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MULTICULTURAL EMPLOYEES: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING  
HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONS

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# MULTICULTURAL EMPLOYEES: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONS

## ABSTRACT

Organizations are experiencing a rise in a new demographic of employees – multicultural individuals, who identify with two or more cultures, and have internalized associated cultural schemas. This paper creates a map of possible ways to organize more than one cultural identity, based on identity integration, which ranges from separated to integrated, and identity plurality, which ranges from single to multiple. Cognitive and motivational mechanisms drawn from social identity theory explain how identity patterns then influence both benefits and challenges for multicultural employees, categorized into personal, social and task outcomes.

Organizational identification and organizational culture each moderate relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes. The framework presented in this paper offers a theoretical basis for understanding how multicultural employees may contribute to their organizations.

Keywords: multicultural, cultural identities, multiple identities

## MULTICULTURAL EMPLOYEES: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONS

Multicultural employees “belong to multiple worlds and carry those worlds with them; they are defined by ambivalence and complexity; they are leading the world in important new ways” (Giridharadas, May 6, 2010).

Organizations are experiencing a rise in a new employee demographic - multicultural employees, who identify with two or more cultures, and have internalized associated cultural schemas (Brannen & Thomas, 2010). Immigration, long-term migration and inter-cultural marriages are all producing increasing numbers of individuals who have internalized more than one culture. For example, 13% of the United States’ population are first-generation immigrants, and 20% speak a language other than English at home; over 20% of Canadian and Australian populations are foreign-born, and over 40% are foreign-born in Singapore (“United Nations Statistics Division,” 2011). Further, children and grandchildren of migrants may also be multicultural, if raised within both heritage and current cultures. All of these statistics indicate that multicultural employees are a significant portion of the workforce.

Despite large numbers of multicultural individuals, culturally-oriented research continues to focus on the differences between cultures, as opposed to new opportunities presented by employees who straddle cultures (Kirkman & Law, 2005). Indeed, cross-cultural comparisons remain the most common form of international management research (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Tsui, 2007). Prior researchers have demonstrated that multicultural societies (Jonsen & Maznevski, 2011), multicultural organizations (Joshi, 2006), and multicultural teams (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander, & Maznevski, 2010; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010) can all

influence cross-cultural competence, which is the ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). This paper examines the next level in that research stream, namely, how multicultural employees contribute to their organizations. Drawing on mechanisms from social identity theory, I develop a framework that can be used to predict personal, social and task outcomes across multicultural individuals, and within both domestic and international organizations. Theoretical arguments integrate recent research focused on the positive outcomes of being multicultural with older research concerned with the negative outcomes of being multicultural, allowing for a more complete understanding of the range of possible work-related outcomes.

#### Who are Multicultural Individuals?

Technically, individuals who have internalized two or more cultural schemas are *multicultural*, while those who have internalized two cultural schemas are *bicultural*, but I refer to them all as multicultural, for consistency. It is worth noting that not all identities are internalized, such as identifying as Irish on St. Patrick's Day, or identifying as Danish because one has a distant Danish relative. When individuals internalize a cultural identity, they internalize the associated set of knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, habits, and domain-specific self-schemas (Markus, 1977). This set, called a cultural schema, then becomes available to the individual, although it is more likely to guide behavior when salient. Specifically, when identities become salient, they facilitate access to the set of knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, and so on, stored in associated schemas. For example, cultural schemas become more accessible when in an intercultural environment, or when travelling internationally (Brumbaugh, 2002; Markus, 1986). Together, cultural identities and cultural schemas help frame the findings from prior research on multicultural individuals.

## Knowns and Unknowns about Multicultural Employees

Early conceptualizations of multiculturalism portrayed the experience as individually detrimental (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937). Researchers theorized about the degree to which multicultural individuals were marginalized (Park, 1928), confused (Erikson, 1956), conflicted (Prelinger & Zimet, 1964), and the degree to which they experienced identity stress and identity uncertainty (Baumeister, Shapiro, & Tice, 1985). Multicultural individuals were expected to either suffer from inadequately defined selves, or feel torn between their multiple, and sometimes incompatible, selves (Baumeister et al., 1985).

In contrast to early research, current psychologists have focused attention on the potential for positive outcomes of multiculturalism (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). They found that multicultural identity patterns have an impact on outcomes such as cognitive complexity (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009) and adaptability (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). Meanwhile, cross-cultural management researchers found that multiculturals' identity patterns impact work-related outcomes, such as awareness of, and ability to respond to, cultural cues (Brannen, Garcia, & Thomas, 2009), and creativity (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Cheng, Sanders, et al., 2008). However, current research largely ignores the propositions developed by early researchers, perhaps because it is no longer socially acceptable to suggest that multicultural individuals suffer as a result of their multiple cultural identities. Despite significant progress in understanding multiculturals' psychological and work-related outcomes, we still lack an overall framework that can be used to better understand multicultural individuals in organizations and predict their range of work-related outcomes.

Although some organizations, such as IBM and Siemens, are beginning to implement programs that develop cross-cultural competence among their multicultural employees, such as using cultural networks to promote knowledge transfer across sites (DiversityInc, 2009), and recruiting multicultural individuals (Siemens, 2009), two ‘unknowns’ impede the ease with which organizations draw on the resources of their multicultural employees: It is not yet clear how multicultural employees vary in their potential contributions, and multicultural individuals are not well understood in the context of organizations (Notable exceptions: Bell, 1990; Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Hong, 2010; Lee, 2010). With respect to the former, when managers think of multicultural employees as a homogeneous group, or as a group that contributes to a narrow set of outcomes, they risk overlooking the variety of resources and challenges that these employees represent. For example, the New York Times article that supplied the opening quotation grouped bilingual individuals in the same category as those who have internalized three or more cultures, to predict global leadership potential (Giridharadas, May 6, 2010). Without understanding variations in multicultural employees’ potential contributions to their organizations, we are left with a condition that may support ineffective organizational policies, such as systematically prioritizing all multicultural employees for globally-oriented positions, or disregarding variations among multicultural employees, positions or organizational cultures. With respect to the latter unknown, only four out of 138 studies included in a recent review measured contextual variables (Yoon, Langrehr, & Ong, 2011). This gap is especially problematic for management researchers, as individuals’ work-related outcomes might not be consistent across organizational contexts (Johns, 2007). In order to make predictions about how multicultural employees might contribute to their workplaces, it is essential to understand the dimensions along which individuals mentally organize their multiple identity patterns, the

antecedents and outcomes of each multicultural identity dimension – both positive and negative – and the effect of organizational context on the relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes. In the sections that follow, dimensions are addressed first, followed by antecedents, outcomes and organizational context.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY PATTERNS

The framework described here develops a basis for theorizing about multicultural employees' range of workplace contributions. When individuals have more than one cultural schema – and thus, more than one cultural identity – the identities are organized in cognition to facilitate sense-making (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Ahead, I build an argument that identity integration, which ranges from separated to integrated, and identity plurality, which ranges from single to multiple, create a map of possible ways to organize more than one cultural identity (Figure 1). *Identity integration* is the extent to which individuals integrate their cultural identities versus keeping them separate (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), while *identity plurality* refers to the number of primary cultural identities, ranging from one to many. By primary cultural identity, I am referring to identities that are highly accessible. For example, a multicultural individual could prioritize one culture over the other (*single* pattern), while another person might have three prioritized cultures (*multiple* pattern). As opposed to much cultural research that considers how the *content* of cultural identities influences behavior, this framework considers how their *organization* influences behavior. Together, these dimensions produce a map that can be used to compare different identity patterns.

## INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

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Identity dimensions are easiest to understand by contrasting the patterns positioned at their end points. Based on the two dimensions, four patterns emerge at the end points of each dimension: prioritizing, compartmentalizing, hybridizing and aggregating. These patterns represent ideal types, not categories, because the dimensions are continuous, not categorical. Although the ideal types are useful for explaining the two dimensions, each multicultural individual is more likely represented by a blend of patterns.

Illustrating the two extremes of identity plurality are *prioritizing* multiculturals, who organize multiple cultural identities hierarchically, such that only one is primary, and *aggregating* multiculturals, who privilege three or more cultural identities. Prioritizing and aggregating multiculturals might have internalized the same number of cultural schemas, but they vary in the number of cultural identities they prioritize. The aggregating ideal type is related to merged (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), integrated (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), marginal, fused (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997), and cosmopolitan (Hannerz, 1990) patterns. It reduces differentiation between in-group and out-group members, because the in-group is more heterogeneous than it is for other patterns (Park & Rothbart, 1982). Compared to aggregating, the prioritizing ideal type permits a simplified identity structure, where most phenomena are filtered through the corresponding prioritized cultural schema, with accents of the second or third cultures. The prioritizing ideal type is related to dominance (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and deletion (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), although it does not rely on identities that are nested objectively (e.g. Sunni and Shiite identities are always nested within Muslim identity), as the dominance pattern does (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Prioritized patterns can exist regardless of

any objective hierarchical relation among identities (e.g. Basque within Spanish within European).

