestic firms too) that their organizational cultures and core values are unique. We know from the extant literature that there are strong national cultural influences on organizational cultures, suggesting that organizations emerging from the same nation will demonstrate similarities in organizational cultural values. And, even if there is less of a subconscious national cultural influence, a quick look at the websites of global firms emerging from the same home country will reveal strong similarities in choice of core values. There is often a bandwagon effect whereby organizations mimic the successful cultures of others in aiming to "do the right thing" (Jonsen et al. 2015). Some would even go as far as arguing that there is a copying of value statements on company websites occurring (Roth 2014). Jonsen et al. (2015) identified practices of strong conformity to industry values (mimetic effects) across Fortune top 100 companies. This is underpinned by numerous theoretical positions (e.g., Whetten and Mackey 2002). The literature implicitly suggests and global firms explicitly express that they have a set of values that makes them unique to those who work for them and gives them an edge in an increasingly competitive global market.

The quandary of value divergence versus convergence versus crossvergence (Ralston 2008) is explored in how social culture and institutions have an impact on organizational practices, yet remains relatively unresolved in terms of its impact on organizational values. Business ideologies and their resultant values impact their surrounding societies and communities (cf. Ralston et al. 2006); this is a dynamic interactive process that works in both ways and is thus difficult to control. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2008), for example, found evidence that organizational value systems go beyond their business context and impact their employees' behavior outside of the work environment. Individual values on the other hand have an influence on the organizations in which people work. Quests for culture to be the differentiator (and hard to imitate) can at the same time involve mimetic or isomorphic institutionalization processes of (perceived superior) values and practices. The *third paradox* is thus that organizational values are argued to be unique to a specific global firm yet can be similar across firms within the same country and/or industry.

### 3.4 The Fourth Paradox: Control Versus Freedom

Management of values is often portrayed as an exercise of control (e.g., Harris and Ogbonna 2011). However, with the complexity and interconnectedness of today's globalized world (Lane and Maznevski 2014), the influences on values are so vast that we cannot really control them. The fact is that we have little knowledge about how to measure values across levels (e.g., Meglino and Ravlin 1998) and these levels—individual, organizational, societal and cultural, are in great flux. We are basically dealing with time-sensitive multi-agent, multi-level and multi-directional forces, compressed into something global firms yearn 'to control'.

We should not become blinded by the imposing assumptions on which corporate values management is built. We should continuously question, as a field, if the traditional dimensional, utilitarian and functional approaches to organizational culture are meaningful. Despite the possible good intent in working with "softer" management methods, critical scholars have spoken of totalitarian tendencies of corporate culturism and the Orwellian world of "thoughtstop" (Wilmott 1993) and slavish behavior (Giddens 1991). Are we walking a fine line between management and manipulation in an attempt to produce "the appropriate individual" (term used by Alvesson and Willmott 2002) by value-based guiding of behavior, instead of order-giving, supervision, follow-up and control?

Values can thus be seen as a social control mechanism (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996)—one of indirect control, that is, by managing the "insides" of workers (Deetz 1995). This leads to a form of self-discipline that is masqueraded as a "therapy of freedom" (Wilmott 1993, p. 525). People most often strive to be in control of important matters that affect their lives (Bandura 1997), and the concept of control is a cornerstone in psychology as well as management theory. Merely accepting "what's coming" is not accepted by leaders in Western mastery-oriented societies, where we are trained to take control over matters that are important to our organizations. However, cultural diversity (demographic and deep-level) is on the rise globally and is increasingly considered an asset and a societal spice of life (Mor-Barak 2005; Jonsen et al. 2013). If we are serious about cultural diversity and

its accompanying value diversity, and the additive multiculturalism of societies, are we not doomed if we believe that imposing strong organizational values can be sustainable? But if we do not deal with values, are we then not thrown into anarchy of some kind? The *fourth paradox* is thus that organizations aspire to homogenizing values as a means of soft control yet simultaneously aim to encourage cultural diversity.

