Conversational Spaces in Teams: A cross-cultural Study of American and Spanish MBA Teams

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Abstract

In today's organizational environment, managers and leaders are beginning to find themselves not only working with teams but also that these teams are becoming more cross-cultural, even multicultural – increasing the need for global leaders and managers. In this study, we used the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) (Lingham, 2004) that both measures and maps out a team's context (one involving human interaction and communication) based on their Real experiences and the Ideal experiences they would like to have along four major aspects: Divergent, Convergent, Status, and Recursive Spaces. We also provide a brief overview of the Theory of Conversational Learning (from which the CoSI was developed) and its relation to cross cultural research. The CoSI was administered to MBA students in similar programs in two countries – America (n=176) and Spain (n=152). The mapping from the data shows one distinct feature: Only the teams Real Divergent Spaces were different. Ideal

Spaces for both cultures were similar. This finding would have implications for future research on teams and cross-cultural research.

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Introduction

The sense of uncertainty in the world is generated by the expanding complexity within cross-cultural interactions. Across the globe, as corporations moving toward employing teams (cross cultural or where members reside in different nations) across all levels increase exponentially, a critical need for managers to increase their knowledge about teams (especially those involving cross cultural interactions) and to develop the skills required not only to be team members but also to lead, create and support these teams. In today's organizational environment, managers and leaders are beginning to find themselves not only working with teams but also that these teams are becoming more cross-cultural, even multicultural – increasing the need for global leaders and managers. In this paper, we argue that in order to help managers develop the skill and knowledge necessary to work in (and with) teams that involve cross cultural interaction, a method that would meet this need is one that provides them with an understanding of the actual experiences of team members and the ideal experiences they would like when they interact as a team in order to function more efficiently and effectively. This method of measuring conversations is unique as it captures the experience of team members by treating the space as an integrative one that incorporates learning, group dynamics and time perception. Developing such a method would require the need to study teams from a different viewpoint: one that centers on experience of team members based on the psychological space created through their interactions – their conversational spaces. To date, Lingham (2004) provides the only method to measure and map out this integrative psychological space and to demonstrate its strong effect on performance, satisfaction and psychological safety.

Although research and theories that focus on the importance of conversations in everyday life (Harkins, 1990; Harrison & Thomas,

1991; Sawyer, 2001; Shotter, 1993), relationships (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler, 2002; Scott, 2002; Kahn, 1995) and groups (McNiff, 2003; Hazelwood, 1998), is becoming more prevalent, the experiences of the psychological space within which these conversations exist has not been researched in detail. This psychological space, framed as "conversational space" forms the integrative context of a team's existence. A good conversational space is one that provides a safe supportive environment, embracing and respecting differences, developing strong trusting relationships, generating learning and getting tasks done effectively. Yet, such spaces also involve how time is experienced: either as linear (agenda driven time) or cyclic (interest driven – where individuals are allowed to voice their opinions freely) (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002). In this study, we compare conversational spaces of MBA students in similar programs across two countries – America and Spain – using the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) developed and validated by Lingham (2004) as an integrative group level construct based on each member's experience of the psychological space of her interactions in their team. Lingham (2004) proposes that conversational spaces form the nexus around which individuals connect, learn, fulfill and design tasks or projects; and create individual and shared realities.

Conversational Spaces and Team Research

Effort to understand the increasing uncertainty and complexity in today's organizational environment has resulted in researchers defining organizations themselves as both conversations (Ford, 1999) and as a network of conversations (Broekstra, 1998). Numerous researchers have positioned conversations as an important aspect of organizational change efforts (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Beer, Eisenhart & Spector, 1990; Ford & Backoff, 1988) with the power to create organizational culture (Ford & Ford, 1995) and construct people's realities (Giddens, 1984;

Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Whitehead, 1941; Winograd & Flores, 1987; Maturana & Varela, 1987). Conversations have also been identified as critical to management education (Shaw & Weber, 1991; Ford & Ford, 1995), and learning (Newman & Holzman, 1997; Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002).

