

Honoring the Kun Lun Way

Cross-Cultural Organization Development Consulting to a Hospitality Company in Datong, China

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This article presents a case study of the adaptation of Western organization development (OD) consulting practices to a Chinese hospitality business in Datong, China. Presented are the founder's personal history and management philosophy as well as the organization development interventions, outcomes, and challenges. The case study describes the consulting experiences of four teams of Western graduate students during the course of their research of and consultation to this company from 2004 to 2008. The cross-cultural relationship between the students and the organization is examined, providing insight into the practice of OD in an international setting.

Keywords: *organization development; Chinese management; cross-cultural consulting; management philosophy; family business*

Organization development (OD) stands poised on the brink of a new era. The field of OD has sought to improve the effectiveness of human and organizational systems using change and development methodologies based on applied behavioral science knowledge (Cummings & Worley, 2001, pp. 1-2). This knowledge and its derivative models, tools, and practices primarily came from Western-based research set in a Western cultural context.

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However, the world has changed since the inception of OD. Today, organizations from every corner of the globe merge and partner with each other across national borders. Corporations are rapidly establishing global product lines and multinational ventures. Nonprofit organizations and governments gather across borders to address the most pressing concerns of the day. These new cross-cultural relationships provide opportunities for OD practitioners to work with a vast array of new clients with new international challenges. To remain relevant, OD must become a global field of practice.

The power of culture to frame the way people perceive reality and act in the world must not be overlooked. Xing (1995) defined culture in terms of the shared patterns of being, thinking, and behaving learned from childhood through socialization. Echoing Schein (1992), culture is deeply rooted in tradition that permeates all aspects of any given society and presents itself in the very basics of everyday lives.

Culture also supplies context, perspective, and motives. As Marshak (1993) noted, organizations view and interpret daily events through a subconscious set of beliefs and assumptions that are rarely examined and yet exert a profound influence over perceptions and actions. Culture defines one's place in the world and provides metaphors that make sense of complexities and abstractions (Akin & Palmer, 2000; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Because culture is deterministic and because Western culture is embedded in OD, OD practitioners in international settings may benefit from knowing if their OD values and consulting methods are applicable to organizations in other cultures—if they can be successfully adapted or need to be discarded altogether.

Recognizing that every OD consultation must be adapted to the client, this case study of a Chinese and Western OD consulting relationship is an opportunity to observe the dynamics of OD in an international setting and to explore two key questions: (a) Can OD be adapted effectively for a Chinese client? (b) What insights can be gained for conducting OD with a Chinese client?

To answer these questions, we first provide an overview of the literature on cross-cultural management consulting, OD values and ethics, Chinese values, and Chinese management. Next, study methods and analysis are described. In the Results section, we present the case study of the Kun Lun Company and a description of 4 years of consultation offered by four different student groups. The students' experiences demonstrated that OD could be effectively adapted for a Chinese client.

In the Discussion section, we offer the Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum as a means for framing and examining the adjustments to OD across the 4-year relationship. Support is given for literature advocating cultural preparations and learning. We also address the client's desire to adopt Western practices indiscriminately. We attribute this to low organizational self-awareness.

Honor was the intervention that spanned the 4 years running concurrent to and often supported by the four annual consultative processes. Other insights explored include violating cultural norms, managing power and time dynamics, working between business and OD consulting, and the impact of nonsite OD steps on the consultation.

We discuss whether cross-cultural OD is merely well done OD. Finally, we discuss limitations and suggest future research.

Literature Review

To understand the context in which the current study was conducted and the gaps in the existing research this study aims to fill, we provide a review of the literature on cross-cultural management consulting and OD values and on Chinese management and values. After considering these bodies of knowledge, we compare Chinese values and management to OD values and consulting to illuminate potential challenges in the cross-cultural consulting relationship. We also identify opportunities for the current study to contribute new insights into the practice of OD consulting for a Chinese client.

Cross-Cultural Management Consulting

The present research draws from the literature on national culture, cross-cultural management consulting, and OD values and ethics. These domains contributed to the students' approach to the consultation and provide context for the research.

Frameworks provide a means for classifying the deeply held assumptions of a culture. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) *Variations in Values Orientations* assesses a culture's orientation to nature, time, human nature, and activity and among people and space. O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen (1994) focus on language, context, time, equality–power, and information flow. Hall and Hall (1997) categorize cultures on the basis of the importance of context to derive meaning. A framework used by the students to understand national culture was Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions of cultural values, which are individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, high and low power distance, high and low uncertainty avoidance, and long- and short-term orientation. According to these descriptors, Chinese culture is collectivist, feminine, and long-term oriented and has high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, a contrast on every dimension to American culture. Although each of these dimensions differentiates between the values held by cultures, the framework does not suggest methods for bridging the national culture gap.

Other researchers writing on cross-cultural management consulting begin to fill this void. Reflecting on effective Chinese–Western consulting relationships, Xing (1995), Berry (2005), and Keller and Kronstedt (2005) advised consultants to study the client's values, relationships, environment, regional differences, negotiating styles, Western stereotypes held by the Chinese, and the rules of the game. Consultants should seek accurate cultural information to dispel misconceptions about the Chinese culture and Chinese–Western relationships. Westerners should respect deeply ingrained, traditional qualities and value the importance of local relationships

(Keller & Kronstedt, 2005). Out of respect for foreign expertise (Berry, 2005) and pressure to modernize and compete globally (Lee, 1996), Chinese clients may expect change to readily follow if they implement Western management solutions. But Lee (1996) warns of the

enormous impact that decisions to adopt western practices and models might have. What seems like a small change on the surface or in daily behavior may actually change values and elements central to traditional Chinese ways of living and working. (pp. 66-67)

With so much at stake, this would suggest that consultants are morally obligated to adapt management practices to the client's culture to avoid such unintended social consequences. The OD consultants in the current research heeded this warning as they entered into the cross-cultural consulting relationship with the Kun Lun Company. In fact, this dynamic of the Chinese client requesting Western solutions and the consultant guarding the client's organizational and cultural interests will be examined in the Results and Discussion sections.

OD Values and Ethics

Although the field of OD does not possess a single set of stated values (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003), the OD Network's Principles of OD Practice (n.d.) highlights respect, inclusion, collaboration, authenticity, self-awareness, and empowerment as the values base for the field. OD practice focuses on systems, process, effectiveness, and health. It is supported by theory, centered on the client, informed by data, and based on action research (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Block, 1981; Cummings & Worley, 2001). The International OD Code of Ethics (1991) outlines a practitioner's ethical responsibilities to self, for professional development and competence, to clients and significant others, to the profession, and to society. Demonstrating that ethical behavior is conceived of differently across cultures, Buller, Kohls, and Anderson (1991) recommended that OD practitioners should be mindful of cultural variances and should be taught the meaning of ethics in other cultures.

Whether the consultant is the expert, a "pair of hands," or a partner is another reflection of values. Both Block (1981) and Schein (1999) favor the partnership role for the OD consultant. Block's *Flawless Consulting* advocates partnership with the client through the distinct stages from entry and contracting; through data collection, analysis, feedback, and intervention; to evaluation. Schein's process consulting stresses the helping relationship, participation by the client rather than consultant expertise, and increasing client capabilities to self-manage.

In view of the extant literature, the current research examined adaptations of the OD consulting process through the use of culturally sensitive OD practices. Exploring the descriptions of these practices in the case study will expand the knowledge of factors that may contribute to successful OD consulting with a Chinese client.

Chinese Values

Confucianism is an ancient philosophy based on the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BC) and forms the moral system guiding all relationships in Confucian society (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005; Lee, 1996; Lin & Chi, 2007; Nisbett, 2003; Xing, 1995). The social nature of human beings is expressed in five essential relationships: emperor and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. These relationships are governed by mutual obligations and ensure that society is harmonious and stable by guiding ethical conduct. Confucian society is characterized by hierarchy, paternalism, emphasis on family, and unquestioning support for social norms (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005). Confucian principles include family centeredness; group orientation; the ideal life focused on simplicity and harmonious relationships, especially with family; maturity of character; common sense; intuition; reasonableness; and an eternal view of time (Xing, 1995).

