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Achieving Mutual Understanding Without Saying a Word: The Conceptualization of *Moqi* and a Nomological Network

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ABSTRACT While the construct of *moqi* (默契, pronounced 'mò-chee') is ubiquitously understood and finds itself in everyday conversations around the home and workplace in China, the theoretical development of *moqi* has been scarce. In this article, we expand on prior work on *moqi* and conceptualize *moqi* as a dyadic level construct that describes a situated state of shared contextualized understanding without saying a word between two counterparties. We further articulate a broader view of *moqi* as a dyadic communication construct that is both target-specific and situation-specific. We propose a nomological network of *moqi* that shows how shared contextualized understandings between counterparties are informed by several different layers, including 'capability' (a) a generalized proclivity to be able to form such understandings with others, and 'contributing factors', (b) how those understandings are formed either (i) through interactions or (ii) without them through overlaps in background characteristics or experiences, and (c) how other factors accentuate the capability and inclination to ultimately achieve *moqi*. We then discuss several potential consequences of *moqi* in organizational settings. Finally, we discuss why *moqi* is a powerful form of effective communication that is meaningful beyond the Chinese cultural context.

KEYWORDS antecedents of *moqi*, consequences of *moqi*, shared contextualized understanding

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INTRODUCTION

In most countries, the idea of spouses or siblings having perfect understandings of each other without saying a word is intuitive to many but does not necessarily stir a particular term to mind. In China, however, the construct of *moqi* (默契, pronounced 'mò-chee') is ubiquitously understood and finds itself in everyday conversations around the home and workplace. As a culture-specific occurrence (Chen & Miller, 2010), *moqi* is a phenomenon taken for granted by the Chinese; it can even stand-alone without explanation as part of a headline for the masses (e.g.,

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Zhang, 2009). As a theoretical construct being considered for use by scholars working in countries around the world, however, much more theoretical development is necessary for *moqi* to become a significant concept worthy of scholarly attention.

One recent study made great strides in introducing *moqi* as a unique construct and in providing a framework for theorizing around it (Zheng, Li, Harris, & Liao, 2017). Importantly, that study empirically validated *moqi* as unique from such Western constructs of leader-member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), personal-supervisor (P-S) fit (Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005), implicit coordination (Khan, Lodhi, & Makk, 2010), and transactive memory systems (Lewis, 2003). That study also articulates important boundary conditions and consequences of *moqi*, but it does have some shortcomings that require further study to construct a robust theory of *moqi*.

In this article, we expand beyond the supervisor–subordinate relationship focus of Zheng et al. (2017), and articulate a broader view of *moqi* as a construct of organizational behavior, impacting relationships both within status tiers (e.g., peers) and across them (hierarchical relationships), as well as those from certain cultural communication backgrounds (high context cultures). *Moqi* is not limited to just supervisor–subordinate relations (in the same way that something like LMX must be, by definition) nor to only friendly relationships. Rather it can manifest in relationships of myriad types (e.g., between family members, friends, coworkers, coaches/athletes, supervisor/subordinates, even between pseudonymous online personas and/or rivals antagonistic to each other). For those familiar with *moqi* and use it in their daily lives in their home culture, the construct is taken for granted. For millions of individuals (particularly in the West) who have never even heard the concept, this article is laying the groundwork beyond the pioneering work by Zheng et al. (2017) to afford access to an important theoretical construct of communication, which is more prevalent in some cultures than others.

In addition to a broader view of *moqi*, our article draws attention to how shared understandings between counterparties come together with specific situations to manifest as *moqi* between those counterparties. For simplicity reasons, we center our discussion of *moqi* at the dyadic level and propose a nomological network that shows how interactions between counterparties are informed by several different layers, including a capability to form such understandings with others, and several contributing factors to how those understandings are formed. We also discuss how the relative lack of past interactions can be overcome as an obstacle through shared demographic, professional/organizational acculturalization, or cultural background overlaps.

This expansion and elucidation is important because *moqi* has the potential to enable people to infer what actions would be desirable in particular circumstances that unfold, thereby, increasing communication efficiency (and thus the efficiency of work itself) as well as the affective bonds between parties who utilize *moqi*. Consider, for example, two colleagues facing an edict from top management

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that shortens their timeline for product delivery to market. If the two colleagues have achieved *moqi*, then they can efficiently move to address the situation without explicit communication, knowing full well what the appropriate action should be. Thus, *moqi* facilitates the effective and efficient tackling of new situations that would otherwise 'test' the dynamics of the dyads encountering them. And because *moqi* is unspoken, it facilitates the bonds between the counterparties. To achieve this end of articulating what *moqi* is and (importantly for theory building) what it is not, we rely on complementary literatures, ranging from cross-cultural communication 'context' (Adair, Buchan, Chen, & Liu, 2016; Cole, 2015) to message encoding/decoding (Brannen, 2004), to build out a more generalized Nomological Network of *Moqi*.

THEORETICAL DEFINITION

Moqi is composed of two Chinese characters: *mo* (默) meaning 'silent' or 'tacit', and *qi* (契) meaning 'fit' or 'agreement'. In sports, we often observe when an athlete knows exactly what to do in the next play by just looking at the coach's body movement or facial expression. Similarly, *moqi* could also exist between a supervisor and a subordinate (Zheng et al., 2017). For example, when noticing the supervisor looking at him/her in a certain way, the subordinate immediately stops talking. In Japan, this same concept is captured not in a word, but in a phrase: *ah-un* (あっ・・・うん), wherein the *ah* captures someone (canonically a spouse) who has remembered something (e.g., 'Ah! [I forgot to take out the trash.]') and the *un* is a counterparty (e.g., the other spouse) agreeing with the unspoken content (i.e., *un* meaning 'yes'). In this sense, while the term *moqi* is Chinese specific, the meaning and phenomenon of *moqi* is not. In this article, we present an emic view (Pike, 1967) of a construct that is unique to a particular communication culture ('high context' culture), but not solely to one national culture. If one insists that cultures can only exist nationally, then we are presenting what Berry (1989: 727) defines as a 'derived etic' view, that is, 'there are features that exist, not only within one culture, but also exist outside it (in the second culture)'. We approach the phenomenon of interest (i.e., *moqi*) from the view of scholars familiar with the system of communication, rather than treating it as an alien object (Berry, 1989: 722).

To understand what *moqi* is and how *moqi* is developed, we rely on the notion of communication context (Hall, 1989) and the individual-based model of communication (Adair et al., 2016) as theoretical foundations. The communication context 'has to do with how much you have to know before effective communication can occur, how much shared knowledge is taken for granted by those in conversation with each other, or how much reference there is to tacit common ground' (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012: 111). It is evident that communication context is related to the unspoken, unformulated, implicit rules governing how information is handled and how people interact and relate (Hall, 1989). A high

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context communication is defined as one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message (Hall, 1989). Although both verbal and nonverbal information exchange are necessary and important in conveying meanings effectively, researchers estimate that nonverbal communication transmits approximately 65% of the meaning in an interaction (Birdwhistell, 1955; Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). When two people engage in high context communication using no words but can reach shared understanding about a specific target (e.g., person, object, incident) in a specific situation, they are said to have *moqi*. Importantly, this means that *moqi* is dyadic in nature, not an individualized phenomenon.