### 3.5 The Fifth Paradox: Transferred Versus Transformed

We have already discussed the role of individuals in transferring or disseminating organizational values to organizational units. As our afore-mentioned early examples (e.g., Deal and Kennedy 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982) show, global organizations aspire to be values-driven. Barrett (2006, p. 1) has stated that “the most successful organizations on the planet are vision-guided and values-driven.” Such assertions presume that not only are values something that can be managed, but that individuals can be molded into believing, aspiring to, accepting, or behaving in accordance with organizational values, regardless of where they are located throughout the global organization. This comes with a caveat. While organizations aim to select individuals who are a fit with their values, and that individual values alignment with group/organizational values are argued to be a pillar of values management (Barrett 2006), this is a near impossible task. Further, there is ample evidence demonstrating that organizational values cannot simply be transferred through various socialization mechanisms and international assignees, but that they must be transformed to suit the local context.

Global firms may want to use organizational values as a way of joining efforts across national and cultural boundaries to reach corporate goals or turn strategies into practices, or even to increase employee commitment and loyalty. This depends on how well values are disseminated and implemented throughout the organization, but more so on how the values are understood and acted out. This begs the question of whether values actually have the same meaning across different cultural contexts. Research on the transfer of management practices demonstrates that the transfer process is fraught with problems. But with respect to global dissemination and implementation of values we know less about the transfer process. A few studies have found that the transfer of values depends on their interpretation in host cultures. For example, a Danish global organization had problems translating the core value ‘ambitious’ into Russian where this had very negative connotations (Gertsen and Söderberg 2012). This suggests difficulties in simply transferring core values if translation is not considered. In other cases d’Iribarne (2012) found that even if the meaning was understood it was difficult for employees to adapt their behavior to the values as this clashed too much with local prevailing practices. D’Iribarne argues that it is possible to agree on values across national and cultural boundaries in the abstract sense; however, when these are to be enacted (or expressed as more concrete values) they are not in fact universal, and may be very difficult to use as guidelines for the work to be carried out.

A study by Gertsen and Zølner (2012b) on the transfer of corporate values from a Danish global organization to subsidiaries in China, India and Japan found that core

values were received well despite the different cultural contexts, but they took on another meaning. According to Brannen (2004), recontextualization is the process of giving new meaning to transferred organizational assets in new contexts. This concept helps to explain why it is often difficult, if not impossible to transfer practices and values and retain their meaning (and form) in new cultural contexts (Gertsen and Zolner 2012a). Essentially, the global organization's values may be known, appreciated and endorsed by other units and employees, but their meaning and enactment will (knowingly or not) differ because of differences in values, expectations and perceptions. The *fifth paradox* is thus that organizations aspire to be values-driven, yet values are hard to transfer and implement without transformation.

#### 4 Scholarly Contributions in This Issue

The articles in this focused issue collectively highlight the multifaceted and complex role of values in multinational organizations. Importantly, the articles illustrate that leveraging values is a challenge faced by organizations at multiple levels, and that identifying, assimilating, espousing and benefitting from national, organizational, managerial or individual values is often an organic process that is difficult to conceptualize, operationalize and translate into tangible outcomes. The authors analyze various issues on the broad theme of leveraging values using a diversity of approaches at the national, organizational and individual levels of analysis. The articles that have been selected to demonstrate the multilayered nature of the focused issue theme; the reader will find common elements interwoven throughout the articles, yet the combined result is a glimpse into the complexity (or impossibility) faced by multinational organizations in 'managing' the power of values.

The selected articles build on the five main premises we have identified as underlying the theme of the focused issue. In relation to each of the themes, the articles address the identified paradoxes in interesting ways, make progress and contribute new directions to the study of values in global organizations (see Table 1).

