

**THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE AND LIFE STAGE  
ON WORKPLACE STRATEGIES OF UPWARD INFLUENCE:  
A COMPARISON OF THAILAND AND THE UNITED STATES**

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**Abstract**

A comparison of the influence style ethics in Thailand and the U.S. for managers in two life stage (age) groups, early adulthood and middle adulthood is presented. Our findings confirm that Eastern and Western cultures emphasize different influence styles. Our findings also indicate that life stage is as important as culture, and possibly *more* important than culture, in explaining the ethical perceptions of upward influence behavior. An implication is that cross-cultural comparison studies should take into consideration key non-culture factors, such as life stage, to fully explore the set of issues that determine influence behaviors in organizations.

Global business is growing faster today than at any point in time in the past. Managers possessing the competencies to understand and to work effectively with others from different cultures are also becoming increasingly important (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra & Yu 1997; Stonham & Bartlett 1992; Tung & Miller 1990). Specifically, one aspect of a multinational organization's effectiveness is the quality of work relationships between superiors and subordinates who come from different cultures (Ralston, Terpstra, Cunniff & Gustafson 1995; Vaught & Abraham 1992). Similarly, cultures, such as the U.S., that are experiencing increased workforce diversity are also finding work effectiveness is influenced by relationships between superiors and subordinates who have different cultural heritages (Ettorre 1993; Muller & Haase 1994; Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen 1993).

As the business world evolves from a nation-state focus to a global focus, managers who are proficient at understanding cultural differences should be more effective in exercising influence in culturally mixed situations. Research on how culture affects individuals' choices of upward influence strategies has been limited (Chacko 1990; Cheng 1983; Chow 1989; Egri, Ralston, Murray & Nicholson, 2000; Fu & Yukl 2000; Ralston, Giacalone & Terpstra 1994; Ralston, Gustafson, Mainiero & Umstot 1993; Schermerhorn & Bond 1991). Nonetheless, the existing research suggests that there are significant cultural differences in the influence strategies that subordinates enact (Ralston et al. 1993, 1994; Schermerhorn & Bond 1991). Egri et al. (2000) provides a current and comprehensive summary of this literature, while Terpstra-Tong and Ralston (2002) provide a conceptual model for understanding the interpersonal upward influence process, including the importance of integrating demographics, such as age, into empirical analyses.

This study provides a first step in the investigation of the interaction of age and culture on the upward influence ethics of managers. The primary goal of this study is to ascertain the

interrelationship between life stage (age) and culture on the influence strategies employed by managers in order to identify compatibilities (or incompatibilities) in influence styles among age-culture groups. To put the cross-culturally untested life stage hypothesis to a rigorous test, we examine the cultural and age-related differences in subordinates' choices of influence strategies that affect relationships between superiors and subordinates in Thailand and the U.S. Previous influence research has shown that there are significant culture differences between Eastern and Western cultures in regards to upward influence ethical preferences (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Ralston et al, 1995; Terpstra, Ralston & Jesuino, 2002). These culture groups provide a challenge to the proposition that age and culture are salient influences in understanding behavior in organizations. Compared with other Asian countries, such as Japan and China, there has been relatively less contact between the U.S. and Thailand. Thus, our selection of Thailand as the Eastern comparison point with the U.S. provides a clearer empirical test of influence strategies in two distinctly different cultures. In addition, Thailand has been an understudied country, in spite of its current growing economic presence in the region. It is ranked second among the ten ASEAN countries, with a national GDP of US\$71 billion (Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board, 2003).

In the remainder of this paper, we present an overview of the upward influence and life stage literatures, followed by a brief discussion of the Strategy of Upward Influence dimensions which are the dependent measures in this study. Based upon this discussion of the literature and the study dimensions, we develop sets of cross-cultural and life-stage hypotheses. We conclude the paper with a discussion of our results regarding the level of importance of life-stage to the cross-cultural research literature, including the implications of this study's findings for managerial practice, as well as for future research.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF UPWARD INFLUENCE AND LIFE-STAGE RESEARCH**

### **Upward Influence and Perspectives on Its Assessment**

An important aspect of a manager's effectiveness is his/her ability to influence others within the organization (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick & Mayes 1979; Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson 1980; Mayes & Allen 1977; Schreisheim & Hinkin 1990; Yukl & Falbe 1990; Yukl & Tracey 1992). Influence has been defined as the informal process by which one person affects the behavior of another (Organ & Bateman 1990). It differs from formal organizational power that involves the hierarchical authority to control the behaviors of others. Managers may often need or wish to influence people who are higher (rather than lower) in the organizational hierarchy. Their ability to develop and use effective upward influence strategies is critical (Ansari & Kapoor 1987; Kipnis & Schmidt 1988; Mowday 1978; Porter, Allen & Angle 1981; Schilit & Locke 1982; Tandon, Ansari & Kapoor 1991). Research has shown that subordinates who effectively use influence strategies can secure desired outcomes and resources from their superiors (Deluga & Perry 1991). Therefore, the way in which managers use upward influence strategies with their superiors may be crucial to their personal success in the organization. From an organizational perspective, the appropriate use of influence in superior-subordinate relationships may also contribute to the effectiveness of the firm in that the ability of superiors and subordinates to effectively function together enhances organizational performance. While research interest in upward influence strategies has intensified over the past few decades, there has been an evolution of views as to how this phenomenon should be studied.

The investigation of upward influence began with an approach that we describe as a tactics perspective. Over time, the investigation of upward influence has progressed into a meta-category perspective. In the following paragraphs, we provide a synopsis of this evolution of research on

upward influence, followed by a review of the literature germane to cross-cultural investigation.