In a recent review on team research, Cohen and Bailey (1997) focused on 54 studies that were done between 1990 and 1996. In this review, the authors presented four types of teams (i.e., work, parallel, project, and management) that have been studied to surface the factors that contribute to team effectiveness.[1] Such empirical studies, however, have been bifurcated. On the one hand, researchers argue that team life is complex and can best be understood by zooming in on specific aspects. This approach resulted in generating vast amounts of knowledge on teams such as decision making (Wageman, 1995; Brown, Tumeo, Larey & Paulus, 1998), psychosocial traits (Gully, Devine & Whitney, 1995; Wech, Mossholder, Steel & Bennet, 1998; Langfred, 1998), T-groups (Lewin, 1951), team learning (Brooks, 1994; Edmondson, 1996; 1999; Kasl, Marsick & Dechant, 1997), the effect of time on teams (Gersick, 1989), group dynamics (Zander, 1982); leadership in teams (Hackman, 1990; 2002), team development (Tuckman, 1965), group emotional intelligence (Druskat & Wolf, 2001) and group design (Steiner, 1972; Hackman, 1987; Campion, Medsker & Higgs, 1993).

On the other hand, researchers have also presented the importance of understanding teams as a whole. Such integrative perspectives, though less popular since the 1950s, have been steadily growing in recent years. Some examples are McGrath's Time, Interaction and Performance (TIP) model (1991); Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) (1949) and his

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[1] Cohen and Bailey (1997) define effectiveness as encompassing three areas: performance effectiveness, member attitudes and behavioral outcomes. In this study, we used all three aspects as our dependent variables.

System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups (SYMLOG) (1979); change processes in groups (Gemmill & Wynkoop, 1991) and group communication (Salazar, 1995). Other integrative models have included cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Wheelan, 1994; Thompson & Fine, 1999) but not the temporal facet as proposed by McGrath (1991).

The internal contexts of teams has become of particular interest to Small Group researchers (Small Group Conference, 2002), and acknowledged as critical by researchers on team learning (Brooks, 1994; Purser, Pasmore & Tenkasi, 1992). This study supports the notion that, despite this bifurcation, integrative models of groups should bridge both streams encompassing research on teams, team learning, and time perception.

A Brief Overview of Conversational Learning

The importance of creating the right psychological space based on team members' interactions has been presented by team researchers as critical to a team's existence (Frey, 2002), and performance (Hackman, 2002) and as a part of the team learning process (Edmondson, 1996; Dixon, 1994). The theory of Conversational Learning (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002) presented the beginning of an integrative construct that bridges group dynamics and team learning. Lingham (2004) developed the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) as the first quantitative measure to capture this psychological space based on the experience (both Real and Ideal) of team members.

Grounded in the theory and practice of Experiential Learning, Conversational Learning is a process whereby individuals construct meaning and transform experiences into knowledge conversations (Kolb, Baker & Jensen, 2002). As a construct, the authors define Conversational

Learning as one that occurs in a space bounded by ten dimensions while also offering it as a way to understand group interaction. Kolb, Baker and Jensen (2002) mention that such a space would serve to emphasize the interpersonal experience among group members and weave multiple voices into an interconnected whole.

The roots of the research in conversational learning go back to the works of Dewey (1938, 1964), Lewin (1951), Piaget (1965), James (1977), Vygotsky (1978), and Freire (1992) (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002). Baker, Wyss-Flamm, Kolb, and Jensen (2002) mention that the precursors to conversational learning were drawn largely from the literature in group research – especially research on group dynamics (Lewin, 1951; Bales, 1949, 1979; Bion, 1959; Schutz, 1966); group growth and development (Mills, 1967; Schein, 1993; Star, 1989; Engentrom & Middleton, 1996); acceptance and trust (Rogers, 1970); as communities of practice to create or generate knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2000; Nonaka, 1994; and Wenger, 1998). Philosophical works such as Habermas' emancipation through ideas speech situations (1984), and Gadamer's ontological definition of conversation (1994) as a process of coming to an understanding, were instrumental in the development of the theory of Conversational Learning.

The model employed for this study is a space where the meaning making process occurs along ten dimensions. These ten dimensions circumscribing the phenomenon "conversational space" are: Apprehension (APP), Comprehension (COM), Intension (INT), Extension (EXT), Individuality (IND), Relationality (REL), Status (STA), Solidarity (SOL), Discursive (DIS), and Recursive (REC). We will also indicate cross-cultural research that is represented in some of the dimensions. Figure 1 shows the mapping of these ten dimensions along the four major spaces as proposed by Lingham (2004): Divergent