Chinese values derived from Confucianism include “filial piety (obedience to parents), working hard, tolerance, harmony, humbleness, loyalty to superiors, observation of rites, reciprocation of greetings and favors, and kindness” (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005, p. 63), as well as “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity” (Wong, 1998, p. 30). *Guanxi*, defined as friendly connections with expectation for reciprocal favor (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005; Wong, 1998), is an extension of relationship obligations and plays a key role as gatekeeper for all social interactions in China.

Chinese Management

Modern Chinese management is influenced strongly by Confucianism and by a 3,000-year history of management (Lui, 1996). According to Lee (1996), Chinese management is characterized by several key features. Chinese management is human centered with emphasis on relationships, trust, and loyalty. Chinese managers practice responsibility for others by maintaining “face.” The need to expose problems to bring improvements, for example, can be subsumed by the need to preserve “face.” Chinese management features centralization of power with little delegation of authority or participatory decision making. Chinese organizations are often smaller in size, originating as small entities and remaining relatively small to maintain control.

Chinese organizations also tend to be family businesses, as in much of the world (Anderson & Reeb, 2003). In family firms, family relationships influence operations, direction, and leadership selection (Harris, Martinez, & Ward, 1994; Gilbert, 1989; Lane, Dashew, Bork, & Jaffe, 1996), and control usually remains with the family throughout the business life cycle (Lee, 1996). Dyer (1988) found first-generation family firms to be primarily paternalistic, moving to professional cultures in the second generation. Family businesses sometimes offset their challenges by establishing formal governance and operations structures and by hiring nonfamily members (Frieswick, 1996; Kets de Vries, 1991).

Family businesses outperform other companies (Dibrell & Craig, 2006; McConaughy, Matthews, & Fialko, 2001; Munoz, 2001). Firms led by family CEOs outperform firms led by nonfamily CEOs (Anderson & Reeb, 2003), and firms with active founders are even more successful. Founders exert a strong, persistent influence on the company's culture (Schein, 1992). A strong culture with consistency throughout an organization's design elements has been linked to performance (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Deal, 1985; Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Galbraith, 2002; Peters & Waterman, 1982) and can be a strategic competitive advantage.

Comparison of Chinese Values and Management to OD Values and Consulting

Reflecting on Chinese values and management and OD values and consulting practices reveals potential hazards in a cross-cultural consulting relationship. Although both Chinese management and OD value respect and relationships, their enactment is not the same across cultures. For example, respect might mean equal treatment in the West, whereas respect might mean deferring to authority in China. Or in the West, one might disclose to develop a relationship, but in China, one might develop a relationship before disclosing. Whereas Chinese management tends to value expertise and looks to a central authority for direction, OD practitioners generally value collaboration, empowerment, and inclusion for successful implementation of change and a meaningful work environment.

In another example, whereas OD emphasizes individual authenticity and candor to identify problems, Chinese management guards against publicly exposing weaknesses to maintain face and harmony in the group. This poses a challenge for Western OD consultants trained to diagnose client problems based on a scientific model. Appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 2001; Watkins & Mohr, 2001) can offer a culturally acceptable alternative by focusing on strengths rather than on problems as the foundation for OD interventions.

With consideration for the differences between Chinese and Western management philosophies, this case study provides an opportunity to examine specific efforts to adapt OD consultation to a Chinese client's culture and needs. Will awareness of differences and certain thoughtful, culturally sensitive adaptations result in an effective OD intervention with a Chinese client? This question gave rise to the current case study.

Study Methodology

This research uses a longitudinal case study design to describe the consulting experiences and insights gained by four different groups of students in the MSOD program at Pepperdine University as they consulted to a Chinese family business

across a 4-year period. The lead professor, an alumnus living in China, and the two authors provided consistent coordination of the research and consultation even as the student teams changed each year.

Consulting teams of 5 to 7 members were selected by the lead professor first on the basis of backgrounds relevant to the assignment (e.g., service or hospitality background) and then by a random sort of students from the MSOD class attending the China session. A typical 5- to 7-person team usually had 2 or 3 members with relevant backgrounds. The program's curriculum included traditional OD subjects, advanced topics in strategy and organization design, cross-cultural theory, and international application prior to the session in China. A typical class averaged 30 members with 7 to 10 years of experience in human resources and OD management. The median age was 35 to 40 years old, and 70% of the class was female.

In the fall of 2004, the lead professor and the alumnus agreed to a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with the leadership of the Kun Lun Company and Pepperdine University's MSOD program. The students would have access to the Chinese business as a case study and as an OD client, and the Kun Lun Company would receive the benefits of a series of OD interventions during the next several years. The authors, who were leaders of the first and second consulting teams, the professor, and the alumnus maintained the relationship with the client during the course of the 4 years.

The consulting cycle (see Table 1) followed the same pattern each year. In November, the professor visited with the organization's representatives to build relationships, check on client progress, and arrange for the next student team. In December or January, the authors e-mailed the organization and the alumnus to gather information on previous OD issues, subsequent business developments, and current concerns. In January, the two authors and the professor reviewed client data to date and developed instructions for the next consulting team using teleconference and e-mail. Later in January, the authors and the professor oriented each new team to the OD consulting assignment using in-person briefs, teleconferencing, e-mail, and written documents from prior engagements.

In March, the team of students visited the client on site for 3 days and worked with the organization to provide the agreed-upon intervention. Each annual 3-day consultation will be described in the Results section, with tables summarizing OD dimensions. The OD consulting cycle concluded in April or May, when the team leader debriefed the authors. The authors, professor, and/or alumnus also contacted the client by e-mail or in person to informally assess the consultation. The authors and professor had little contact with the client outside this 5- to 6-month OD cycle. The alumnus maintained occasional, casual contact with the organizational leadership.

Data gathering methods shifted during the course of the engagement. Initially, students used semistructured interviews and translated company documents to construct a business history and description of the company's management philosophy. Each year, students probed for more information to fill gaps and gain clarity. Through

Table 1
Annual Organization Development Consulting Cycle of MSOD
Students to Kun Lun Company, 2004–2008

Time Frame	Consulting Activity	Communication Vehicle
November	Preentry and contracting: Professor builds/maintains relationships, checks progress, arranges for team.	In-person meeting
December/January	Preliminary data collection: Company and alumnus provide update to authors.	E-mail
Early January	Preliminary data analysis and diagnosis: Authors and professor develop team assignment and instructions.	E-mail, teleconference
Mid- to late January	Team orientation: Authors and professor orient new team to assignment.	In-person meeting, e-mail, teleconference, documents
January/February	Team preparation: Team develops intervention strategy, process, tools, and action plans.	Teleconference, e-mail, document development
March (3 days)	Student team consults to Kun Lun Company: See Tables 2 through 5 for summaries of 3-day consulting process each year.	In-person meetings
March/April	Evaluation: Professor, authors, and/or alumnus gather informal feedback from client on engagement.	E-mail, teleconference, in-person meeting
March/April	Debrief: Team leader provides authors with data on engagement.	E-mail, teleconference, in-person meeting, documents

observations, tours of facilities, interviews, and surveys, students diagnosed the client's business challenges. The diagnoses were confirmed by the client. Some business data, such as some financial data, were not made available to the students. During the 3 days in Datong, the student consulting teams were primarily self-managed with one or two adjunct faculty observing and providing feedback to the teams. The professor monitored the progress of the consulting assignment and was available as a resource, but he did not directly intervene with the client during the 3-day consultation.

Following the consulting assignment, team leaders debriefed the authors, providing field notes, samples of interventions, reflections on process, and interview and survey data. These data sets from multiple methods, groups, and years were reviewed by the authors, the alumnus, and the professor to increase the reliability of the findings within the constraints of culture, language, geography, and time. These confirmed findings were built layer upon layer into one collective story to form a rich description of the Kun Lun Company, to examine efforts to apply OD in a culturally sensitive way and to determine if these adaptations were effective.

Looking across the gathered data, the authors were able to make descriptions of the client system and to look for themes and patterns in the consulting relationship. Analysis of data was necessarily after the fact, was grounded in events that took

place each year, and represents a loose form of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). At times using an informal validation process, the authors separately analyzed data and then reviewed findings with each other, the local alumnus, or the professor for validation.

Looking across the themes and patterns in the data, the authors also developed Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum to understand the changing nature of the client–consultant relationship over the 4 years and to highlight the cross-cultural adaptations we made over the years. This Continuum will be reviewed in the Discussion section. The continuum is informed by Block (1981) and by Schein’s process consultation (1999). For example, the continuum reflects Schein’s adaptive, client-focused, process-centric helping relationship rather than an expert model. Likewise, Block prefers client ownership of the process and working in partnership with the consultant. Both seek to increase client capacity rather than dependence, which is a prominent feature of the continuum.

