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Organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait

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in Kuwait

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify evidence for, first, the existence and nature of organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait, second, the differences and similarities when comparing with construction organisations in China and, third, the differences and similarities when comparing with construction organisations within the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through researcher administered survey instruments from 33 Chinese construction project managers in Kuwait, then were analysed by using the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument and empirical statistics.

Findings – The Hierarchy culture was found to be dominant. It matches the predominant organisational culture among construction organisations in China, but is different from the blend of Hierarchy and Group culture of construction organisations in the GCC.

Originality/value – Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait were found to foster an organisational culture that is close to Chinese construction organisations in China regarding Hierarchy, Market and Adhocracy culture, but closer to the GCC construction organisations regarding the Group culture. Practitioners need to be aware of the differences and similarities identified in order to manage cultural diversity effectively.

Keywords China, Organizational culture, Kuwait, Gulf Cooperation Council, Construction organization, OCAI

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Similar to the other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC, i.e. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates), business activities related to construction projects in Kuwait always include construction professionals from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Understanding the organisational culture of the involved organisations is of paramount importance in order to identify potential challenges in managing cultural diversity and to optimise cultural diversity management. This is of special importance when considering interaction between professionals from organisations with different organisational cultures; consideration of accepting a cross-cultural assignment and its influence on job satisfaction (Behery, 2009); intercultural business collaborations (Cameron *et al.*, 2006; Ritchie and Eastwood, 2005); and choices of how to enter new markets in different cultures (Quer *et al.*, 2007).

Frequently, Chinese project stakeholders are involved and represented by Chinese professionals. An increasing involvement of Chinese construction organisations has been observed in the countries of the GCC over the past years, but little is known beyond anecdotal evidence regarding their organisational culture in the GCC when compared to their organisational culture in China, and to the predominant organisational culture of construction organisations in the GCC.



Relationships between the countries of the GCC and Asia are developing quickly and have intensified over the past five years (Quilliam and Kamel, 2015). Increased trade between the GCC and China is related to China's increasing energy consumption, especially that of crude oil (Sadoddin, 2014; Bazoobandi, 2015), which in turn has led to Chinese companies investing in multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and industry projects in the GCC (Pacheco and March, 2014; Zulfikar Rakhmat, 2014). Salman and Geeraerts (2015) pointed out that China is willing to take on immediate and significant short-term costs (domestic, international, or both) in order to achieve the long-term benefits it seeks, particularly in the Middle East. Construction and construction-related fields in the GCC have been booming and Chinese contractors play a significant role (Ramkur, 2010; Davids, 2010). According to a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, China will be the biggest export market for the GCC by 2020. This in turn draws Chinese companies to the GCC, especially in relation to the telecommunication, consumer goods and construction sectors (EIU, 2014).

Initiated by this increase of activity of Chinese organisations in the GCC, and based on the shown importance of optimising cultural diversity management, this present contribution is aimed at providing new insights regarding the organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations within Kuwait. So far, the organisational cultures of entities within the countries of the GCC have not received much attention from researchers (Javidan *et al.*, 2006; Dedoussis, 2004). A recent study contributed to filling this gap and found that a combination of Hierarchy culture and Group culture is predominant in construction organisations within the GCC (Jaeger and Adair, 2013). Virtually, no research has investigated the culture of Chinese construction organisations in the GCC, specifically with the aim of identifying differences when compared with Chinese construction organisations in China and GCC construction organisations. However, these comparisons are important in that they allow an understanding of intercultural challenges between organisations with different organisational cultures and, furthermore, they create a basis for managing cultural diversity more effectively. Practical benefits resulting from the study carried out here will be shown later in the sub-section "Practical implications".