(APP, INT, IND, REL, SOL), Convergent (COM, EXT, DIS), Status (STA), and Recursive (REC).
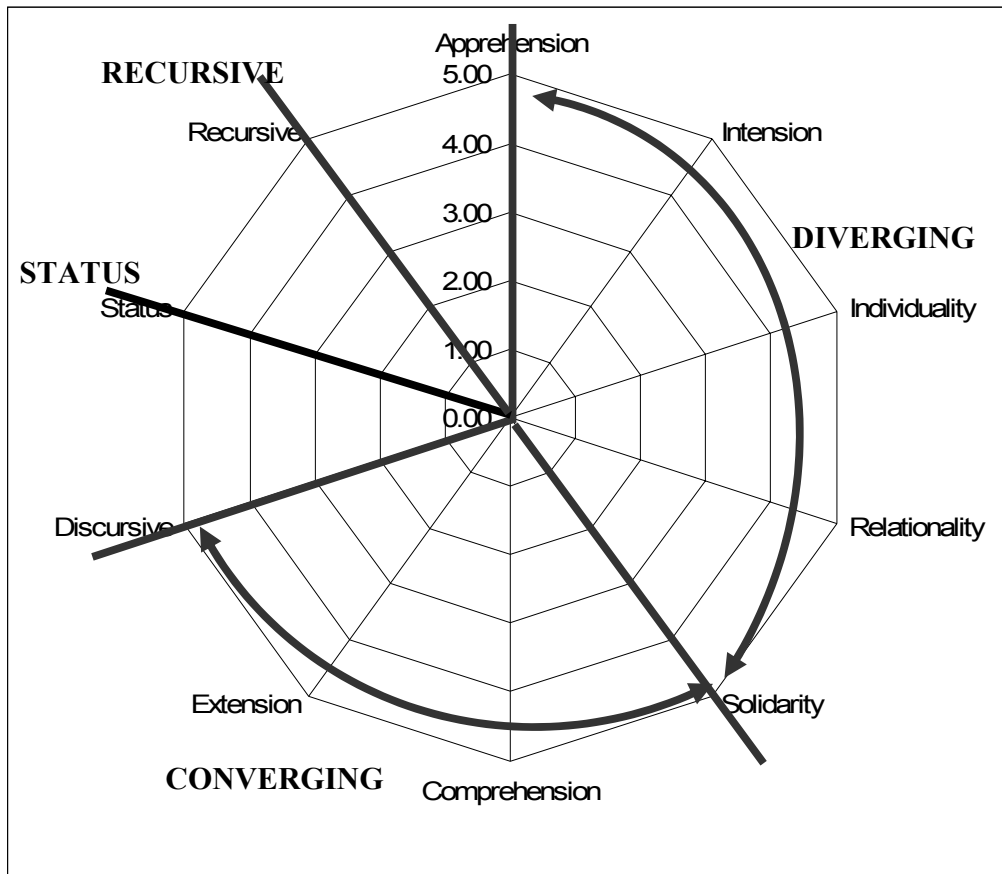
Figure 1. Conversational Space Mapping of the Ten Dimensions along Four Spatial Aspects

In the conversational space of a team, apprehension is experienced as the dealing with feelings, reactions and being open and receptive to new experiences. Grasping knowledge through apprehension can be experienced as members being personally involved in issues raised in the conversation. Comprehension is experienced as the rationalizing and

evaluating of ideas or issues that are raised in the conversation. There is a tendency to analyze and break down issues into their component parts and to conceptualize or theorize about issues in the conversation. Intension is experienced as the pondering before enactment. Members tend to be in a more contemplative space where the behavior is that of observation, listening, and caution. In this pole of the dialectic, members tend to take the time to look at all sides of an issue before acting on it. Extension is experienced as the desire to get things done or to try things out as experimenting on issues rather than to contemplate on them. Members would tend to be results-oriented and practical. Individuality is experienced as the freedom for members to be unique individuals in the team with the ability to act independently and share their own unique life experiences. Relationality is experienced as the desire to be connected to other team members through the acting and agreeing on issues in relationships with team members. Simply, members tend to try to fit into the group. An extreme of relationality is where members conform to the group when under social pressure with the group members feeling that the majority is right (Levine, 1999; Asch, 1951) or causing Groupthink (Janis, 1972) to happen.

In cross cultural research, the individualism-collectivism is argued as the single most important dimension of cultural difference in social behavior (Triandis, 1995) and that it is most robust across cultures (Schwartz, 1994). The inclusion of this dimension (individuality–relationality) in Conversational Learning Spaces might also be critical in capturing differences in conversational spaces across cultures. Hofstede (1980) describes Individualism along a continuum from "low" to "high" and that the level of this dimension in a society could affect organization membership and leadership within organizations, suggesting a correlation between Individualism and Power Distance. A similar argument is presented in Kluckhohn's (1961) relational orientation. Kluckohn articulates that this dimension includes relation to authority.