The articles are presented based on their level of analysis. We start with two articles that investigate values at the organizational level: *Interpretive Frames as the Organization's "Mirror": From Espoused Values to Social Integration in MNEs*, by Birgitte Grøgaard and Helene Loe Colman, and *Cultural Change following International Acquisitions: Cohabiting the Tension between Espoused and Practiced Cultures*, by Satu Teerikangas and Olivier Irrmann. One article in this issue considers values at the group level: *Leveraging Values Diversity: The Emergence and Implications of a Global Managerial Culture in Global Organizations*, by Alfred M. Jaeger, Sung Soo Kim, and Arif N. Butt. At the individual level of analysis we also have two articles: *Collectivist Values, Exchange Ideology and Psychological Contract Preference*, by David Thomas, Elizabeth C. Ravlin, Yuan Liao, Daniel L. Morrell and Kevin Au, and *Language, Cultural Intelligence, and Inpatriate Turnover Intentions: Leveraging Values in Multinational Corporations*

**Table 1** Premises, paradoxes and progress in the research on values in global organizations

Premises	Paradoxes	Progress (articles in this focused issue)
(1) Organizational values <sup>a</sup> lead to positive outcomes (superior performance) in global organizations	(1) Espoused values cannot be seen as true representations of organizational values in global firms, yet they are argued to have a real impact	Interpretive frames as the organization's mirror: from espoused values to social integration in MNEs (Grøgaard and Colman)
(2) Organizational values can be managed to improve coordination and integration (act as glue) in global organizations	(2) Organizational values are seen as a top down managed process, yet values emerge throughout the organization	Cultural change following international acquisitions: cohabiting the tension between espoused and practiced cultures (Teerikangas and Irrmann)
(3) Organizational values are influenced by national culture	(3) Organizational values are argued to be unique to a specific global firm yet can be similar across firms within the same country and/or industry	Leveraging values diversity: the emergence and implications of a global managerial culture in global organizations (Jaeger, Kim and Butt)
(4) Organizational values are used as 'soft management' in attempt to leverage diversity	(4) Organizations aspire to homogenizing values as soft control yet aim to encourage cultural diversity	Collectivist values, exchange ideology and psychological contract preference (Thomas, Ravlin, Liao, Morrell and Au)
(5) Organizational values need to be adjusted, adapted, translated or matched to be successfully implemented in another cultural context	(5) Organizations aspire to be values-driven, yet values are hard to transfer and implement without transformation	Language, cultural intelligence, and in-patriate turnover intentions: leveraging values in multinational corporations through in-patriates (Froese, Kim and Eng)

<sup>a</sup> Organizational values include core values; although the two are not interchangeable, the streams of research display similar assumptions and findings

*through Inpatriates*, by Fabian Jintae Froese, Kwanghyun (Harry) Kim and Aileen Eng.

At the organizational level, shared organizational values can be achieved through socialization mechanisms and bring numerous organizational benefits, such as knowledge transfer and a reduction in employee turnover, especially when there is a fit between personal and organizational values. Grøgaard and Colman conducted an in-depth qualitative study of integration within one Norwegian multinational enterprise (MNE) across four countries. As reflected in our Paradox 1, Grøgaard and Colman argue that the dissemination and integration of organizational values in global organizations is a more difficult task than at first appears. Although it is accepted that corporate values may be communicated and passed on to subsidiary employees through various socialization mechanisms, there is little control over how these values are actually interpreted by employees. A highly interesting finding is that employees had stereotypical perceptions of the MNE's espoused values based on the local subsidiary context and the MNE home country culture, which they term

“interpretive frames” of socialization. In their case company, these interpretive frames render the idea of integrating subsidiaries through broad “global” corporate values difficult, as nationality plays a prominent role in both interpreting values and in perceptions of the parent organization. A main contribution of their findings with respect to progressing the body of research on espoused values is that we are forced to question the value of espoused values when organizations aim to instill a one-size-fits-all approach.