Results

Case Study of Mr. Liu Hai Ming and the Kun Lun Way

Early beginnings. Liu Hai Ming, the founder and chairman of the Kun Lun Company, was born in rural ShouZhou, Shanxi Province, in 1946. The son of a farmer, Liu Hai Ming grew up working in the fields and received the standard 8 years of education. He later became a member of the Communist Party, as was the norm for the time.

In 1980, the owner of a hotel gave Mr. Liu a booklet by an unknown author, later referred to as the Little Book, that changed his perspective. The Little Book described the hospitality industry, traditionally considered less desirable, as offering great value to society through service to customers, honesty and integrity, and commitment to employees. From his Confucian worldview, Mr. Liu believed an honorable person would engage only in an enterprise that would benefit society and thus bring honor to his family. After further educating himself in business and customer service by reading newspaper and magazine articles, he worked as a restaurant manager in the 1980s.

The Cultural Revolution had ended and in the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping advocated economic reforms. The centralized economic control of the late 1950s through late 1970s gave way to greater private ownership in the 1980s and 1990s (Garnaut & Song, 2004). By the millennium, the private sector had grown to 62% of China’s total economic activity. In this rapidly reemerging private sector, Mr. Liu seized his business opportunity.

Business development and outcomes. In 1991, after 11 years working in restaurant management, Liu Hai Ming purchased a failing restaurant in Datong and reopened it as the Kun Lun Restaurant with 86 employees, a 140-m² (1,500-square-foot) facility, and a menu of common dishes.

From this beginning, growth was steady. Eventually his enterprises would include the Kun Lun Restaurant and the Hongya Restaurant, both in Datong, and the Tianyilong Hot Pot Restaurant in Beijing. His sons, Liu Dong and Liu Sheng, were hired, and the elder Liu maintained oversight and promoted his management philosophy to the entire enterprise.

Throughout the 1990s, dining rooms were expanded, staff were added, menus were improved, and new facilities were opened. Within 6 months of opening, the Hot Pot Restaurant was operating at full capacity. In 1999, Liu Hai Ming shifted the Kun Lun restaurants from a low-cost/high-volume strategy to a differentiated high-quality strategy. Business boomed. In 2000, annual income for the Kun Lun Restaurant was 16 million yuan (US\$1,932,974), and by 2004, it reached 17.76 million yuan (US\$2,148,430).

The Garden Hotel. As the restaurants flourished, Mr. Liu opened the Garden Hotel in 2004. After firing an outside manager who did not implement Mr. Liu's philosophy, he placed his son, Liu Dong, as general manager and hired Alex Lee, a Malaysian with extensive hotel industry experience, as assistant general manager. This time, the outside manager worked out well in the role. With 340 hotel staff, 108 rooms, and two restaurants on site, they turned a profit in 2006 running at 60% capacity. They anticipated growth with the opening of a local airport. Property adjacent to the hotel was purchased to add a conference facility, pool, and gym.

Management Philosophy and Culture

Mr. Liu's management philosophy, the Kun Lun Way, was developed from the Little Book and his other readings. A blend of Confucian tradition and entrepreneurial insights, the philosophy clearly distilled the Kun Lun culture, or "the way we do things around here" (Deal, 1985, p. 605), by defining expected behaviors and relationships with customers, employees, and community. The elements of the Kun Lun Way were (a) a Confucian worldview, (b) innovative entrepreneurialism, (c) customer service and quality, and (d) commitment to employees and their training.

Confucian worldview. Grounded in Confucian values, Mr. Liu placed service to community, care of subordinates, and honor to family over concerns for personal profit. He evaluated his ventures based on their benefit to society and honor to his family. He educated his staff in these values as the path to business success.

Innovative entrepreneurialism. Joined to his Confucian values was his entrepreneurial spirit. Enterprising and constantly watching for market trends, he understood both the nature of the market and the need for innovation. He said that innovations, uniqueness, and high quality would lead to competitive ability, whereas imitation would lead nowhere. Mr. Liu believed that "opportunities go hand in hand with challenges."

When the restaurant was in trouble because of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak, he increased salaries, hired a new chef, and upgraded the facilities. His risk taking yielded positive outcomes for the enterprise. Whereas Keller and Kronstedt (2005) describe the dissonance in Chinese society between the push to maintain ancient cultural traditions and values and the pull of the trappings of capitalism, Mr. Liu blended both, sacrificing neither his culture nor his business sense.

Customer service and quality. Information he read in articles helped form his beliefs in customer service and business management. "The newspapers gave me new ideas and taught me a lot of knowledge I didn't have before," he recalled in interviews. He studied articles from the Chinese press, including "Customers Are Our God," "Profit Comes From Hygiene," and "Smiling Service." Newspaper articles on Western business practices, including one on the Mary Kay Company's customer service, influenced his thinking. He believed a business would not last if its only goal was profit. But if the goal was to satisfy the customer, the business would be rewarded.

Commitment to employees and their training. Mr. Liu was committed to exceptional employment practices. Whereas the popular adage was "Service first, customers first," Mr. Liu adopted the guideline "Employees first." He explained, "Only when we have first-rate employees can we offer first-rate service to customers." To consistently achieve this high customer service standard, Mr. Liu employed a strict system of rules and training. This training was sought after by workers wanting to gain job skills. Formal training meetings were held monthly and employees were tested weekly. He also provided financial assistance to sick employees, security escorts for female employees, retirement pensions, and holidays. Mr. Liu was regarded as an inspiring leader. His parental leadership approach combining fatherly strictness and motherly love was consistent with Confucian values.

OD Consultation: Opportunities, Choices, and Outcomes

This section describes the OD consultation provided by the students to the Kun Lun Company each of the 4 years. The Methods section outlined the full 5- to 6-month OD cycle enacted without variation each year. This described the prework phase in which the professor visited the client in the fall, followed by the professor, authors, and alumnus collecting and analyzing initial data and preparing the next group of students, with heavy reliance on information technology. The following section explores in detail the OD dimensions enacted during the 3 days of on-site work in China, with tables summarizing each year. Throughout the consultation, the targeted subsystem was the executive leaders and managers. One in-depth description of an intervention adapted for the cultural context is provided for each year. The students' choices to adopt or violate Chinese cultural norms and the impact of those choices are also examined.

Table 2
Dimensions of Organization Development (OD) During Year 1

OD Dimension	Year 1 Examples
Presenting problems or opportunities	Opportunity to study a successful family-owned business with a unique management philosophy
Data collection methods	Observations Interview leaders in formal group meetings Unobtrusive measures (company documents)
Diagnosis	Client system did not value or leverage philosophy and culture Client not confident in human resources retention and training practices
Interventions	Diagnosis and feedback meeting Human resource management training
Evaluation	Positive response, desire for more interaction University invited back
Cross-cultural consulting notes	Hired local OD consultant (interpreter) for follow-up work Chose female spokesperson in male-dominated culture; client initially looked to male team member but then accepted female leader and participation of each team member Honored and affirmed client and Kun Lun Way Maintained client face using appreciative inquiry Resisted requests for Western solutions Adapted Galbraith's (2002) star model of organization design

Certain preparations and cross-cultural practices were consistent for all four student groups. Each year, students followed the recommendations described in the literature to prepare for their work in China. They studied Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, read about Chinese culture and business, attended a cultural briefing provided by the MSOD program, and reflected on previous cross-cultural consulting experiences. They discussed the need to suspend their assumptions and preconceived biases as they entered the client system. Teams 2, 3, and 4 were prepared for local culture, use of an interpreter, and client issues by the authors. Once on site, all four teams carefully demonstrated respect by following Chinese cultural protocols, including appointing a team spokesperson; dressing in business attire; learning a few phrases of Mandarin; observing formal meeting etiquette, such as greetings, introductions, and conversation, to honor their hosts; receiving the client's hospitality of tea and meals; and not rushing to work but focusing on relationships. Each team also relied on the services of one interpreter throughout the engagement.

Year 1

The first team arrived in Datong in March 2005 to study a successful, family-owned business with a unique management philosophy and to provide OD consultation. Table 2 summarizes the OD dimensions of the 3-day consulting cycle for Year 1.