The national cultures of three of the six countries of the GCC were included in Hofstede's (1980) early analysis of cultural dimensions: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Based on a factor analytical treatment of country averages for value measures (Hofstede, 1984), the country scores of the four dimensions for each of the three countries were found to be the same. This confirmed that countries of the GCC are similar in many aspects (e.g. Ellaboudy, 2010). Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the culture of organisations within the construction sector in countries of the GCC is comparable (Al-Khalifa and Aspinwall, 2001), and that consequently the results of the present study are also relevant for the other countries of the GCC.

Organisational culture

Organisational culture is defined as a culture that shares beliefs and values, and provides individuals of an organisation with a framework for their behaviour and understanding of the organisation (Deshpandé and Webster, 1989). It was summarised by Liu *et al.* (2006) that organisational culture "is a multi-faceted construct (Pettigrew, 1979); reflects customary thinking, feeling, and acting [...] (e.g. Ouchi, 1981; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2000) and involving cognition, affect and behaviour (Ott, 1989); is both learned and transmitted (Schein, 1985); and is an abstraction from behaviour as well as a product of behaviour (Davis, 1985; Quinn, 1988)".

The discussion of organisational culture has focussed on different aspects such as the impact of organisational culture on organisational performance and change (e.g. Yeung *et al.*, 1991; Wilderom *et al.*, 2000; Kreitner and Kinicki, 2001; Rowlinson, 2001). The relation of the type of business and its organisational culture has found considerable

attention more recently (e.g. Brockmann and Döhren, 2006; Nummelin, 2006; Zhang and Liu, 2006). A significant relationship between organisational culture and project performance has been shown regarding project management activities (Hyväri, 2006; Yazici, 2009), whereas no significant relationship was identified by an empirical study investigating the impact of a project team's cultural diversity on project performance (Dulaimi and Hariz, 2011). The international construction industry was found to be prone to conflicts arising from business interaction with parties from different cultures (Gould and Joyce, 2002). This confirms the importance of the study carried out here.

Liu *et al.* (2006) showed that organisational culture can be studied based on two basic approaches, namely the typological approach (culture types) and the trait approach (cultural dimensions) and that there is little agreement on how to categorise culture types. Regarding the trait approach, four distinguished dimensions of organisational culture, namely power, role, task and person were identified by Handy (1985). Quinn (1988) applied the Competing Values Framework (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983) to analyse organisational culture. This framework is based on two axes: flexibility and control are the two extremes of the vertical axis and internal focus and external focus are the two extremes of the horizontal axis. The Compass Model, focussing on organisational behaviour as a reflection of organisational culture, utilises the two dimensions as follows: assertiveness and responsiveness (Hall, 1995). Liu *et al.* (2006) showed that studies in the dimensions of organisational culture have been carried out from "different perspectives such as the socio-psychological (e.g. Ansari *et al.*, 1982), the technological (e.g. Chatman and Jehn, 1994) and the socio-structural (e.g. Reynolds, 1986; Hofstede *et al.*, 1990)".

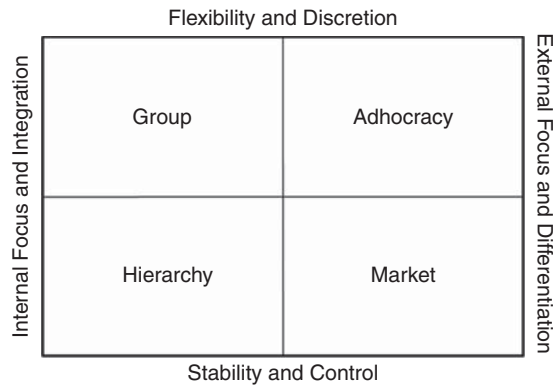
The Competing Values Framework

Although the comparison of organisational cultures may utilise different approaches and different perspectives, it was decided here to utilise the Competing Values Framework. This approach has been found to provide a holistic view of organisational cultures when ipsative measures (i.e. descriptors that require respondents to compare two or more desirable options and select the most preferred one) are used (Zammuto and Krakower, 1991), and it has been found useful by executives to understand and describe cultures (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1991). Furthermore, the Competing Values Framework allows comparisons with results of numerous previous studies, since it is widely used (e.g. Cameron *et al.*, 2006), including the previous study on organisational culture of construction professionals in the GCC region (Jaeger and Adair, 2013). The framework is explained in more detail below, with a detailed discussion of the measures to be used in the Research Method section.

