

From Introduction to Leading: The Creative Transformation of Organizational Behavior in Taiwan

Bor-Shiuan, Cheng

Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University

Organizational behavior (OB) research in Taiwan has been flourishing for over half a century. The article aims to illustrate the process of OB development in Taiwan from my experience—how did I elect the research approach under the circumstances of culturalism? These pathways include the etic introduction, cross-cultural comparison, indigenous psychology, globalized dialogue, and practical action approaches. The choice of approach depends on the context in which the individual is located.

In 1970s Taiwan, OB researchers mostly believed that the only way to modernize was to learn the latest knowledge from the United States (US) and Western Europe (WE). Therefore, we take the cultural neutrality position, believing that the principles of OB research should be universal and must be actively imitated. Subsequently, the etic approach has become the trend to transplant important OB concepts, theories and measurements directly. Because of Japan's outstanding economic outlook, the intervening effects of the cultural context have gradually become an inevitable concern, which motivated the OB researchers to adopt cultural relativism to examine the outcome of implementing western theories across various cultures—comparing the OB between Taiwan, US, and WE.

Nevertheless, since the cross-cultural research was developing based on western theories, the understanding of OB in Taiwan remained inadequate. Meanwhile, the perspectives of cultural psychology and cultural characteristic have caught more researchers' attention, coupled with the promotion of Taiwan's indigenous psychology movement, indigenous exploration began to be adopted. Throughout the long-term systematic research, we were dedicated to developing theories and collecting data to puzzle the insufficient understanding of OB research. Simultaneously, we positively engaged in the conversation to understand OB's East and Western perspectives. We also expected to integrate the OB concepts with cultural contexts.

Since the 21st century, the perspective of multicultural convergence has been highlighted as a gateway to opening up the globalized conversation. As a result, solving practical problems has become crucial for social science researchers by conducting systematic action research. That is, we solved the managerial problems based on constructing OB knowledge. Above, in turn, enhanced the theory's effectiveness, reliability, and feasibility.

As going through all the pathways, we learned that the full-cycle approach enables us to expand and innovate the OB knowledge and accomplish the missions as OB researchers — taking into account theoretical contribution and practical implications, hypothesis and evidence, as well as research and help. Ultimately, our study can potentially manage managerial issues, enhance well-being and facilitate the sustainable development of organizations.

Keywords: *action research, creative transformation, cross-cultural approach, indigenous approach, organizational behavior in Taiwan*

Extended Abstract

Organizational behavior research was introduced to Taiwan in the 1970s and has since undergone substantial development over the past five decades. It has not only gradually matured but also seen the emergence of various

innovative topics. To date, many research themes remain topics of ongoing discussion; however, the research trajectory has experienced numerous turning points, especially after the remarkable economic growth in East Asia. During this period, the cultural and contextual aspects have gained value. In terms of the process of modernization and its evolution, after World War II, most researchers believed that there was only a single path to modernization, where countries were expected to learn from Western nations. However, as Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea began to rise, the following questions emerged: Is there potential for alternative routes to modernization? Why does East Asia, with its distinct cultural context, continue to demonstrate exceptional economic performance? What might be the underlying reasons? Thus, it is necessary to incorporate culture and carefully determine the differences in organizational behavior across diverse cultures. In this article, I draw on my personal research experience spanning five decades. I examine the transition process, the underlying reasons, the problems encountered, and the outcomes of Taiwan's organizational behavior research journey. Furthermore, I share some personal reflections on the evolving landscape and challenges encountered during this transition process.

Organizational behavior originated from the field of behavioral science, drawing inspiration from European and American social psychologists' inquiries into motivations behind people's work. In the Hawthorne study (Mayo, 1949), researchers found that individuals work not only to meet instrumental economic needs but also to develop friendships, seek personal growth, realize their ideals, and obtain recognition. Thus, in addition to economic rewards, individual workers' needs for belonging, interpersonal development, group relationships, and group interactions should be considered. This led to the development of group dynamics and the science of leadership. Furthermore, with the introduction of the concept of "system," organizations began to be considered as a system including personnel, objects, society, technology, and information. This conceptual advancement elevated the study of organizational behavior to a more comprehensive level, involving both

micro and macro perspectives (Wren, 1987).

The 1970s marked the period during which I pursued my studies at universities and research institutions. During this period, some researchers highlighted the contingent nature of organizational behavior and management in Taiwan, as the country was still in the stage of knowledge introduction. Most researchers tend to adopt a culturally neutral perspective, believing that Western organizational behavior should be universally accepted and actively emulated. However, the economic success of Japan prompted many people to question why a nation with such a distinct culture could achieve such remarkable success. What factors underlie this achievement? Under the influence of the Japanese experience, Taiwanese researchers have also embarked on a profound exploration of the connotation of Chinese culture with East Asian characteristics. How does it differ from Western culture? What limitations might Western concepts of organizational behavior face when applied to Taiwan? Thus, in the 1980s, Taiwanese researchers in the field of organizational behavior began to adopt the standpoint of cultural relativism. They compared whether organizational behavior in Taiwan differed from that in the United States or Western Europe, thus marking the beginning of cross-cultural comparative research.

As cultural typology theory gained more support, there was an increasing emphasis on localization research to highlight the cultural characteristics of various regions. This approach was considered crucial to understanding how culture affects actions and to gaining deeper insights into local organizational psychology and behavior. In other words, the rise of cultural psychology and the standpoint of respecting multiculturalism indicated the importance of constructing effective organizational behavior patterns tailored to the uniqueness of local cultures, given the diversity of cultural types worldwide.