Koltko-Riveria (2004), however, argues that this is confusing and that the power or authority should be separate. The combination of Individuality and Relationality in Conversational Spaces takes this difference into account as it distinguishes these two aspects from Status and Solidarity.

Status is experienced as having the need for a single strong leader in the team to guide, decide and help others learn. There is a clear status hierarchy in the team. A healthy interaction, according to Wilber (1995) involves components of hierarchy (status) and heterarchy (solidarity). A similar position is articulated by Miller (1986) where inequality can be temporary or permanent. Such a space is based on respect and understanding toward one another. This is articulated in cross-cultural studies such as Hofstede's (1980) "Power Distance" dimension. Measured from "small" to "large," this dimension is particularly relevant to people's willingness to engage in self-managing behavior and decision making (Rafferty & Tapsell, 2001). Solidarity is experienced as the desire to be equals or peers, where leadership is shared. Members learn from one another, decide as a team and have strong personal relationships with each other.

Discourse is experienced as the desire for members to move on based on agendas and time constraints either imposed by members of the team or given to them by members outside the team. Such a conversation would be focused on the completion of the task at hand. Recourse is experienced as the tendency to return to previously discussed issues (or to stay with issues) that capture the attention of team members. This ontological and epistemological dialectic is also presented in cross-cultural research, particularly Kluckhohn and Strodbeck's (1961) "Activity Orientation" which is that of "being" versus "doing."

As organizational researchers are gravitating toward understanding teams in organizations, the Conversational Space Inventory (Lingham, 2004) could be used to understand the experience of teams in organizations as it is both a descriptive and predictive tool. The inherent trend in the 21st century of organizations relying on teams makes it crucial to *understand* and *use* an integrative model that captures learning, team dynamics and interest-agenda driven aspects of individuals' experience in teams especially across cultures. In this study we use the CoSI to compare the Conversational Spaces of American and Spanish MBA students that went through the same Leadership Assessment and Development Program.

Method

The Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) contained 35 items and four dimensions where the Divergent Space captured the Apprehension, Intension, Individuality, Relationality and Solidarity items, a team's Convergent Space captured the Comprehension, Extension and Discursive items, and with the Status and Recursive Spaces as the final two dimensions. In this study, we compare the results of the CoSI that was administered to 184 MBA students (176 valid responses) in a Midwestern US university and those that were administered to 166 MBA students (152 valid responses) in a Spanish university going through the same leadership program after participating in a Group Decision Making Exercise so as to determine is there are any cross cultural differences between the American and Spanish MBA teams.

Sample

The demographics of these two sets of teams are shown in Table 1. In the US sample, the average team size was 6.2 members (4.2 males and 1.9 females) with 18 full-time and 14 part-time MBA teams. The Spanish sample had an average team size of 6.36 members (5.03 males and 1.32 females) with 14 full-time (8 teams had attended the program in Spanish and 6 in English) and 17 part-time (13 teams attended the program in Spanish and 4 in English) MBA teams. Members in the Spanish teams completed the CoSI that was translated into Spanish after being back-translated for face validity. 176 responses from the US and 152 from the Spanish samples were valid. It must be noted that the full time MBA sample in Spain consists also of students from Europe and Latin America but only a handful from America and Asia. On the other hand, the full time MBA sample from America also consisted of student from Europe, Latin America and Asia. However, most of the students in the American sample were from America and most of the students from the Spanish sample were from Spain.

Procedure

As part of the Leadership Assessment and Development Program in both America and Spain, the MBAs were formed into teams that comprised of at least three different learning styles (Kolb, 1999) and a mixed of gender where possible. After being together and working for at least a month, the teams go through a Group Decision Making Exercise (GME). The Conversational Space Inventory was handed out only after the groups had gone through this 45-minute GME as a team with a task to make a decision on keeping three of six employees in an organization. After the exercise, team members were given the CoSI (Spanish teams were given the valid translated version-after verification from back translation).