Illustrating the end points of identity integration, *compartmentalizing* multiculturals see their identities as separate and identify with one or the other, depending on the context, while *hybridizing* multiculturals see their identities as integrated. The compartmentalizing ideal type organizes multiple cultural identities by retaining all of them, yet separating them by context, which is similar to the alternating (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) and compartmentalized patterns (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In contrast, the hybridizing ideal type identifies with the intersection of cultures, similar to intersection (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), aggregated (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), and blended patterns (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). For example, hybridizing Chinese-Canadians will identify with other Chinese-Canadians as their in-group (more than with Canadians or Chinese). The identity integration dimension has been shown to significantly influence multiculturals' frame switching behavior, creativity and other outcomes (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Cheng, Sanders, et al., 2008). With these two dimensions, an unlimited number of potential patterns can emerge, not limited to the four ideal types at the endpoints of each dimension.

In sum, multicultural individuals' identities can be represented by the map of possible organizing patterns created by identity integration and identity plurality dimensions. In order to arrive at these identity patterns, multicultural individuals interpret a set of antecedents through the dual desires to reduce uncertainty (cognitive mechanism) and increase self-esteem (motivational mechanism).

## ANTECEDENTS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY PATTERNS

Propositions explaining how different identity patterns arise are based on individuals' unique sets of experiences and situations. However, relationships between antecedents and multiculturalism patterns are probabilistic, not deterministic, because the mechanisms linking antecedents to patterns represent individual interpretations of exogenous antecedents. The mechanisms described ahead are present across multicultural individuals, but the extent to which they apply varies with individual differences, such as personality or need for cognitive closure (Leung & Chiu, 2010). Thus, two multicultural individuals with the same set of antecedents could form different identity patterns, because differences in cognition or motivation could produce different interpretations of the antecedents. For example, two individuals may both prioritize the identity(ies) with the highest potential to enhance self-esteem, based on perceptions of group prestige. However, they may end up prioritizing different identities, because one concludes that a politically charged subculture has higher group prestige, while the other may conclude that the mainstream culture has higher prestige and is therefore best for increasing self-esteem. Similarly, variation in the extent to which individuals are comfortable with cognitive inconsistencies may affect the degree to which they are drawn to consistent identity patterns over inconsistent patterns (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rotheram-Borus, 1990).

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people sort others and themselves into social groups in order to reduce uncertainty, and they positively differentiate their own in-groups from out-groups in order to enhance self-esteem. Self categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) describes one aspect of social identity

theory, namely how people categorize themselves in groups based on the groups' relative salience, distinctiveness and perceived prestige (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Salience refers to how easily a category comes to mind, or accessibility, while distinctiveness refers to the uniqueness of a particular group. Perceived prestige refers to an individual's subjective judgement of cultures, not an objective ranking of cultural groups (Bartels, Pruyn, De Jong, & Joustra, 2007). Individuals are more likely to identify with groups that are seen to have increased salience, distinctiveness and prestige, compared to other groups. Therefore, these characteristics became criteria for inclusion of antecedents in the current framework. Three categories of antecedents – personal history, current context, and cultural content – meet the following criteria for inclusion: Stable and long-term, exogenous to the individual, and related to perceived group prestige, salience and distinctiveness, the three drivers of identification in social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

*Personal history* refers to a person's family and context during childhood and adolescence. Identity research often focuses on this time period (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Poston, 1990) because identity development occurs to the greatest degree during adolescence (Erikson, 1963). *Current context* refers to large-scale context, such as region, country or city. *Cultural content* refers to the values, norms, beliefs or behaviors normally associated with each culture. Propositions predict that current context and cultural content antecedents are related to identity integration through the cognitive desire to reduce uncertainty, while personal history antecedents are related to identity plurality through the motivational desire to increase self-esteem, explained next.

## Personal History Antecedents

Personal history influences whether individuals are motivated to identify primarily with a single culture or with multiple cultures (identity plurality dimension), by influencing the way people perceive the prestige of cultural groups. Social identity research reveals that people are motivated to increase self-esteem by identifying with prestigious groups, and by positively differentiating their own social groups from others (Turner et al., 1987). I call this the *motivational mechanism*. Perceived prestige does not refer to an objective ranking of cultural groups. Instead, it refers to an individual's subjective judgment of cultures, where multicultural individuals are motivated to identify with the culture(s) they evaluate most positively (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The stability of perceived prestige depends on the stability of each individual's set of referent groups, against which they evaluate their own groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). It follows that subjective judgments of relative group prestige should predict whether multicultural individuals will be motivated to identify primarily with a single cultural group, or evenly across multiple groups. This mechanism can either precede or reinforce internalization of a cultural schema, where individuals who are motivated to identify with a culture will then surround themselves with cultural artefacts, such as people and media from that culture, supporting the process of internalizing that culture's schema.

Affect can influence the subjective perception of group prestige. Although Tajfel (1982) originally claimed that affect was an important factor in how people define their social groups, the role of affect dwindled over time as social identity research became associated with cognitive experimental research on minimal groups (Chao & Moon, 2005; Park & Judd, 2005). The minimal group studies consistently demonstrated that when people identify with groups – even temporary, random groups – they will subsequently evaluate their own groups more

positively than others, in order to increase self-esteem through association with the higher prestige group (Park & Judd, 2005). Despite Tajfel's involvement with the minimal group studies, he insisted that affect also precedes self-categorization (Park & Judd, 2005), wherein individuals first make value judgments of groups, and then categorize themselves within the group that they evaluate more positively. It follows that causality likely runs both directions: judgments of cultural group prestige lead to identification with higher prestige groups, and identification with groups lead to positive differentiation of one's own cultural groups, compared to others.

Therefore, individuals are motivated to categorize themselves in groups they perceive to have higher prestige, to increase self-esteem (Park & Judd, 2005). Individuals who perceive prestige to be high in more than one culture will be motivated to identify with both or all groups, resulting in higher identity plurality. In contrast, individuals who perceive only one culture as highly prestigious will be motivated to identify primarily with that group, resulting in lower identity plurality. Personal perceptions of cultural prestige stem from individuals' interpretations of their own personal experiences (Cheng & Lee, 2009) not from objective rankings of group prestige. This is especially true of experiences that occur while individuals' cultural identities are being formed, typically during childhood, adolescence, or after immigrating to a new country (Phinney, 1990; Poston, 1990). Therefore, the motivation to increase self-esteem by identifying with high-prestige groups justifies the following proposition:

P1a: The number of cultures with which individuals perceived high levels of cultural group prestige during identity formation will be positively related to identity plurality.

Generational status, explained next, has the potential to be an important predictor within the personal history category of antecedents, because childhood experiences can influence perceived group prestige (Cheng & Lee, 2009; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Based on the motivation to increase self-esteem by identifying with high-prestige groups, the number of generations a family has lived in a country is likely to influence identity plurality. This can be explained through the process of acquiring another culture, called acculturation (Berry, 1980). Research often equates acculturation processes with cultural identity patterns. In fact, several articles restrict their definition of multiculturals to those who draw on Berry's (1980) *integration* acculturation process, in which individuals maintain both cultures equally (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012; Tadmor et al., 2009). This approach is problematic for two reasons: it unnecessarily restricts the boundary conditions for classification as a multicultural individual, because multiculturalism does not require equal identification across both or all cultures, and it confounds the process of internalizing a new culture with the patterns of cultures that have already been internalized. Logically, the process of acculturation must occur prior to mentally organizing acquired cultural identities, thus acculturation must be a precursor to multicultural identity patterns (Brannen & Thomas, 2010). Those who draw on an integrated acculturation process are most likely to have higher identity plurality than those who draw on separated (identifying primarily with the home culture) or assimilated (identifying primarily with the host culture) acculturation processes, because each of the latter processes prioritize one culture over the other(s).

Drawing on acculturation processes, judgments of group prestige shift across generations, such that first-generation immigrants generally had more childhood experience with their home cultures (i.e. separated acculturation process), especially if they immigrated as adults, while

second-generation immigrants often had childhood experience with both (Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, & Wong, 2002). It follows that first-generation immigrants may have lower identity plurality than second-generation immigrants. It has been documented to take three generations before immigrants identify more with the host country than with the home country (Connor, 1974). Therefore, third-generation immigrants or later may be more likely to have experience primarily with the host culture, and therefore prioritize the host cultural identity. Based on evidence from generational change in identity patterns, I propose that second-generation immigrants will have higher identity plurality than first- or third-generation immigrants:

P1b: Generational status will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with identity plurality such that first- and third-generation immigrants will have lower identity plurality than second-generation immigrants.

In sum, personal history antecedents are predicted to be related to identity plurality, based on the motivation to identify with high-prestige groups in order to increase self-esteem. In addition to the influence that personal history has on multicultural identity patterns, current context is also likely to influence identity patterns (Johns, 2007).

#### Current Context Antecedents

Large-scale context, such as the city, region or country of residence, is likely to be a more important predictor of multicultural identity patterns than temporary contexts that change over the course of a day, because multicultural identity patterns are based on the organization of cultural schemas, which remain stable over time (Ashforth et al., 2008; Markus, 1986). Temporary changes in context, such as going home after work, affect the *accessibility* of particular schemas (Markus, 1977, 1986), but they do not affect the content, meaning, or

organization of those schemas (Molinsky, 2007). Thus, I use current context to refer to larger-scale, stable contexts, such as country, city or region.

