



Review

A Meta-Theory of Global Work Encounters

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Abstract:	Concepts such as global work and cross-cultural interaction have been used to refer to a variety of types of encounters, resulting in imprecise theorizing and difficulty drawing implications for practice. Integrating across disparate literatures, we developed a meta-theory for global work encounters, defined as instances in which individuals associated with different cultural, national, or geopolitical institutional contexts interact for the purpose of completing organizationally sanctioned tasks. Our meta-theory incorporates theoretical perspectives from the domains of diversity, cross-cultural psychology, and international management, each of which focuses on different global work encounters and the processes and spaces they create: cosmopolitan spaces characterized by status entrenchment resulting from maintenance processes; hybrid spaces characterized by amalgamation resulting from adaptation processes; and optimally distinctive spaces characterized by both uniqueness and commonality resulting from adjustment processes. Our theoretical framework identifies the initial conditions— consequences at the individual level on identity, interpersonal level on mutuality, and task level on synthesized knowledge— that give rise to these three types of spaces and the processes that prompt evolution from one space to another. We thus offer a nuanced view of global work encounters to capture the range of experiences individuals may have in global work.

A META-THEORY OF GLOBAL WORK ENCOUNTERS

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ABSTRACT

Concepts such as global work and cross-cultural interaction have been used to refer to a variety of types of encounters, resulting in imprecise theorizing and difficulty drawing implications for practice. Integrating across disparate literatures, we developed a meta-theory for *global work encounters*, defined as instances in which individuals associated with different cultural, national, or geopolitical institutional contexts interact for the purpose of completing organizationally sanctioned tasks. Our meta-theory incorporates theoretical perspectives from the domains of diversity, cross-cultural psychology, and international management, each of which focuses on different global work encounters and the processes and spaces they create: cosmopolitan spaces characterized by status entrenchment resulting from maintenance processes; hybrid spaces characterized by amalgamation resulting from adaptation processes; and optimally distinctive spaces characterized by both uniqueness and commonality resulting from adjustment processes. Our theoretical framework identifies the initial conditions— consequences at the individual level on identity, interpersonal level on mutuality, and task level on synthesized knowledge— that give rise to these three types of spaces and the processes that prompt evolution from one space to another. We thus offer a nuanced view of global work encounters to capture the range of experiences individuals may have in global work.

It has become axiomatic to claim that work today is global. Organizations increasingly operate across borders to reduce labor costs, capture expertise, and understand new markets (Hinds, Liu & Lyons, 2011; Mockaitis, Zander & De Cieri, 2018). Employees in the same firm may originate from many countries; they often live and work far from where the company is located and use technology that links employers to skilled labor no matter where it resides (Hajro, Caprar, Zikic & Stahl, 2021). As a result, global work interactions are characterized by very different assumptions, processes, and consequences. Yet much of the past research fails to acknowledge these distinctions, resulting in an inability to develop integrative theory or comprehensively inform practice.

Consider an instance in which participants perceive national differences that correspond to entrenched status inequalities that are assumed to represent distinctions in competence or professionalism. Metiu (2006) found team members in certain regions may block members in other regions from participation in projects. Theories of expectation states (Ridgeway & Correll (2004) and status hierarchies (Al Dabbagh, Bowles &

Thomason, 2016; Levina & Vaast, 2008) uphold the persistence of status (Correll & Ridgeway, 2004; Ridgeway, 2014), often arguing negative consequences for individuals, yet the predictability of such encounters may promote efficiency. Contrast such encounters with a second case in which participants work across geographies, but assume differences can be set aside to create a “hybrid” space that transcends the norms of any one culture. Such encounters are explained by theories of intercultural interaction (Earley & Gibson, 2002) that build on adaptive structuration theory (DeSantis & Poole, 1994) to emphasize adaptation and compromise. But Värlander, Hinds, Thomason & Pearce (2016) found new work practices expected in global innovation centers were not known equally at the different sites and were viewed by many as an imposition of an American way of working. Such research highlights the utility of these encounters to organizations, but seldom addresses the toll on individuals (Cramton & Hinds, 2014). A third type of global work encounter emanates from an assumption that differences are resources to be leveraged and present opportunities for learning. Collaborators may work together in a highly interdependent way, and adjust their processes to accommodate different cultures while still ensuring each member’s authentic voice. Such encounters emphasize simultaneous adjustment and preservation as well as uniqueness and commonality. Gibson (2022) documented multicultural relationships among Europeans, Asians, and Indigenous Australians in which all parties reported “feel[ing] valued” and being “recognized and acknowledged.” Optimal distinctiveness theory explains global work encounters of this type (Brewer, 1991). Although this is theorized as a path to inclusion, the feasibility of incorporating it in complex organizations is less understood (Jang, 2017; Gibson, Dunlop, & Raghav, 2021).