**The Tactics Perspective.** Empirical interest in upward influence in organizations heightened considerably approximately twenty-five years ago when Kipnis et al. (1980) inductively developed a list of influence tactics. Based on U.S. data, the tactic categories identified as relevant to upward influence were: reason (or rational persuasion), friendliness (or ingratiation), assertiveness, bargaining (or exchange), higher authority, and coalition. Subsequent upward influence tactics research has identified additional tactics such as adherence to rules and manipulation (Schilit & Locke, 1982), inspirational appeals and consultation (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), and legitimating (Yukl & Tracey, 1992).

The Kipnis et al. framework (e.g., Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1990) was used to develop measures of the type of influence strategies or tactics used by subordinates in the U.S. (e.g., Chacko, 1990; Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor & Goodman, 1997; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Mowday, 1978; Ralston 1985; Ringer & Boss, 2000; Schilit & Locke, 1982; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe 1990; Yukl & Tracey 1992). Although there has been some consistency of tactics categories across these studies, there has not been unanimous agreement on a specific set of categories.

**The Meta-Category Perspective.** Subsequent to their groundbreaking influence tactics work, Kipnis and his colleagues grouped the tactics into three meta-categories that later became known as *hard*, *soft*, and *rational* strategies (Kipnis, 1984; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). Hard tactics are those that involve both position power and coercive tactics, such as blocking or blackmail. Soft tactics involve the use of personal power and power sharing, such as ingratiation, upward appeals, and consultation. Rational tactics refer to the use of logic and rational bargaining in a non-emotional way, such as using rational persuasion and exchange (Farmer et al., 1997; Kipnis &

Schmidt, 1988; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). The meta-category perspective has been empirically validated by other influence researchers (Egri et al., 2000; Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Farmer et al., 1997; Ralston & Pearson, 2003; Sun & Bond, 2000).

**The Cross-Cultural Aspects of Upward Influence.** It was nearly a decade after Kipnis et al. (1980) first stirred the curiosity of researchers to empirically explore upward influence issues that this subject was studied from a cross-cultural perspective (Terpstra-Tong & Ralston, 2002). Cross-cultural investigations of upward influence tactics have focused on U.S. and Japanese female executives (Suzuki & Narapareddy, 1988), U.S. and Hong Kong participants (Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991), Chinese managers in Taiwan (Schmidt & Yeh, 1992), and Chinese and U.S. managers (Fu & Yukl, 2000). There has been relatively more cross-cultural research that has taken a meta-dimensions approach to upward influence strategies (Egri et al., 2000; Ralston et al., 1993, 1994, 1995, 2001; Ralston & Pearson, 2003; Terpstra et al., 2002). These studies have consistently shown significant societal differences in the influence strategies initiated by subordinates. Egri et al. (2000) found that the meta-dimensions approach appears to be more reliable than the tactics dimensions approach in cross-cultural research. Further, Ralston and Pearson's (2003) study of upward influence in 24 countries identified an influence-ethics hierarchy that consists of three meta-dimensions: organizationally beneficial behavior, self-indulgent behavior that focuses on the individual's level of self-interest, and destructive behavior.

### **Life Stage and Personal Values**

The life stage model proposes that there is a universal sequence of human development throughout the human life cycle. Each life stage is distinctive in terms of its cognitive, emotional and behavioral experiences. Over the course of one's life, there is a widening of concern from one's physiological and security needs (childhood); to personal identity and independence

(adolescence); to one's success in relationships -- both business and personal (young adulthood); then to caring for others and societal interests (middle adulthood); and finally, to spiritual wisdom about the meaning and contribution of one's life (late adulthood) (Erikson, 1968, 1997; Giele, 1980; Hudson, 1991; Levinson, 1980; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976; Settersten & Mayer, 1997; Stevens-Long, 1990).

Childhood and adolescence (0-19 years) is a period of biological, psychological and social growth and learning of the values and competencies necessary for being a responsible and independent adult. While important, this stage is not relevant for our study of managerial influence behavior in organizations. Late adulthood (60 years and older) is a period of stewardship, mentoring and passing on values to younger generations as one contemplates the meaning and contribution of one's life. While also an important life stage, late adulthood is likewise not particularly relevant to this business-based study as this is a period during which individuals retire from their formal work roles.

The two life stages that are most relevant in terms of the business careers in organizations are early adulthood (20-39 years) and middle adulthood (40-59 years) (Erikson 1997). The early adulthood stage is one of experimenting and making important decisions about career, life style, and personal relationships. Critical developmental tasks involve developing the capacity for love and intimacy as well as learning how to be a self-sufficient adult. Middle adulthood is a period of personal mastery and assuming leadership in family, work, and community social systems. One major theme of middle adulthood is caring for others and being a stable, responsible, compassionate and productive member of society. For many, the transition into middle adulthood involves re-evaluating earlier life choices and either recommitting to these or creating a new life structure that better meets one's values and needs.

Although Erikson (1968) proposed that these life stages are universal, research on age, aging, and the life course have been primarily conducted in Western societies. Cross-cultural research on age structuring suggests that “chronological age has the strongest salience in communities that are part of modern, industrialized societies” (Settersten & Mayer, 1997: 237). In support, Pan, Chaffee, Chu and Ju (1994) found that older Chinese and American participants had more traditional social orientations (collectivism and conservatism), and that they were less supportive of egalitarian (individualism) and Confucian (including *guanxi*, the use of connections to solve problems) values than their younger counterparts. Egri and Ralston (2004) found that Chinese and American youths had more values commonality than did Chinese youth and Chinese elders. Other cross-cultural studies, however, have not found significant age-related differences in the importance of managers and employees’ personal and work-related values (Bigoness & Blakely, 1996; Smith, Dugan & Trompenaars, 1996). To date, we have not been able to identify any study that has examined life stage theory, whether single-country or cross-culturally, in the context of the ethics of influence behavior in organizations. Thus, one contribution of this research is that it helps us to assess whether behavior that epitomizes one’s ethical values is influenced by life stage across diverse cultures.