In summary, according to my previous research experience, Taiwan's organizational behavior research over the past 50 years has followed a distinct trajectory. First, it actively introduced relevant knowledge for translation, transplantation, and imitation. Subsequently, culture and context were considered. Finally, a cross-cultural route was opened. With the growing emphasis

on the indigenization of social sciences, Taiwan's organizational behavior research began to move toward a prospecting phase centered around localization. This phase involved the development of theoretical models and empirical research with a focus on revising and refining theories. After the completion of the construction of theoretical models, the field is now moving toward a globalization route, aiming to foster integration with local theories in Western or other societies through dialogue. This can lead to the establishment of a universal theory that includes culture and context.

Conclusion

Drawing on personal experiences, this article provides insights into the development of organizational behavior research in Taiwan over the past 50 years and the turning point of the research route. In the early days, primary research involved only the introduction of essential concepts and theories, followed by empirical investigations to examine the applicability of Western theories in the Taiwanese context. These studies revealed that some theories do not work. Therefore, I imitated the specific process of the development of Western theories and re-examined the construction of related constructs. This examination indicated similarities between some constructs in China and the West but also highlighted notable disparities. These differences are related to contextual variations. Cross-cultural comparative research has been conducted based on the perspective of cultural typology. However, this approach can only examine differences in the application of Western concepts of organizational behavior and cannot determine the actual role of local culture in organizational behavior. Therefore, guided by the principles of cultural and local psychology, studies on Chinese local organizational behavior were conducted. This research is characterized by innovative conceptualization and theory construction, leading to a series of discussions that have yielded valuable insights. Furthermore, to engage in global dialogue, we aim to foster creative transformation through the mixing and blending of cultures. In addition, we have followed the practice of action research, considering theory and

practice, imagination and evidence, and academic pursuits with a focus on helping others. This approach allows organizational behavior to truly solve the organizational and management problems faced by local and other human societies.

During this process, the backdrop of a backward society plays an important role. Before its rapid economic growth, Taiwan lacked the concept of organizational behavior, and rigorous research in this field was limited. Therefore, it could only introduce relevant ideas through the translation of books and papers, followed by conducting replication research. Simultaneously, it adopted well-developed and reliable Western measurement tools to collect local data to verify relevant theories and models. Although this approach is not conducive to the growth of professional knowledge, it offers an opportunity for backward countries to introduce and learn new knowledge. As more studies of this nature were conducted, it became evident that the external validity or analogy effect of theories is generally limited. To identify possible interference factors, it became essential to consider the situational conditions of organizations and modify the theoretical models accordingly. However, the contribution of this approach to innovation remains limited. Therefore, only the prophets advocated for the inclusion of cultural values and strove to promote the localization movement, expecting to create new research paths, break through existing thinking patterns, create new constructs of organizational behavior, and establish new theories. This led to the proposition of paternalistic leadership, which emerged as a new leadership theory. Although the classical Western literature suggested that corporate managers need to demonstrate authority and nurturing behaviors to build a productive and satisfying work group, the patriarchal system, rooted in tradition, remained a significant factor. Traditional domination still persists and has not disappeared. However, Western researchers have deliberately ignored or dismissed it. Therefore, the proposal of paternalistic leadership can supplement the deficiencies of leadership or governance theory (Gelfand et al., 2007).

The process of delving into leadership can provide several crucial insights, including the nature of academic

research, the creation and verification of new concepts, the reflection of academic systems, and the consideration of culture and context. However, the pursuit of knowledge and truth is invaluable for researchers. In this endeavor, the creation and verification of new concepts is an important process of knowledge seeking and testing. This includes the creation of new concepts, the construction of theories, and their acceptance by the academic community, giving them legitimacy. Furthermore, with the establishment of consistent standards, these concepts have gradually matured. This has led researchers to narrow their focus and the direction of their exploration.

In essence, academic research and concept creation signify the pursuit of knowledge for its value and innovation, driven by a deep sense of intrinsic motivation. However, because the academic system of a backward society is not adequately sound or is limited by political correctness, researchers may find themselves unable to operate as freely as they desire (Mintzberg, 2005). Therefore, the system also needs to be improved. For example, researchers should be encouraged to conduct localized research that can solve local problems or at least strike a balance between the verification of foreign theories and localized research, instead of following Western trends and mainstream research directions. Researchers should be empowered to work according to their own ideas and choose a more creative approach. Researchers should continuously learn new research methods and even understand the philosophical implications of various methods. In addition, they must be proficient in various theories within their field and understand the history of theoretical development and contextual factors shaping these theories over time and space. Subsequently, they should use real-world

phenomena to gain deeper insight into the organizational context and master key issues for long-term serial discussions based on changes in local or global time-space backgrounds (Hambrick, 2007).

Under this premise, because the situation and background of different periods have played an important role in influencing research, it is imperative to determine the impact of the current global background on research. Macro-organizational behavior researchers, such as Beck and Giddens, have argued that the contemporary world is in the context of a global risk society because globalization leads to free market capitalism or the vigorous development of extreme crony capitalism (Henderson, 2020). This shift has resulted in not only the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and the rise of geopolitics but also sudden changes in global climate, ecological disturbances, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the proliferation of digital technology. These factors have given rise to the so-called “organized irresponsibility” or “organized immaturity” phenomenon. Therefore, the roles of workers in organizations are evolving, expanding into various hybrid roles such as digital personas, virtual entities, Internet personalities, global collaborators, and ecological agents. Not only have the roles of people within organizations become more diverse but their quality of life is also declining (Guest et al., 2022). Thus, the study of organizational behavior and its research approaches are becoming increasingly complex. These problems warrant an extensive investigation by latecomers to this field. They must delve into these issues, offering solutions and insights that can make organizations more humane and the ecological environment healthier.