Context influences the perceived salience and distinctiveness of cultural groups, which in turn influences how individuals organize their cultural identities in order to reduce uncertainty. In contrast to the motivational mechanism's goal of increasing self-esteem, this relationship can be explained by the goal of reducing uncertainty by developing identity patterns that are internally consistent. Also based on social identity theory, I call this the *cognitive mechanism* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consistent patterns, with a single set of guiding norms, values and assumptions, reduce uncertainty more effectively than inconsistent patterns with multiple sets of guiding norms, values and assumptions, because inconsistent patterns have the potential to provide conflicting guidance (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). People are generally drawn to consistent patterns over inconsistent ones, but the context can limit the ease with which individuals integrate their cultural identities (Haslam, 2004).

When culture is both salient and distinctive in a particular context, then borders between cultural groups are perceived more easily (Friedkin & Simpson, 1985), making it more difficult to integrate identities. For example, culture's salience and distinctiveness as a way to categorize others may be influenced by the degree of cultural segregation in society, which is in turn influenced by a region's multicultural policies. Cultural segregation is the degree to which people live in different residential areas, work for different organizations and participate in different leisure activities, based on cultural background (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2009). Regions with assimilationist policies have been found to exhibit a greater degree of cultural segregation (Taylor, 1991), resulting in increased salience of culture as a means of differentiating groups of people, and increased likelihood that multicultural individuals will separate their cultures

instead of integrating them (Williams & Berry, 1991). The effect of assimilationist policies on segregation is illustrated by Vasta (2007), who argues that the Netherlands' transition from multicultural to assimilationist policies since the mid-1990s increased social divisions based on an 'othering' of non-Dutch persons. In addition, Koreans living in China were found to be less likely to be multicultural than Koreans living in the United States; this difference may be attributed to higher levels of cultural integration in the U.S. than in China (Lee, Falbo, Doh, & Park, 2001). Also, in countries with strong multiculturalism policies, such as Canada and New Zealand, mainstream identity and ethnic identity tend to be positively related or not related, while they are negatively related in France, Germany and The Netherlands, where policies do not promote multiculturalism to the same extent (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006). These findings indicate that people experience a region's multicultural policies by noticing the degree to which people segregate themselves into cultural groups, leading to the following proposed relationship between current context and multicultural identity patterns:

P2: The degree to which regional multiculturalism policies reduce cultural segregation will predict identity integration among residents.

Multicultural identity patterns may change more rapidly during times of drastic contextual change. For example, cultural identity may become unstable after a move to a new country, until a new cultural identity can be developed with respect to the new country context. The cultural identity someone holds in one country may no longer make sense in the new country, and it will likely take a few years to stabilize the new identity by making sense of one's self in a new country context. In this way, development of cultural identity as an adult resembles a punctuated equilibrium that remains stable unless the context changes drastically (Gersick, 1991; Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). Thus, for individuals who remain residents of their

home countries, the content of cultural identities, including their associated norms, values, assumptions and beliefs, remain generally stable throughout a person's lifetime. This content may also influence how people mentally organize their cultural identities, through the desire to reduce uncertainty.

### Cultural Content Antecedents

Individuals will go to great lengths to maintain self consistency by placing themselves into consistent groups (Markus, 1977). Integrated identity patterns are more consistent than separated identity patterns, so it is likely that people will be drawn to integrated identity patterns (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). However, some pairs of cultures are liable to lend themselves to integration better than others. Specifically, pairs of cultures may be easier to integrate if the cultures are loose, if cultural distance is small, or if the countries representing the cultures have low levels of cultural friction. All three instances of cultural content draw on the theoretical rationale that the pursuit of cognitive consistency will lead individuals to be naturally drawn to integrated identity patterns, unless the cultures themselves impede integration.

*Cultural tightness.* In tight cultures, there are clear behavioral norms and sanctions for deviations from those norms, such as tighter controls on permissible media content, and stricter rule abidance expectations of children (Au, 1999; Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006). Examples of culturally tight societies include Japan, Greece, and rural India (Bhagat, Baliga, Moustafa, & Krishnan, 2003). In contrast, loose cultures exhibit less clarity about behavioral norms, and also tolerate more deviance from norms, such as Thailand and the Lapps of Northern Sweden (Bhagat et al., 2003). Tight cultures are more difficult to integrate than loose cultures because the former exhibit limited within-culture variation, and this limited variability is reflected

within individuals (Au, 1999; Gelfand et al., 2006). For example, members of tight cultures, such as the priesthood, seldom integrate their personal (I am a man) and occupational (I am a priest) identities. Instead, they prefer to separate their identities without allowing them to mix, perhaps because the tight priesthood culture is inconsistent with many aspects of personal identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Compared to individuals socialized in loose cultures, those socialized in tight cultures learn to adopt a relatively narrow range of allowable behaviors, feel a heightened sense of scrutiny for their actions, and access normative expectations more easily (Gelfand et al., 2006). All of these mechanisms are likely to impede identity integration.

P3a: Cultural tightness will be negatively related to identity integration.

*Cultural distance.* Cultural distance refers to the magnitude of differences between two cultures (Shenkar, Luo, & Yeheskel, 2008). When cultural distance is small, multicultural individuals may find it easier to integrate their cultures because there are fewer inconsistencies to reconcile (Van de Vijver & Phalet, 2004). That is, although distance alone does not imply that cultures are contradictory, it could impede integration when the norms, values, behaviors and assumptions associated with each culture are markedly different. For example, when cultural distance is calculated as the absolute difference between country A and country B, on the sum of Schwartz's seven country-level values, German-Austrians (total distance = 1.02) would likely have an easier time integrating their cultures than German-Ugandans (total distance = 6.43)(Schwartz, 2007). Schwartz's country-level values were calculated for 77 countries based on the data used to develop his ten individual-level values (Schwartz, 1992). A study of Latvian-Americans who immigrated to America during childhood found that by the time they reached high school age, there were more who integrated their cultural identities, than

those who kept them separate. By the time they reached their 50s and 60s, none of the participants continued to separate their cultural identities (Smith, Stewart, & Winter, 2004). The participants themselves attributed this trend to the similarities between their cultures – at the time of immigration, both countries shared a religion, similar family values, and similar emphasis on work and education, and this facilitated identity integration (Smith et al., 2004). Thus, cultural distance is likely to impede identity integration.

P3b: Cultural distance will be negatively related to identity integration.

*Cultural friction.* Shenkar, Luo and Yeheskel (2008) proposed friction as an alternative metaphor to cultural distance, suggesting that distance is not enough to explain complex interactions between cultures (Salk, 2012). In addition to distance, cultural friction also considers power asymmetries, historically conflicted relationships, and goal incongruity (Shenkar et al., 2008). In the context of identity patterns, cultural friction tends to increase the salience of group differences and group boundaries (Friedkin & Simpson, 1985), thus cultures with historically conflicted relations, political misgivings or conflict towards one another are likely more difficult to integrate than cultures with low levels of friction. For example, Palestinian-Israelis would likely have a harder time integrating their multicultural identities than Australian-New Zealanders, because the relationship between the former set exhibits more friction than the latter. Thus, even beyond the effect of cultural distance, it follows that cultural friction will also impede identity integration.

P3c: Cultural friction will be negatively related to identity integration.

All of the antecedent propositions are illustrated in Figure 2, and summarized in Table 1, along with their associated mechanisms. Overall, current context and cultural content likely influence whether multiculturals separate or integrate their cultural identities, based on the

desire to reduce uncertainty. Personal history is expected to influence identity plurality, based on the motivation to identify with high-prestige groups in order to increase self-esteem.

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## OUTCOMES OF CULTURAL IDENTITY PATTERNS AND THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Each multicultural pattern is a unique representation of self, based on a unique set of internalized cultural schemas, and thus produces unique personal, social and task outcomes. This three-part categorization of outcomes mirrors the most common distinction made in the expatriate and adjustment literatures, between personal well-being, interpersonal relationships and task-related effectiveness (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). Despite issues in the original theory, including data-driven development and lack of validation (Thomas & Lazarova, 2005), similar three-part distinctions continue to be applied as categorical tools, even beyond purely adjustment outcomes (Thomas & Fitzsimmons, 2008). The three categories are applied here as a useful and common distinction among organizationally-relevant outcomes (as contrasted to purely psychologically-relevant outcomes), in order to develop implications for organizational practice and research. Consistent with the arguments supporting antecedent propositions, outcome propositions are developed for identity integration and identity plurality dimensions based on the dual desires to reduce uncertainty and increase self-esteem, as drawn from social identity theory. I describe each category of outcomes in turn, starting with personal outcomes.