### **MEASURE OF UPWARD INFLUENCE**

In this study, we used the Strategies of Upward Influence [SUI] measure to assess managerial upward influence strategies. The SUI consists of three dimensions that create a hierarchy of ethical influence behaviors: organizationally beneficial behaviors, self-indulgent behaviors, and destructive behaviors (Egri et al., 2000). These dimensions serve as the basis for our hypotheses regarding upward influence in organizations.

**Organizationally Beneficial Behaviors.** These are the standard prescribed and sanctioned

behaviors for employees in organizations. They may be viewed as the “*organizational person*” approach to upward influence because these behaviors tend to be directly beneficial to the organization. Organizationally beneficial behaviors include working hard, volunteering, mentoring, developing good working relationships, getting the job done, and working overtime.

**Self-indulgent Behaviors.** These behaviors are self-serving for the individual within the organization. They epitomize the “*it’s me first*” approach in that these behaviors show self-interest being above the interests of others or the organization. Whether they help or harm the organization is subject to interpretation and may be determined by the situation. Self-indulgent behaviors include supporting the views of important people, blaming others for mistakes, taking credit for others’ work, and impression management.

**Destructive Behaviors.** These are extreme self-serving behaviors that directly hurt others, and often times, the organization. In many industrialized societies, these behaviors are illegal. They may be described as a coercive approach to gain influence because of the harm these behaviors can bring to others and the organization, and might be labeled as “*burn, pillage and plunder*” strategies. Destructive behaviors include blackmailing a co-worker, stealing documents, using listening devices, and hiring a criminal to hurt someone.

## **HYPOTHESES**

### **Country Culture Hypotheses**

The primary challenge facing the development of country or culture-based hypotheses is the limited cross-cultural research on upward influence (Terpstra-Tong & Ralston, 2002). The dearth of research is particularly true for Thailand. The theoretical bases for our hypotheses are primarily based on previous cross-cultural research on values (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Inglehart, 1997; Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Schwartz, 1999). Ronen and Shenkar (1985) identified eight value-based

country clusters that were arranged along a continuum of cultural difference. Ronen and Shenkar's model shows that the Far East (including Thailand) and Anglo (including U.S.) country clusters are diametrically opposed to one another and thus represent very different cultures in terms of values and behaviors. More recent cross-cultural research has confirmed the contrasting profiles of the Far East and Anglo country clusters that reflect their diverse values (Schwartz, 1999). We used three of Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) culture dimensions—power distance, individualism-collectivism, and gender role orientation (formerly, masculinity-femininity)—to develop our culture-based hypotheses regarding upward influence<sup>1</sup>.

Power distance relates to societal norms regarding the distribution of power. In large power distance cultures (such as Thailand), there is more acceptance of an unequal distribution of power and privileges within hierarchical organizational systems. This is characterized by a high concentration of formal authority and centralization of decision-making at top levels. The disparity in status and compensation levels in hierarchical systems necessitates that lower level managers in large power distance cultures would need to seek more circuitous routes of influence in order to achieve personal goals and objectives (Davis & Ruhe, 2003). In contrast, formal authority and decision making power is decentralized in flatter organizational structures in small power distance cultures (such as the U.S.) which emphasize the importance of equality, cooperation, and trust in participatory social systems (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). As a result, there is more consultative and participative management among organizational members which engenders open discussion and sharing of ideas between superior and subordinate managerial levels.

Previous cross-cultural research has found that power distance is positively related to the acceptability and use of coercive influence strategies (Egri et al., 2000; Morris & Pavett, 1992; Ralston et al., 1994, 1995, 2001; Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991), unethical decision making

(Christie, Kwon, Stoeberl & Baumhart, 2003; Getz & Volkema, 2001; Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993) as well as perceived corruption (Husted, 1999). The use of organizationally beneficial influence strategies would be expected to be more consistent with the open power-sharing norms of low power distance cultures (e.g., the U.S.). Conversely, destructive influence strategies are more consistent with the need for the more circuitous (subversive) means of influence required in high power distance cultures (e.g., Thailand). The impact of power distance on self-indulgent behavior is not addressed in the research literature. However, to be a subordinate perceived as self-indulgent would appear to be less tolerated in a high power distance Asian culture, such as Thailand, than in a low power distance culture, such as the U.S. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1a.** *In a high power distance culture (Thailand), **Organizationally Beneficial Behavior** is less acceptable than in a low power distance culture (the U.S.).*
- H1b.** *In a high power distance culture (Thailand), **Self-Indulgent Behavior** is less acceptable than in a low power distance culture (the U.S.).*
- H1c.** *In a high power distance culture (Thailand), **Destructive Behavior** is more acceptable than in a low power distance culture (the U.S.).*

The individualism-collectivism value dimension is concerned with norms regarding individual versus group obligations and relationships (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In individualistic cultures, individual self-interests supersede those of the group, and organizational members have instrumental and calculative relationships with the organization and its members. In collectivistic cultures, the interests of one's in-group are emphasized in reciprocal organizational relationships in which favoritism and nepotism are often used to ensure loyalty and commitment (Husted, 1999; Jackson, 2001). As identified by Triandis (1995), there are in-groups and out-groups in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures with the primary distinction being that the in-group—out-group contrast is greater in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. Perhaps more

importantly, Triandis (1995) also found a unique feature of individualistic cultures is the like-group phenomenon. The like-group might be described as a temporary in-group based on need such as the necessity to work together on a project. It follows that in like-group situations, greater emphasis would be placed on cooperation and teamwork than in out-group situations. However, if one's company is viewed as the in-group, as is the case in some collectivistic cultures, then the converse argument would be the more logical because the company and its members would then be the primary concern of the collective. Thus, membership of the in-group, not societal level of collectivism, may be the better predictor of behavior.