The Competing Values Framework is based on the above-mentioned two axes which reflect any organisational culture as a combination of four types of culture (Figure 1). Each culture is influenced by two aspects. The first aspect reflects the continuum "flexibility and discretion vs stability, order and control", whereas the second aspect reflects the continuum "internal focus and integration vs external focus and differentiation". The four types of culture stand for unique ways of thinking, dealing with challenges and creating organisational values (Cameron *et al.*, 2006). The instrument has been slightly modified by Jaeger and Adair (2013) in that the term "Clan" has been replaced by "Group" in order to avoid potential negative associations of the term "Clan" in some cultures.

The types of culture can be described as follows (Cameron *et al.*, 2006):

- Group: organisations with focus on internal aspects of the direct work environment with flexibility, concern for people, and sensitivity for customers.
- Hierarchy: organisations with focus on internal aspects in order to ensure control and stability.



Sources: Cameron *et al.* (2006); modified by Jaeger and Adair (2013)

- Adhocracy: organisations with focus on external aspects with a high level of individuality and flexibility.
- Market: organisations with focus on external aspects in order to ensure control and stability.

To identify an organisation’s type of culture, six characteristics (called “dimensions”) need to be determined, by using the “Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument” (OCAI) that was developed by Cameron *et al.* (2006). The OCAI consists of six dimensions and each of the dimensions is described by four different key elements that correspond to the four different types of culture. These key elements are shown in Table I, and measures of the OCAI are explained in detail in the Research Method section.

| Dimension | Type of culture | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| | Hierarchy | Group | Adhocracy | Market |
| Organisation is | Controlled and structured, formal procedures | A personal place, an extended and sharing family | A dynamic and entrepreneurial place | Very result oriented, people are competitive |
| Leadership is | Focused on coordinating and efficiency | Mentoring, facilitating and nurturing | Entrepreneurial, innovative and risk-taking | Aggressive, result oriented and no-nonsense |
| Employee management characterised by | Security of employment, conformity | Teamwork, consensus and participation | Individual risk-taking, uniqueness and innovative | Hard-driving competitiveness and achievement |
| Organisation held together by | Formal rules, policies | Loyalty, mutual trust, personal commitment | Commitment to innovation and development | Emphasis on goal accomplishment and achievement |
| Strategic emphases are | Permanency, stability, efficiency | Openness, human development, trust, participation | Acquisition of new resources, creating new thing | Competitive actions and achievement |
| Criteria of success are | Operational efficiency | Development of human resources | Having the most unique or newest product | Winning in the market, outpacing the competition |

Table I.
Key elements of types of cultures

Sources: Adapted from Cameron *et al.* (2006); Denison and Spreitzer (1992), Yong and Pheng (2008) and Zammuto *et al.* (2000)

In summary, although an increasing importance of Chinese construction organisations operating in the countries of the GCC can be observed, little is known about their organisational culture. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent their organisational culture matches, first, the organisational culture of construction organisations within China and, second, the predominant organisational culture of construction organisations in the countries of the GCC.

In the following, the study's purpose, methodology, results, implications and conclusions are described.

Purpose of study

This study aims at answering the following questions:

- RQ1.* Which organisational type of culture is perceived to be dominant in Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait?
- RQ2.* What are differences and similarities of the perceived organisational type of culture, when compared to the predominant organisational type of culture of Chinese construction organisations within China?
- RQ3.* What are differences and similarities of the perceived organisational type of culture, when compared to the predominant type of organisational culture in construction organisations within the GCC?

Research method

Before presenting the results, data collection and method of analysis are explained in more detail.