Table 1
Comparative Sample of American and Spanish MBAs

AMERICAN					SPANISH				
American	Team Size	Number of MEN	Number of WOMEN	Response (%)	Spanish	Team Size	Number of MEN	Number of WOMEN	Response (%)
					← Spanish Section →				
MBA FT[b]	6	5	1	83.3	MBA FT[a]	5	3	2	40
MBA FT	5	2	3	100	MBA FT	6	5	1	83.3
MBA FT	5	4	1	80	MBA FT	6	6	0	100
MBA FT	5	3	2	100	MBA FT	6	6	0	66.7
MBA FT	5	4	1	100	MBA FT	5	4	1	100
MBA FT	5	3	2	100	MBA FT	6	5	1	50
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	MBA FT	5	5	0	100
MBA FT	6	5	1	100	MBA FT	5	4	1	100
MBA FT	6	3	3	100	← English Section →				
MBA FT	6	5	1	100	MBA FT	6	4	2	66.7
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	MBA FT	6	4	2	100
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	MBA FT	5	4	1	100
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	MBA FT	6	4	2	66.7
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	MBA FT	6	4	2	100
MBA FT	6	4	2	83.3	MBA FT	6	5	1	100
MBA FT	6	4	2	100	← Spanish Section →				
MBA FT	6	6	0	100	MBA PT	6	4	2	66.7
MBA FT	6	3	3	100	MBA PT	7	6	1	71.4
MBA PT[b]	6	4	2	83.3	MBA PT	7	6	1	71.4
MBA PT	7	5	2	57.1	MBA PT	7	6	1	85.7
MBA PT	7	5	2	57.1	MBA PT	7	4	3	71.4
MBA PT	5	3	2	100	MBA PT	6	4	2	71.4
MBA PT	7	4	3	71.4	MBA PT	7	6	1	57.2
MBA PT	6	4	2	100	MBA PT	6	6	0	66.7
MBA PT	6	3	3	83.3	MBA PT	7	5	2	71.4
MBA PT	6	5	1	100	MBA PT	7	6	1	71.4
MBA PT	8	5	3	100	MBA PT	7	5	2	71.4
MBA PT	7	5	2	100	MBA PT	7	6	1	71.4
MBA PT	7	6	1	85.7	MBA PT	7	4	3	71.4
MBA PT	7	5	2	85.7	← English Section →				
MBA PT	7	5	2	85.7	MBA PT	8	6	2	75
MBA PT	8	5	3	100	MBA PT	7	6	1	85.7
					MBA PT	7	6	1	57.24
					MBA PT	8	7	1	100
TOTAL	**197**	**135**	**62**	**182[c]**		**197**	**156**	**41**	**152[c]**
AVERAGE	**6.2**	**4.2**	**1.9**	**92.4 %**		**6.36**	**5.03**	**1.32**	**77.2 %**

[a]MBAFT indicates the MBA teams that are Full-Time students in the program.
[b]MBAPT indicates the MBA teams that are Part-Time students in the program.
[c]This figure indicates the total responses we obtained.

Results

Based on the initial study (Lingham, 2004), the 10 poles collapsed into four dimensions that were re-theorized as Divergent, Convergent, Status, and Recursive Spaces. The final CoSI used in that study comprised of 35 items. We handed out the CoSI and made a comparison based on the 35 items used in the American sample to maintain consistency in our comparison. The 35 items are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
**Final Set of 35 items in the Conversational Space Inventory**

Items for Apprehension:	**Items for Comprehension:**
3. In our conversations, members are open to new experiences.	1. In our conversations, members are focused on ideas and logic.
4. During our conversation, members are receptive and open minded.	2. In our conversations, we employ logic and reason things out.
5. During our conversation, members feel personally involved in things or issues.	3. During our conversation, members analyze ideas and break them down into smaller parts to work with.
	5. During our conversation, members are focused on developing logical theories.
Items for Intension:	**Items for Extension:**
1. In our conversations, members listen carefully to each other.	2. During our conversation, members want to get things done.
3. During our conversation, members consider all sides of an issue before acting on it.	4. In our conversations, members are focused on being practical.
5. In our conversations, members take their time to listen before talking.	5. In our conversations, members are focused on seeing results from our work.
Items for Individuality:	**Items for Relationality:**
1. During our conversation, members are able to share their own unique life experiences.	1. During our conversation, members try to connect with others through common experiences.
3. In our conversations, members are able to share their own unique viewpoints.	4. In our conversations, members care for, and are concerned about each other.
5. In our conversations, members	5. In our conversations, members emphasize