While the self-interested aspect of individualism suggests that self-indulgent and destructive influence strategies are relatively more acceptable in high individualism cultures, there is conflicting empirical evidence regarding the influence of individualism/collectivism values on the acceptability of soft and hard influence tactics. For example, soft, relationship-oriented upward influence strategies are more acceptable in individualistic cultures (Kennedy, Fu & Yukl, 2003; Ralston et al., 2001) as well as in collectivistic cultures (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Fu, Kennedy, Tata, Yukl & Bond, 2001). While some studies have found hard, assertive influence strategies to be more acceptable in individualistic cultures (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998; Lu, Rose, & Blodgett, 1999), other studies have found these types of influence strategies to be more acceptable in collectivistic cultures (Fu et al., 2001; Ralston et al., 2001).

In sum, the previous empirical research is contradictory or ambivalent at best, regarding the impact of individualism-collectivism values on upward influence ethics behavior. The classic Hofstede definition of individualism-collectivism would suggest that collectivistic societies embrace working together while individualistic societies are self-oriented. Therefore, organizationally beneficial behavior would be more aligned with the collectivistic philosophy,

while self-indulgent and destructive behavior would be more aligned with the individualistic philosophy (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H2a.** *In a collectivistic culture (Thailand), **Organizationally Beneficial Behavior** is more acceptable than in an individualistic culture (the U.S.).*
- H2b.** *In a collectivistic culture (Thailand), **Self-Indulgent Behavior** is less acceptable than in an individualistic culture (the U.S.).*
- H2c.** *In a collectivistic culture (Thailand), **Destructive Behavior** is less acceptable than in an individualistic culture (the U.S.).*

Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) gender role orientation dimension relates to societal goals and the appropriate means for their attainment. In masculine societies, the primary concern is with material success that is attained through assertiveness and a competitive lack of concern for others. In feminine societies, the primary concern is with the nonmaterial quality of life that is enhanced through the development of cooperative and egalitarian interpersonal relationships. Given the collaborative nature of organizationally beneficial influence strategies, we would expect these to be viewed as more acceptable in feminine cultures (e.g., Thailand) than in masculine cultures (e.g., U.S.). Alternatively, we would expect that self-indulgent and destructive influence strategies would be viewed as more acceptable in masculine cultures than in feminine cultures. These expectations are consistent with previous cross-cultural research that has found a positive relationship between cultural masculinity and corruption (Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Husted, 1999). Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H3a.** *In a feminine culture (Thailand), **Organizationally Beneficial Behavior** is more acceptable than in a masculine culture (the U.S.).*
- H3b.** *In a feminine culture (Thailand), **Self-Indulgent Behavior** is less acceptable than in a masculine culture (the U.S.).*
- H3c.** *In a feminine culture (Thailand), **Destructive Behavior** is less acceptable than in an individualistic culture (the U.S.).*

### **Life Stage (Age) Hypotheses**

Neugarten and Hagestad (1976) identified that chronological age may not be synonymous with biological, social or psychological age, it is a practical index that is universally used. Previous studies suggest that as persons grow older, they become less individualistic and more conservative. Given that adult development is viewed as a gradual process (Stevens-Long, 1990), we would also expect that the relationship between age and the importance attributed to various values and resultant behaviors (e.g., influence style) would be basically linear. With younger adulthood epitomized as learning to be self-sufficient and striving to scale the corporate ladder faster than their co-workers, we expect that younger managers view the more aggressive and more self-serving influence behaviors (self-indulgent and destructive) as more acceptable than do older, middle adulthood managers. In that middle adulthood is associated with being a responsible and productive member of society, we expect these older managers would view organizationally beneficial behaviors as being more acceptable than would the young adulthood managers.

- H4a.** *For the **Organizationally Beneficial Behavior** dimension, older managers will score higher than younger managers.*
- H4b.** *For the **Self-indulgent Behavior** dimension, younger managers will score higher than older managers.*
- H4c.** *For the **Destructive Behavior** dimension, younger managers will score higher than older managers.*

## **METHOD**

### **Subjects**

The 501 participants in this study were managers and professionals from the U.S. and Thailand. Data were collected in the U.S. using a nation-wide mail survey, and the Thailand data were collected at the beginning of seminars on local business issues held at a university in Bangkok. It should be noted that the two data collections employed different methodologies, but share two very

important commonalities. Both were voluntary and both were anonymous. In a mail survey, voluntarism and anonymity are reasonably easy to insure. To insure the same in the Thai data collection, seminar participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to not turn in their questionnaire or to turn it in blank. They were also told that when finished, they should put their questionnaire in the provided envelope and deposit it in a box near the door and away from the survey administrator. Furthermore, Thai participants were told that if they had concerns about their anonymity, they were welcome to put their questionnaire somewhere in the middle of the pile of questionnaires in the box. The response rate for the U.S. sample was 18%, for a total of 247 responses to the 1,379 surveys that were mailed and not returned as undeliverable. The response rate in Thailand was 95%, with 254 respondents of the 267 seminar participants.