Data collection

A total population of 33 Chinese organisations involved in construction projects in Kuwait were identified. These organisations were approached by one of the researchers in order to administer the survey instrument to one of their Chinese construction professionals. The construction professional had to have more than two years of work experience within their organisation in Kuwait in order to allow comparable perceptions on the culture of their organisations. In all organisations, the construction professional was either the country manager or a senior construction professional selected by the country manager to meet the researcher. Because of the closely specified nature of the survey participants (i.e. construction professional, Chinese nationality, more than two years of work experience within the organisation in Kuwait), comparability of responses is considered to be given. The research area was considered by the Chinese organisations in Kuwait to be of a sensitive nature and, in general, they reflected hesitation to allow administering survey instruments to more than one representative. Also, the researcher was aiming at spontaneous perceptions (not carefully crafted perceptions) in order to reduce the Hawthorne effect (i.e. modification of respondents' perception as a consequence of the fact that they are studied); especially since the current situation (vs desired situation) was analysed.

Data were gathered using a questionnaire which included the OCAI and additional questions, including respondents' demographic data. Three responses had to be excluded from the analysis since it became apparent during administering the survey instrument that the construction professional did not meet the requirements stated above. However, the number of usable responses met a rule of the thumb requiring at least 30 respondents to allow reliable conclusions (Hauschildt and Hamel, 1978, p. 237), especially, since the quality of survey results was found to improve insignificantly beyond 20 respondents (Zahn, 1993).

In total, 22 of the identified companies are owned by the Chinese Government, and eight of the identified companies are owned by private Chinese owners. However, it has been decided not to differentiate between the two groups in this study, since the identified total number of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait is relatively small and breaking into sub-populations may not allow the drawing of reliable conclusions.

Application of the OCAI was based on constant sum scales that required respondents to divide 100 points between four choices (reflecting the four culture types) for each of the six dimensions (cf. Table I). Since the relative importance of the four culture types is to be identified, this is an appropriate scale commonly used for the OCAI. Using ipsative measures has advantages over ordinal scales in that it seems inappropriate to separate the four quadrants as independent (Zammuto and Krakower, 1991). However, this also means that the measures are not suitable for a correlation-based analysis such as factor analysis and regression because of the underlying spurious correlations, but multi-trait-multi-method analysis and multi-dimensional scaling provided support for the psychometric property of the instrument, and the instrument has been identified as appropriate for applied settings when differences between the four culture types are to be emphasised (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1991).

Analysis

The mean, standard deviation and statistical significance were determined for the four types of culture.

Cronbach's α was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the used scales (Santos, 1999) and compared with the reliability coefficients reported earlier by Cameron and Quinn (1999, shown in the following in brackets). The correlations between each type of culture and the sum of the remaining types was 0.67 (0.82) for the Group culture, 0.6 (0.83) for the Adhocracy culture, 0.63 (0.67) for the Market culture and 0.79 (0.78) for the Hierarchy culture. This means that the internal consistency of all four scales are at least marginally reliable; a coefficient of smaller than 0.6 would be considered unreliable (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p. 640).

A larger coefficient would have been preferable, however, since the study is based on the total population and since it seems to be an opportune time to answer the stated research questions (see introduction for trend of increasing involvement of Chinese construction organisations in the countries of the GCC), further analysis is considered to be justified. The high dependency of Cronbach's α from the outliers of a specific sample has been shown before (Liu *et al.*, 2010).

Results

Looking at the mean scores for each of the four different types of culture (Table II), it is apparent that the mean of the Hierarchy culture (34.17 on a 100-point scale) is the dominant culture. It is followed by the mean of the Group culture (29.14), Market culture (21.08) and Adhocracy culture (15.72).