Like social capital (Baker, 2000; Portes, 1998), *moqi* is shared between two people and requires interaction between individuals. Those interactions create shared understandings between the counterparties (① in Figure 1). Importantly, *moqi* is target-specific, i.e., even when shared understandings exist between counterparties regarding a specific person or issue, they may not have the same shared understandings regarding a different person or issue. Moreover, *moqi* is also situation-specific, meaning that those understandings are not *moqi* until they become relevant to a particular situation. As our Nomological Network of *Moqi* shows in Figure 1, *moqi* (②) represents the congruence of a shared understanding between two individuals (①) and a situation (③) during which those shared understandings may be relevant. Thus, *moqi* is an emergent or enacted state varying across different situations (or informed by prior situations) between two or more individuals.

Within the organizational behavior literature, there is a concept known as perspective-taking (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003), which is where an individual considers the world from another individual's viewpoint. By default, this means that the individual engaging in the perspective-taking does not already view the situation from that perspective and must 'switch mindsets' to a different perspective. Perspective-taking has been linked with negotiators' ability to create resources at the bargaining table (i.e., 'grow the pie') and to claim more of those resources for themselves (Galinsky et al., 2008), as well as to reduce biases in the treatment of pain by nursing professionals (Drwecki, Moore, Ward, & Prkachin, 2011). For perspective-taking to have these effects requires individuals to look at a particular situation and to then ask themselves, 'What would [Party A] do in this situation'? or 'How would [Party A] feel in this situation'? then allow that reflection to inform their own agency. In *moqi*, those same individuals would instead ask, 'What would [Party A] want me to do in this situation'? or 'What would [Party A] want to have happen in this situation'? then act in accordance with that reflection. Thus, *moqi* is not a state of perspective-taking, but rather a state of perspective-taken alignment, both in mindset and in action.

Let us take, for example, the shared understandings that might emerge between a department chair and a deputy chair regarding a subordinate's job competence in light of a recent accident. As the chair and deputy chair interact, both

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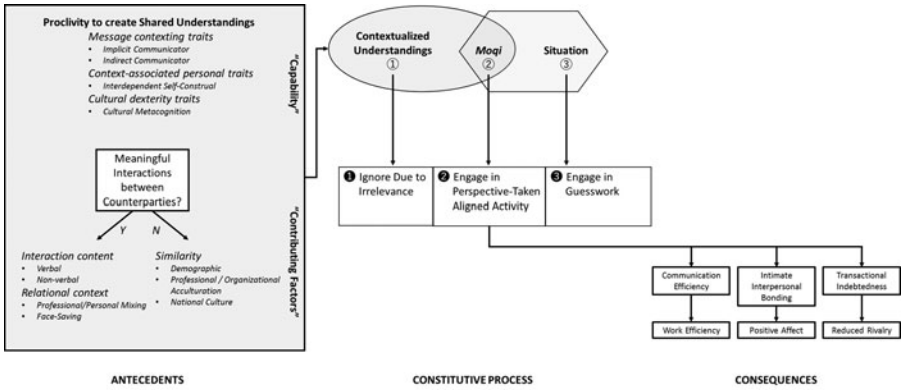

Figure 1. Nomological network of *moqi*

verbally and through various nonverbal cues, they come to have an understanding regarding not just the subordinate but also each other as communicators (including idiosyncrasies of body language, such as eye rolling and raised eyebrows). Should the chair and deputy chair hear about a new accident, they may be able to know what the other is thinking about the situation just by looking at each other. (Note: At the highest levels of *moqi*, the individuals would not even need to be in each other's presence to know what the other would be thinking.) The more the counterparties have repeated this process of interactions in the past, the more likely they will have *moqi* regarding the implication of future accidents in judging the subordinate's job competence.

Importantly, it is the situation of the new accident that transforms the shared understandings constructed from prior interactions into *moqi*, which subsequently leads to perspective-taken aligned activity when agency is called for (❷). Should the organization never again see another accident, then the shared understandings between the chair and deputy chair are irrelevant (❶); *moqi* would never be achieved in these circumstances, making moot acts of agency based on those shared understandings (and most likely absurd looking to others, should they ever happen).

On the other hand, should the chair and deputy chair encounter an altogether new situation (e.g., a complaint of sexual harassment involving the subordinate), then they will most likely engage in guesswork informed by their shared understandings of each other (❸). So, while no shared understandings are directly relevant to the new situation at hand (e.g., sexual harassment), prior interactions will certainly inform how the chair and deputy chair respond. This is how *moqi* is an emergent state informed by prior situations.

WHAT *MOQI* IS NOT

Having defined *moqi* as a nonindividualized, target-specific, and situation-specific shared understanding between two counterparties, it is important to distinguish

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moqi from other competing constructs that may overlap conceptually. In their focus on subordinate-supervisor *moqi*, Zheng et al. (2017) made large strides in validating empirically the distinctness of *moqi* from such Western constructs as LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), P-S fit (Lankau et al., 2005), implicit coordination (Khan et al., 2010), and transactive memory systems (Lewis, 2003). We feel that there are several other constructs from which *moqi* should be distinguished.

First, *moqi* is not rapport. Rapport is conceptualized as a state of mutual positivity and interest that arises through the convergence of nonverbal expressive behavior in an interaction (Bernieri, 1988; Bernieri, Davis, Rosenthal, & Knee, 1994; Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990). While nonverbal expressive behavior is part of high context communication (and a necessary component of *moqi*), mutual positivity and interest, while often accompanied *moqi*, are not essential conditions. As an example, two rivals in a work group might have the same understanding of the contextual cues used in each other's communication based on their previous interactions – they can achieve shared understanding of each other without saying a word but may not enjoy mutual positivity and interest.

Second, *moqi* is not mind-reading. In his book *Mindwise*, Epley (2014) described mind readers as those born with an extraordinary ability (sixth sense) to understand what others think, feel, believe, want, and know. Whereas very few true mind readers exist in this world, it is clear that mind-reading refers to an accurate understanding of others' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, wants, and knowledge. Mind-reading is a one-way understanding, and thus an individual-level construct. In contrast, *moqi* is a two-way matched understanding between two communicators, and thus a dyadic level construct. Another difference between mind-reading and *moqi* is that mind-reading is not only based on others' nonverbal cues or the context in which communication occurs, but also inferred from others' verbal language (Epley, 2014). Verbal language is obviated by definition in the case of *moqi*.

Third, while *moqi* might be an important factor that could influence the development or enhancement of trust, *moqi* itself is not trust. Trust is defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). *Moqi* simply refers to a shared contextualized understanding between two people without words in a given circumstance. Conceptually, these are very distinct constructs with little room for conflation when considered on these terms.