Although the life stage research proposes the ages of 20 to 39 for young adulthood and 40 to 60 for middle adulthood (Erikson, 1997), we followed a reviewer's suggestion to develop age groups based upon the mean age (38.7 years) and standard deviation (10.2 years) of our sample. Using a 1.5 standard deviation width for age groups, the young adulthood group was 23 to 38 years of age and the middle adulthood group was 39-54 years of age. For the Thai sample, there were 154 participants in the 23-38 age group, and 100 participants in the 39-54 age group. For the U.S. sample, there were 121 participants in the 23-38 age group, and 126 participants in the 39-54 age group.

As shown in Table 1, the demographic differences of participants between these cultures were not substantial. Nonetheless, all demographics were included as covariates in analyses to determine if any demographic characteristic had a significant effect on the three influence behavior dimensions.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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### **Instrument and Procedures**

Participants' views on influence ethics were assessed using the Strategies of Upward Influence [SUI] instrument. The SUI consists of 38 short scenario items. Each item was measured on an 8-point Likert-type scale, where the value 8 indicated that an item was extremely acceptable for co-workers to use as a means of influencing a superior, and the value 1 indicated that an item was extremely unacceptable. Thus, the higher the score, the greater is the acceptability of a type of influence behavior.

Participants were instructed that there were no right or wrong answers, and that it was their perceptions that were important. They were asked to indicate the acceptability of co-workers engaging in the behavior described in each of the 38 scenario items as a means of influencing a superior. We asked participants to indicate the acceptability of co-workers using these tactics, rather than reporting on activities in which they personally engaged, to encourage participants to be more willing to respond honestly. This approach has been found to reduce the possibility of participants "faking" desirable responses in studies that deal with sensitive information, such as upward influence attempts (Anastasi, 1982).

### **Design Issues Unique to Cross-Cultural Research**

In most cross-cultural research, there are at least three unique methodological issues that need to be addressed: translation; cultural response bias; and cross-cultural equivalence of dimensions. First, regarding translation, the Strategies of Upward Influence instrument was translated from English into Thai using the standard translation procedure of one individual translating the questionnaire. Then, a second individual back-translated the questionnaire into English, with the two translators

resolving any translation differences.

Second, regarding cultural differences in response patterns to questionnaire scales when administered in different cultures (Leung & Bond, 1989; Ralston, Cunniff & Gustafson, 1995; Smith et al., 1996), participants' item responses were standardized. Since respondents in some cultures tend to use all response options (e.g., Anglo), while respondents in other cultures (e.g., Asian) tend to eschew the extremes and use mostly the middle of the scale, this was an important issue to address in our study. Thus, prior to conducting hypothesis-testing analyses, participants' scores for each influence dimension were converted to culturally standardized scores (Leung & Bond, 1989; Smith, Peterson & Schwartz, 2002). Within each culture, the overall means and standard deviations for the 38 Strategies of Upward Influence items were calculated. Then, participants' scores for each item were converted to standardized scores using the following equation:  $SS_{(i,j)} = [S_{(i)} - \mu_{(j)}] / \sigma_{(j)}$  where,  $SS_{(i,j)}$  = the subject's standard score for item  $i$  in culture  $j$ ,  $S_{(i)}$  = subject's self-reported score for item  $i$ ,  $\mu_{(j)}$  = overall mean of all 38 SUI item scores for culture  $j$ , and comparably  $\sigma_{(j)}$  = overall standard deviation of SUI item scores for culture  $j$ . The resulting culturally standardized score represents the relative acceptability of an influence strategy for participants within a culture.

Third, concerning the reliability of dimension constructs across cultures, we calculated scale reliabilities (Cronbach alphas) for the three influence dimensions for each of the four culture-age groups. To be retained in an analysis, a group's Cronbach alpha for a particular dimension needed to be greater than .60, a generally accepted level in multi-country studies (Fu & Yukl, 2000). For the three SUI dimensions, the ranges of Cronbach alphas for the four culture-age groups were the following: organizationally beneficial behaviors ( $\alpha = .66$  to  $.77$ , 11 items); self-indulgent behaviors ( $\alpha = .73$  to  $.78$ , 16 items); and destructive behaviors ( $\alpha = .82$  to  $.91$ , 8 items). These scale

reliabilities were comparable to those obtained in other cross-cultural studies of influence tactics (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Ralston et al., 1995).

### **Analysis**

To test our hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with the three influence dimensions as the dependent variables; national culture (Thailand and U.S.), and age group (23-38 years old and 39-54 years old) as the independent variables; and the five demographic variables (gender, years worked, position level, organization size, and industry) entered as covariates. Duncan multiple comparison tests were conducted for any dimensions found to be significant in the MANCOVA (Kirk, 1982).

## **RESULTS**

In the MANCOVA, country (Wilks'  $\lambda = .91$ ,  $F = 13.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and age group (Wilks'  $\lambda = .96$ ,  $F = 5.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significant variables. In addition, gender (Wilks'  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F = 3.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and position level (Wilks'  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F = 2.61$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant covariates. The results of the MANCOVA are presented in Table 2, while the means, standard deviations and results of the Duncan multiple comparison tests are presented in Table 3.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

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### **Culture Hypotheses**

Organizationally beneficial behaviors were hypothesized to be relatively more acceptable in low power distance (Hypothesis 1a), collectivistic (Hypothesis 2a), and feminine (Hypothesis 3a) cultures. The finding that U.S. managers scored significantly higher than Thai managers in respect to the relative acceptability of organizationally beneficial behaviors ( $F = 36.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is consistent with Hypothesis 1a, but not with Hypotheses 2a and 3a. Thus, the organizationally

beneficial behavior findings only minimally support these hypotheses.