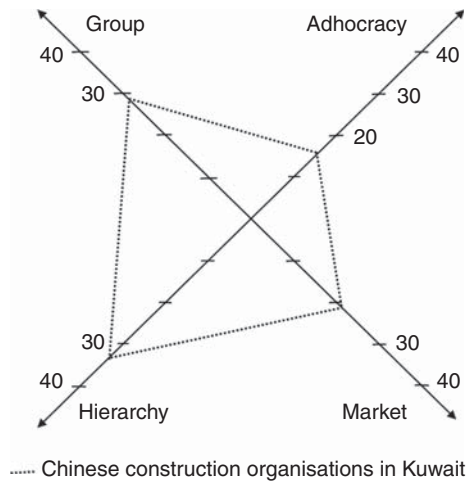
The type of culture can be shown graphically as a culture profile, and it is shown for the Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait in Figure 2.

The results shown in Table III, distinguished by various categories, confirm the dominant type of culture. Mean scores could range from 0 to 100, representing a percentage

| Type of culture | Mean | SD |
|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Group | 29.14 | 9.52 |
| Adhocracy | 15.72 | 5.56 |
| Market | 21.08 | 7.58 |
| Hierarchy | 34.17 | 11.75 |

Table II.
Mean scores for each
type of culture

Note: The Mean represents a percentage out of 100

Figure 2.
Culture profile

| Category | <i>n</i> | Mean | SD | Dominant culture | df | <i>F</i> | <i>F</i> crit | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|------------------|----|----------|---------------|----------|
| <i>Highest qualification</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Masters | 15 | 36 | 12.53 | Hierarchy | 1 | 0.7 | 4.20 | 0.41 |
| Bachelor | 15 | 32.33 | 10.59 | Hierarchy | | | | |
| <i>Organisation size</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 101-500 | 7 | 38.81 | 7.15 | Group | 1 | 0.47 | 4.23 | 0.50 |
| > 500 | 21 | 35.56 | 11.37 | Hierarchy | | | | |
| <i>Ownership</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Private | 5 | 37 | 7.54 | Group | 1 | 0.06 | 4.18 | 0.81 |
| Public | 25 | 35.07 | 12.43 | Hierarchy | | | | |

Notes: For organisation size, two organisations belonged to neither category and were not considered. $p < 0.05$

Table III.
Dominant
organisational culture
of Chinese
construction
organisations

out of 100, and column 5 (“Dominant culture”) shows the Hierarchy culture as the dominant culture for most of the shown categories. However, the ANOVA of the shown sub-categories shows no significant difference and, consequently, analysis and interpretation of the sub-categories will be omitted.

Discussion

Construction professionals of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait perceive a dominant Hierarchy culture in their organisations, followed by Group culture, Market culture and Adhocracy culture. Organisations always reflect more than one type of culture and in fact, the adaptation of a mix of elements related to different types of culture is common (Yong and Pheng, 2008; Cameron *et al.*, 2006). For example, many organisations in Qatar were found to represent a combination of two types of culture (Al-Khalifa and Aspinwall, 2001). At the same time, it was found that one type of culture becomes dominant over time (Cameron *et al.*, 2006; Denison and Spreitzer, 1992).

The identified types of culture will now be discussed in detail, first, based on a comparison with the organisational culture of construction organisations in China and,

second, based on a comparison with the organisational culture of construction organisations in the GCC. Since the organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in the GCC region has not been analysed previously, the results found here cannot be compared with previous results of these organisations.

Comparison of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait with those in China

Figure 3 represents a comparison of the previously identified culture profile of the Chinese construction organisations operating in Kuwait vs Chinese construction organisations in China (Zhang and Liu, 2006). The means of the types of culture for the Chinese construction organisations in China from Zhang and Liu (2006) were converted to a common 100-point scale in order to allow comparison (Group 26.47; Adhocracy 16.83; Market 21.95; Hierarchy 34.76).

When interpreting this comparison, one needs to keep in mind that:

- (1) Zhang and Liu (2006) focussed exclusively on construction organisations, but these covered also a diverse variety of sub-groups such as plant and industrial engineering;
- (2) workforce and leadership teams of construction organisations in China are significantly less culturally diverse compared with construction organisations in the GCC;
- (3) Zhang and Liu (2006) did not focus exclusively on the perception of one organisational function; and
- (4) the national culture of China is different from Kuwait (power-distance index, individualism index, masculinity index, uncertainty avoidance index, in China: 80, 20, 66, 40 vs countries of the GCC: 80, 38, 52, 68; Hofstede, 1980).