## Personal Outcomes

As discussed earlier, identity patterns vary in their effectiveness at reducing uncertainty, based on variations in internal consistency, ranging from low to high along both identity dimensions. Specifically, identity patterns with a single, prioritized in-group (e.g. Canadianized-Chinese) are more internally consistent than patterns with multiple in-groups (e.g. Canadian and Chinese and Nepalese), and integrated patterns are more internally consistent than separated patterns. Inconsistent identity patterns fail to reduce uncertainty as effectively as consistent patterns due to inconsistent patterns' potential to provide conflicting guidance for behavior, resulting in greater psychological toll. Psychological toll refers to the negative feelings that can result from switching among identities, including identity stress, lack of adjustment, work-related stressors and negative health outcomes, which deplete psychological resources available for other activities (Molinsky, 2007). Although psychological adjustment is not necessarily the opposite of psychological toll, a lack of adjustment contributes to higher psychological toll. Evidence that integrated multiculturals have better psychological adjustment than those with separated patterns may indicate that integrated multiculturals also suffer less psychological toll than those with separated patterns (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Thus, single, integrated identity patterns should result in the lowest levels of psychological toll, while those with multiple, separated identities should experience the highest.

An artifact of early multiculturalism studies is the assumption that all forms of multiculturalism are psychologically difficult (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). This is sometimes the case, but exists to a greater degree for people who have inconsistent patterns, and thus experience more uncertainty than people with consistent patterns (Roccas & Brewer,

2002). It follows that personal outcomes likely vary along with both identity plurality and identity integration, because both dimensions influence the degree of identity pattern consistency. Identity stress is examined in more depth because it remains an important construct within this category, linked to early theorizing about multicultural individuals.

*Identity stress.* Identity stress is stress that results from existential uncertainty, or uncertainty about the answer to the question, “Who am I?” (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004; Thoits, 1999). There are two competing hypotheses about the effect of multiculturalism on stress. According to the identity accumulation hypothesis, more identities lead to less stress because each identity gives meaning and helps guide behavior (Thoits, 1983). This hypothesis claims that individuals with multiple identities may be better able to buffer feelings of stress or depression, due to a sense of self that is less bound to any one aspect of the self (Linville, 1987; Thoits, 1983, 1986). In contrast, Baumeister, Shapiro and Tice (1985) argued that when an individual has multiple identities, the identities may conflict with each other, thus increasing stress as they become less useful for guiding behavior. Their model claims that as the number of identities increases, the potential for identity conflict also increases, resulting in greater stress. Together, these two perspectives seem to result in a set of conflicting hypotheses; when the number of cultural identities increases, the result may be less stress (Linville, 1987; Thoits, 1983), or more stress (Baumeister et al., 1985).

These seemingly conflicting hypotheses are actually compatible. Stress is only increased when the number of *inconsistent* identities increases, resulting in identity patterns that are less effective at reducing uncertainty. This occurs when identity patterns are high on identity plurality and low on identity integration. Organizing multiple, separated identities is stressful because it requires individuals to reconcile conflicting aspects of self, resulting in a greater

psychological toll than single, integrated patterns. The following proposed relationships are based on the psychological toll of having an inconsistent cultural identity pattern.

P4a: Identity plurality will be positively related to psychological toll.

P4b: Identity integration will be negatively related to psychological toll.

Although logically, managers might prefer employees with low levels of psychological toll because they have more cognitive resources available for other activities, there may be social benefits that compensate for the psychological toll of inconsistent identity patterns, explained next.

### Social Outcomes

Identity plurality is proposed to predict social capital outcomes when individuals' patterns of relationships are influenced by their identity patterns. Social capital refers to the resources embedded within, available through, and derived from an individual's network of relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, individual employees can access social capital resources through their personal networks of relationships or membership in groups (Bourdieu, 1986), and draw on these resources to help them transfer knowledge, link unrelated groups, innovate and learn, especially in multinational organizations or organizations that conduct business across borders (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2010). Social capital results from identity patterns when individuals seek to increase self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-groups from referent out-groups (Ashforth et al., 2008). Specifically, individuals' sets of referent out-groups depend on identity plurality; as the number of cultural identities increases, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between in-group and out-group members, suppressing the effect of out-group bias. In contrast, people with one primary cultural identity find it easier to differentiate between in-group and out-group

members, facilitating out-group bias. Social capital is often divided into structural, relational and cognitive social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). I illustrate the relationships between identity patterns and social capital outcomes with structural and relational examples.

*Structural social capital.* Employees' network of relationships, including the composition of their in-groups, friendships and professional connections, constitute their structural social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). When employees are better connected across multiple groups, they are better able to span boundaries and facilitate positive interactions among groups, even across cultural faultlines (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2010). Individuals with fewer cultures can more easily differentiate between in-group and out-group members, facilitating the evaluation of other cultures as having less prestige. Consequently, they may be less likely to include people from other cultures in their social networks. In contrast, individuals with multiple cultures may find it more difficult to differentiate between their own cultures and referent cultural out-groups, resulting in less evaluative distinctions among individuals from diverse cultures. The result may be that individuals with high identity plurality have the widest variety of cultures in their in-groups, even beyond their own cultures. In contrast, multiculturals with low identity plurality likely have more culturally homogeneous in-groups than those with high identity plurality, resulting in lower levels of social capital for low plurality patterns, and supporting the following proposition.

P5a: Identity plurality will be related to higher levels of structural social capital.

*Relational social capital.* Assets developed through relationships are collectively called relational social capital, including trust of others and individual trustworthiness, respect, attachment and mutual obligations (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). When these assets cross group boundaries, such as cultural, organizational or departmental groups, they facilitate interactions

by encouraging cooperation (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2010). Relational social capital usually develops over time, and it can deteriorate when an individual behaves inconsistently with developed expectations (for example, lying to a relational partner). Thus, relational social capital likely increases along with identity plurality, because as an identity encompasses a wider array of meanings, there may be fewer bases for intergroup conflict. Indeed, the development of multicultural identities has been proposed as a way to reduce ethnocentrism (Thomas, 1996), and research on out-group bias found that as the number of meanings for a group increased, measured by the number of distinct group names, intergroup hostility fell (Mullen, Calogero, & Leader, 2007). Thus, relational social capital assets likely increase as multicultural identity patterns encompass a wider range of possible meanings, indicated by higher identity plurality, and supporting the following proposition.

P5b: Identity plurality will be related to higher levels of relational social capital.

The third type of social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), cognitive social capital, is more closely related to task outcomes because of its reliance on the cognitive desire to reduce uncertainty, explained next.

### Task Outcomes

Beyond the psychological toll of mentally organizing inconsistent cultural identities, and the social capital resources that that multicultural employees can access, multicultural employees may also draw on their identity patterns to perform work-related tasks, such as solving complex problems, leading multicultural teams, and negotiating across cultures (Fitzsimmons, Miska, & Stahl, 2011). Indeed, two meta-analyses independently found significant relationships between identifying with at least two cultures (versus identifying with one culture) and behavioral competence, including academic achievement and career success

(Berry et al., 2006; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). Although the empirical evidence indicates a relationship between cultural identities and behavioral competence, theoretical mechanisms to explain this relationship remained elusive (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012).

Here, I propose that based on the degree to which multicultural identity patterns reduce uncertainty, they may lead to task outcomes through the development of intercultural skills. Inconsistent identity patterns do not reduce uncertainty as effectively as consistent patterns, likely resulting in a higher psychological toll for inconsistent patterns, but also allowing for more complex cognitive schemas. Complex schemas contain multiple sets of values, assumptions and norms that can be accessible simultaneously, and are sometimes in conflict, facilitating outcomes that depend on cognitive complexity. Thus, task outcomes represent the flip side of personal outcomes, in that inconsistent patterns produce the highest psychological toll, but also produce the highest level of intercultural skills. Overall, identity patterns are expected to influence which set of intercultural skills individuals develop, and in turn, these skills influence their success at performing intercultural tasks, such as solving complex global problems by drawing on ideas from multiple sources. Ahead, I draw on Yamizaki and Kayes' (2004) model of task-related skills to illustrate the particular relationships between identity dimensions and action and analytical skills.

*Action skills.* Action skills such as adaptability and flexibility help to predict task achievement across cultures, and have been used to help predict expatriate success (Mol, Born, Willemsen, & Van der Molen, 2005; Schaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006). There is some evidence that multicultural individuals are more adaptable than monocultural individuals because they have more cultural identities than monoculturals, and thus a wider variety of cultural schemas to guide behavior (Bell & Harrison, 1996). Following the same

logic, multiculturals with the most inconsistent cultural identity patterns should have better action skills than those with consistent patterns, because pattern inconsistency results in more selection among behavioral repertoires. Therefore, action skills such as adaptability and flexibility should be highest for multicultural individuals with the most inconsistent identity patterns, related to both identity plurality and identity integration as follows:

P6a: Identity plurality will be positively related to action skills.

P6b: Identity integration will be negatively related to action skills.

*Analytical skills.* Beyond the ability to adapt to new contexts, analytical skills such as interpreting culturally different behaviors, negotiating successfully across cultures and solving global ethical problems are also essential to successfully accomplishing intercultural tasks (Fitzsimmons et al., 2011). Broadly, analytical skills are related to *cognitive* social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), and refer to skills that require complex thinking, such as cultural metacognition and creativity. Cultural metacognition is knowledge of and control over one's thinking and learning activities during cross-cultural interactions (Thomas, 2006; Thomas et al., 2008), and it facilitates positive cross-cultural interactions (Brannen et al., 2009; Stephan & Stephan, 1992). For example, multicultural individuals who identified strongly with two cultures were found to be more integratively complex than those who identified more strongly with one culture over the other (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006), and this difference was attributed to the increased dissonance of having two equal cultures. Cognitive complexity has also been found to increase with identity separation, because perceptions of cultural conflict sharpen cultural awareness (Benet-Martínez et al., 2006). Both findings are consistent with the argument that inconsistent identity patterns produce more dissonance than consistent patterns, and thus push individuals to pay more active attention to cultural content, increasing analytical

skills as a consequence. Since identity inconsistency varies along both identity dimensions, analytical skills likely increase along with identity plurality and decrease with identity integration, leading to the following two propositions:

P7a: Identity plurality will be positively related to analytical skills.