Fourth, sometimes two people may make the same choice in a situation, but for different reasons, including sheer randomness. While a superficial examination of the outcome may appear to be *moqi*, neither of these situations are. For something to be *moqi*, the act of agency must be informed by both the situation and shared understandings to create perspective-taken aligned activity. This is why *moqi* cannot come from either random chance or perspective-unaligned choices.

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One of the defining differentiators between *moqi* and these other constructs is that contextualized understandings may include interactions with antagonistic counterparties as well. Consider a faculty member with an antagonistic relationship with their dean and a contentious topic with a dark history known to the faculty member comes up in a large meeting. If the dean knows that the faculty member knows of the dark history, then the faculty member could lock eyes with the dean and communicate clearly without saying a word, 'I am choosing not to reveal the dark history because it is better that this information remains secret'. And the dean would agree – all without saying a word. As another example, consider two inmates on opposite sides of a prison fight silently agreeing to not cooperate with the prison guards in identifying the causes and perpetrators of said violence (see Ugelvik, 2014). This type of *moqi* is attributable to the acculturation that happens among inmates, which draws a line between those behind bars and those keeping them behind bars. It also creates a social 'chit' for the party who remained silent when given the opportunity to get a rival punished by the guards. Thus, it is possible to achieve *moqi* between individuals who just minutes before had been trying to physically harm each other. The potential for the achievement of *moqi* between even antagonist actors is a key reason why *moqi* should not be conflated with other constructs such as 'rapport', 'mind-reading', or 'trust'.

CONSTITUTIVE PROCESS OF *MOQI*

If *moqi* is the convergence of shared contextualized understandings with a given situation, then those three components are elements of a constitutive process that has two contributing factors (contextualized understandings, ①, and the particular situation at hand, ③) and one manifestation (*moqi*, ②), see Figure 1. As described earlier, it is the particular situation (e.g., an accident, a company-wide CEO announcement, a faculty meeting, etc.) that transforms the shared understandings constructed from prior interactions between counterparties into *moqi*, which subsequently leads to perspective-taken aligned activity on the part of at least one of those counterparties (❷). When no overlap exists between the contextualized understandings and the situation at hand, *moqi* cannot be achieved and perspective-taken aligned activity cannot be pursued. Importantly, however, in these circumstances, two other things *can* happen.

First, because the contextualized understandings are irrelevant to the matter at hand, they are ignored as irrelevant by the counterparties. This path in the constitutive process of *moqi* is marked (❶) and designates when *moqi* is not achieved and when contextualized understandings do not overlap with the situation at hand.

Second, given that the situation itself demands action from the individual (who cannot rely on shared contextualized understandings to know precisely what to do), that individual has the ability to reference the contextualized understandings that have been accumulated across interactions with the counterparty to look for clues to the questions, 'What would [Party A] want me to do in this

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situation'? or 'What would [Party A] want to have happen in this situation'? with a higher probability of success than randomly guessing. We refer to this as the application of guesswork to the situation at hand (marked (❸) in Figure 1), which does entail some level of intuiting. This is because the individual has no experience with that particular situation in the past or no shared understandings about what a counterparty might have done in the same situation, and thus, has no 'perfect match' reference point. (Note: The 'perfect match' situation is when *moqi* is achieved, marked ② in Figure 1.) Thus, while *moqi* may not be achieved between the counterparties when there is no 'perfect match' reference point, some of the shared contextualized understandings may be *referenced* in terms of providing hints and evidence as to how to resolve the situation at hand in ways that might align with a perspective-taken approach, while other shared understandings will be completely *ignored* as irrelevant.

In summary, while achieving *moqi* provides a resolution with 100% alignment with the counterparty's preferred resolution (❷), some of the contextualized understandings shared with the counterparty on situations unrelated to the one at hand can increase the probability of alignment with the counterparty's preferred resolution above random guessing (❸). Thus, when *moqi* is achieved only (❷) happens in the constitutive process, but when *moqi* is not achieved – and shared understandings happen to exist between counterparties – both (❶) and (❸) take place. This latter boundary condition is what distinguishes guessing what a random new pseudonymous user in an online community might desire as opposed to intuiting what a long-time pseudonymous contributor to the same online community might want. The acuity of intuiting only increases when the individual facing the situation can and/or has observed or interacted with the counterparty in organizational contexts as is most common.

With this understanding of the process in mind, we must now explore the factors that constitute the antecedents of *moqi* (including both the 'capability' or proclivity to form shared contextualized understandings and the 'contributing factors' that go into the creating of shared understandings) as well as explicate some of the important consequences of achieving *moqi* in the end.

ANTECEDENTS OF *MOQI*

As a complex communication construct, *moqi* is achieved through a rich mix of different factors. Most important to this mix is repeated meaningful interactions – both verbal and nonverbal – that facilitate the creation of shared understandings between counterparties, which can manifest as *moqi* under specific circumstances. Meaningful interactions allow the counterparties to understand motivations, norms, and expectations of their counterparts. This means they are neither superficial interactions (e.g., interactions limited only to small talk or chit chat; see Kashdana & Roberts, 2006) nor cursory interactions (e.g., brief encounters), unless sufficient encounters facilitate the aforementioned understandings

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(see Kleinhans, Priemus, & Engbersen, 2007 as an example). Several factors are likely to enhance the ability to create those shared understandings, notably, the ability to read nonspoken cues (heightened in implicit communicators), the ability to see oneself as a vehicle of communication from others (heightened in indirect communicators), the ability to view oneself as part of a fabric of interdependence with others (heightened in those with interdependent self-construal), and the ability to comprehend and calibrate cultural knowledge (heightened in those with high levels of cultural metacognition). When interaction history is absent or very low, factors such as demographic similarity, shared professional/organization acculturation, and shared national cultural background can accelerate recognition that there are shared understandings that have already been built up over time even though the individuals themselves may not have interacted in the past themselves. Recognition of those similarities can speed the process of achieving *moqi* even at the first interaction.

For their part, Zheng et al. (2017) theorized that feedback-seeking (both explicit and implicit) would directly impact *moqi* and that greater power distance orientation and greater 'face' consciousness would both enhance the effects. It is important to note that the latter two moderators found empirical support with implicit feedback-seeking, which relies on contextual cues. These authors cite several examples of such cues, including 'facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and overheard conversations' (Zheng et al., 2017: 7). While helpful as examples, contextual cues are an important part of high context communication (Cole, 2015) and come in myriad forms that demand a much more precise categorization scheme to be of theoretical help to scholars interested in *moqi*. In this section, we expand on prior work on communication context (Adair et al., 2016) and cultural metacognition (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012) in articulating how shared contextualized understandings between counterparties are informed by several different layers, including a 'capability' (a) a generalized proclivity to be able to form such understandings with others, and 'contributing factors' (b) how those understandings are formed either (i) through interactions or (ii) without them, and (c) how other factors accentuate the capability to ultimately achieve *moqi* under particular circumstances.