In this paper, we examine the research on each of these types and present a meta-theory of global work encounters. Meta-theory uncovers and clarifies the assumptions, conditions, and limitations of a set of theoretical perspectives (Mayo, Kakarika, Mainemelis, & Dueschel, 2017) to reveal an underlying structure that deepens the meaning of a phenomenon (Zhao, 1991). We propose that the global work literature includes all three kinds of these encounters and draws upon different theoretical perspectives, but has labeled them all global work. Discerning these three fundamentally different spaces, the processes that take place in each one, and how movement might occur across them provides greater insight into the nuances of global work.

Our meta-theory makes three key contributions to understanding global work. First, we identify each of these spaces and elucidate their different initial conditions, processes, and consequences. We also explore the theories that have been used to explain how each space functions. By “illuminating oversights” we advance a more refined understanding and definition of global work encounters (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1047). Second, because a key aim was to speak both to those researching global work and those examining domestic diversity, we have incorporated concepts into our understanding of global work that have been useful in characterizing other dimensions of diversity such as sex, gender, race, and age that are often studied in a domestic context. Specifically, we bring concepts such as fault lines (Lau & Murnighan, 1998) and diversity climates (Ely & Thomas, 2001), from the diversity literature to bear on global work. By “draw[ing] connections between works and investigative streams not typically cited together,” we enrich theory in both (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: p. 1030). Finally, we explore how one space can evolve into another. Thus, we advance a dynamic understanding of global work encounters (Cramton & Hinds, 2014).

GLOBAL WORK ENCOUNTERS

We define *global work encounters* as instances in which individuals associated with different cultural, national, or geopolitical institutional contexts interact to complete organizationally sanctioned tasks. This definition has at least three important components. First, the differences pertain to cultural, national, and geopolitical institutional contexts. These are linked to identification with group membership and so are often less readily detectable than individual sources of diversity such as sex, gender, race, or age (Tyran & Gibson, 2005; Harrison et al. 2002; Millikan & Martins, 1996). Individual characteristics such as sex, gender, race, and age are often overt, observable, and reflected in physical features and presentations that can provide visual cues that are quickly used to classify individuals (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Ridgeway, 2011; Tasheva & Hillman, 2019). A social consensus often forms about these physical attributes because people defined by them tend to occupy certain roles—at work, at home, and in organizations—whose qualities form stereotypes that become the basis of common assumptions about status and power (Eagly & Koenig, 2021; Jackman, 1994).