On the 1st day of the engagement, students met first with a representative of the executive team, beginning to build rapport and carefully clarifying expectations. Students appointed a female spokesperson, a purposeful departure from cultural norms. Initially, the client representative turned expectantly to the male team member. But after the spokesperson's identity was clear, all client representatives turned to her as the leader in future meetings and also accepted the contribution of each team member. Students toured the restaurants and hotel facilities, asking questions to understand the design of the enterprise. The students did not stay at the hotel this 1st year but did dine in the client's restaurants four different times. During this phase, students suspended their Western penchant for critical questioning, opting instead for an appreciative questioning style (Cooperrider, 2001; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). This allowed the client to maintain face by focusing on strengths. This positive approach worked well; participants felt comfortable and proud discussing their organization's history, operations, benchmarks, and interests. The client provided students with biographical and business history documents, which were translated that evening. To lay the groundwork for further data collection on Day 2, students requested interviews with employees and managers.

On the 2nd day, after breakfast in and a tour of the hotel, students were taken to a formal, traditionally arranged meeting room, where Mr. Liu gathered with his leadership team and key managers for interviews. Apparently the trust level would not yet allow for private interviews. All "interviews" were conducted in the group setting and flowed through the team spokesperson. During this phase, Mr. Liu began to share his business history and philosophy.

Honoring the client also began in this phase. The spokesperson reflectively listened and affirmed the positive: the quality of the company's buildings, décor, staff, service, and food. The Kun Lun leadership team members were visibly proud and seemed relieved. The spokesperson also expressed the team's genuine respect for Mr. Liu's philosophy, asking many questions about its origin, tenets, and application in the organization. The leadership team was eager for the students' expertise and business advice and did not seem aware of the full value of their own philosophy and organizational culture. The students wondered if it was adequately leveraged as a competitive advantage. The students hesitated to offer Western ideas, fearing such information would be regarded as "the way" to conduct business without any critical evaluation for cultural and organizational fit. The students were concerned the Kun Lun Company would lose something essential if Western ideas replaced its adaptation of Confucianism and entrepreneurialism.

Toward the end of the 2nd day, the leadership team expressed interest in learning more about human resource practices, particularly, training and retaining employees. This was as close as the client came to disclosing specific concerns during this 1st year.

Meeting privately, the students discussed the dynamics underlying the consulting engagement and their many limits. Although they were seasoned business leaders in

the West, none had significant hospitality experience. They could not know the family or organizational dynamics or their own impact on these. With their limited cultural knowledge, they could not discern nuances. They felt pressure to avoid making a mistake that would harm the fragile new relationship with the Kun Lun Company or the reputation of the university. They also acknowledged their own potential to be intoxicated by the engagement. Traveling to China was a long-anticipated, exotic experience. The client treated the students as honored guests, offered generous hospitality, and requested their advice. Mindful of the limits and dynamics at play, the students resisted the expert role and exercised caution as they proceeded.

Late on the 2nd evening, the students analyzed the data collected using an informal content analysis process and team debriefing. They diagnosed the client as having a strong management philosophy and organizational culture but not valuing or leveraging these to their full potential across all elements of the organization. They also diagnosed the client as not having confidence in the Kun Lun Company's human resource training, development or retention practices, although students acknowledged they did not have enough information to determine if this lack of confidence was founded. Drawing from the members' organizational backgrounds, the team prepared interventions.

On the 3rd day, the students provided two interventions to the client: a diagnosis and feedback meeting and human resource management training. First, they honored Mr. Liu, expressing their high regard for the Kun Lun Way. This philosophy was an advantage to the organization and equal to the management approach of many successful companies in the United States. Next, they provided the Star Model of Organization Design (Galbraith, 2002), a clear, elegant model that would be useful to the Kun Lun leaders after the students were gone. The Kun Lun Way should be evident in and applied to all five main areas of the organization: strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people. Next, the students provided basic information on human resource practices.

Diagrams detailed the process of attracting, hiring, training, and retaining employees. The students described the components of a traditional Western compensation system and introduced a three-part critical evaluation model: Part 1, "Keep . . . what is working well"; Part 2, "Create . . . what will help you in the future"; and Part 3, "Change . . . what will get in the way of the things one must keep and create." The Kun Lun Company should use only what was appropriate for its culture and organization. The session concluded according to Chinese business norms with pictures, speeches, and gifts. Afterward, the Communist Party political officer, who observed all the meetings for the 3 days, stated that he used to think all Americans were cowboys but now he knew they really cared for and listened to other people too. The family invited the university to return to the business the following year.

In the months following, the Kun Lun leadership hired the team's interpreter, himself an OD consultant, to follow up on its progress. The Kun Lun Company purchased the lot neighboring the hotel for expansion. It also began plans to franchise the Hot Pot Restaurant.

Table 3
Dimensions of Organization Development (OD) During Year 2

OD Dimension	Year 2 Examples
Presenting problems or opportunities	Employee retention concerns Managers not supporting Kun Lun Way How to become a five-star hotel?
Data collection methods	Interviews Observations Customer satisfaction survey
Diagnosis	Kun Lun Way not leveraged as strategic advantage Managers do not know Kun Lun Way Need shared leadership to promote Kun Lun Way Competitive strategy: four-star facility with five-star-quality experience
Interventions	Critically adapt Western practices to protect culture Customer satisfaction survey feedback Diagnosis-and-feedback meeting Strategy discussion
Evaluation	Received feedback with enthusiasm Deep learning Son embraced Kun Lun Way High trust level Continue relationship with university Incorporated Kun Lun Way into training and Hot Pot franchising Client learned to critically evaluate advice against Kun Lun Way
Cross-cultural consulting notes	Communicated value of Kun Lun Way Used five-star image Modeled shared leadership Maintained client face Took appreciative approach Resisted providing solutions without client adaptation

Year 2

In 2006, the second team stayed at the Garden Hotel. At their first meeting, the Liu family and company leaders welcomed the students with openness and urgency. Table 3 summarizes the OD dimensions for the 2nd year. The leadership team was quickly transparent about its business concerns. The *guanxi* created by the first team and by ongoing relationship-building efforts of the professor and the alumnus prepared the way for this trust. In interviews between one or two leaders and two or three students, the leaders explained that the hotel had become the priority business for the family. They expressed concerns about employee retention at the hotel and about managers not supporting the management philosophy, and they requested

specifications for becoming a five-star hotel. The leaders still perceived the students as the business experts, undervaluing their own expertise and the Kun Lun Way. On this 1st day, students also toured facilities and dined in the restaurants.

On Day 2, the students conducted interviews with department heads to understand how and to what degree the Kun Lun Way was transferred from leadership to middle management to staff. To allow the client to maintain face, the students framed their questions appreciatively. These interviews indicated that long-term employees and family knew the philosophy, but the Kun Lun Way was not being transmitted throughout the organization. The organization would benefit from more shared leadership, wherein the burden to transmit the Kun Lun Way did not rest on Mr. Liu but was the responsibility of all managers. The students used the Internet and personal contacts to research guidelines for four- and five-star hotel ratings and to benchmark Chinese hotel industry employee retention data. The students also conducted a satisfaction survey. Late in the evening, they prepared for the next day's interventions.

On the 3rd day, students met with the leadership team, including Mr. Liu, and conducted a diagnosis and feedback meeting, which included a strategy discussion and customer satisfaction survey feedback. The students' research determined the current facility would not meet strict five-star criteria. Instead, they recommended that the Garden Hotel be positioned strategically as a "boutique" four-star hotel and polish its strengths to create a five-star experience. The five-star experience plan nicely merged the client's five-star concerns with the previous year's star model.

This five-star-experience model was also configured as a five-pointed star, with each point reflecting the Kun Lun Way. First, continue to offer exceptional, five-star food, a pillar of the company's original business success. Second, continue to provide five-star service, another area of strength. Third, create five-star leadership by developing shared leadership and responsibility for recognizing and promoting the Kun Lun Way. The students provided Hilton Hotel research demonstrating that shared leadership built employee loyalty. Fourth, create five-star loyalty. The Garden Hotel was not unique in experiencing high turnover. Research into retention issues revealed an average turnover rate in China of 20% to 30%. The students suggested counteracting the turnover by building work-group communities within the organization, by highlighting opportunities for advancement, and by using selective hiring practices to ensure that new hires were aligned with the organization's philosophy. Fifth, create five-star communications by having company leaders share the Kun Lun vision in large groups and individually with next-level management. Managers and employees should decide how department goals connected to the vision. Fully developing these capabilities would strengthen the culture and create a five-star experience for customers and employees.