P7b: Identity integration will be negatively related to analytical skills.

In contrast, decision-making is expected to be fastest when identity patterns are the most consistent, because it takes longer to process decisions that draw on multiple cultural identities than it does to process decisions drawing on one primary cultural identity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This is supported by findings that response latencies on self-relevant questions are longer when two inconsistent schemas are primed, and shorter when two consistent schemas are primed (Tavella, 1997). Indeed, one of the foundational studies of schemas tested response latency as a proxy for the existence of self-schemata (Markus, 1977). Schemas, however, are not accessed continuously, but only when made salient by the context. Thus, this response latency effect is only expected for activities within the culture domain, such as decisions about whether to offer a bribe within the local cultural context, what to counter during a cross-cultural negotiation, or whether to accept a proposal for a new cross-cultural partnership. Although decision-making quality is generally more important than decision-making speed, speed can also be important during situations with tight deadlines or during times of crisis. Culture-domain decision-making speed is the elapsed time between first considering a decision that explicitly relates to culture, and coming to a final conclusion, and is expected to be longest for the most inconsistent identity patterns.

P8a: Identity plurality will be negatively related to culture-domain decision-making speed

P8b: Identity integration will be positively related to culture-domain decision-making speed.

Together, personal, social and task outcomes illustrate what happens when cultural identity patterns influence the way people think and behave, as depicted in Figure 3. However, multicultural identity never works in isolation of contextual influences (Chao & Moon, 2005; Markus, 1986). In particular, this framework examines the moderating effect of organizational identification and organizational culture, because employees have the potential to develop an organizational identification that competes for salience with cultural identities (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Depending on both the strength and content of the organizational identification, it may be more influential than multicultural identity when organizational identification is salient, weakening relationships between multicultural identity patterns and their outcomes. The effect of organizational identification is described first, followed by organizational culture.

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INSERT FIGURE THREE ABOUT HERE

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Moderator: Organizational Identification

The framework developed here relies on the salience of cultural identities, where salient identities facilitate access to content stored in associated schemas (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The mere presence of an identity may not be enough to prompt identity-relevant outcomes, except when that identity becomes salient (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed II, 2002). For example, multiculturals had higher cognitive complexity when talking about cultures, but not about landscapes (Benet-Martínez et al., 2006); they had higher creativity when developing

fusion cuisine dishes, but not monocultural dishes (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, et al., 2008), and female engineers had more original ideas about designing a new product for women, but not for college students in general (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, et al., 2008). In these examples, multicultural identity only influenced outcomes for activities within the cultural domain, when the context primed salience of the multicultural identity, facilitating access to cultural schemas.

When multiculturals are physically at work, thinking about work, or talking with colleagues from work (henceforth, within the work domain), the context is likely to heighten salience of organizational identification, increasing accessibility of organizational schemas (Ashforth et al., 2008). Organizational identification is the internalization of an organization's distinctive, central and enduring attributes, as part of one's identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Although the framework presented here generally assumes a work domain, most outcomes could also occur in other domains, such as home or social, while the proposed moderating effects are only expected to occur within the work domain. That is, unless the organizational context simultaneously primes both organizational and multicultural identities (explained by the second moderated relationship, ahead), individuals within the work domain may find that they can access organizational schemas more easily than multicultural schemas.

Factors increasing identity salience include both strength of identification (Yip & Fuligni, 2002), and contextual primes (Forehand et al., 2002). It follows that expected relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes may be moderated by the strength of organizational identification, increasing the likelihood that organizational identification is relatively more salient than multicultural identities, within the work domain. Specifically, employees who exhibit strong organizational identification may find that organizational identification is relatively more salient than multicultural identities, resulting in weakened

relationships between multicultural identity patterns and personal, social and task outcomes (Markus, 1977). It is worth noting that the proposed moderating effect of strength of organizational identification may also exist at lower levels of identification, namely at the subgroup or team levels. Indeed, individuals often identify more strongly with lower-order identities than they do with the organization, implying that lower-order identities have the potential to be more salient than organizational identities (Ashforth et al., 2008). One explanation is that salience can be primed by encountering relevant referent groups (Forehand et al., 2002). Since employees are more likely to encounter employees from other workgroups than employees from other organizations, it follows that lower-order identities may be more frequently primed than organizational identity. However, it has been argued that within nested identities, salience of lower-order identification primes salience of higher-order organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2008; Vora & Kostova, 2007). Since organizational-level identification is the broadest nested identification within the work domain, I theorize at the organizational level, while recognizing that parallel effects may exist at lower levels of identification.

P9: Within the work domain, the strength of organizational identification will moderate the relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes, such that the relationships will be strongest when organizational identification is weak.

Beyond individual differences in organizational identification, variations also exist in the content of organizational cultures. In particular, organizational ideologies are one aspect of organizational culture, representing sets of organizational beliefs about the social world and how it operates (Alvesson, 1987). Two common culture ideologies indicate competing organizational approaches to cultural diversity (Park & Judd, 2005; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, &

Sanchez-Burks, 2011). *Color blindness* ideology endorses ignoring cultural differences, and instead emphasizing shared characteristics, while *multiculturalism* ideology acknowledges and celebrates differences among cultural groups (Plaut et al., 2011). As explained in the previous section, the work context primes salience of organizational identification, regardless of cultural ideology. Differences between these two ideologies become evident by analyzing how they interact with simultaneous salience of multicultural identities. Based on the cognitive mechanism of reducing uncertainty, and evidence from international joint venture managers (Li, Xin, & Pillutla, 2002), individuals resist simultaneously holding salient inconsistent identities. Although the color blindness ideology may be effective at reducing inter-group conflict by promoting superordinate identities (Brewer, 1996; Hogg & Terry, 2000), it may also suppress relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes, because it suppresses recognition of within-group variability, and is therefore inconsistent with simultaneous salience of multicultural identity. This argument is similar to the argument developed for the cultural tightness antecedent, wherein tight cultures allow for less variability, and are therefore difficult to integrate with other identities. It follows that the color blindness ideology could suppress relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes while in the work domain.

In contrast to color blindness, the multiculturalism ideology explicitly acknowledges multiple cultural groups within the organization (Plaut et al., 2011). This condition is consistent with simultaneous salience of both organizational and multicultural identities, allowing employees to access both sets of schemas within the work domain (Ely & Thomas, 2001). For example, after reviewing 63 studies published from 1997-2002, Jackson, Joshi and Erhardt (2003) concluded that organizations are more likely to benefit from multiple cultures when the

organizational culture values breadth of experience, skills, and attributes, indicating that the multicultural ideology may allow for salience of both cultural and organizational identities. As such, the strength of organizational identification and the cultural ideology endorsed by the organization's culture are both likely to influence the degree to which organizational identification is relatively more salient than multicultural identities, within the work domain.

P10: Within the work domain, cultural ideology will moderate relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes, such that the relationships will be strongest in organizations that endorse a multiculturalism ideology, and weakest in organizations that endorse color blindness.

In sum, multicultural identity patterns influence three categories of outcomes, based on two mechanisms drawn from social identity theory: Personal and task outcomes are influenced by the degree to which patterns are internally consistent, and thus, the degree to which they effectively reduce uncertainty; social outcomes are influenced by the degree to which patterns increase self-esteem by positively differentiating in-groups from comparison out-groups. Specifically, psychological toll is expected to increase along with identity plurality (P4a) and decrease along with identity integration (P4b), because low plurality and high integration patterns are more internally consistent than high plurality, low integration patterns. Structural (P5a) and relational (P5b) social capital are expected to increase along with identity plurality, because fewer cultural identities provide a stronger basis for positive differentiation between in-group and out-group members. Task outcomes are expected to be mediated by intercultural skills, such that action and analytical skills are expected to increase along with identity plurality (P6a & P7a) and decrease along with identity integration (P6b & P7b), while the inverse is expected for culture-domain decision-making speed (P8a & P8b). The logic of the task

outcome relationships is that internally inconsistent patterns access more cultural schemas than internally consistent patterns, promoting complex thinking and broad cultural knowledge, while consistent patterns promote decisiveness.

Two constructs are expected to moderate the relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes. When employees are within the work domain, both positive and negative outcomes may be suppressed by strong organizational identification or color blindness cultural ideology, because the context promotes relative salience of the organizational identification over multicultural identities, facilitating easier access to organizational schemas than cultural schemas. Organizational ideologies that are inconsistent with simultaneous salience of multicultural and organizational identities are expected to suppress cultural identity salience and access to cultural schemas. Thus, the strength of organizational identification and cultural ideology are both expected to moderate relationships among multicultural identity patterns and their associated outcomes (P9, P10).