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3 In contrast, characteristics that coincide with cultural, national, and geopolitical institutional contexts
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5 are less recognizable because they represent group norms communicated through verbal and nonverbal
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7 behavioral patterns that are generally learned through extended individualized interaction and information
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9 gathering (Harrison et al. 1998; 2002). For example, in global work, only extensive collaboration may reveal
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11 that the parties differ in terms of *cultural orientations*, defined as shared systems of beliefs, values,
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13 expectations, and behavior developed by groups over time (Bond & Smith, 2018; Schwartz, 1992). The
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15 literature on these differences emphasizes their manifestation in cognitive and perceptual processes that
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17 influence understanding, meaning, and communication during work interactions (Zellmer-Bruhn & Gibson,
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19 2014). Although cultural differences may be associated with assumptions about roles (e.g., those from certain
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21 countries hold powerful positions as presumed “colonizers,” Darley & Luethge, 2019), these are less likely to
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23 be easily and widely recognized, and may only have salience and normative value to those identifying with the
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25 culture as opposed to cultural outsiders.
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28 For this reason, we use the phrase *associated with* to signal that because the differences associated
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30 with cultural, national, and geopolitical institutional contexts are not easily observable, global work encounters
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32 are especially susceptible to faulty assumptions about others in the interaction, mistakenly assuming they
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34 identify with the context and hold certain values, beliefs, or logics, and then behaving toward them as if they
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36 do. Indeed, scholars emphasize that not all individuals from a particular cultural, national, or geopolitical
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38 institutional context will be representative of it and identify with it, further complicating global work
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40 encounters (Hong & Khei, 2014; Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006). Having been raised outside of one’s
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42 country of birth, in a family with parents from different cultural backgrounds, or being educated and working
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44 in many different countries, may mean that an association with a given context is not a central part of one’s
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46 identity, nor does it guide behavior at work, even if interaction partners assume it does.
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49 Further, although participants in a global work encounter are often geographically dispersed, perhaps
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51 across several time zones and thousands of miles (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006), they also may be located in the
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53 same geographic area but have been born or socialized in different cultural or national contexts and therefore
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55 identify as culturally different from one another (Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown & Zagefka, 2014). As a result,
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global work encounters may occur within a single country, if the parties identify with, or are assumed to identify with, another cultural or national context. For example, a team member born in South Africa and one born in France may interact in the U.S. where they reside and work. Each may assume the other identifies with, and is representative of, their countries of birth, which then constitutes a global work encounter. But it may also be true that both have come to identify primarily as American.

Third, we include in our definition that a global work encounter pertains to interaction conducted to *complete organizationally sanctioned tasks*. Defined as such, global work encounters are pervasive. Although not limited to certain work or roles, their work effort and organizational purpose separate them from casual interactions. The literature documents multiple purposes for their occurrence: negotiating a job offer (Al Dabbagh et al., 2016), resolving a conflict (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005), innovating (Gibson, Dunlop & Cordery, 2019), transferring practices (Gibson, Dunlop, Majchrzak & Chia, 2022), brokering between individuals of different cultures (Jang, 2017; Dibble & Gibson, 2013), and “schmoozing” (Molinsky, 2007). How these interactions are structured and composed sets important parameters for how the global work encounter unfolds.

This component of our definition of global work encounters both expands and adapts prior conceptualizations of global work (see Table 1), including the notion of *intercultural interaction spaces* (Zellmer-Bruhn & Gibson, 2014), which focused on the situation in which the work interaction occurs rather than on the interaction itself or on *cross-national collaboration* (Hinds et al., 2011), which addressed only those work interactions occurring across formally defined national boundaries. Yet, global work encounters defined this way are more specific than the notion of *intercultural interaction* (Thomas & Ravlin, 1995), which included interactions outside of the workplace, or *multicultural experiences* (Maddux et al., 2021; Leung and colleagues, 2008), which referred more broadly to exposure to elements or members of a different culture(s) that may not necessarily involve completion of work tasks. It is also distinct from *acculturation*, which is the

process of change in the behavioral repertoire, value system, and personal identity of individuals upon migration (Berry, 2005). In our conceptualization, mere exposure is not enough, and full-on migration is not necessary. A global work encounter involves interactions. However, as we elaborate below, we take inspiration from the acculturation literature in which scholars have specified the variety of acculturation strategies that exist (Berry, 1997; 2005; Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2017; Hajro, Zilinskaite & Stahl, 2017).

We have organized the remainder of our paper into three archetypal interaction spaces of global work encounters—cosmopolitan, hybrid, and optimally distinct. For each, we first identify the initial conditions that give rise to each type of space, including geography, work design, and approach to differences. These are the raw ingredients of global work encounters and are highlighted in different theoretical foundations. Next, we discuss the respective processes that may occur during the encounter (i.e., maintenance, adaptation, and adjustment) that promote defining characteristics of the space (i.e., status entrenchment, amalgamation, and uniqueness and commonality). Then we explore the consequences of each space at the individual, interpersonal and task levels. At the individual level, participants in the encounters are likely to experience consequences for their self-identity. At the interpersonal level, we consider whether the interactions are experienced as mutually satisfying and productive or as favoring one party over another. Then we consider the extent to which task-relevant knowledge is likely to be synthesized as a result of the encounter. Finally, we consider how, through the levers of job crafting, global experience and intercultural competencies, spaces may evolve and change from one type to another. This framework is illustrated in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 2. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this framework for theory, research, and practice.