Proclivity to Form Shared Contextualized Understandings

If *moqi* is a state of shared contextualized understanding between two individuals without saying a word, then the capability to read nonspoken cues, the inclination to see oneself as a vehicle of communication from others, the ability to view oneself as part of a fabric of interdependence with others, and the skill to interpret messages in a culturally dexterous manner are key traits that inform the likelihood of achieving contextualized understandings between people, and thus *moqi* itself, under particularized circumstances. The first three of these traits are related to what Adair et al. (2016) refer to as message context.

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Message contexting traits. Message context refers to the explicitness/implicitness of the message or the directness/indirectness of its communication (Cole, Chen, & He, 2021). Implicit and indirect messages contain information hidden in the socio-cultural system (Triandis, 1972) and in internal context – that is, information contained within the individual, for example, in nonverbal cues or in the life experience one brings to a social interaction (Hall, 1989). In implicit and indirect communication, listeners must take an active role in searching for, and inferring, their counterpart's meanings and feelings from what was said, but more often from *how* it was said or what was *not* said.

Indirectness. Indirectness means that the message entails some degree of circumvention to reach its target (Brew & Cairns, 2004a), whereas directness refers to the degree to which the message is communicated straight to the target. Indirect messages are often sent through other parties, who are enlisted in the delivery of both good and bad news. For those who use indirect ways of communicating, it is not uncommon for admonishments to be delivered to a nonculpable party in order to communicate displeasure to the culpable.

Cole (2015: 586) documents one such indirect message in Japan in this way:

> 'The department head chose to tear into a junior employee in the middle of the office to make a point. He would routinely use him and other low-level employees, who were involved but had very little decision-making power with respect to what he was unhappy about to send a message to the others'.

Contrast that way of communicating with what Molinsky (2013: 36) documented about direct messaging in the Caribbean:

> 'You just communicate the message and expect the employee to listen – and improve'.

These are very different ways of delivering messages. In the former, an individual participant becomes part of a performative act that 'enacts' the space around the communicator (Austin, 1962; Lockwood, Giorgi, & Glynn, 2019; Weick, 1995). This is what Cole (2015) documented in his exploration of 'context' as an endogenous factor that can be manipulated as part of the communicative process, rather than just an exogenous characteristic. Those who are familiar with – and utilize – more indirect ways of communicating will be more likely to have shared understandings with others who are also are familiar with – and utilize – similar ways of communicating. They are also more likely to accept that they may end up serving as a vehicle for others' comprehension on a matter, thus yielding some of their own agency to another communicator.

Implicitness. Implicitness refers to the degree to which the target must 'read between the lines' to ascertain what is being communicated through the message (Gao, 1998; Suzuki, 2010). This contrasts sharply with explicitness, which refers to the

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degree to which the message content is straightforward and specific. Implicit messages cannot be interpreted at face value whereas explicit messages must be.

Implicit messages often include talking around the issue (i.e., circumlocution) and/or the hedging of assertions (i.e., equivocation). Both circumlocution and equivocation are often observed when individuals are delivering criticisms to others in ways to attempt to preserve the 'face' of the person being criticized (Hwang, 1987). Consider this example of an American executive working for a Japanese firm in New York City as he learned that while explicit messaging may work with American coworkers, a more implicit approach was more effective with Japanese coworkers.

> 'If a subordinate in the United States delivered a contract to him that was full of errors, he would likely say quite straightforwardly, "You made a mistake" or "You need to redo this because it is wrong" … Curtis might now get the same message across in an indirect (and harmony-preserving) manner; for example, "As you know, accuracy of these reports is very important. Please review this again just to double-check that it's absolutely correct and to insure that we do not send incorrect information"'. (Molinsky, 2013: 75–76)

By focusing on the importance of error-free documents with Japanese coworkers, Curtis was able to communicate his message without naming a culpable party, something that might be embarrassing to the person being called out. Implicit ways of communicating require more work on the interpretation side of the communication, but do allow for face-saving, a factor that has already been linked in prior work with *moqi* (Zheng et al., 2017).

Interdependent self-construal. While indirectness and implicitness are unique communication constructs (Cole et al., 2021), Holtgraves (1997) points out that indirectness is the behavioral enactment of the interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) in the domain of communication. Interdependent selves have a need to maintain harmony with others (Triandis, 1989) and, therefore, will use more indirect and implicit messages. In support of these theoretical arguments, Adair, Buchan, Chen, and Liu (2013) found that across three cultural samples (USA, China, and Chile), individuals with a stronger interdependent self-construal were, in fact, associated with more indirect and implicit communication. In contrast, directness is the behavioral enactment of the independent self-construal (Holtgraves, 1997). Independent selves are more self-centered and therefore will use more direct and explicit messaging, including assertive persuasion and argument (Triandis, 1989), even when doing so might offend.

Because *moqi* itself is anchored in *shared* contextualized understandings and a mindfulness of what others might think and desire in particular situations, interdependent self-construals should be more important than independent self-construals in creating *moqi*. Individuals primed with interdependence were found to be more likely to take the communication target's knowledge into account and

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avoid providing redundant information than individuals primed for independence (Haberstroh, Oyserman, Schwarz, Kühnen, & Ji, 2002). Furthermore, given the linkage between interdependent self-construals and more indirect and implicit ways of communicating messages, we theorize that *moqi* will be more prevalent when both parties share these communication tendencies. In other words, those aware of their interconnectedness with others (interdependent self-construal), the ability to interpret what is *not* said (implicitness) and to understand how a message is sent (when sent indirectly) all help build the foundation through which shared contextualized understandings, and thus *moqi*, can be obtained.

Does this mean that individuals who are explicit and direct communicators cannot achieve *moqi*? No, like-mindedness makes *moqi* between people possible, but explicit communicators will be much less likely to be able to read cues (a skill of implicit communicators) and a directness impulse most likely would steer such communicators away from seeing themselves as vehicles for achieving a state of perfect understanding with others without saying a word. On top of that, given that these communication tendencies also tend to go hand-in-hand with independent self-construals, an independent attitude would push for a more self-oriented action with lesser regard for others than if the actor held an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This yields the following propositions regarding the baseline proclivity to achieve shared understandings:

Proposition 1: When a party has an interdependent self-construal, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased. This effect is even higher when both counterparties have interdependent self-construals.*

Proposition 2: When a party has an understanding of how indirect messages are delivered, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased. This effect is even higher when both counterparties have an understanding of how indirect messages are delivered.*

Proposition 3: When a party has an understanding of how implicit messages are delivered, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased. This effect is even higher when both counterparties have an understanding of how implicit messages are delivered.*

Cultural metacognition traits. In addition to these messaging contexting skills, cultural dexterity can also inform the ability to form shared understandings. 'Some people are so skilled at managing themselves across cultures that you might call them "cultural chameleons"' (Molinsky, 2013: xii). Such a skill is referred to as cultural metacognition, which Chua et al. (2012: 117) define as 'the mental process directed at acquiring, comprehending, and calibrating cultural knowledge'. Importantly for the creation of both shared contextualized understandings, and ultimately *moqi* under the proper circumstances, cultural metacognition promotes both a 'heightened sensitivity to the fact that individuals' motivations and behaviors are

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invariably shaped by the cultural contexts in which they are embedded' (a.k.a., contextualized thinking) and 'discriminative use of mental schemas and behavioral scripts when interacting across cultures' (a.k.a., cognitive flexibility; Chua et al., 2012: 117). These are very important traits that can facilitate the creation of shared contextualized understandings when interacting with those from different backgrounds.