Teerikangas and Irrmann argue that leveraging values in organizations is a necessary precondition for leveraging culture, the focus of their study. The literature on mergers and acquisitions has focused on either integration or culture change, rather than the role of culture within the integration process. In addressing this gap and the paradox concerning the management of values through a top-down process (Paradox 2), Teerikangas and Irrmann consider post acquisition integration from the perspective of acquiring firms that seek a unified organizational culture. Their rich data set is comprised of 166 interviews carried out in eight cross-border acquisitions by four Finnish global organizations. Teerikangas and Irrman’s main contribution lies in examining the duality and progress of post-acquisition cultural change where they identify drivers, outcomes and directions of post-acquisition cultural change. They find that cultural change will occur even when no explicit integration efforts are undertaken. Importantly, they uncovered that there were dissonant understandings not only about the cultural integration strategy as such, but also whether there even was one being put into practice. Moreover firms that seek to align their acquired firms with their official espoused values have less success than those that allow the process to occur more naturally, based on communication and aligning organizational practices; in these firms, culture change has a more powerful and lasting impact as the organizations practice what they preach. Thus, how an organization “manages” its culture, employs a more “top-down process” or allows it to emerge, is key in leveraging values toward post-acquisition organizational success.

At the group level, the conceptual article by Jaeger, Kim, and Butt revisits several concepts in the debate about convergence versus divergence of global values and the more recent crossvergence view with implications for leveraging values in global organizations. We see connections between the authors’ idea that organizations must allow for the emergence and coexistence of different types of values in organizations and Paradox 3. On the one hand, national cultures help to shape organizational core values. On the other, so does the socialization of groups of employees within them. Jaeger and colleagues argue that managerial values are more inclined to change than are societal or cultural values. As such, whereas societal national culture can be used to categorize and distinguish groups or societies, managers within these societal groups have exposure to different contexts and socialization, shaping their managerial values. These managers may be categorized according to their similarities or differences on managerial ideology or values. The authors refer to the situation in which groups of managers share these values as “groupvergence”. In their article, they discuss the reasons that clusters of locally-minded and globally-minded manager groups emerge, their coexistence in multinational organizations and the means by which organizations can leverage the

values of global managerial clusters to their benefit. According to the authors, understanding groupvergence can help organizations enhance performance. In our view, Jaeger et al. additionally contribute to values research by identifying and conceptualizing how different groups of values within the organization contribute to shaping the cultural identities of individuals and organizations. Whether and how these values can be measured and groups delineated are a few considerations that may inspire future research.

Two articles consider individual-level values in global organizations and are linked to the fourth and fifth themes in our review. Thomas, Ravlin, Liao, Morrell and Au, consider the effect of individual level cultural values on employee perceptions of and preferences for the psychological contract in organizations. Specifically, the authors examine the psychological contract through the lens of collectivism. Thomas and colleagues have carried out two studies, one was an experiment and the other a scenario-based study, both innovative in nature. The first included Canadian and Chinese university students, and the second MBA students from the US and Hong Kong. Quantitative statistical analytical procedures were carried out to test the theoretically derived hypotheses. Among their findings is that a collectivist orientation is positively related to preferences for relational aspects of the psychological contract. It is through an experimental design in the first study that Thomas and colleagues identify that a collectivist orientation has an impact on fundamental beliefs about the nature of exchange. Their second study shows how a collectivist value orientation has an effect on preferences for the psychological contract through beliefs about social exchange. In this way the authors demonstrate a casual chain, taking us further than identifying separate cultural effects. A key contribution of this work is a furthering of our understanding about how organizations and employees engage with one another, as well as how values affect employee preferences for and beliefs about organizations and employment relationships. This points to the need for organizations to (re)consider the strength of individual cultural values in the desire to homogenize values (Paradox 4).

The final article by Froese, Kim and Eng delves into the role of international human resource management in the dissemination of organizational culture and values. We know that expatriates are a key resource for organizations in transferring knowledge, socialization and boundary spanning activities. However, much of the literature has focused on expatriates from the headquarter's perspective in transferring policies and practices to subsidiaries; we do not as yet know much about the use of inpatriates in transferring organizational culture or their role in facilitating values change. Froese, Kim and Eng depart from traditional perspectives by examining the relationship between corporate language and turnover intentions of inpatriates. Froese and colleagues performed hierarchical moderated linear regression analyses to test their theoretically derived hypotheses on the survey responses from inpatriates working in Korea-based MNCs. As inpatriates' perceptions of organizational level motivational cultural intelligence and English as a common corporate language are negatively related to turnover intentions, the authors argue that those organizations that demonstrate global values can be more attractive to employees and help integrate them across subsidiaries. Thus, this article highlights the importance of cultural carriers in transferring organizational values

(Paradox 5); the findings point to benefits of creating a strong corporate culture through the movement of individuals throughout the organization and stressing common “global” values.