Self-indulgent behaviors were hypothesized to be relatively more acceptable in low power distance (Hypothesis 1b), individualistic (Hypothesis 2b), and masculine (Hypothesis 3b) cultures. The finding that U.S. managers scored lower than Thai managers for self-indulgent behaviors ( $F = 11.77, p < .001$ ) is not consistent with any of the hypotheses. Therefore, the self-indulgent behavior findings do not support these hypotheses.

Destructive behaviors were hypothesized to be relatively more acceptable in high power distance (Hypothesis 1c), individualistic (Hypothesis 2c), and masculine (Hypothesis 3c) cultures. However, there was no significant country difference in respect to destructive behaviors ( $F = 1.61$ ). Thus, the destructive behavior findings do not support these hypotheses.

In sum, the results indicate that cultural power distance appears to be predictive of the relative acceptability of only organizationally beneficial influence strategies, but that individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity are not predictive of any of the upward influence dimensions.

### **Life-Stage Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 4a proposed that older managers would have higher organizationally beneficial behavior dimension scores than younger managers. There was no significant effect for age group ( $F = 1.53$ ). Post hoc group comparisons showed no significant age group difference for U.S. managers. Older Thai managers scored significantly lower than younger Thai managers who had similar organizationally beneficial scores to U.S. managers. In sum, Hypothesis 4a (organizationally beneficial behaviors) was not supported.

Hypothesis 4b was fully supported. Younger U.S. and Thai managers had significantly higher self-indulgent behavior scores than older U.S. and Thai managers ( $F = 10.07, p < .01$ ). Likewise,

Hypothesis 4c was fully supported since the young U.S. and Thai managers had significantly higher destructive behavior scores than their older counterparts ( $F = 8.23, p < .05$ ). It is also noteworthy that for both the self-indulgent and destructive behavior dimensions, younger Thai and U.S. managers had similar scores as did older Thai and U.S. managers.

### **Influence of the Covariates**

With respect to the demographic covariates, male managers had significantly higher destructive behavior scores than female managers ( $F = 9.18, p < .01$ ). Further, respondents at the top management level had significantly lower organizationally beneficial behavior scores than those at lower organizational levels ( $F = 7.12, p < .05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Consistent with recent research that has shown the importance of understanding other within-culture differences such as socio-cultural generations (Egri & Ralston, 2004) and regional differences (Egri et al., 2000; Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra & Yu, 1999; Ralston, Nguyen & Napier, 1999), this study found that life stage is a significant predictor variable in cross-cultural research. While not rejecting the importance of understanding cross-cultural differences, this study's findings show that national culture is but one of the factors that need to be taken into consideration when trying to understand the behavior of different cultural groups (Fu et al., 2001).

Interestingly, as shown in Table 2, we found that for destructive influence behavior, life stage was significant while culture was not. Given an eta-squared value of .13 for age group and .11 for country group, it appears that life stage is at least as good, if not a better predictor, than national culture for determining the acceptability of destructive influence behaviors. Consistent with life stage theory, younger Thai and U.S. managers and professionals attributed significantly higher acceptability to destructive behaviors than both groups of older Thai and U.S. managers. Contrary

to previous research that has found significant cultural differences in the acceptability of unethical and corrupt business practices (e.g., Husted, 1999; Davis & Ruhe, 2003), we found no significant country difference in the perceived acceptability of destructive influence behaviors. While one possible explanation may be the weak predictive utility of the Hofstede dimensions (Bond, 2002; Fang, 2004; McSweeney, 2002; Tayeb, 1994; Triandis, 2004), another possible explanation is that there has been a cross-cultural convergence regarding the low acceptability of destructive influence tactics. Specifically, this finding suggests the predominance of a global business ideology with respect to unethical business practices (Kaptein, 2004; Snider, Hill & Martin, 2003).

We found that both life stage and culture contribute significantly to our understanding of the relative acceptability of self-indulgent influence strategies. Consistent with life stage theory, younger Thai and U.S. managers and professionals viewed self-indulgent behaviors as being more acceptable than did their older counterparts. Contrary to expectations based on Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) values dimensions, the acceptability of these self-interested influence strategies was significantly higher in a country (Thailand) that has a high power distance, collectivistic, and feminine values orientation, than in a country (U.S.) with a contrasting values profile.

Our findings regarding managers' perspectives on organizationally beneficial influence strategies were less definitive (See Table 3). Contrary to life stage theory, we found no significant differences between younger and older U.S. managers in their views of the high acceptability of organizationally beneficial behaviors. Further, we found that younger Thai managers viewed these influence behaviors as being more (rather than less) acceptable than older Thai managers. These findings are more consistent with the culture hypothesis, but only with respect to organizationally beneficial strategies being viewed as more acceptable in low power distance cultures. One plausible explanation for the younger Thai managers being more like the higher-scoring U.S.

groups (Ralston et al., 1993) may be a crossvergence effect due to global technological and modernization developments.

Overall, we found that the Hofstede cultural values dimensions were generally ineffective in predicting country differences in influence ethics. In light of a growing body of literature that has questioned the utility of the Hofstede's values dimensions scores as cultural predictors (Bond, 2002; McSweeney, 2002; Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmier, 2002; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001), this study's findings provide additional empirical support for these concerns. Future research might choose to consider the following meso- and macro-level variables to predict cultural differences in influence strategies.

At the meso-level of analysis, Triandis' (1995) extension of the individualism/collectivism construct regarding the operation of like-groups in individualistic cultures may provide more explanatory potential than the Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) values dimensions in understanding cross-cultural differences in influence behaviors in business settings. Triandis' conceptualism of like-groups is consistent with Inglehart's (1997) observations regarding the difference between post-materialist and modernist societies. Post-materialist societies (such as the U.S.) are more self-transcendent than modernist societies (such as Thailand) which are less economically developed. Self-transcendence indicates a universalistic-orientation (Schwartz, 1994) which extends beyond the in-group orientation of collectivistic societies. Thus, self-transcendent cultures are more concerned about the equitable treatment of all, not just one's family and friends within the in-group collective. As such, the post-materialist—modernist contrast argues, accurately, that U.S. managers would place a stronger emphasis on organizationally beneficial behavior than their Thai counterparts.