Molinsky (2013) asserts that cultural metacognition – what he calls global dexterity – can be learned and implemented in one's daily life without 'losing yourself' in the process. So, when a German colleague responds to a colleague's inquiry about changes made to a document with, 'They are wrong. Our clients will not understand it. It will never work that way' … (Molinsky, 2013: 26), the inquiring party need not interpret the response as rudeness and take personal offense that will reverberate negatively into future interactions. In a cross-cultural context, a more cultural metacognitive (or dexterous) approach would interpret the response in more culturally specific ways and appreciate the honest feedback without attaching the emotions that accompany personal slight to the message. Those with high cultural metacognition skills are thus better able to ask: 'What would [Party A] want me to do in this situation'? or 'What would [Party A] want to have happen in this situation'? which helps lead to *moqi*.

It is important to note that while cultural metacognition is helpful in navigation cross-cultural situations, the flexibility and open-mindedness that accompanies it, can apply equally to interactions between individuals from the same culture. The cultural metacognition capability does not just 'turn on' only in cross-cultural settings. Thus, two individuals from the same culture will have a higher probability of achieving *moqi* if both have high cultural metacognition than when both do not.

Proposition 4: When a party has a high level of cultural metacognition, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased. This effect is even higher when both counterparties have high levels of cultural metacognition.*

Combined, message contexting traits (implicit messaging skills and indirect messaging skills), context-associated personal traits (interdependent self-construals) and cultural dexterity traits (cultural metacognition) form a foundation for the ability to achieve *moqi* with others. In the section that follows, we articulate how interactions or similar backgrounds/experiences inform the process (rather than ability) to achieve *moqi*.

How Shared Understandings Are Formed: Interpersonal Interactions

At heart, *moqi* is determined by a shared deep understanding of two individuals. Through interaction after interaction, counterparties come to understand how certain words, topics, situations and so forth will influence the thoughts and reactions of each other. A husband or wife learns to read their spouse and anticipate

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their reaction, sometimes changing their approach to certain topics in terms of words used, the timing of the interaction and so forth. When that understanding is shared back with the husband or wife from the spouse for a given situation, one can say that *moqi* has been obtained. The unspoken nature of *moqi* between counterparties that understand each other deeply has even made it a tool for dramatic effect at key scenes in Hollywood films.[1]

Interactions can happen through in-person contact (such as within an organization, Zheng et al., 2017) or through online or other remote contact (such as in online learning contexts, Donavant, 2009). Shared understandings can even occur when identities are pseudonymous or otherwise socially ambiguous (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, & Majchrzak, 2011), so long as there are sufficient indicators of responses and reactions to different stimuli to infer preferences on the part of the individuals behind the identities. Marginalized populations often rely on anonymous identities to connect to like-minded individuals, for example, which creates a deep appreciation for the others in the community, whose patterns can be observed for cues about attitudes, values interests and the like (McKenna & Bargh, 1998).

Proposition 5: When counterparties have repeated meaningful interactions, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings between them, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased.*

When parties interact, the context of the relationship can really matter. When speaking to a supervisor, a subordinate may show a more deferential demeanor than when speaking to a peer; one could expect a different demeanor altogether when interacting with a member of royalty at a state dinner, or a police officer during a traffic stop. Thus, status or positional differences can impact the way interactions unfold (Adair et al., 2016). Zheng et al. (2017) argued that one's attitude and attentiveness toward power differences (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004) would make individuals more sensitive to implicit cues, and thus the creation of *moqi*. We suggest that several other aspects of relationship context also can inform how shared understandings are formed, and thus, whether *moqi* is possible to achieve in the proper circumstances.

One example is the degree of mixing between one's professional and personal life (Adair, Buchan, & Chen, 2009). Individuals with some cultural backgrounds readily display family photos on their desks and chat about family outings or the performance of their children in various activities (Molinsky, 2013). In other cultures, such displays and discussions are viewed as inappropriate for a professional setting. Those who mix professional with their personal life are providing more information about themselves to their counterparties. Accordingly, one could expect that those with higher mixing of personal and professional lives will have a higher likelihood to achieve *moqi* than those not so forthcoming.

Proposition 6: When a party has a high tendency of mixing of personal and professional life, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under*

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particular circumstances, is increased. This effect is even higher when both counterparties have high tendency of mixing.

Relationship context also includes information that would indicate the need for face-saving and/or humility. Face concerns arise in encounters where an individual's credibility as a social actor could be questioned by interpersonal exchanges (Liao & Bond, 2011). Face is an external attribute that differs fundamentally from competing internal attributes (e.g., desires and emotions) in predicting organizational behavior in certain cultures, particularly in the East (Kim & Nam, 1998). Zheng and colleagues (2017) argued that consciousness of face would enhance an individual's ability to notice cues as well as motivate said individuals to look for (and interpret) cues. Face-saving individuals are more likely to want to avoid embarrassment for self and others, which may spur preemptive actions in situations that might turn uncomfortable. A threat to face has been shown to be connected with assertive and diplomatic conflict styles among Anglos and more passive and solution-oriented styles for Chinese (Brew & Cairns, 2004b).

Proposition 7: When a party has a high consciousness of face saving, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings with a counterparty, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances, is increased. This likelihood is even higher when both counterparties have high consciousness of face saving.*

How Shared Understandings Are Formed: Reliance on Similarity

When the interaction history between counterparties is absent or very short, does that mean that *moqi* is impossible to achieve? Our answer is no. Both shared understandings and the achievement of *moqi* are still possible without deep interpersonal interaction through indications of behavioral predictability, often gleaned from overlaps in background experiences that move the parties quickly down the 'learning curve' of each other when they finally do interact.

Similarity Facilitates the Congruence Between the Encoding and Decoding Process

When individuals do not necessarily know each other well, similarity between them is the first cue that they have in discerning that they may actually share understandings of the world that surrounds them. Similarity is linked with behavioral predictability (Bauer & Green, 1996), facilitating the mapping of behavioral tendencies from one actor to another (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Similarity is particularly important when one thinks about how communication actually unfolds a process that entails encoding of a message on the part of the communicator and decoding of the message on the part of the target of the communication (Wren-Lewis, 1984).

The encoding process on the part of the communicator necessitates decisions about what words should be used (or *not* used), what examples should be used (or

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avoided), what framings should be used (or ignored), and what timing, cadence, tone, and other dimensions should be used. This encoding process is informed by the communicator's personal background, life experiences, educational background, cultural imprinting, and so forth. It is also informed by the goal of the communication, which might range from simply relaying information to influencing the behavior, feelings, or attitudes of others (Halliday, 1975).