The following description highlights adapting the diagnosis and feedback meeting to the cross-cultural context. To communicate the importance of shared leadership and team engagement, the team intentionally chose to demonstrate shared leadership rather than attempting to describe the concept across the language barrier.

The spokesperson opened and closed the presentation and answered Mr. Liu's questions as courtesy dictated, but she spoke highly of her team, deferred to her team members, and verbally highlighted the expertise of each member. By delegating each portion of the feedback meeting, she demonstrated that all team members could and should lead. About halfway through the presentation, Mr. Liu lit up. "I understand!" he said through the translator. "You are all leaders in different ways!" He then applied this to his own management team and its ability to take his management philosophy throughout the organization on his behalf. This was a significant breakthrough for the Kun Lun Company.

The students honored Mr. Liu and his Kun Lun Way by encouraging leaders and managers to embrace the Kun Lun Way of doing business and to be cautious about adopting Western business practices, which might not be relevant or might need adaptation. The leadership team was encouraged to critically evaluate anything offered from any source, as Mr. Liu originally did when he developed the Kun Lun Way. If the leaders did not scrutinize outside advice, then they could lose what made the company unique. The Kun Lun leadership team was initially reluctant to critically evaluate the students' advice because this violated the cultural norms for respecting authority. When the students explained further and provided an example, Mr. Liu and his team expressed understanding that it was not offensive to the students for them to modify all business and management practices to align with the Kun Lun Way.

Finally, the students provided feedback from the customer survey on ways the hotel could improve services to meet the expectations of Western guests, such as providing more power adaptors, smoke-free rooms, irons in the rooms, and English-speaking front desk staff. This advice was given without hesitation because it would not compromise management philosophy.

Mr. Liu received all these ideas with great enthusiasm. The level of trust attained in the 2nd year was significant and directly linked to the fact that the students not only understood and affirmed his management philosophy, but also documented that his approach achieved high levels of customer satisfaction. He expressed the need to continue a relationship with the university. After the final meeting, the students were invited to attend Mr. Liu's birthday celebration. This was a great honor to the students and the MSOD program.

In the year following the students' interventions, the leadership team and the managers worked to incorporate the Kun Lun Way into their management practices, training programs, and the franchising of the Hot Pot Restaurant.

Year 3

On the 1st day of the consulting engagement in 2007, the Kun Lun leadership team updated the new group of students on the local business environment. Table 4 summarizes the OD dimensions for the 3rd year. Datong was changing and business was becoming

Table 4
Dimensions of Organization Development (OD) During Year 3

OD Dimension	Year 3 Examples
Presenting problems or opportunities	Business environment competitive and expanding Continued attraction and retention issues
Data collection methods	Practical applications of Kun Lun Way Employee interviews
Diagnosis	Observations Ensure organization design alignment
Interventions	Focus on unique organizational culture Develop human resources management practices Best-practices research and feedback Diagnosis-and-feedback meeting
Evaluation	Organization design Client confirmed diagnosis and feedback Discussed implementation options
Cross-cultural consulting notes	Leadership resolved to implement organization design Adapted Galbraith's (2002) star model for client's culture Honored Kun Lun Way and strengths Used appreciative inquiry for interviews Changed language for cultural fit Male team leader enacted patriarchal dynamics; female consultants had trouble contributing Difficult to manage client when problem focused Student anxiety affected client

more competitive. The airport recently opened, prompting hopes of an increase in local business. The opening of McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken in Datong affected business. Fast food was considered a higher-class option because it is more expensive than a regular restaurant meal. The leadership team also anticipated competition from the Sheraton Hotel, which would be opening in the third quarter of 2008.

Internally, the leaders continued to face employee attraction and retention challenges even with the company's efforts to infuse the Kun Lun Way into all areas of the organization. About one third of recruits were attracted by the organization's reputation, but more came because starting salaries were higher. Newer staff had a higher turnover rate, opting for pay increases elsewhere. Staff from the original Kun Lun Restaurant tended to stay, valuing Mr. Liu's philosophy and seeing their jobs as careers. Although the organization provided opportunities to move to other functions, some staff members were reluctant to move to new roles, although these included promotions and pay increases.

One son, Liu Dong, who thought the Kun Lun Way was old-fashioned, now championed the culture at the hotel, although sometimes he was unsure about how to apply it in practical terms. The leadership team was also concerned about overseas marketing, driving Web site traffic, the four-star hotel experience, and quality and

staffing in the Hot Pot franchises. With such limited time and so many issues, the students determined to conduct best-practices research for Western hospitality companies and to interview employees.

On the 2nd day, the students conducted employee interviews using appreciative rather than problem-focused questions, because workers were hesitant to speak about any weaknesses within the organization. This adaptation of the OD process allowed the staff and the organization to maintain face while also probing the impact of the Kun Lun Way. Employees were asked, (a) What makes you feel most valued by your manager? (b) What do you value about the Kun Lun Way? (c) Where do you see yourself in 3 to 5 years? and (d) What do you find most exciting about your job?

Responses described initiative, delegating responsibilities, being treated like family, customer service, clear priorities, learning, solving problems, and more. These appreciative interviews demonstrated that when managers and employees know and apply the Kun Lun Way, it has a strong impact on employees and the organization. That evening, the team reviewed the data and arrived at the following diagnoses: The client needed to ensure that all elements of the organization were aligned, to focus on developing and maintaining the unique Kun Lun culture, and to develop human resource management practices. The students designed interventions to address these diagnoses.

On the 3rd day, the students met with the leadership team and Kun Lun managers to conduct a diagnosis and feedback meeting, which included best-practices research and feedback and an organization design intervention. Once again, the students urged the client to focus on the Kun Lun Way and not be limited by Western views. They provided Galbraith's (2002) star model as a framework for their presentation, placing the Kun Lun Way at the center of the model to demonstrate that the culture should inform all other aspects of the organization. Rather than describing the "alignment" among the points of the star, the students adapted their explanation to reflect the Confucian ideal of "harmony" among all points of the star. This term resonated with the managers and leaders.

Using the star model, the students summarized their findings, offered questions, and facilitated discussions that followed. Concerning strategy, students asked the leadership team to consider how its business strategy addressed recruiting and retention. Concerning structure, students asked if the leaders were willing to create additional opportunities for advancement. Concerning processes, students asked if all processes were standardized and documented to use in training. Concerning rewards, students asked the leadership team to consider how much information it had about competitors' rewards and whether it could incorporate comparable rewards. Concerning people, students asked the leadership team to consider creating a training system. Concerning philosophy, they asked the leadership team to consider making its philosophy visible to employees and customers alike. Students observed that companies gain a unique competitive advantage when customers and employees understand the philosophy that is the heart of the organizational culture.

Mr. Liu said the students' perceptions were accurate. He wanted to understand Western practices, but he also realized the Kun Lun Company had to find its own way. The group engaged in an in-depth discussion of many ideas, including creating clearer job paths, incentivizing lateral moves, and instituting certificate programs. The meeting ended with the leadership team determined to make progress on issues before the next group of students came to visit.

This third team of students encountered several challenges with the cross-cultural dynamics. When they chose to follow the client's cultural expectations by selecting a male student as team leader, their own team dynamic took on a patriarchal hierarchy by nature of the male-to-male relationships formed with the family. This inadvertently made it more difficult for the female students to get a voice at the table with the family leadership. The team also noted that its Western, problem-focused orientation, when combined with the client's penchant for Western expertise, created a dynamic that was difficult to manage. In addition, because of their Western action orientation, the students experienced the formal meeting environment as limiting their consultative progress. This created some urgency among the students, and the client was undoubtedly affected by their anxiety.