Additionally, our findings are consistent with the argument that the prevalence of ethical

business practices is positively related to macro-level influences such as economic development (Husted, 1999). Specifically, previous cross-cultural research has found strong positive correlations between country individualism, business non-corruption, and economic development level (Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Ralston et al., 1994; Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991). One explanation is that unethical behavior and corruption (destructive influence strategies) are relatively less prevalent in individualistic cultures because of more highly developed systems of formal laws and rules needed to guard against highly individualistic actions that harm societal and organizational interests (Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Getz & Volkema, 2001; Husted, 1999). Whereas the U.S. is a high economic development (US\$37,610 GNI per capita) and high business non-corruption (ranked 13<sup>th</sup> out of 133 countries) country, Thailand is a low economic development (US\$2190 GNI per capita) and low business non-corruption (ranked 70<sup>th</sup>) country (Transparency International, 2003; World Bank, 2004). Following Thailand's 1997 economic crisis, one precondition of IMF funding was to introduce a number of constitutional, regulatory and corporate governance reforms to bring Thailand's financial and political systems into alignment with developed market economies such as the U.S. As documented by White (2004), attempts to implement these reforms have been effectively neutralized by corporate interests, the military and political parties, which may be indicative of the difficulty in changing the "corruption-culture" of a society.

Inglehart's (1997) theory of culture change proposes that there is a higher level of post-materialist values (such as egalitarianism, interpersonal trust, individualism, and self-transcendence) in countries with high economic development levels as well as for generations that have grown up during periods of economic security. This is in contrast with modernist survival values (such as materialism, economic determinism, and rationality) that are characteristic of societies experiencing socioeconomic and political insecurity. In their study of generational

differences in U.S. and Chinese managers' values orientations, Egri and Ralston (2004) found no significant generational differences for the U.S. in respect to the importance of individuals' self-transcendence values. To the extent that interpersonal trust and self-transcendence values are consistent with organizationally beneficial influence behaviors, this study's finding regarding the similarity between older and younger U.S. participants is not surprising.

Inglehart's theory of culture change also helps explain the higher organizationally beneficial behavior scores of younger Thai managers and professionals who grew up during a period of relative economic and political security compared to their older counterparts, while life stage theory substantially explains the findings for self-indulgent and destructive behaviors. As noted, a cultural crossvergence effect would present one plausible explanation for the integrated culture and life stage findings.

As with every study, there are limitations of this research that we would like to bring to the reader's attention. As noted previously, while both samples were collected anonymously from volunteer subjects, different collection techniques were used. As a result, the Thai sample may be described as more of a convenience sample than the U.S. sample. Additionally, the data are from one country in each of two different culture groups. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to all countries within each culture group. Future research is needed to explore the cultural consistency of these relationships.

In conclusion, this study has provided substantial evidence that upward influence styles differ not only across cultures, but also across life stage groups. Furthermore, these findings, from two very different cultures, provide preliminary evidence that changes in behavior due to life stage may be consistent across cultures. If subsequent research were to confirm this consistency, there are a number of ramifications for researchers. For example, these results would help to explain

differences in findings among studies that have used different age groups for participants.

Likewise, these findings demonstrate the importance of using participants of the same age for which the study wishes to draw conclusions. Thus, this study's findings illustrate the need to use comparable age participants across countries in cross-cultural studies. An important implication is that students simply are not acceptable surrogates for business practitioners. Finally, this study's findings are consistent with previous cross-cultural research that has investigated the impact of the age-culture interaction on work values (e.g., Egri & Ralston, 2004).

In this study, we demonstrated the importance of taking the life stage of participants into consideration when comparing samples from different cultures and the hazards of making generalizations about a culture from a specific age group within that culture. If researchers are to develop a global model of behavior, it is crucial to identify the behavioral factors that are *consistent* across all cultures, as well as those that are different. Moreover, the evidence of greater across-culture similarities for the younger managers and professionals suggests that the acceptability of various upward influence strategies may be converging or crossverging as a result of economic-driven cultural interaction (Inglehart, 1997). Therefore, there is clearly a need to investigate whether these patterns exist across a wider sampling of cultures. If so, it would provide support for our belief that a fairly consistent pattern of the relative level of acceptability of the different upward influence strategies—as well as behavior, in general—does exist across cultures.

The implication for practitioners from this study, as well as from previous research, is that it may be naïve to assume relative consistency in behavior within a culture. Life stage, geographic region and other micro (e.g., gender), meso (e.g., group culture) and macro (e.g., economic development) factors must be taken into account to have a sophisticated understand of behavior within and across cultures. However, proof of this viewpoint must be left for future research.

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### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup>On the advice of a JWB reviewer, we used Hofstede's (2001) culture values dimensions to develop these hypotheses.