COSMOPOLITAN SPACES

In the first type of global work encounter, often formed across a geographic divide that involves disparities in resources and power, participants perceive enduring differences that may be assumed to represent differences in competence or professionalism. Strong subgroups form along these divides. We call these “cosmopolitan spaces” because they are often marked by status entrenchment in which some participants may be perceived as more worldly, whereas others are perceived as “local” and likely of lower status (Yeoh, 2004;

Skey, 2012).¹ The potential contributions of locals, whose skills, knowledge, and experiences are associated with the national context, are valued less than those of cosmopolitans who have accumulated international skills, knowledge, and experience (Al Dabbagh et al., 2016; Haas, 2006). Al Dabbagh et al. (2016) explained that cosmopolitan spaces are often associated with Western capitalist values and logics (e.g., competitive, performance driven), in contrast to traditional non-Western business cultures (e.g., those more relationship oriented) (Erez & Shokef, 2008, Fu & Chiu, 2007). Such spaces develop through maintenance processes, as predicted by expectation states theory (Ridgeway & Correll (2004) and theory pertaining to status hierarchies (Metiu, 2006). Next, we introduce initial conditions of cosmopolitan spaces, the processes of maintenance that occur within them, and finally, their consequences.

Initial Conditions of Cosmopolitan Spaces

Geography. Global work encounters can be contrasted in terms of the geographies represented. When an interaction spans regions with disparities in resources and power, a cosmopolitan space is likely to occur. One such case is when an interaction spans members who represent the Global North and South divide.² Headquarters, leadership, or strategic roles may be in the Global North, while lower-rank roles or outsourced work is based in the Global South (e.g., Levina & Vaast, 2008). As such, geography may serve as a status-based difference and may coincide with higher pay for “expatriates” than for “locals” (Carr, 2010; Carr, MacLachan & Chipande, 1998). For example, Metiu (2006) and Koppman, Mattarelli and Gupta (2016) studied collaboration between software developers in the U.S. and India; Levina and Vaast (2008) studied a Western-based financial services firm that outsourced its high-end information technology (IT) work to third-party vendors in India and Russia; and Leonardi and Rodriguez-Lluesma (2013) studied engineering teams in

¹ Cosmopolitanism has historically been viewed as “a form of privilege, connoting the well-travelled and culturally sophisticated, contrasted with the provincial and naïve” (Synowich 2005: p. 56); but we acknowledge that it is also considered to be “a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (Held 1996: 103). In the management literature, although some have used the term as a positive trait (e.g., Haas, 2006), we rely on the historically consistent definition that emphasizes the status differentials between cosmopolitans and locals (e.g., Al Dabbagh et al., 2016).

² The term “Global South” was promoted as an alternative to “Third World” when the United Nations Development program launched its “Forging a Global South” initiative in 2003 (Dirlik, 2007). The Global South is regularly considered to include Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe; the Global North includes North America, Western Europe, and Oceania (Shumate & Dewitt, 2008). We use the terms Global North and South to avoid the linearity and hierarchy implied in the terms “emerging versus developed economies” (Ballakrishnen, 2021). However, we acknowledge the concern that “when academic discourse has adopted the language of the global north-south divide, it has occasionally done so uncritically, using the terms to fetishize difference” (Caison & Vormann, 2014: 68).