When considered collectively, the two identity dimensions, antecedents and outcomes create a framework that may be used to improve the effectiveness with which organizations draw on their multicultural employees, based on implications for theory, managers and organizations, as explained in the following sections. The complete framework is depicted in Figure 4 and summarized in Table 1.

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INSERT FIGURE FOUR AND TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

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## DISCUSSION

The framework and mechanisms developed in this paper can contribute to future research in the field of multicultural employees, and inform managerial and organizational decisions about this unique workplace demographic.

### Theoretical Contributions

This paper's primary contribution is a theoretical basis for studying multiculturalism at the individual level, as a logical extension of multiculturalism research conducted at societal (Jonsen & Maznevski, 2011), organizational (Joshi, 2006), and team levels (Stahl, Mäkelä, et al., 2010; Stahl, Maznevski, et al., 2010). The framework bridges early research on mitigating potential negative outcomes of multicultural identity with current research on positive outcomes, and facilitates theorizing about how this new employee demographic influences the range of work-related outcomes by clarifying theoretical mechanisms of influence. For example, the theoretical rationale for linking identity plurality with psychological toll indicates that stress is only increased when the number of *inconsistent* identities increases, resulting in identity patterns that are less effective at reducing uncertainty. This argument reconciles previous conflicting theories about the relationship between number of identities and stress, and it illustrates how new insights might be developed by applying the dual mechanisms of reducing uncertainty and increasing self-esteem to other instances of multiple identities, even beyond multicultural identities. By grounding research on multiple identities in a shared theoretical foundation based on social identity theory, this framework could be extended to examine more complex interactions among multiple identities, exploring the wider *cultural mosaic* (Chao & Moon, 2005).

In particular, this framework illustrates the utility of identity salience to understand cross-domain identity dynamics, such as combining cultural and organizational identifications. Researchers drawing on social identity theory and self-categorization theory often assume that identities are always salient, or that a relevant context will necessarily prime its associated identity (e.g. when I'm teaching, my professor identity is salient) (Ashforth et al., 2008; Forehand et al., 2002). However, this assumption may be overly simplistic. Instead, identities may be primed through the intersection of an identity-relevant context with an identity that is central to the individual. By considering the role of identity salience, it becomes easier to model complex interactions across multiple identities. For example, the moderators presented in this framework allow for variations in the degree to which the same situation primes identities across individuals, depending on the degree to which that identity is central for each individual. As identified at the beginning of this paper, it is common for research to examine multicultural employees using only psychological processes. However, Reicher (2004) argues that this reductionist approach is problematic, ignoring the role played by organizational context. There is growing interest in moving beyond the reductionist approach, towards examining employees' whole selves, including multiple identities across multiple domains (Chao & Moon, 2005; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008). Identity salience may be a key mechanism to help explain these complex identity interactions.

Just as the framework presented here answers some questions, it also highlights important questions that have not yet been addressed. First, multicultural individuals who have the most difficult experience (highest psychological toll) are also proposed to have the highest level of task outcomes (higher action and analytical skills). I theorize that identity pattern inconsistency leads to both outcomes, but it is possible that identity pattern inconsistency leads

to psychological toll, and that psychological toll, in turn, leads to increased task outcomes. The latter explanation would be consistent with recent theorizing about the process through which multiculturalism increases integrative complexity (Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012; Tadmor et al., 2009), wherein multiculturals who experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance must expend more effort coping with the dissonance, and therefore develop more complex responses than those who experience less dissonance. If psychological toll is found to mediate relationships between identity patterns and task outcomes, this implies that there may be an optimal level of psychological toll, rather than assuming that dissonance or psychological toll ought to be minimized. An important next step in this direction would be an experiment-based study, to help determine whether personal outcomes mediate task outcomes.

The second unanswered question also refers to the time-element of multiculturalism. There is a need for empirical evidence about the stability versus malleability of cultural identity patterns over time and across contexts. Research that defines multiculturalism in terms of cultural schemas usually assumes that patterns are reasonably stable over time, or at least that they change slowly, because schemas are assumed to be reasonably stable over time (Markus, 1986). In contrast, studies that define multiculturalism in terms of identity may allow for more frequent changes over time, depending on the form of identification (Roccas et al., 2008). This is an empirical question, and the field would benefit from a longitudinal study of multicultural pattern change over time.

Finally, multicultural identity patterns themselves may influence how individuals reconcile inconsistencies between their cultural and organizational identities<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, research on identity conflict suggests that there are many different ways to resolve conflicts stemming from multiple identities, including decoupling, cognitively separating, either sequentially or

spatially, prioritizing based on importance, compromising or simply living with dissonance (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kreiner et al., 2006; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Vora & Kostova, 2007). Again, the salience mechanism may help to explain why different individuals come to disparate solutions to reconciling identity conflict. For example, a multicultural employee who works at an organization that is explicitly multicultural might find that both organizational and cultural identities are primed by the same context, facilitating simultaneous access to both schemas.

Future researchers attempting to operationalize the moderating effect of organizational culture will be advised to attend to potential multi-level issues. Two general approaches are possible: researchers could measure organizational culture at the individual level, as a perceptual construct, or they could specify an aggregated organizational-level measure using an additive composition model (Chan, 1998). Although the former approach has been in previous research to avoid specifying cross-level effects (Reichers & Schneider, 1990), findings based on this within-individual perceptual approach are less easily applied to organizations. For the latter approach, an additive composition model is the most appropriate way to operationalize the ideological content of organizational culture because it represents the organization's central defining feature, as opposed to its variability, strength or degree of consensus among employees about the organization's cultural ideology.

### Managerial Implications

Managers can use the framework to help guide placement decisions as workplace demographics shift towards more employees with multiple cultures. Managers can make more systematic decisions about which roles suit particular multicultural employees by watching employees for examples of the outcomes presented here. For example, multicultural employees

who prioritize one of their cultural identities may have generally lower levels of adaptability. This characteristic may be suitable when the organization prefers expatriates to follow home country norms, as is common for expatriates in countries where bribery is endemic.

Multicultural expatriates who prioritize the home culture may resist temptations to bribe, while still being able to relate to colleagues from another culture due to their multicultural identity. A second example is that multicultural employees who have high levels of cultural plurality may have higher levels of social capital, due to their tendency to befriend people from many different cultures, even from outside their own cultural groups. This may explain why Carlos Ghosn – the Brazilian-Lebanese-French CEO of Nissan and Renault – shines as a merger and acquisition (M&A) facilitator for Nissan and Renault, even though he is not an expert in either organization's culture. However, caution is advised when using multicultural status to influence placement decisions, as monocultural employees may also have similar capabilities to their multicultural colleagues. Just as cross-cultural training ought not be used to restrict individuals' opportunities based on group averages, this framework ought not be used to restrict multiculturals' opportunities to only intercultural contexts. Thus, it would be inappropriate to select individuals based on this framework. Instead, I recommend placing multicultural employees strategically once managers know more about particular employees' skills and challenges.

### Organizational Implications

The framework can also be used as partial justification for organizations to use caution when encouraging employees to identify strongly with the organization. It is usually assumed that organizations ought to encourage employees to become highly identified with their organizations, influencing known benefits such as increased effort, intrinsic motivation,

organizational citizenship behaviors and self-sacrifice for the sake of the organization (Ashforth et al., 2008). However, employees who identify strongly with their organizations may be less likely to draw on their multicultural identities than those who have weak identification with their organizations. This may be problematic for organizations attempting to benefit from their multicultural employees, because employees' unique skills, abilities and challenges may be unavailable to their organizations if employees are overly identified with their organizations. This 'dark side' implication is consistent with findings that organizational identification is related to reduced levels of creativity (Rotondi, 1975) and suppressed dissent (Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998).

Instead, organizations that combine strong organizational identification with a multicultural ideology might be better positioned to draw on their multicultural employees' skills and abilities as a valuable resource. It is generally helpful for employees to share an organizational identification and guiding set of values (Barney, 1986). However, this shared set of values may come at the expense of a diversity of values stemming from multicultural employees. Given that multinational organizations often fail to take advantage of the knowledge, skills and experiences of their global employees, organizations with processes that allow multicultural employees to identify strongly with their organizations while simultaneously accessing their cultural schemas may have an opportunity to get ahead of their competitors. A recent study of 3578 employees indicated that the mere presence of diversity programs and initiatives was not enough to develop an organizational culture supportive of multiculturalism (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010). Instead, it required the combination of diversity programs and initiatives, along with managers' endorsement of relational values, and multicultural representation in management. As a result, in order to benefit from the skills

of their multicultural employees, organizations should take a holistic approach to developing a multicultural ideology.

## CONCLUSION

Global migration indicates that multicultural employees are already a significant workplace demographic. The framework presented in this paper offers a theoretical basis for understanding how multicultural employees may contribute to their organizations, spurring future discussions on the business implications of an increasingly important workplace demographic.