Based on the cultural dimensions and types of culture shown in Table I, the differences can be interpreted as follows. Both the Hierarchy culture and the Adhocracy culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (Hierarchy: 34.17; Adhocracy: 15.72) are similar to construction organisations in China (Hierarchy: 34.76; Adhocracy: 16.83) because of the same cultural background. The multi-cultural diaspora context in Kuwait may lead to slightly less formal procedures and less secure employment than in China, as well as slightly

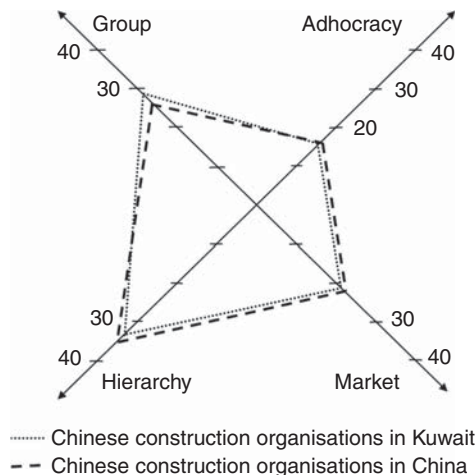


Figure 3.
Comparison of culture profiles: Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait vs Chinese construction organisations in China

reduced entrepreneurial dynamics and individual risk-taking, but construction organisations in both contexts show similarities.

For Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait, the Group culture is more emphasised whereas the Market culture is slightly less emphasised (Group: 29.14; Market: 21.08) when compared to construction organisations in China (Group: 26.47; Market: 21.95). Being away from family and home culture and being situated in a market environment with different rules may lead to a stronger emphasis on organisations as an extended family, nurturing leadership and teamwork, whereas competitiveness of employees and result orientation are less emphasised. Similarly, mutual trust, participation and development of human resources are perceived as more important, whereas goal accomplishment, competitive actions and outpacing the competition are perceived as less important, when compared to the culture of construction organisations in China.

Yazici (2009) found that Group culture is a sole contributing factor for project and business performance, which means that the key elements of this type of culture are of paramount importance for project success. Therefore, the stronger emphasis on Group culture may also be an intuitive response to the need for success within a foreign environment.

Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait do not only foster links with the construction organisations in China (e.g. headquarter, subcontractors, consultants, etc.), rather they also interact with the construction organisations in Kuwait and the wider GCC region. Therefore, the organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait will now be discussed based on a comparison with the culture of construction organisations operating in the GCC region.

Comparison of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait with GCC construction organisations

Figure 4 shows a comparison of the previously identified culture profile of the Chinese construction organisations operating in Kuwait vs general construction organisations operating in the GCC region (Jaeger and Adair, 2013). The means of types of culture for the GCC construction organisations were: Group 28.68; Adhocracy 19.87; Market 23.02; and Hierarchy 27.98 (Jaeger and Adair, 2013).

As shown by Jaeger and Adair (2013), the culture profile of GCC construction organisations (Figure 4) reflects an alignment between national cultures of the countries of

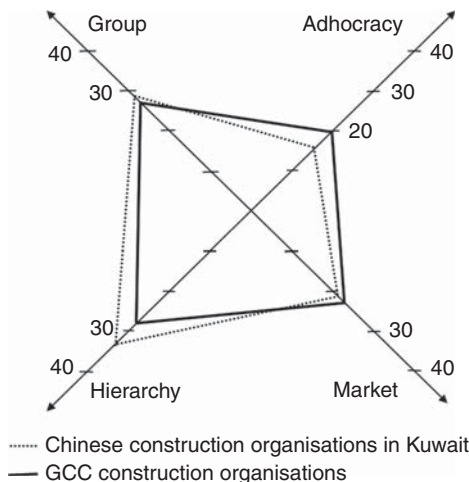


Figure 4. Comparison of culture profiles: Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait vs GCC construction organisations

the GCC and the organisational culture of construction organisations within these countries. The national culture of countries of the GCC showed a high power-distance and a very low level of individualism (Hofstede, 1980). This is in line with the dominating role of the Group culture and the Hierarchy culture of construction organisations in the GCC region (Jaeger and Adair, 2013).