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2 a global corporation. Each of these scholars documented the perceived cross-national “pecking order”
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4 (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013, p. 489) between counterparts from the Global South and Global North.
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7 Notably, because multinationals originate from multiple countries, status is not limited simply to the
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9 Global North; status may also arise from organizational position (e.g., headquarters or technical expertise).
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11 Jain & Hinds (2021), for example, explored the power ambiguity that occurs when an organization’s
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13 headquarters is in India, a location often associated with lower status in global teams. Because team members
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15 at both the Indian and American locations had relatively equal access to critical resources and authority, were
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17 all Indians, and were all employed by the parent organization (thereby eliminating subsidiary or vendor-client
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19 relations), they did not observe the clear status and power hierarchy often seen in research on collaboration
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21 across the Global North and Global South (e.g., Metiu, 2006). Gibbs, Gibson, Grushina & Dunlop (2020)
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23 explained a similar finding whereby the non-U.S. location has the higher technical skills and thus higher status
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25 within the organization. Gibbs et al. (2020) explained that although the headquarters was in the U.S., the
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27 refineries in the U.S. were not performing well, and U.S. members reported feeling lower in status. In contrast,
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29 members from refineries in Western Australia were highly regarded because of their many technological
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31 advances.
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35 **Work Design.** A second initial condition for global work encounters pertains to how the work
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37 underway is designed and structured, factors that encourage specific types of global work encounters because
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39 they create the parameters for task completion. These parameters include who will collaborate on tasks and
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41 how they will interact. Considerable work design literature has examined the content and structure of the jobs
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43 performed in organizations and the broader context within which work is conducted (Parker, Morgeson &
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49 Johns, 2017). Much of this research has focused on single-country settings, but some of the same issues are
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52 highly pertinent to the context of global work
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For example, the design of collective work efforts can result in the development of subgroups based on function, projects, or demographics (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Subgroups create a sense of belonging that can be conducive to interaction within the subgroup, but when they become strong and divisive, work conflict ensues (O’Leary & Mortenson, 2010). When membership in multiple subgroups overlaps, fault lines occur (Gibson & Vermeulen 2004; Lau & Murnighan, 2005), causing tension much like how friction along tectonic plates results in earthquakes. In global work encounters, fault lines do not form only along demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race), but also may form based on cultural and geographic markers. When cosmopolitan spaces have been documented, splits in teams occurred not only across the Global North and the Global South, but also arose out of work designs in which task assignments also coincided with geography, creating multiple overlapping subgroups and thus strong fault lines. These divisive initial conditions gave rise to global work encounters characterized by cosmopolitan spaces.

Approach to difference. A third initial condition pertains to the assumptions about, and approaches to, differences. Integration of a variety of frameworks across the literature on domestic diversity (based on gender, race, and age) suggests three ways to approach differences: as features that (a) are engrained, (b) should be discarded, or (c) can be leveraged (Di Tomaso, Post & Parks-Yancy, 2007; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Brewer, 1991; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska & George, 2004). For example, DiTomaso et al. (2007) argued that an inquiry into diversity is fundamentally about inequality. This is because group relations are overlaid with the need to legitimize long-term inequality, occur within institutional structures that reproduce inequality, and incorporate day-to-day mechanisms that reinforce privilege or disadvantage. This suggests a relative stability in how workers experience diversity. Yet, Chattopadhyay et al. (2004) argue that responses to diversity vary, depending on whether individuals perceive the status hierarchy to be permeable, legitimate, and stable.

When differences are assumed to be engrained, cosmopolitan spaces are likely to ensue. In a global work encounter, these differences are likely to coincide with culture or country; for example, differences in language proficiency can create inequality, and these differences become engrained when those in a global work encounter are asked to use a single language. Al Dabbagh et al. (2016) found that command of English, as the language of international business, defined one's status as either cosmopolitan or local. The authors explained: "An African job candidate might speak numerous languages of his home region, but lack command of English and therefore appear 'local.' Whereas a British or American candidate might only speak English fluently, but appear still 'cosmopolitan' if he had extensive international work experience" (p. 1459). When such differences are assumed to be inherent, stable, and unchangeable, cosmopolitan spaces ensue. The following proposition summarizes the initial conditions that give rise to cosmopolitan spaces:

Proposition 1: When (a) composition is across geographies associated with status, (b) work is designed with strong subgroups and (c) differences are assumed to be engrained, stable and evidence of disparity in competence and professionalism, a cosmopolitan interaction space is likely to ensue.