Year 4

Before reviewing the 3-day consultation for Year 4, it is necessary to describe the preliminary data analysis, diagnosis, and team orientation conducted by the authors and professor in January, as it significantly differs from the previous years. The authors and professor assessed client, student, and situational factors. They noted the client valued the Kun Lun culture, trusted the MSOD student groups, and consistently requested instructive content. They worried the client was becoming impatient with diagnosis-and-feedback meeting interventions. Students were limited by time constraints yet were inclined to cautiously collect their own diagnostic data each year. The authors and the professor determined this fourth team could safely rely on the existing body of diagnostic data and use greater off-site prework for planning to offer a different intervention. From this assessment, the authors and professor took a highly directive approach, instructing the fourth group of students to deliver a management training workshop to the Kun Lun management team with all preparatory work to be done in advance of their arrival.

Given this directive, in the month before the engagement, the students reviewed previous data on the client and conducted short e-mail "interviews" for updates. Multiple potential workshop topics were identified. To increase the client's capacity to address future challenges and develop systemically, they prepared a workshop based on Edgar Schein's problem-solving model (Schein, 1999, pp. 152-153). This workshop was an OD intervention rather than business consulting because it developed the OD capability of the client.

The steps of Schein's (1999) model start with a felt need and proceed through two cycles. Cycle 1 consists of (a) formulating the problem, (b) generating proposals for

Table 5
Dimensions of Organization Development (OD) During Year 4

OD Dimension	Year 4 Examples
Presenting problems or opportunities	Client facing many challenges and requesting solutions
Data collection methods	E-mail "interviews" with company leader Unobtrusive measures (previous diagnostic data)
Diagnosis	Client valued Kun Lun Way Client critically assessed input against their culture Multiple potential problems identified Problem-solving training would increase client capability
Interventions	Human process training (1.5 days) using Schein's (1999) problem-solving model
Evaluation	During workshop: Actively participated, discussed real issues After workshop: Applied to development of new Web site
Cross-cultural consulting notes	Relied on off-site preparations to overcome time constraints Renamed workshop to be culturally appropriate Relied on interpreter to provide cultural guidance Rearranged training room Used interactive training approach; not lecture format Discussion of sensitive subjects

solutions, and (c) forecasting consequences and testing proposals. Cycle 2 includes (d) action planning, (e) taking action steps, and (f) evaluating outcomes of those actions. As part of Cycle 1, a full range of decision-making options are reviewed; these are decision by lack of response, formal authority, self-authorization (minority), majority rule (voting or polling), consensus, and unanimous consent. See Table 5 for a summary of OD dimensions for Year 4.

In Datong on Day 1, the team met with the assistant manager of the hotel to confirm arrangements and preview the workshop content. The students were thrown into a small panic when the assistant manager asked if the workshop could be changed because discussing problems would not be a comfortable, face-saving experience. He also expressed concern that the content was not substantial enough. The team clarified his concerns and assured him of its desire to help and willingness to adapt to the organization's needs. First, to be more culturally appropriate, the students changed the name of the workshop from "Problem Solving" to "Process Improvement: How to Make Something Good Even Better." Second, the students explained the workshop would indeed be substantial and would provide managers with relevant tools and skills to build their capabilities.

The one-and-a-half-day workshop intervention was conducted on the 2nd and 3rd days in Datong. The workshop was attended by managers from different departments, from midlevel up to the senior leaders. The 1st day of the workshop consisted of an opening exercise to get acquainted. Next, the process improvement (problem-solving) model was introduced with questions to engage participants in thinking

critically about its potential application. The 2nd day of the workshop featured a review and then practice using the model on actual problems identified by the participants. Small-group discussion format was used. Because participants were curious about the consultants, the session ended with an open panel discussion on topics ranging from American business practices to feedback on their own operations.

Initially, the participants seemed quiet and tense. They were visibly agitated when the consultants changed the room arrangement from a formal conference table to small table groups. Previous student teams would not have taken this bold move, afraid of offending the client. Because of the trust built through the years, students could now violate this cultural norm.

After this, the participants asked questions and engaged in meaningful discussion. When the students introduced sensitive subjects, such as decision making, the managers participated with humor. In the end, participants were pleased with the workshop. The students and their Chinese clients exchanged gifts and celebrated the successful intervention with toasts and a banquet. In gratitude for the students' work, Liu Dong went to some effort to bring lunches to the train station for their trip back to Beijing. Since that time, the Kun Lun Company has applied the decision-making model to the creation and launching of a new Web site. The company reported that the model was very helpful.

A significant example of adapting to the cross-cultural consulting environment was the students' reliance on the interpreter for cultural insights. The students privately debriefed with her at breaks to clarify client behaviors and to ask about their own. For example, the team worried that participant cell phone use in the meeting indicated disinterest. But the interpreter assured them this was a cultural norm and not reflective of the engagement. Her nuanced insights proved invaluable.

When asked about the long-term impact of OD consultations on the organization after 4 years, the Kun Lun leaders noted that their philosophy and culture are now central to the organization. For example, the Kun Lun Way is central to the business strategy. They use the Kun Lun Way as the basis for their selection practices and as a component of their training. They focus on internally promoting into management positions those who believe in and practice the Kun Lun Way, strengthening their management team and culture. Finally, they critically evaluate outside input against their philosophy to ensure compatibility and adaptations when necessary.

Discussion of the Case

The purpose of this research was to explore the adaptation of OD consultation in a cross-cultural setting and to explore two questions: (a) Can OD be effectively adapted by Western consultants for a Chinese client? (b) What insights can be gained for conducting OD with a Chinese client? To do this, we described the OD consultation provided by four teams of MSOD students to a hospitality organization. In this

Table 6
Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum

Observed Consultant/ Client Factors	Initiation	Dependence	Partnership	Independence
Student groups	Year 1	Years 2 and 3	Year 4	
Consultant cultural adaptations	Honor the client. Emphasize relationships before the work. Demonstrate high regard for culture. Use appreciative approach. Act humbly. Go <i>very</i> slowly.	Affirm client strengths. Resist expert role. Model desired behaviors. Test client adaptability. Focus on process. Go slowly.	Engage client collaboratively. Educate client on process. Encourage questions and modifications. Use client flexibility. Go faster.	Acknowledge client independence. Follow rituals to honor relationship. Change relationship within culture. Reflect on lessons. Stop consulting. Client self- reliance.
Consultant goal	Build relationship and trust. Make accurate diagnosis.	Build client's self- awareness and confidence. Equalize power.	Build client's capacity to change and develop.	
Client goal	Gain business contacts and solutions.	Use Western expertise to grow business.	Build capacity to change and develop.	Self-reliance.
Client actions	Control of time and process Low disclosure Impression management	Test consultant boundaries High disclosure "You are expert. Tell us how."	Collaborate. Disclose as needed. Critically adapt ideas.	Self-directing Disclosure not needed End consulting relationship
Client attributes	Polite but cautious Lack of organizational self-awareness Minimal trust in consultant	Emerging organizational self-awareness Lack of confidence Increased trust in consultant Minimal trust in self	Increased organizational self-awareness High trust in consultant Increased trust in self	High organizational self-awareness High trust in self

section, we discuss our findings reflecting on the successful adaptations of OD for the Kun Lun Company.

First, we discuss the features that set this OD consultation apart from what is common in OD. Next, we offer Table 6, Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum, as a framework for analyzing adaptations of OD and their impact on the client–consultant relationship across the 4 years. With this perspective, we address the question of whether OD can be successfully adapted. We enumerate findings that confirm the literature's advice on cross-cultural consulting. Finally, we discuss new insights from our research on OD conducted with a Chinese client.

Our findings indicate that OD can be successfully adapted by Western consultants for a Chinese client; that the literature provides sound suggestions for preparing for and entering a consultation in a culturally sensitive, aware manner; and that our research extends the OD knowledge base by suggesting insights into possible client issues and consultant responses and by addressing the consultative process with a Chinese client.

It must be acknowledged that several factors distinguish this consultation from typical OD. Normally, an OD consulting group would be fairly stable and have regular contact with the client. This would build the relationship, maintain trust, and ensure consistency. In this case, four different teams consulted to the same client system for 3 days at a time across a 4-year period. This is highly unusual. In this case, the client built a trusting relationship with the university embodied by the professor and alumnus. The professor and authors then supplied the stable, long-range perspective, safeguarding the data and the process from year to year. They ensured continuity among the consulting teams. The extended time—up to 6 months—between each consultation cycle, time pressures when in the country, face-saving efforts, and language barriers made assessment quite difficult. More follow-up would be desirable but was not practical within the confines of the relationship and time constraints. These features set this consultation apart from normal OD.

Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum

Table 6, Cross-Cultural Adaptations and the Consulting Relationship Continuum, was developed as we reviewed the themes and patterns in the case study data. We offer it here as a framework emerging from our 4 years of research to be tested by others. Its content was influenced by both Block (1981) and Schein (1999). This can be seen in its focus on the development of the client as a full participant and owner of the consulting process and outcomes who gains OD competencies through the engagement. The continuum's purpose was to highlight the cross-cultural adaptations we made within the context of the client–consultant relationship across the 4 years. Following are descriptions of the stages of the consulting relationship and the cultural adaptations to aid our Chinese client in progressing along the continuum.

During the initiation phase in the 1st year, the client was characterized by low levels of trust and high levels of caution. The client was polite and careful to make a good impression. The client chose not to reveal problems to save face at this early stage. Organizational self-awareness was low, and the managers were uncertain of consultant motives. They carefully controlled the setting and the use of time. The driving interest of the client was to gain business contacts and quickly address business challenges with ready solutions from the West. In contrast, the goal of the consultants in the short term was to build a trusting relationship on the foundation of the client's relationship with the university. They also sought to understand the client's

organization development needs. In the long term, the consultants' goal was to impart OD capacity to the client. In adapting to the face-saving aspects of the Confucian culture, the consultants used honor and an appreciative approach to recognize the Kun Lun Company's strengths, build trust, and begin to shift the client's self-awareness. It was also vital for the consultants to go slow and demonstrate high regard for the client's culture and traditions, which they learned about in their preparations.

During Years 2 and 3, the consultant–client relationship remained in the dependence phase. Although OD values rate dependence as undesirable for a client, it is normal in a high power-distance culture to rely on perceived authorities for direction. This manifests in client requests to be told what to do to resolve problems. Although trust in the consultants increased, client confidence remained low. The client perceived the consultants as experts and perceived itself as needing help. Although low during initiation, disclosure was high during the dependence phase. Gaining Western business expertise remained the client's goal, whereas the consultants sought to build client self-awareness and confidence in the Kun Lun Way, and to equalize the power in the client–consultant relationship. During this phase, each party tested the other to find the limits of its boundaries and adaptability. The consultants found it useful to model the behaviors they hoped to impart to the client to overcome language and cultural barriers.

In Year 4, the relationship moved to partnership. In this collaborative stage, the client had developed high levels of trust for the consultants and increasing confidence in the Kun Lun Way. The client's perceptions of equality strengthened, and disclosure was given as needed rather than withheld. The client's self-awareness increased and the leaders were finally able to see their business and the Kun Lun Way from the consultants' view. At this partnership stage, the goals of both the client and the consultant were to increase the client's capacity to change and develop. The client learned to evaluate and alter inputs to fit the Kun Lun culture and business environment. Consultants were able to progress more quickly. They educated the client on process, took into account client flexibility in designing interventions, and engaged the client in questioning and adapting tools for the Kun Lun Company's culture and purposes.

At some future time, the goal is the client's independence. At this stage, the managers have built a healthy self-awareness and are self-reliant. They trust their own ability and have adapted tools and skills to manage change and development processes. Disclosure is no longer needed, as the consulting relationship has ended. We anticipate the consultant would transition by celebrating the client's independence, by marking the end of the consulting relationship with social rituals, by reflecting on shared accomplishments and lessons learned, and by ending the consultation. It will be necessary at that time to explore what relationship may be culturally appropriate between the former client and the university. This is unknown territory yet to be explored but necessary to traverse with the same care and sensitivity used in establishing the relationship.

Question 1: Can OD Be Effectively Adapted by Western Consultants for a Chinese Client?

In this investigation, we set out to discover if OD could be effectively adapted by Western consultants for a Chinese client. Our data indicate that it can. Despite significant cultural barriers, including language, values, history, social norms, gender role expectations, and business customs, the students effectively entered the client system, established and maintained trusting consultative relationships, gathered relevant data from multiple sources, diagnosed the client's OD needs, confirmed the diagnoses with the client, and provided a variety of interventions to increase the client's organizational effectiveness and capacity to manage change. We began to see applications of OD skills and knowledge by the client in the organization. For example, the client included the Kun Lun Way in selection, training, franchising, and leadership habits. The application of the problem-solving model was also evidence of the client's learning. Moreover, the client ceased to focus solely on Western business practices. Through the consultative process, the client moved from initiation, through dependence, to a partnership phase, where the next generation understood the value of the management philosophy and culture and began to harmonize the elements of the organization's design. The students fostered this by adapting their consultative process and OD methodologies in ways recommended by the literature and in ways they developed on site, relying on their OD training, humanistic values, and cultural sensitivity. These adaptations and insights are examined next.

Question 2: What Insights Were Gained for Conducting OD With a Chinese Client?

Learn a cultural framework. The literature suggested steps consultants can take to prepare for and initiate effective Chinese–Western consulting relationships. Some of our findings agree with this advice. Learning a cultural framework (Hall & Hall, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994) proved useful as a diagram for making sense of cultural experiences otherwise puzzling without context. Understanding both the client's and their own culture in these categorical terms allowed the students to suspend their assumptions and act as inquiring learners. They realized that behaviors might have different meanings, responded thoughtfully, and avoided misattributing client behaviors.

Learn and observe cultural norms. The current research also echoed the findings of Xing (1995), Berry (2005), and Keller and Kronstedt (2005), who recommended that consultants working in China study their client's culture and build relationships by observing cultural norms. Our research found that readings, lectures, and briefings from cultural experts provided enough information to give students confidence to meet the client but also alerted them to their limited cultural knowledge. Tangible

actions, such as offering gifts, observing formal banquet rituals, offering toasts, properly giving and receiving business cards, and learning a few phrases in Mandarin, demonstrated a good-faith effort to show respect for the culture. The students accepted social invitations as opportunities to build trust and convey respect even though these infringed on their preparatory time. Preconceptions of Americans as self-focused and impolite were overcome by these simple efforts to adhere to cultural norms. Our research also indicated that learning about the client's culture ahead of time gave the students the opportunity to reflect on and make plans to mitigate conflicts between their personal values and the client's cultural norms. Students considered their personal response to such issues as gender roles and hierarchical power. This was the genesis of the concept of violating the client's cultural norms, which will be discussed below.

Diagnosing the client's desire to adopt Western practices. Lee (1996) cautioned consultants that Chinese clients may eagerly adopt Western business practices without realizing the possible impact on Chinese culture, values, and way of life. It was proposed that this derives from pressures to modernize and compete and from a high power-distance culture that respects experts (Berry, 2005; Hofstede, 2001; Lee, 1996). The students encountered this same dynamic with the Kun Lun Company and diagnosed a lack of organizational self-awareness; the leaders did not realize the company's strength in the Kun Lun Way. It is not known if this constellation of issues and diagnosis represents a common cluster of client characteristics that other consultants to Chinese businesses may encounter. We suggest this warrants further investigation to determine if these factors appear together in other Chinese organizations. In the next section, we will discuss methods used to address this diagnosis, resulting in increased client self-awareness, confidence, and critical evaluation of outside solutions to fit the management philosophy.

New Insights on Cross-Cultural OD Consulting

In addition to confirming existing research, this case study offers new insights into the practice of OD by Westerners with a Chinese client. The following section delineates these new insights, suggesting areas for potential research beyond the limits of this case study.

Honor: Holding up an appreciative mirror. Our research suggests that an appreciative intervention in which the Western consultant honors the organization's strengths through multiple channels is an effective method for increasing organizational self-awareness and checking the unbridled pursuit of Western business solutions. After students diagnosed low organizational self-awareness and the proclivity for Western business practices, they assessed this to be an unhealthy pattern that did not promote effectiveness and could undermine success by negating their distinctive business practices. Data collection clearly indicated the Kun Lun Company had a compelling management philosophy and

successful enterprise history. To be sure, Mr. Liu was confident of his management practices but struggled to transmit his philosophy to the next generation of leaders, who did not discern the unique value of the Kun Lun Way as a strategic competitive advantage. The intervention the students developed to address this was a human process intervention that spanned the full 4 years of the consulting assignment and was woven into all other interventions. The intervention was to honor the Kun Lun Company by holding up an appreciative mirror to the organization. Specifically, in all client interactions, the students took a positive approach to observations and questions, verbally praised the organization's strengths, resisted the expert role in refusing to tell the client how to do things like the West, and demonstrated high regard for Chinese culture. These consulting behaviors were a mirror to help the client see the company's strengths.