On the receiving end, the target of the communication must decode the message from the communicator. The target's decoding and interpretation is based on their own personal background, life experiences, educational background, and so forth. This means that if the communicator encodes information in a particular way and the target of the communication decodes the information in a different way, there is much room for misunderstanding. Consider, for example, the 'ritual refusal' that unfolds when a guest is asked to stay for dinner in China.

> 'In Chinese culture, an invitation to dinner often functions as a leave-taking act and the speaker's expression of good wishes. A host might say "Please stay for dinner/lunch", and then, the guest typically declines the invitation and takes his/her leave. The invitation is often, if not always, a ritual one which is often inappropriate for the visitor to immediately accept. It is a strategy to have the visitor leave the house, or a conventionalized way of saying good-bye'. (Chen, Ye, & Zhang, 1995: 151)

Each interactor in the 'ritual refusal' is communicating information that is encoded in the different parts of the script. The host, for example, is communicating relational cues in showing the visitor that they are a welcome guest. The guest is also communicating relational cues by communicating their appreciation for the invitation, even as they take leave of the premises. If the guest were to instead go to the washroom to prepare for dinner, however, the host would feel very uncomfortable with the way the encoded message (a compliment presented as an invitation) was decoded (as an actual invitation rather than a social nicety that should be ignored) by the guest.

With this background in mind, one can readily recognize how when similarities in encoding/decoding exist during verbalization, they most likely also exist in nonverbalization contexts as well. Moreover, should the communicator and the target share similarities between themselves, the probability of misunderstanding would be lower, and the likelihood of shared understandings would be higher. While similarity can exist in many different dimensions, we focus on three specific types of similarity – demographic similarity, professional/organizational acculturation similarity, and national cultural similarity.

Demographic similarity. Demographic similarity refers to the sameness between the interlocutors' personal characteristics that are often readily observable, such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity. A long literature on homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Lewis, 2015; Wimmer & Lewis, 2010) and supervisor–subordinate

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interactions (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) documents how individuals display preferences in interacting with similar others, which may help increase the possibility that the decoding process will be congruent with the encoding process. We could also expect that the effect would be cumulative as more similarities are found. Thus, two Chinese women might encode and decode with a given level of acuity, but two Chinese professional women of the same age would likely encode and decode with a higher level of acuity even with little interaction between them.

Accumulated research in relational demography (e.g., Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992) indicates that the more similar the demographics between a supervisor and a subordinate, the more likely they will develop high-quality leader-member exchange relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) or *guanxi* (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998). When individuals share demographic characteristics, they often presume that their counterparty will respond as they would in the same circumstance (thus, encode and decode in similar ways). At the same time, when demographic differences exist between counterparties, the individuals cannot presume the same response and may also act in accordance with that presumption. This may explain why individuals who are different from others on demographic attributes report lower organizational attachment (Tsui et al., 1992); the behaviors of their peers may not align with their own expectations and encoding/decoding mismatches may make the demographically dissimilar individual feel that they are not being heard. In some cases, the individuals may actually be aware of how differences matter, such as the fact that women tend to obtain social support and friendship from other women within their organization (Ibarra, 1992), while at the same time obtaining instrumental access through their ties to men, who historically have controlled the levers of advancement and resource allocation. Specialized knowledge of such differences may alter the way a conversation unfolds as well as how the counterparties interpret the aftermath of those conversations in informing future actions.

Proposition 8: When counterparties share demographic characteristics, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings between them, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances is increased.*

Professional/organizational acculturation similarity. Having received training in the same profession or organizational environment can increase the chance for the two counterparties to understand each other due to shared understandings, cognitive schema, or values accumulated through that training. Physicians are instilled with the values to 'do no harm', while lawyers are instilled with the values that even the worst criminal deserves good legal representation. Members of professions maintain those shared understandings – which guide behavior – and protect both the understandings and behaviors informed by them when threatened by external forces (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). These shared understandings derived from organizational or professional overlap are often known as logics (Lounsbury, 2007;

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Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Faculty who receive training at institutions that value patenting, for example, carry that logic with them, even if they end up at institutions that do not value that activity (Trank, 2001). Encoding and decoding clashes are more likely when the communicator is using a different logic than the target.

Organizations also engage in a similar type of acculturation, impacting individuals throughout their entire careers (Michel, 2011). The degree to which counterparties are familiar with the same culture, norms, and routines of an organization will influence how similarly they interpret processes, behaviors or violations occurring in that organization. A young woman working in a firm where older men dominate all leadership positions has a higher probability of correctly decoding information transmitted by another young woman in the same firm with roughly the same level of organizational tenure, than information encoded by someone from a firm dominated by younger women. Those acculturated into particular communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), including online communities (Silva, Goel, & Mousavidin, 2008), are also less likely to have decoding problems.

Research has documented how acculturation can turn even the most mundane task (e.g., mopping floors) into a larger expression of the goals of the organization (e.g., sending astronauts to the moon; Carton, 2018). Two sailors similarly acculturated through stories of disasters that happened as a result of errant bolts near jet engines on aircraft carriers would know precisely what the other would do if encountering such a bolt on the ground (Weick & Roberts, 1993); those not so acculturated might be perplexed by the action of suddenly swooping down to grab a loose bolt. Thus, at a theoretical level (as well as in practice), professional and/or organizational acculturation similarity plays a vital role in allowing individuals to view a situation identically as another without ever 'shifting' their perspective – that is, achieving 'perspective-taken alignment' without needing to engage in 'perspective taking'. This captures the power of acculturation similarity even when the counterparties may have never personally interacted in the past prior to the interaction in which *moqi* manifests between the parties.

> *Proposition 9: When counterparties share a professional and/or organizational acculturation background, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings between them, and thus* moqi *under particular circumstances is increased.*

National culture similarity. At the most macro level, growing up in the same national culture increases the chance for two communicators to interpret the meanings of a behavior in a similar manner. As an example, nodding one's head means 'I heard you' in many Asian cultures, but it means 'I agree with you' in the US. The idea that body movements help convey meaning across cultures is well known, and includes numerous cues that signal the positions of, and distance between, counterparties (Adair et al., 2016).

Information conveyed by facial expressions and other body language is best accounted for by its controllability (Zuckerman, Larrance, Spiegel, & Klorman, 1981). Take, for example, eye contact, which is considered essential in

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communication in the United States for its ability to communicate attention and respect to one's counterparty. With that positive affect in mind, averting one's eyes in the US may suggest any number of different negative traits, including lack of confidence, culpability in an unbecoming activity, or embarrassment (among others). In China or Japan, however, averting one's eyes demonstrates deference to the counterparty, especially with a superior. Zheng et al. (2017) included body language as an example of cues in implicit feedback, but body language is a complex, culturally informed, and imprinted dimension of context between communicators.