The most common type of culture in Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait is the Hierarchy culture, followed by the Group culture. The most common type of culture of construction organisations in the GCC region is the Group culture, followed by the Hierarchy culture. Based on cultural dimensions and types of culture shown in Table I, the differences can be interpreted as follows.

The Hierarchy culture is more pronounced and the Adhocracy culture is less pronounced (Hierarchy: 34.17; Adhocracy: 15.72) when compared to GCC construction organisations (Hierarchy: 27.98, Adhocracy: 19.87). The main reason for the more pronounced Hierarchy culture is most likely the similarly pronounced Hierarchy culture of Chinese construction organisations in China (see previous section) since the Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait are connected to parent organisations in China and most of their construction project managers had previous work experience in construction organisations in China. However, the difference reflects also the previously described diaspora of Chinese construction organisations which makes it more difficult for them to develop an entrepreneurial place and innovation than for GCC construction organisations. The latter are better integrated into the local system. Finally, as already stated before, most of the identified Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait are owned by the Chinese Government, and these tend to focus more on Hierarchy culture than the privately owned Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (cf. Table III).

For Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait, Group culture is slightly higher emphasised and Market culture is less emphasised (Group: 29.14; Market: 21.08) than for GCC construction organisations (Group: 28.68; Market: 23.02). This means the emphasis is more on the organisation as an extended family, nurturing leadership, teamwork, mutual trust and development of human resources, as opposed to an emphasis of results orientation, goal accomplishment, competitive actions and outpacing the competition. The emphasis on the Group culture may reflect again the situation of Chinese construction project managers being away from family and the need for more mentoring because of an unfamiliar environment. However, the lesser emphasis on Market culture, which is in fact even less than the emphasis on Market culture within China, may also reflect the nature of the business Chinese construction organisations in the GCC are involved in. Most of them represent contractors who came to the GCC because their parent organisation in China won a bid, and they are focussing now on implementation of the project vs competing with competitors. GCC construction organisations are more affected by local competition which may be mirrored in their organisational culture. The lower uncertainty avoidance index of the Chinese national culture, i.e. 40 (Hofstede, 1980), as compared with the uncertainty avoidance index of the GCC national culture, i.e. 68 (Hofstede, 1980), may also be reflected in less emphasis on results orientation and goal accomplishment, which are key elements of the Market culture (Figure 1).

Based on the findings discussed here, the following section will summarise the implications.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications become apparent when considering each type of culture separately and comparing the means of the three types of organisations considered here.

For the Hierarchy culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (34.17) emphasise the related key elements (Table I) slightly less than Chinese construction organisations in China (34.76), but much more than GCC construction project managers (27.98). This difference reflects a much stronger bond with their national culture and organisational culture of their parent organisation than adopting an organisational culture more compatible with the Hierarchy culture typical for construction organisations in the GCC region.

For the Group culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (29.14) emphasise the related key elements (Table I) much more than Chinese construction organisations in China (26.47) and slightly more than GCC construction organisations (28.68). Comparing with the organisational behaviour described in the previous paragraph related to the Hierarchy culture, it reflects the opposite trend: Chinese organisations adopt a Group culture that is much closer to the organisational culture of host organisations.

For the Market culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (21.08) emphasise the related key elements (Table I) slightly less than Chinese construction organisations in China (21.95) and even lesser than the GCC construction organisations (23.02). It reflects their focus on project implementation which reduces their emphasis on competitiveness.