emphasize that each person in the team is unique.	that everyone is part of the group.
Items for Status: 1. In our conversations, someone takes the role of team leader. 2. In our conversations, there is a clear status hierarchy in the team. 3. During our conversation, the team looks for guidance from one team member. 5. During our conversation, one member makes final decisions for the team.	**Items for Solidarity:** 1. In our conversations, all members are treated as peers. 2. In our conversations, leadership is shared. 4. In our conversations, members learn from one another. 5. During our conversation, we decide collectively as a team.
Items for Discursive: 1. The conversation is focused on achieving goals. 2. Our conversations are focused on moving forward with the task. 4. In our conversations, members are focused on completing the task efficiently.	**Items for Recursive:** 1. During our conversation, members return to previously discussed issues that are important to them. 2. Our conversations are focused on discussing issues that are important to individual members. 3. Our conversations are shaped by issues that concern team members. 4. In our conversations, we revisit earlier issues that are important to individual team members. 5. In our conversations, we make time for issues that are important to team members.

As both sample groups (American and Spanish) went through the same program and group exercise, we are confident that other confounding variables have been controlled. Thus, we hope to show if Conversational Spaces (Real and Ideal) are consistent or different across teams that are undergoing managerial and leadership development education. Although the importance of conversations has been of growing interest to researchers and practitioners in organizational life, there has been no instrument that measures this psychological space based on the experience of team members. The Conversational Space Inventory not only captures the four major dimensions of Conversational Spaces, it

also shows the Real experiences of team members and the Ideal experiences they would like to have. We therefore also show the averaged Real and Ideal Conversational Spaces for the American and Spanish MBAs (Figure 2) using the mapping system shown in Figure 1. Although at a glance they both seem similar, one distinguishing characteristic differentiates the Real Spaces in both groups – the Divergent Space. In the US, the Real and Ideal Spaces show a tendency toward experiencing and wanting more Divergent Space dimensions: Apprehension, Intension, Individuality, Relationality and Solidarity. Teams in the US sample also wanted a more Recursive Space – where individuals are free to voice their interests and concerns in the team. In the Spanish teams, there is not only a lesser need for Divergent Space (reflected in their Ideal space) but also less experience (reflected in the Real space) on all aspects of the Divergent Space. However, in the Spanish sample, they all expressed a need for better Divergent and Convergent Spaces but not Status or Recursive Spaces. On the other hand, though the experienced space of the US sample is greater in most respects (when compared to the Spanish sample), they too expressed a need for better Divergent, Convergent but also Recursive Spaces. We also looked at their ratings of three outcome variables (psychological safety, performance, and member satisfaction). In general, the average ratings on these three outcomes were lower for the Spanish teams (though not much less).
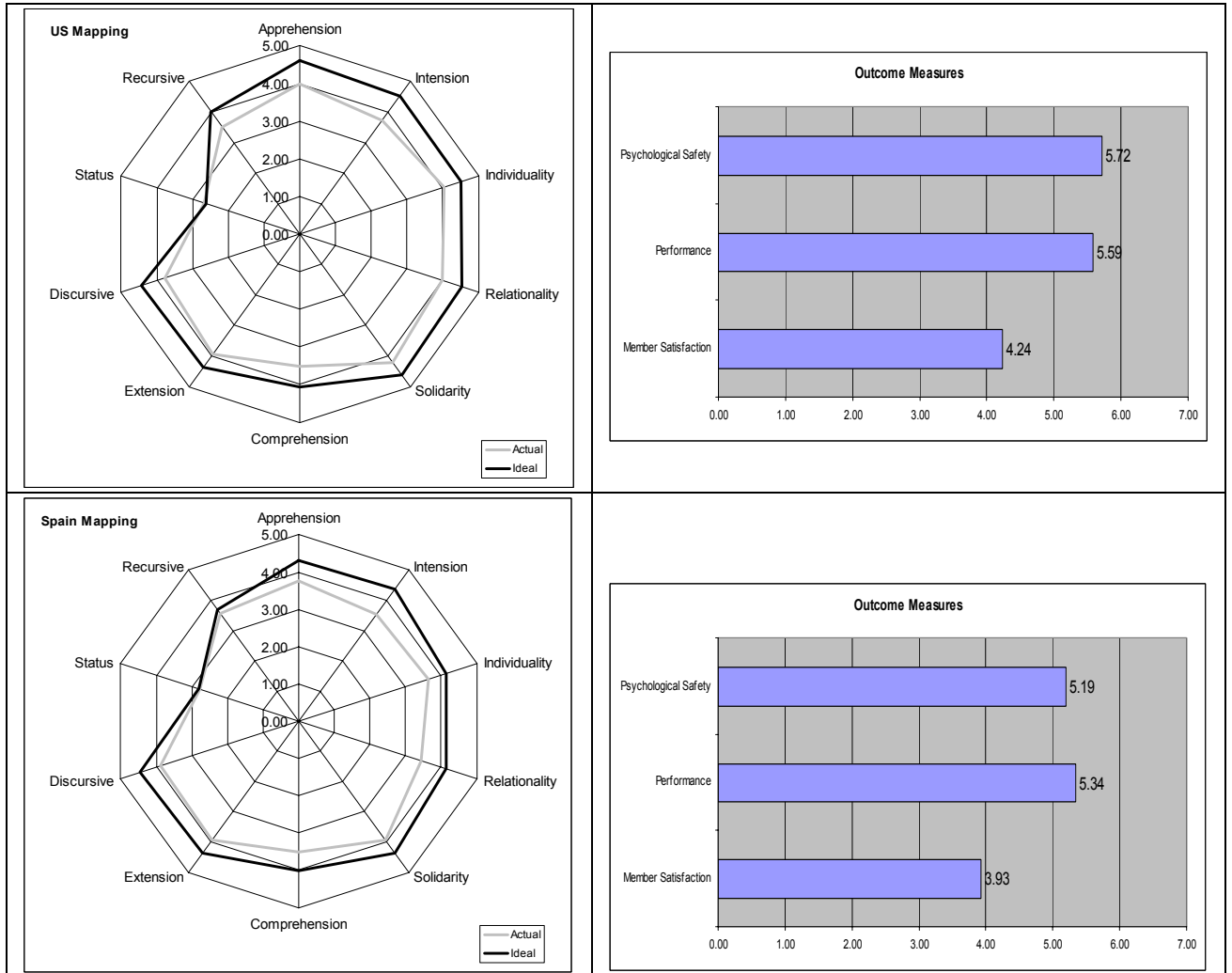
Figure 2. Real and Ideal Mappings of the CoSI and the ratings of outcomes