In addition to physical movements, vocal movements such as the use of silence, interruption, emotions, and speech volume also come into play in helping counterparties quickly recognize their similarities, and thus the potential for aligned responses in particular circumstances. Silence is an uncomfortable form of auditory space that is interpreted as a void to be filled in Mexico, which explains why Mexican laborers maintain camaraderie by avoiding silence and constantly interrupting one another (Rasmussen, 2017). In contrast, silence in Japan is *not* considered an empty space, but rather a communicative act that carries meaning to counterparties observing or experiencing the silence (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996). The tone of conversation or the volume of speech are also contextual cues that convey meaning (Cohen, 1997; Hall, 1966), such as passion for a topic or demeanor. Just a few seconds of a voice can communicate warmth, hostility, dominance, anxiety, politeness, and numerous other interpersonal judgments (Ambady, LaPlante, Nguyen, Rosenthal, Chaumeton, & Levinson, 2002; Laplante & Ambady, 2003).

Combined physical movements and vocal movements are likely to be understood in the same way if the two people had the same exposure to the same culture, creating a semiotic 'fit' between the individuals (Brannen, 2004). The ability to read such movements between counterparties can accentuate the ability to create *moqi*.

Proposition 10: When counterparties share national culture similarity, the likelihood of achieving shared understandings between them, and thus moqi *under particular circumstances is increased.*

To summarize, repeated meaningful interactions – both verbal and nonverbal – facilitate the creation of shared understandings (i.e., serve as the most valuable 'contributing factors' into their creation), and thus *moqi* under specific circumstances. Several factors accentuate the 'capability' to create those shared understandings, notably, the ability to read nonspoken cues (heightened in implicit communicators), ability to see oneself as a vehicle of communication from others (heightened in indirect communicators), ability to see oneself as part of a fabric of interdependence with others (heightened in those with interdependent self-construals), and ability to comprehend and calibrate cultural knowledge (heightened in those with high levels of cultural metacognition). When the interaction

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history is absent or very low, overlaps in demographic characteristics, professional/organizational acculturalization, and national culture facilitate the recognition of counterparties that they might view the world similarly, and thus, already share perspectives on what the other might desire in particular circumstances. When different contributing and facilitating factors are present at the same time (e.g., both interactions and shared acculturation being present), one should presume that their effects would be either additive or multiplicative, increasing the likelihood of achieving shared understandings between them, and thus *moqi* under particular circumstances.

MOQI AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Moqi is an important phenomenon to study because it has downstream consequences on the counterparties. We predict three direct outcomes, through which further consequences can occur.

The first direct outcome is high communication efficiency between the *moqi* dyad. There is no doubt that communicators bear more upfront costs in building up shared contextualized understandings; those understandings become a (nondepleting) resource that can be tapped over and over again to create efficiency with every additional circumstance in which shared understandings are relevant. And while it has been shown that the decoding of messages can take an enormously long time when the communicator is high context and the target of the communication is low context (Cole, 2015), when the two counterparties have developed shared understandings of the various contextual cues, encoding and decoding can take place extremely quickly and efficiently (Hall & Hall, 1987). In the workplace, when *moqi* is established between peers or between a subordinate and a supervisor, the increased communication efficiency can speed up work processes, which can lead to high work efficiency because research indicates that workers, especially knowledge workers (professional, technical, administrative, and clerical), often spend the majority of their workday (50%–80%) in communication, two-thirds in talking (Klemmer & Snyder, 1972). When talking is obviated, then communication is immediately more efficient, which reverberates further to more efficient downstream task completion.

Proposition 11: Moqi *will be positively related to communication efficiency, through which work efficiency is enhanced.*

The second direct effect of *moqi* is creating a positive feeling or deep interpersonal connection between the dyad members. Instead of spelling out every word in a message, they can use body movements, cues or 'codes' to communicate to each another, something known as *Xin Ling Shen Hui* (心领神会) in Chinese. Such *Xin Ling Shen Hui* between the *moqi* dyad members, when repeated over time across situations, could lead to an intimate interpersonal bond, and thus positive affect between the dyad members. This is because repeated *moqi* instances could lead

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to attributions of more similarities between the dyad's deep beliefs and values, which are important foundations for interpersonal liking (Byrne, 1969; Condon & Crano, 1988; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). For example, when a subordinate notices on multiple occasions that the supervisor has gone out the way to protect their self-esteem by not explicitly pointing out an issue but rather by using 'cues' that only the two of them could understand, the subordinate is likely to develop a special positive feeling toward the supervisor.

Proposition 12: Moqi *will be positively related to feelings of intimate interpersonal bonding within the* moqi *dyad, through which positive affect is enhanced.*

When the counterparties are rivals or enemies, the use of *moqi* in the face of a situation that could otherwise lead to detrimental outcomes to one of the parties (e.g., inmates with guards or street gangs to police) actually creates a social 'chit' that has the potential to reduce rivalry in the future. The phrase 'I owe you one' need not be spoken to hold between rivals, reducing the possibility of the party who benefited last time harming the rival holding the social 'chit' in a future interaction. There is ample evidence that even deadly rivals may engage in practices that accord with social exchange theory (Descormiers & Morselli, 2011), and *moqi* simply adds to that toolkit. Whether the transactional indebtedness effect leads to long-term changes in rivalry is an empirical question, but there is ample evidence that it can reduce rivalry temporarily, especially in the face of a common enemy or joint gains (Descormiers & Morselli, 2011; Ward, 2013).

Proposition 13: Moqi *will be positively related to feelings of transactional indebtedness between rivals in a* moqi *dyad, reducing rivalry temporarily.*

DISCUSSION

This article conceptualizes *moqi* as a dyadic level construct that describes a state of shared contextualized mutual understanding without saying a word between two people who would enact perspective-taken aligned behaviors when confronted with a given situation. This construct is important and meaningful because it captures an interpersonal phenomenon that is taken for granted in China, that occurs across cultural and organizational settings, yet has not been explicitly discussed or systematically studied (cf., Zheng et al., 2017).

The nomological network of *moqi* we outlined in this article makes several significant theoretical contributions to the organizational behavior literature in general, and especially to the interpersonal relationship and communication literature. First and foremost, we expand Zheng et al.'s (2017) work to define *moqi* beyond hierarchical dyads to include any two counterparties of different relationships. We also provide more clarification about what *moqi* is by clearly distinguishing it from seemingly similar constructs such as rapport, mind-reading, and trust. We described *moqi* as target-specific and situation-specific, and as only triggered by

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a situation that is relevant to the shared contextualized understanding developed on the basis of repeated interpersonal interactions in the past (or in the absence of interaction, based on behavioral predictability enacted by similarity in demography, professional/organizational acculturation, or national culture). This broader, more general, and more nuanced conceptualization of *moqi* provides an asphalt on which future researchers to drive, which could lead to more fruitful discoveries.