To use an analogy, it was as if the Kun Lun Company sought to refashion itself after the image of a Western organization. Instead, the consultants repeatedly turned the client away from the image and held up a mirror reflecting back the Kun Lun philosophy, values, and organizational culture. The students taught the client to weave that philosophy into the organization design and strengthen the culture. Through the sincere, repeated affirmations of respected outsiders (the students), the Kun Lun leadership team learned to value Mr. Liu's founding philosophy and to use it throughout the enterprise. This awareness built self-confidence and moved the client to the partnership phase of the consulting relationship.

Note that requests for expertise can appeal to a consultant's ego. We agree with Block (1981) and Schein (1999) that to the degree possible, the expert role should be resisted as not in the best interests of the client. Particularly with historic patterns of domination or humiliation, it is vitally important for Western OD consultants to build client confidence and to equalize the perceived power in the relationship. This is the ultimate form of helping, which is the essence of OD's humanistic values.

Violating cultural norms. Although it is advised to respect traditions (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005), the literature is not clear on if it is ever appropriate to disregard norms and traditions. Our research shows that violating a client's cultural norms, if done with care and thoughtfulness, can be an important source of information about the client's ability to adapt and change. These violations were all done within the context of demonstrating great respect for other cultural practices. The students were careful not to be disrespectful or to overdo this learning strategy. This approach takes a new angle on two of Schein's (1999) tenets of process consultation, which remind consultants to access their ignorance and that everything is a source of data. This study shows that carefully testing a client's unknown cultural boundaries can be an important source of learning. After observing the client's responses to violations, the students made informed choices regarding OD methods. Over time, our data show that as students observed the client's tolerance for Western OD practices, the students' choices became more culturally bold. Early violations of norms used by the client were appointing a female team lead, using shared leadership, and encouraging managers to

critically evaluate consultant advice. Later violations included rearranging the physical space, using interactive methods, and discussing problems. The client adapted to each intentional violation. Used with solicitude, violation of cultural norms can provide the consultant with important client insights to adapt OD interventions. If it is used carelessly, the client may be offended and even terminate the relationship.

Business or OD consulting. Our data demonstrated that the client's pull toward business consulting was present all 4 years but diminished over time. We suggest that this derived primarily from the client's not knowing the difference between business and OD consulting as well as from pressure to compete. As the students consistently redirected the client to attend to systemic issues affecting effectiveness and to develop OD skills, the Kun Lun leadership team learned about OD. Although the team members remained interested in Western business practices, their expectations were recalibrated to OD, and by the 4th year, they participated in OD and asked fewer tactical questions. For their part, the students were aware of client expectations and constantly sorted through business and OD issues. Students did not want to feed client overconfidence in outside sources. Nor did they want to disappoint the client or appear to be withholding information but desired to maintain good relations for the university. Ultimately they chose to provide some tactical business and operations advice when they were certain it would not compromise the Kun Lun culture and management philosophy. This suggests it may be useful for consultants to provide a client with some limited business know-how as they educate on OD and earn trust as credible advisors.

The impact of nonsite OD. In our data, we noted a significant shift in cultural issues in the 4th year. We noted the client had increased confidence, trust in consultants, and comfort with the students. The consultants delivered a workshop using several decidedly Western methods. The client adapted well and engaged in the workshop. The client also displayed desired critical evaluation skills this year by questioning the students' content and methods for fit with the organization. We posit that several factors contributed to the shift in cultural issues. The client benefited from an ongoing relationship with the professor and the alumnus. The consultants' prework and outreach to the client established a relationship that allowed the consultants to move beyond cultural issues. The directive approach for the assignment moved the students closer to the client faster than the other groups. This suggests that timely preparations, the bridging function of those overseeing the consultation, and ongoing relationship-building efforts can help overcome cultural barriers.

Cross-cultural OD: OD on steroids. After reviewing this research, one might notice that OD adapted for a Chinese client does not appear that much different from OD conducted in Western nations. The process, interventions, challenges, and even adaptations may all sound very familiar to the OD practitioner. Furthermore, the construct of national culture is similar to organizational culture; each has language, rituals, norms,

assumptions, beliefs, and espoused values. In this sense, all OD is cross-cultural. This begs the question, “Isn’t effective cross cultural OD just good OD?” Our answer is yes. Yes, cross-cultural OD is good OD . . . and something more. Cross-cultural OD is distinguished by its intensity. It is OD on steroids. Cultural differences and language barriers magnify and exaggerate the OD process. For example, in this research, the need to build a relationship necessitated attending many meals and banquets, which took away from planning time. When planning did occur, it was under time and sleep pressures. The use of a translator slowed communication by half and impacted the amount of work accomplished. It also had the advantage of providing time to “listen” first to body language and then to words, slowing down communication. Increased ambiguity surfaced emotional issues. Change in time, food, environment, language, sleep, and norms had a deep impact on the consultants’ sense of well-being and intensified the experience. Cross-cultural OD is intense, but it is still OD.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations to this study must be acknowledged. First, the Kun Lun Company and Mr. Liu Hai Ming are not necessarily representative of the majority of companies in China. Mr. Liu’s business approach appears unique, which is what makes his story so compelling. However, the consulting dynamics may be different with another, less enlightened organization.

Second, this study does not address the consulting dynamics that would occur when more than two cultures are involved. This would certainly increase the complexity of the engagement, but we cannot say for certain if the same guidelines would apply. Our intuition tells us that the need to honor, go slow, be intentional, not impose Western ways, build trust, and guide the client to partnership and eventual independence would still be effective. What we do not know is what else might be needed.

A third limitation of the study is the time spent with the client each year. Student groups were with the client for 3 days each. They made efficient use of that time but would have certainly built stronger relationships, gathered deeper data, and taken the consultative process farther with more insights had they been with the client longer.

A fourth limitation is the influence of previous teams’ methods and findings on subsequent teams, which undoubtedly biased them to a certain approach and findings. Although independent research teams starting the consulting process from the beginning each time might have had some benefit to the study, it would have been detrimental to the client. It was necessary for the sake of effectiveness and efficiency for the teams to build on the work of previous teams.

A fifth limitation is the applicability of these findings to Chinese clients in other parts of China. The MSOD faculty purposefully took students to a city that was not heavily influenced by the West. It is not known if findings would apply to a Chinese client in areas with more exposure to Western business practices, such as Shanghai or Beijing.

Future research should explore the adoption of Western business practices and their impact on Chinese culture. Do consultants and organizations really need to be concerned about adopting Western practices? Is there a deleterious effect? Do such practices significantly change the culture, values, or way of life, as Lee (1996) cautions, or does the culture prevail, ultimately altering the practices? Are certain organizational characteristics associated with the drive to adopt Western practices? Is lack of organizational self-awareness a common concern for businesses in developing economies? Future research could also highlight case studies with multiple cultures, consulting for longer periods of time and with a more thorough evaluation of business outcomes. This is a long-term proposition and beyond the scope of the students' research.

Conclusion

This case study presented a Chinese hospitality business and management philosophy and the lessons learned about the cross-cultural OD consulting process in China. Although the Western OD students may have possessed technical, business, change, or industry expertise, they lacked at least one essential element. They were not Chinese. The students did not speak the language or understand the culture in more than an elementary manner. They did not have a Confucian worldview or a collectivist perspective. They did not have the same focus on family honor, nor were their identities based in group membership. Because of this cultural gap, their Western OD practices, unproven in a Chinese context, might not be completely relevant and certainly should not be applied without careful consideration and collaboration with the client. By simply providing Western expertise, they might have done more harm than good—they might have had unintended impacts, perhaps stripping the client of their agency, sense of competence, and uniquely Chinese way of doing business. Instead, the students chose to embody their OD values of respect, collaboration, self-awareness, and empowerment. The client increased self-awareness of the strategic value of the Kun Lun organizational culture and management philosophy. The client learned to critically modify Western practices for fit, trusting internal leaders and managers as the expert. Each year, the students adapted the OD intervention cycle with cultural sensitivity. Across the entire 4-year span, the students intervened by honoring the Kun Lun Way. This established a foundation for the client to move toward independently leading the Kun Lun Company's organization development.

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