During a keynote speech on multiculturalism, Wayson Choy, a Chinese-Canadian novelist, described being multicultural as being like a composite material (Choy, 2010 April). Composite materials are used in manufacturing because they are particularly well-suited to their tasks – lighter, stronger, cheaper or more flexible – but they require more work up-front in order to develop them. In the same way, multicultural employees have unique skills that are particularly well-suited to the global workplace, but organizations may need to put the right conditions in place first, before they can reap the benefits of their multicultural workforce. In this paper, I propose a framework that managers and researchers can use to think systematically about the range of contributions and challenges multicultural employees bring to their organizations. Organizations with managers who are aware of the range of possible outcomes their multicultural employees represent may set themselves up to benefit from the unique skills of their “composite materials”: their multicultural employees.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who offered this suggestion.

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FIGURE 1

Model of Multicultural Identity Dimensions

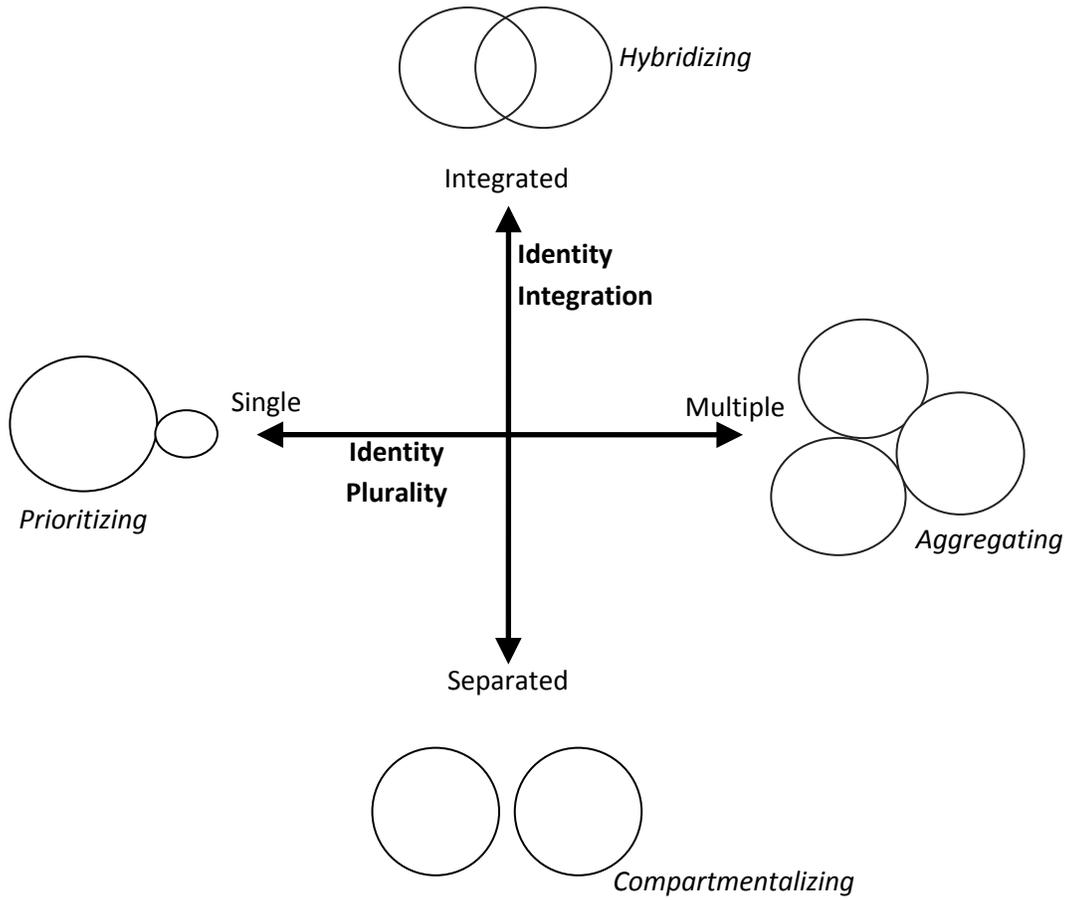


FIGURE 2

Proposed Antecedents of Multicultural Identity Dimensions

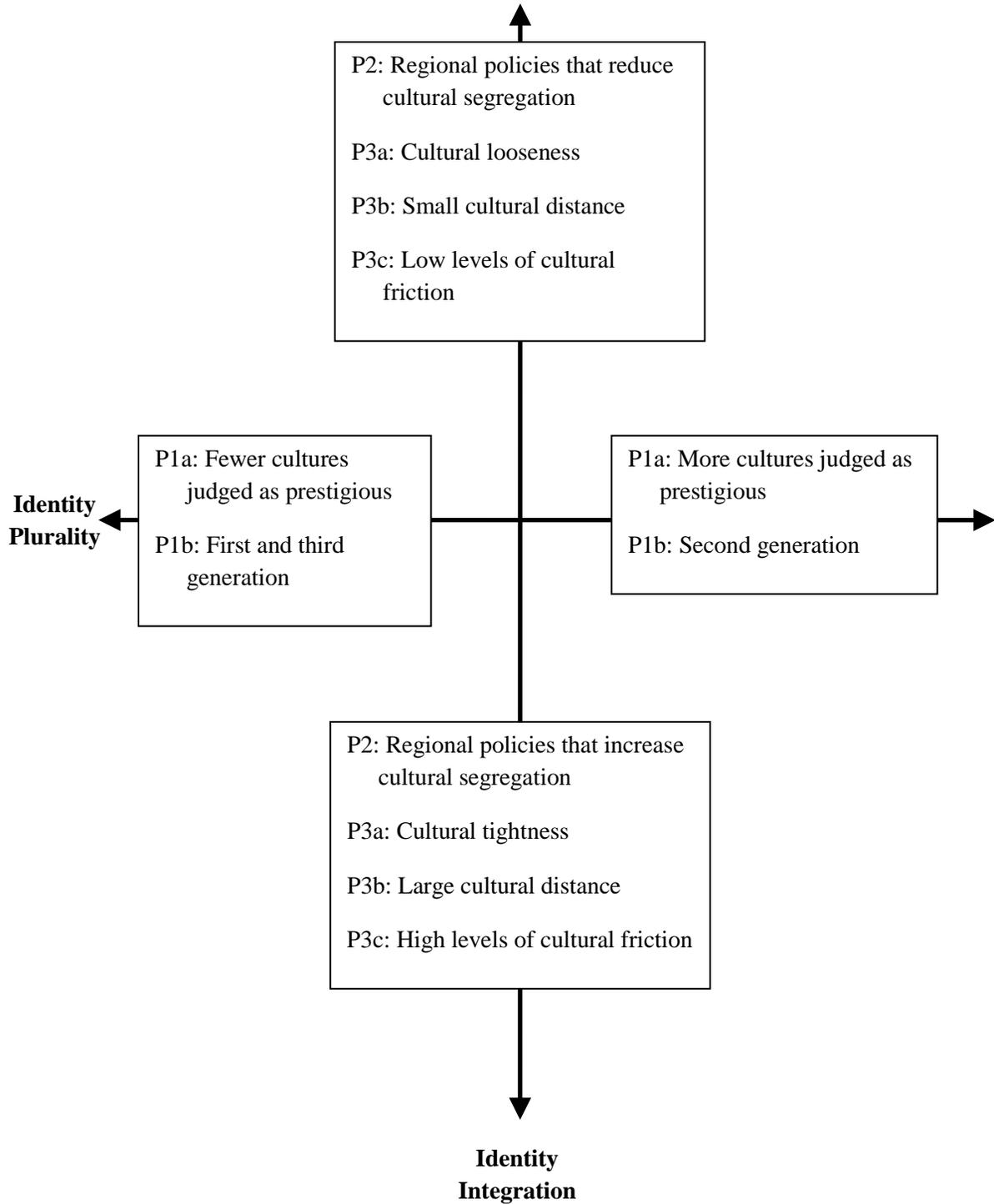


FIGURE 3

Proposed Outcomes of Multicultural Identity Dimensions

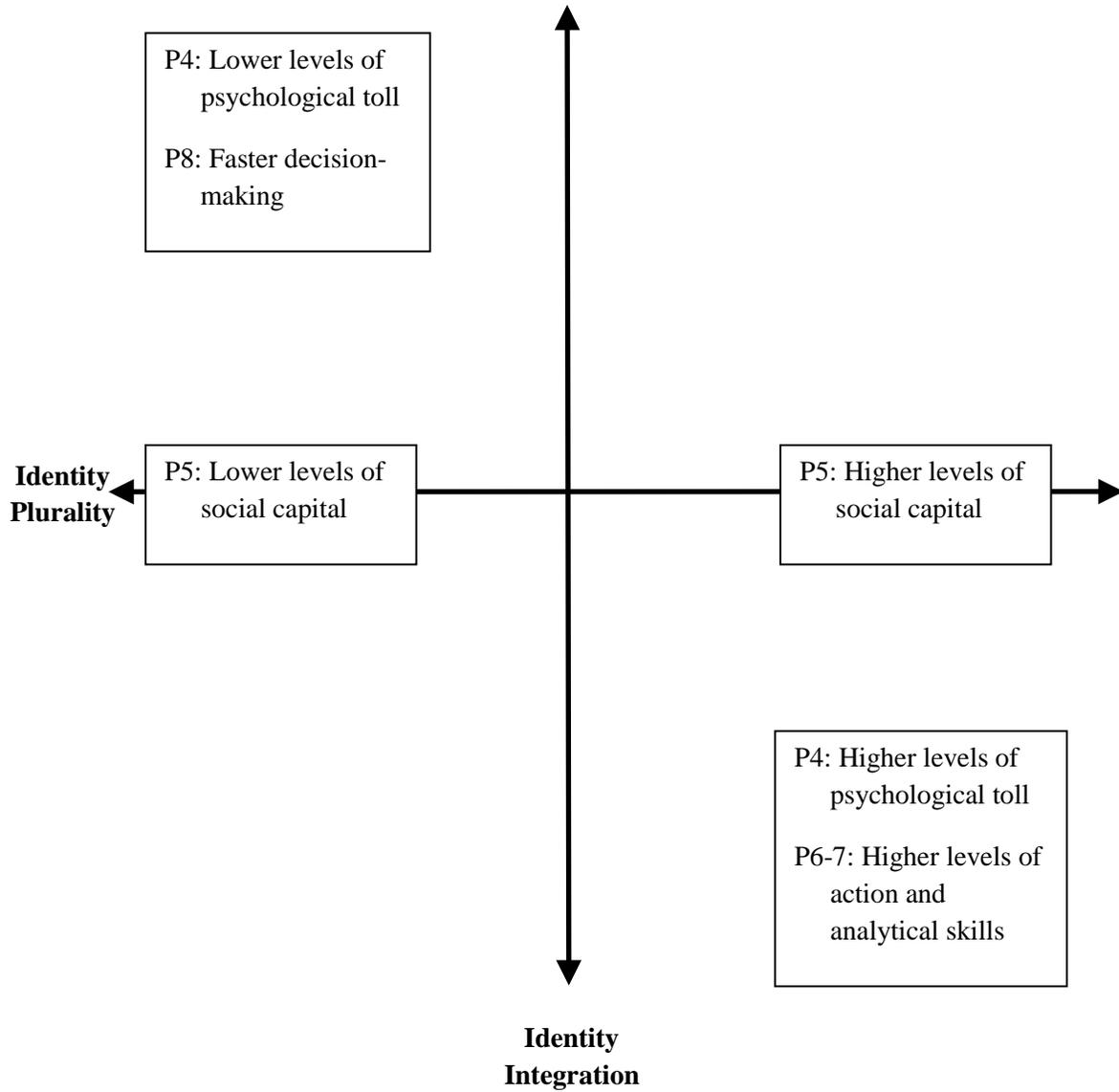


FIGURE 4

Overall Framework of Multicultural Identity Dimensions, Including Antecedents, Outcomes and Moderators

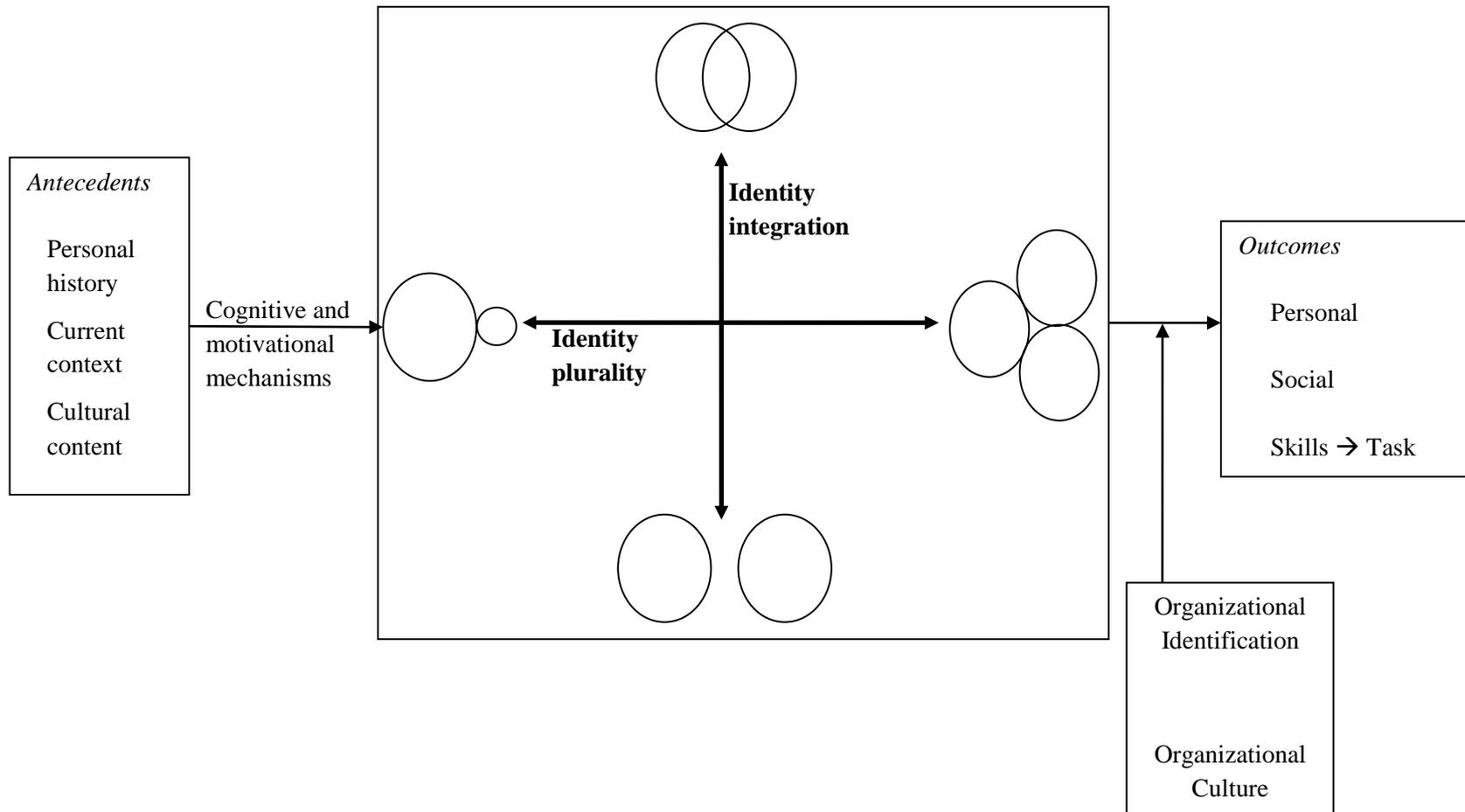


TABLE 1

Propositions and their Associated Mechanisms

Propositions	Mechanisms
<i>How antecedents influence multicultural identity patterns</i>	
<i>Personal history</i>	
P1a: The number of cultures with which individuals perceived high levels of cultural group prestige during identity formation will be positively related to identity plurality.	Motivated to increase self-esteem by identifying with higher-prestige groups.
P1b: Generational status will have a curvilinear relationship with identity plurality.	
<i>Current context</i>	
P2: The degree to which regional multiculturalism policies reduce cultural segregation will predict identity integration among residents.	Cognitive desire to reduce uncertainty by relying on the context as a guide.
<i>Cultural content</i>	
P3a: Cultural tightness will be negatively related to identity integration.	Cognitive desire to reduce uncertainty by maintaining internal consistency.