Maintenance Processes in Cosmopolitan Spaces

Beyond these initial conditions, particular processes characterize each type of global work encounter. Expectation states theory forms the theoretical foundation that explains the maintenance processes that occur within cosmopolitan spaces. The theory explains how hierarchies of evaluation and influence—what Ridgeway and Correll (2004) call the "power and prestige structure" of interactions — emerge and are maintained and how differences become markers of status at work. The theory also documents how sticky status hierarchies can be, serving to stabilize resource and power inequality (Ridgeway, 2011; 2014).

Scholars have identified several social processes that maintain hierarchies in cosmopolitan spaces during global work. One is that cosmopolitan or global is perceived as better, affecting the hiring process (Ridgeway, 2014). Multinational employers often express a preference for employees with global, and especially Western, experience (Al Dabbagh et al., 2016). One hiring manager said "global perspective is very important" and another contended expatriates were "prepared to work much harder than your local guy" (p. 1459). Al Dabbagh et al. (2016) found awareness of these stereotypes inhibited locals from intentions to self-advocate.

Scholars have also identified social processes, based on evaluations of who is competent and most suitable for authority, that maintain hierarchy in teams during their collaboration (Ridgeway, 2014). For example, although U.S.-based developers knew remote collaboration with developers in India required detailed documentation, their documents were not detailed enough to allow the remote group to fully participate in the work (Metiu, 2006). Similarly, Koppman et al.'s (2016) study of Indian IT offshore outsourcing firms found that both Western colleagues and Western clients failed to treat Indian team members as collaborators.

Higher status groups can also maintain their status by retaining better working schedules for themselves. For example, Gibbs et al. (2022) found the timing of meetings (among those collaborating across time zones) most often favored the regions considered "high status," routinely ignoring that collaborators in the lower-status regions were saddled with middle-of-the-night conference calls. Koppman et al. (2016) also reported Indians working offshore were expected, unlike Western team members, to work late on weekends. Our second proposition captures the maintenance processes that occur in cosmopolitan spaces.

Proposition 2: Processes of maintenance during global work encounters result in cosmopolitan spaces characterized by entrenched status hierarchies in which the skills, professional norms, and schedules of participants deemed cosmopolitan are more highly regarded and rewarded, and thus granted higher status, than those of noncosmopolitan contributors.

Consequences in Cosmopolitan Space

Individual Level (*Identity*). Within cosmopolitan spaces, the identity of each individual is likely constrained and limited to a single cultural, national, or geopolitical institutional context that others associate with the individual. Although an individual may attempt to claim another identity, it is less likely to be granted by others. Accordingly, the impact on identity may be more positive or negative, depending on whether one is identified by others as a higher-status cosmopolitan or a lower-status local. In Neeley's (2013) study of the mandated use of English, nonnative English speakers described feeling "diminished," "devalued," and "reduced," experienced performance anxiety and a heightened sense of job insecurity. Others have documented that those barred from work because of an identity are likelier later to leave the organization (Metiu, 2006).

In contrast, those identified as cosmopolitans experience enhanced status such as the groups Metiu (2006) noted who were able to continue "owning the code." U.S.-based developers commented they could complete projects entirely on their own; they saw this control as essential because it signified "the consolidation

of its superior status position relative to the Indian group” (p. 430). After a companywide English language mandate, native English speakers reported a heightened sense of belonging, increased optimism about career advancement, and expanded networks (Neeley & Dumas, 2016).

Interpersonal Level (*Mutuality*). At the interpersonal level, interactions in cosmopolitan spaces lack mutuality. Rigid status hierarchies can hamper building effective working relationships. In Neeley’s (2013) study, nonnative speakers were distrustful (“the Americans’ mastery of the language may lead them to take advantage of us and try to fool us”) and resentful (“I’m not really happy with English people thinking that we don’t need any other languages ... it’s annoying”) toward their native-speaking counterparts (p. 485). Lower-status team members may be explicitly instructed to work according to high-status Western norms (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2022). For example, Koppman et al. (2016) described how managers recognized the American and Indian teams had different norms of communication, including the use of emails, and told their Indian employees to simply adapt to the Western culture. Leonardi and Rodriguez-Lluesma (2013) described how members of the high-status culture assumed efforts by low-status individuals to gain status by adopting dominant occupational norms were attempts to cover up deficiencies.