## 5 Concluding Reflections

We trust that this focused issue will give readers an appreciation of the complexity of values research by providing a diverse set of frames for interpreting values. Some consider values as a global as well as context-specific phenomenon that influences and shapes managerial values. Others conceptualize organizational values and query whether espoused or emergent values can be leveraged in integrating firms within the global organization. Still others consider values as carried by individuals, shaping beliefs about the best way to manage and be managed.

In order to leverage, manage, or even cherish, differences in values, we need to understand them better. More recently contemporary organizations are moving away from the earlier notion that organizational culture is to be used to ‘glue’ the geographically dispersed units of multinational companies together, while managing, or effectively overriding national cultural differences. Instead, cultural diversity is to be embraced, multiculturalism viewed as an asset, and multicultural leadership implemented. However, we should not be blinded by the dimensional comparisons of national cultures and values quantifications that have dominated the cross-cultural management literature (cf. Guthey and Jackson 2011). These “Hofstedian”, “Schwartzian” and “Globean” comparisons are needed, and they are heavily used by many scholars and managers. But, and perhaps as a result, scholars tend to disregard the social processes surrounding culture and values formation in global organizations (cf. Gehman et al. 2013). We urge future research to more extensively explore the dynamic interaction between individuals, teams, organizations and societal influences, when studying values, including (often moderating) variables such as power, status, poverty, technology, religion and other important aspects of social life. In a recent review of decades of cultural research, Giorgi et al. (2015) recommend three future directions and considerations in particular: (a) changing organizations, including new ways of organizing—hybrid and permeable organizational boundaries; (b) changing societies, including the increasingly strong relationship between organizations and society; and (c) changing empirical measures, including methodological pluralism. We agree with these but also stress a need for more openness to tensions, paradoxes, processes, ambiguity and flux. More research is needed at the intersection of these multi-level developments that managers face in international business life. We see the articles in this issue as each making their own contribution to the themes we have identified, while collectively mapping the way for future scholarly contribution on values as an ever-evolving area of theory and practice.

**Acknowledgments** We would like to start by expressing our gratitude to Professor Elizabeth Rose for her support when this focused issue on *Leveraging values in global organizations* was initiated. Additionally, we thank her for helpful statistical reviews of the papers, and for providing the authors with



detailed suggestions and comments during the workshop. We are especially grateful to all the reviewers (names listed below) for their insightful and constructive comments on the papers submitted to this focused issue. Reviewers can never be thanked enough for taking the time to share their expertise and provide authors with developmental reviews. This work has greatly benefitted the authors and the guest editorial team of this focused issue. Thank you!.The process of bringing this focused issue to publication has been more prolonged than what any of the editors, or the authors envisioned at the onset of this endeavor. We therefore would like to express our appreciation to the authors and to the MIR Editors-in-Chief Professors Joachim Wolf and Michael-Jörg Oesterle, for their patience and supportive comments throughout the whole process. Additionally, we have a special note of thanks to Stefan Doetsch, assistant to the editorial office who took us through the last phase of the process, and to Sebastian Jilke, who took over from Stefan and helped us make it over the finishing line. We would like to thank Peter Edlund who helped organize the pre-publication workshop, the wonderful staff and premises at Sigtuna Folkhögskola in Sigtuna, Sweden, and the Department of Business Studies, Uppsala for support with materials. Finally, we are grateful to and would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Swedish Science Foundation (Vetenskapsrådet) for the workshop, which was funded together with Professor Lena Zander's research in the project: 'Culture in Global Organizations: A study of leadership, philosophies, and core values in companies' attempts to manage multiculturalism in the workplace'.

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Peter Zettinig

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