**TABLE 1**  
**Demographic Data for the Four Culture—Life Stage Groups [n=501] in the Study**

		U.S. (23-38)	U.S. (39-54)	Thai (23-38)	Thai (39-54)
Age	Mean	31.3	46.6	30.3	45.2
	SD	3.4	5.1	4.8	3.9
Gender:	Male	43.8%	47.6%	38.3%	49.0%
Years Worked	Mean	6.6	21.1	7.7	21.3
	SD	4.9	9.0	4.9	4.8
Position	Professional	66.9%	49.2%	42.9%	20.0%
	1 <sup>st</sup> Level Mgmt.	20.7	19.0	27.3	21.0
	Middle Mgmt.	12.4	23.0	22.1	36.0
	Top Mgmt.	0.0	8.7	7.8	23.0
Company Size (# employees)	Under 100	33.1%	31.0%	33.1%	18.0%
	100 or more	66.9	69.0	66.9	82.0
Industry					
	Agriculture, mining, forestry	4.1%	4.0%	0.6%	3.0%
	Construction	2.5	0.8	0.6	3.0
	Manufacturing	5.8	8.7	18.2	18.0
	Transportation, utilities	8.3	10.3	6.5	12.0
	Wholesale and retail trade	5.0	3.2	17.5	7.0
	Finance, insurance, real estate	13.2	21.4	2.6	7.0
	Services (e.g., hotel, restaurant)	28.9	10.3	16.9	4.0
	Public administration	4.1	4.0	3.2	10.0
	Health care	7.4	9.5	0.6	1.0
	Other	18.2	27.0	33.1	35.0

**TABLE 2**  
**Country and Age Group Differences in Influence Tactics:**  
**Results of the MANCOVA**

	Organizationally beneficial	Self-indulgent	Destructive
	F	F	F
Country	36.96***	11.77***	1.61
Age group	1.53	10.07**	8.23**
Country x Age group	1.73	0.06	0.48
Gender	0.13	1.06	9.18**
Position level	7.12*	1.21	0.63
Company size	0.50	0.54	0.10
Industry	0.62	1.33	1.62

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

\*\*\* p < .001

**TABLE 3**  
**Duncan Multiple Comparison Test Results**  
**for the Four Groups on the Three Influence Dimensions**

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Groups			
Organizational	0.78	0.35	Thai (39-54)			
Beneficial	0.91	0.34	Thai (23-38) *			
Behavior	0.98	0.32	U.S. (39-54) *			
	0.98	0.31	U.S. (23-38) *			
			Thai (39-54)	Thai (23-38)	U.S. (23-38)	U.S. (39-54)
Self-Indulgent	0.05	0.47	U.S. (39-54)			
Behavior	0.07	0.46	Thai (39-54)			
	0.26	0.39	*	*		
	0.34	0.47	*	*		
			Thai (39-54)	U.S. (39-54)	Thai (23-38)	U.S. (23-38)
Destructive	-0.95	0.22	U.S. (39-54)			
Behavior	-0.92	0.27	Thai (39-54)			
	-0.83	0.28	*	*		
	-0.80	0.26	*	*		
			U.S. (39-54)	Thai (39-54)	U.S. (23-38)	Thai (23-38)

where \* indicates comparisons are significant at the p<.05 level, controlling for experiment-wise error rate.

## Appendix A

### The 38 Items of the Strategies of Upward Influence Measure

1. try to increase their credibility by obtaining a diploma or advanced degree, such as an MBA.
2. spread rumors about someone or something that stands in the way of their advancement.
3. volunteer for undesirable tasks to make themselves appreciated by the superior.
4. hire a criminal to seriously injure a competitor for a promotion.
5. try to influence the boss to make a bad decision, if that decision would help them to get ahead.
6. learn the likes and dislikes of important people in the organization in order to avoid offending these people.
7. use detrimental information to blackmail a person who is in a position to help them get ahead in the organization.
8. become well known within the organization by volunteering for high profile projects.
9. support the views of important people in the organization, even when they do not agree with these views.
10. use their network of friends to discredit a person competing with them for a possible promotion.
11. withhold information to make someone else look bad.
12. identify and work for an influential superior who could help them get an advancement.
13. attempt to act in a manner that they believe will result in others admiring them.
14. take credit for a good job that was done by their subordinates.
15. use their technical expertise to make the superior dependent upon them.
16. demonstrate the ability to get the job done.
17. threaten to quit the company if their demands are not met.
18. put a listening device, such as a tape recorder, in the office of a competitor for a promotion to get information about this person.
19. threaten to give valuable company information to someone outside the organization if their demands are not met.
20. help subordinates to develop their skills so that the subordinates, in turn, will be in a position to help them attain their objectives.
21. offer sexual favors to a superior.
22. blame another for their own mistakes.
23. dress the way successful business people dress.
24. try to create a situation where a competitor for a promotion might be caught using illegal drugs or engaging in some other illegal activity.
25. try to get the answers to a job promotion examination to insure that they would score higher than the others taking the exam.
26. put false information on a job resume to make themselves look better than they really are.
27. behave in a manner that is seen as appropriate in the company.
28. develop an in-depth knowledge of the work assignments.
29. try to develop contacts who might be able to provide detrimental information about one of their competitors for a promotion.
30. ask to be given the responsibility for an important project.
31. make sure that the important people in the organization hear of their accomplishments.
32. not bypass the superior and go to someone at a higher level in the organizational chain of command for fear of alienating the superior.
33. steal secret corporate documents and give them to another company in return for a better job at the other company.
34. maintain good working relationships with other employees, even if they dislike these other employees.
35. seek to build a relationship with a senior person who could serve as a mentor.
36. make anonymous, threatening phone calls to psychologically stress a competitor for a promotion.
37. work overtime, if necessary, to get the job done.
38. quit the company to take a better job with a new company.

## **Appendix B**

### **Item Allocation for the Dimension Hierarchy of the Strategies of Upward Influence**

Organizationally Beneficial Behavior	Items: 03, 08, 16, 20, 23, 28, 30, 32, 34, 35, 37
Self-Indulgent Behavior	Items: 02, 05, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 26, 29, 31, 38
Destructive Behavior	Items: 04, 07, 18, 19, 24, 25, 33, 36