A distinct feature of Ideal Conversational Spaces in both the US and Spanish MBAs is a lesser focus on both the Recursive and Status dimensions (although there is a slightly higher need for the Recursive dimension in the US sample. Based on the initial study (Lingham, 2004), Status negatively affected performance, satisfaction and psychological

safety.[2] Hence, a lower rating on this dimension is appropriate as the program focuses on developing leadership competencies and the participants would not prefer to have a strong dependence on a leader. Also, team members are encouraged to facilitate participation toward its goal, providing the space for every member to feel satisfied in theirs and others contributions to the team and that they would be able to feel safe to voice their opinions and views without feeling judged.

However, the Real Conversational Spaces for both subsamples were not as similar. Although in the American sample, each dimension had a higher rating when compared to the Spanish sample: Apprehension, Individuality, Intension, Relationality and Solidarity (all aspects of Divergent Space) were experienced more by Americans. The Convergent and Status were quite similar in both samples. The Ideal Recursive Space was slightly different – with the American sample identifying more of a need. The Real and Ideal Divergent Spaces would suggest cultural difference between both populations, especially the much lesser need for Individuality in the Spanish sample.

Discussion and Conclusion

Measuring Conversational Spaces in teams is perhaps the only method presently being developed to study the psychological space created based on the experience of the interaction of team members. As a method, it is relevant to conversational or discourse analyses except that this method provides a quantitative system to measure and map out a team's conversational space as an integrative psychological space within which teams exist. Although theoretically this space has been proposed to have

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[2] In his study, Lingham (2004) mentioned that teams did not like to experience dependence on a strong leader. This finding had nothing to do with the capabilities of any leader but that teams did not like the experience of having a strong leader as it negatively impacts performance, individual member satisfaction and psychological safety.