Second, the development of our nomological network of *moqi* connects the individual differences literature in OB studies with interpersonal outcomes – especially communication efficiency (and thus work efficiency) and intimate interpersonal bonds (and thus positive affect). While communication occupies a majority of time in a workday (Klemmer & Snyder, 1972), how to achieve communication effectiveness has not received as much scholarly attention in the management literature. A brief review of previous studies on communication indicates that their focus is often on the communication process itself (e.g., encoding, Masuda & Nisbett, 2001; or medium, Miyamoto & Schwarz, 2006), or how communication style and content influence employee outcomes such as exercise of voice (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2019) or creativity (Chua, 2018), while comparatively little is on how individual characteristics would impact interpersonal communication effectiveness. Since *moqi* represents both communication effectiveness (shared understanding) and efficiency (no words needed), the key antecedents we identified, such as capability to understand implicit messages, in seeing oneself as a vehicle in conveying messages, in viewing oneself as an interdependent actor, and in comprehending and calibrating cultural knowledge, provide new insights into the potential root causes for people's encoding/decoding processes and communication styles.

The key mechanism – repeated interpersonal interactions via both verbal and nonverbal exchanges – in bridging two individuals with different characteristics into a state of *moqi* enriches the literature on interpersonal dynamics in general, especially in terms of curbing prejudice and biases between people of different age, gender, race/ethnicity, culture, etc. While the contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) has received much empirical support, demonstrating that repeated contact between people of different social groups can develop cognitive understanding and affective ties that help reduce biases, our mechanism specifies the broad concept of contact as the verbal and nonverbal communication act, in which verbal exchanges enhance cognitive understandings and nonverbal exchanges create affective bonds between people (although our focus is on the latter). The identification of this mechanism adds precision and nuance to enrich the contact theory, which could lead to more accurate predictions of consequences.

Another potential contribution is that we may be able to extend our model to map out a process of developing *moqi* at a group level. First, is it possible for members within a group to develop *moqi* such that they can rely on contextual cues (instead of verbal language) to convey meanings that would be understood accurately by every member? When a mob boss shows a visitor to the door,

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then nods to his three thugs, they know what to do with that visitor. The same can be said for athletes on a sports team who has had many interactions with their spirited teammate or coach – in particular situations, they know what to do. Those shared understandings were built up across time through the thugs/players interacting individually or jointly with the boss/coach/teammate, and through interactions between each other. As such, *moqi* should exist at the group level. Our model of dyadic level *moqi* lays out foundation work for future research to develop theoretical models of group level *moqi*.

While we would never make claims about statistical generalizability (i.e., that our model is generalizable to any situation), we do believe that we can assert some degree of naturalistic generalizability (Stake, 2005; Stake & Trumbull, 1982), given that the process we document might be similar to processes that unfold in similar situations by similar individuals. And while no attempt at fostering trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiries is unassailable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 329), we do feel that our articulation of *moqi* would allow scholars approaching the construct empirically to be able to meet the criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability in accordance with accepted qualitative research norms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 328).

Still, to truly advance research on *moqi*, empirical testing of our model is vital. The first issue is related to construct measurement. While Zheng et al. (2017) have developed and validated an 8-item scale[2] of subordinate *moqi*, the items are devoid of circumstances or specificity about particular people, objects, or situations. Given that *moqi* is both target-specific and situation-specific, more work needs to be done in validating a theory of *moqi* and in developing further scales. For example, when the CEO announces a new reward system in a company meeting, the degree of *moqi* regarding the new system between person A and person B can be measured by the extent to which their independent interpretation and reaction would match. If without talking to each other, they share a common understanding about the system and its implications, then there is a strong possibility of *moqi* between them.

Another way to determine whether or not *moqi* occurs between person A and person B is to measure the extent to which they will rely on contextual cues rather than words in communication, and whether they have similar understandings of the meanings embedded in the contextual cues. The 94-item communication context scale developed by Adair, Buchan, Chen, and Liu (2014) can serve this purpose very well. This scale measures the four major components of communication context and has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties.

The antecedents of *moqi* identified in our model can be examined empirically as well. The degree of overlap in demographic characteristics, acculturation backgrounds or national culture can be assessed by the extent to which the two people were born in the same country/state/city, speak the same languages/dialects, attended the same college, majored in the same subject area, and work/worked for the same organizations. Individuals' similarity in surface characteristics such as age, gender, race, job tenure, and in deep-level characteristics such as

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personality, values, attitudes, and interests can also be measured. Information regarding target-specific interactions can be obtained by asking them to recall incidents and discussions in the past as well as their interpersonal interactions (Zheng et al., 2017). These antecedents are mostly facts and objective data, and they are readily available in the HR office of a company, or by a simple self-report survey.

For other antecedents, namely implicit/indirect communication tendency (Adair et al., 2016; Holtgraves, 1997), interdependent self-construal (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Haberstroh et al., 2002), and culture metacognition (Chua et al., 2012; Molinsky, 2013), there are well-established instruments that can be used directly to measure them. On the consequences of *moqi*, for work efficiency and affective ties between the *moqi* dyad, there exist adequate instruments in these streams of research, so it should not be difficult to measure.

CONCLUSION

Moqi is a powerful form of communication found in China and in other high context cultures around the world. We have articulated a broader view of *moqi* than prior published work by theorizing deep interpersonal interactions between counterparties as a key mechanism to develop *moqi* and articulating several different layers of individual 'capability' and 'contributing factors' that can enhance or diminish the development of *moqi*. We also discuss several potential consequences of *moqi* in organizational settings, both direct and indirect. We look forward to further development of this important construct by scholars around the world.

NOTES

The two authors made equal contributions to the article. All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

[1] In the film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *moqi* plays a key role in setting up the final chase scene between the titular protagonist, Ferris, and his sister, who almost hits Ferris while driving home after spending the day trying to catch her brother skipping school. Rather than immediately pointing out Ferris' truancy to their mother (who is sitting in the car's passenger seat), the siblings both know (born from thousands of interactions and a deep knowledge of each other) that the sister prefers that their mother discover Ferris' truancy by herself rather than being told explicitly by siblings tattling on each other. As their eyes meet, this mutual understanding without saying a word cues the soundtrack music and sets off a frantic race between Ferris (who hopes to continue his ruse and be found 'sleeping' in bed when his mother arrives) and his sister (who hopes the mother discovers the ruse by finding Ferris out of bed and in complete health). A similar 'race for resources' is portrayed in the film, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, this time between spouses rather than siblings, whose actions in shooting at each other belie an unspoken mutual understanding that differs markedly from the words coming out of their mouths professing love for each other.

[2] Item 1: I can understand his/her task requirements at work. Item 2: I can usually understand any ambiguities and concerns about work for my supervisor. Item 3: I can cooperate with him/her at work. Item 4: I am clear about my supervisor's work methods. Item 5: I am able to understand his/her train of thought. Item 6: I cooperate well with my supervisor. Item 7: I can cooperate with and act in concert with my supervisor. Item 8: I am familiar with my supervisor's work style.

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