P3b: Cultural distance will be negatively related to identity integration.	
P3c: Cultural friction will be negatively related to identity integration	
<i>How multicultural identity patterns influence outcomes</i>	
<i>Personal outcomes</i>	
P4a: Identity plurality will be positively related to psychological toll.	Inconsistent patterns reduce uncertainty less effectively than consistent patterns, resulting in higher psychological toll.
P4b: Identity integration will be negatively related to psychological toll.	
<i>Social outcomes</i>	
P5a: Identity plurality will be related to higher levels of structural social capital.	Motivation to increase self-esteem by positively differentiating in-groups from comparison out-groups.
P5b: Identity plurality will be related to higher levels of relational social capital.	

**Propositions**

**Mechanisms**

*Task outcomes*

P6a: Identity plurality will be positively related to action skills.

P6b: Identity integration will be negatively related to action skills.

P7a: Identity plurality will be positively related to analytical skills.

P7b: Identity integration will be negatively related to analytical skills.

P8a: Identity plurality will be negatively related to culture-domain decision-making speed.

P8b: Identity integration will be positively related to culture-domain decision-making speed.

Inconsistent patterns reduce uncertainty less effectively than consistent patterns, resulting in higher levels of skills, but longer times required to process decision.

*How organizational identification moderates the relationships among identity dimensions and outcomes*

P9: Within the work domain, the strength of organizational identification will moderate the relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes, such that the relationships will be strongest when organizational identification is weak.

P10: Within the work domain, cultural ideology will moderate relationships between multicultural identity patterns and outcomes, such that the relationships will be strongest in organizations that endorse a multiculturalism ideology, and weakest in organizations that endorse color blindness.

Identities only guide behavior when salient. Strength of organizational identification increases the likelihood that organizational identification is relatively more salient than multicultural identities.

Identities only guide behavior when salient. It is possible for more than one identity to be salient simultaneously, if the identities are consistent.

## MULTICULTURAL EMPLOYEES

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