For the Adhocracy culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait (15.72) emphasise the related key elements (Table I) slightly less than Chinese construction organisations in China (16.83) and even lesser than the GCC construction organisations (19.87). In addition to their focus on project implementation, it may also reflect again their diaspora situation which makes innovation for them more difficult than for their parent organisations within China.

In summary, regarding Hierarchy culture, Market culture and Adhocracy culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait show more similarities with Chinese construction organisations in China than with GCC construction organisations. However, regarding the Group culture, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait show more similarities with GCC construction organisations than with Chinese construction organisations in China.

Practical implications

The comparisons allow us to derive direct practical implications for practitioners, such as construction project managers and representatives of construction organisations in the GCC region. First, Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait will not easily adopt the less formal project organisation (Hierarchy culture) of GCC construction organisations, as they will prefer a more formal approach similar to their parent organisation in China. The results reflect that adopting organisational approaches of the host situation is happening to a much lesser extent, than following their home situation in China. Second, the closer proximity of Chinese organisations to the Group culture of host organisations reflects the impact of the Chinese diaspora which creates a similar emphasis on Group culture elements typical for the GCC construction organisations. This has potential to facilitate intercultural contacts and teamwork and may even alleviate challenges resulting from the more formal approach to project organisation. Third, the organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait will promote innovation (Adhocracy culture) less than the organisational culture of GCC construction organisations. Therefore, meeting the need of developing new and innovative approaches to challenges should be assigned ideally to GCC construction organisations, or, less ideally, to the Chinese parent organisation in China. Fourth, the Market culture of GCC construction organisations and, to a lesser degree, of the Chinese construction organisations in China, represents an advantage for developing new market segments and increasing competitiveness. Although Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait are closer to the GCC market, the

organisational culture of their parent company would support increasing competitiveness more effectively. Alternatively, business partnerships with GCC construction organisations such as joint ventures would support their competitiveness in the GCC region. This would also be a recommendable solution regarding the previous point related to innovation and developing new products and methods. Fifth, the previous four implications influence inevitably the job satisfaction of construction professionals considering work for a Chinese construction organisation in the GCC region, whereas the more specific implications depend on expectations, previous experience and cultural background of the professional.

Limitations and future research

The construct validity of the data collection process presented here might be limited although research administered survey instruments led to a high response validity by ensuring a high level of seriousness and avoiding maturation effects caused by familiarisation with the questions. However, these advantages and the face-to-face situation have also potential to distort answers.

The external validity is given for the perception of the construction professionals surveyed here. Professionals of organisations belonging to other industries or located in other regions have most likely differing perceptions.

Regarding derivable practical implications, the scope of this study was limited to direct practical implications that result from the comparisons carried out. However, further indirect practical implications, such as implications related to organisational effectiveness, were not part of this study, but could be analysed in a future study based on the results found here.

Furthermore, differences between Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait owned by the Chinese Government and Chinese construction organisations privately owned should be analysed in a future study.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify, first, the organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait; second, differences and similarities when comparing with Chinese construction organisations in China; and, third, differences and similarities when comparing with GCC construction organisations. Based on the personal interviews and applying the OCAI, the Hierarchy culture was found to be the dominant organisational culture of Chinese construction organisations in Kuwait. Furthermore, Hierarchy culture, Market culture and Adhocracy culture in Kuwait were found to be quite similar to that found in Chinese construction organisations in China, whereas the Group culture in Kuwait was similar to that found in GCC construction organisations. This means for practitioners who have to manage cultural diversity within the framework of business activities:

- that Chinese construction organisations in the GCC region prefer a more formal approach;
- their organisational culture focusses less on innovation;
- business partnerships with GCC organisations would increase their competitiveness; and
- their emphasis on key elements of the Group culture facilitates effective cross-cultural communication.

Because of the similarity of the socio-economic context, the findings are also relevant for the other countries of the GCC.

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