ten poles (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002), the first quantitative empirical study (Lingham, 2004) revealed only four main dimensions (although the ten poles are included in them). This study shows that two of these four dimensions (a team's Divergent and Recursive Spaces) distinguishes American and Spanish Conversational Spaces. Although at one glance the results seem similar, the mappings show that the Real Spaces of both populations are quite distinct – in that the American sample had higher ratings each of the dimensions for the Divergent Space in both the Real and Ideal Spaces). Although this course focuses on increasing self-awareness and how one operates in a team, all members would see each other not only as peers but would also not want to be dependent on a strong leader (hence the lower rating on Status Spaces for both samples). This finding suggests that American MBAs tend to interact with more focus on relating to others, being more involved and also being conscious of themselves as members of a team while respecting members as individuals. Although the Ideal spaces for both populations were somewhat similar, the distances (gaps) between the Real and Ideal spaces are greater in the Spanish sample. As part of the education on teams in the MBA program in Spain, it would therefore be critical to begin helping teams develop a healthier Divergent Space and to then move toward their Ideal Spaces (as their Ideal spaces show a need to have a more improve in every single aspect). Finally, the teams in the American sample had much more interaction as a team then the Spanish sample as the duration of the course in America was longer than that of the similar course in Spain. This greater exposure to working within the team coupled with the intent of the course to promote greater self-awareness and becoming a better team player may be one reason why the Divergent and Recursive Spaces (non-task and leader dependence spaces) were higher both in the Real and Ideal Spaces of the teams.

As can be seen, Conversational Spaces is a very powerful method to help teams see where they are and where they would like to be that is unique

to their team. On the other hand, we are finding that the Ideal space for MBA students may be similar across at least two cultures and further studies would have to be done to collect data from MBA students from other countries and/or cultures.

Basadur, Pringle, and Kirkland (2002) demonstrated in their research on creativity in Spanish, American and Japanese cultures that the Spanish could learn to appreciate and use divergent thinking as part of the creative process. Interestingly, the findings from this study do support this. The one distinguishing difference between the Real Spaces of both MBA samples is the Divergent Space. From a cross-cultural perspective, apart from it learning dimensions (Apprehension and Intension), the Divergent Space involves very similar aspects proposed in cross-cultural research. The dimensions of Individuality, Relationality, which has been framed as Individualism and Collectivism (Triandis, 1995; Schwartz, 1994, Kluckhohn, 1961), and Solidarity (framed along acceptance of authority and power distance (Hofstede, 1980). In the initial study to develop the Conversational Space Inventory, Lingham (2004) showed that the Status Space (which is related to power distance or authority) is a distinct factor from Relationality and that Relationality and Solidarity are part of the Divergent Space, which aligns with Koltko-Riveria's (2004) assertion that power or authority should be separate from Relationality. In both samples, the team's preferred not to have dependency on a strong single leader. Although one might argue that since the course promotes peer leadership, such a pattern is expected, the CoSI has also been tested on T-groups, and teams in Organizations (Lingham, Richley & Royo, 2005; Lingham, Richley & Soler, 2005) that teams do not express the need or dependence on a strong leader in their Ideal Spaces. This implies that Power Distance (Hofstede, 1980) *in a team* is not helpful regardless of cross-cultural or cultural contexts. Further research using the CoSI on other work teams would be needed to confirm this finding. Another important finding relates to the Convergent Space of a team: "Acting"

and "Doing" are not similar dimensions as proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodbeck's (1961) "Activity Orientation." The "Doing" aspects (Extension and Discursive dimensions that form part of the Convergent Space of a team) factored out separately from a team's Recursive Space ("Being") (Lingham, 2004). The findings thus far demonstrate that the Convergent Spaces, Status Spaces, and Recursive Spaces were similar across cultures. As we collect more data over the next few months, we would be able to make a stronger assertion with regards to the similarities and differences between the MBA teams from the two cultures.

In today's organizational environment, the increasing need for global leaders and managers to develop skills to work with and lead teams are becoming more multicultural and therefore becoming increasingly important. This paper demonstrated a there is a difference in the Real Conversational Spaces of the MBA teams from the two samples – the Divergent and Recursive Spaces for the Real and Ideal mappings were higher in the US sample. However, both MBA groups expressed the need to have a better Divergent Space in the mapping of the Ideal Spaces that they would like to have. This would not only nudge the boundaries of cross-cultural team research, but also provide a way to help teams reach their Ideal Spaces (which may require more focus on a team's Divergent Space in MBA teams as part of leadership courses). We are, however, confident that this stream of research would provide organizations across the globe that are moving toward teams (whether multicultural or not) a method to help leaders and managers increase their knowledge about teams (even those involving cross cultural interactions) and to develop the skills required not only to be team members but also to lead, create and support these teams in order for them to function more efficiently and effectively.

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