Task Level (*Synthesized knowledge*). At the task level in cosmopolitan spaces, little synthesis of knowledge occurs because status differences across locations inhibit it. Several scholars found high-status individuals less willing to work with their lower-status counterparts (e.g., Al Dabbagh et al, 2016; Metiu, 2006). Levina & Vaast (2008) found status perceptions hampered knowledge sharing. One “onshore” manager said: “Indian vendors ... are not well-qualified. ... Russian vendors were even worse. They were small, linguistically challenged [laughs] and not competent enough” (pp. 314-315). As result, useful suggestions from non-Western team members were often ignored. Despite clear norms in some cosmopolitan spaces that improve efficiency (Neeley, 2013; Feeley & Harzing, 2003), most evidence highlights a lack of synthesis. In summary, in cosmopolitan encounters, a status hierarchy emerges across regional divides in which a “cosmopolitan” versus “local” distinction becomes entrenched that favors the cosmopolitan (Ridgeway, 2014). Although cosmopolitan spaces bring clearer prescriptions for behavior, these can alienate individuals, which

restricts identity claiming, takes a toll on relationships, and prevents qualified team members from contributing knowledge to the task. The following proposition summarizes these outcomes:

Proposition 3: Global work encounters characterized by cosmopolitan spaces result in (a) constrained identities for lower status individuals, (b) lack of mutuality in interpersonal outcomes (e.g., some parties enjoy more control, belonging and access), and (c) poor task outcomes because of a lack of synthesis of knowledge.

HYBRID SPACES

Within hybrid spaces, global work encounters are characterized by geographic representation across multiple regions, but are culturally blind, as opposed to resting on the belief that cultural diversity brings strategic benefits. Work design is out of favor, lessening the possibility of subgroups as havens. Differences are to be discarded and transcended by a common identity or process. As predicted by theories of intercultural interaction (Earley & Gibson, 2002) and adaptive structuration (Giddens, 1979), processes of adaptation result in amalgamation, creating a hybrid (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000) or “third” (Adair et al., 2006) culture that supersedes any one individual’s culture.

Initial Conditions of Hybrid Spaces

Geography. Multiple geographies are represented in hybrid spaces but not necessarily across low-versus high-status geographies. Instead of attending to culture, geographic representation may be driven by economic considerations such as access to natural resources or markets. Zaidman and Brock (2009) described collaboration between India and Israel that involved access to specific resources; Hajro et al. (2017) studied a team of Americans, Japanese, European, and Austrian members who were interacting because they each represented a different market the firm serviced. Hybrid spaces may also be culturally blind, developed with the intent of superseding cultural differences; within the context examined by Vaerlander et al. (2016) the expectation was to develop a superordinate team identity and a working process that would be more salient than cultural differences between the United States, Germany, India, and China.

Work Design. Hybrid spaces are likelier to ensue when the tasks being completed in a global work encounter are structured in such a way that participants represent different subunits, functions, or projects, as well as different cultures or nations, thus creating extreme diversity. Each participant brings to the task very

different skills sets, priorities, objectives, and views, and may have a different cultural orientation. In such teams, Gibson and Vermeulen (2003) found members were unable to create pockets of similarity that help them to feel more psychologically safe. Instead, each member was an “island,” and over time different views and perspectives were no longer expressed. Vaerlander et al. (2016) noted that a large multinational set up innovation centers to maximize diversity, with project teams composed of developers, designers, locals, and expatriates. Nevertheless, corporate leadership encouraged a single “Innovation Center” way of working that amalgamated differences rather than allowing them to flourish. Thus, the work design promoted a hybrid space.

Approach to difference. An assumption that differences can be discarded in favor of norms or views that transcend any home culture or country prompts hybrid spaces. This may be an explicit organizational approach to diversity that employees are encouraged to follow, or it may be a perspective held by individual participants. Hajro, et al. (2017, p. 358) described such a view among multinationals where leadership “expected individuals to lessen the significance of their national culture and assimilate into the organizational culture.” Cultural differences were downplayed in favor of expectations that “employees follow the corporate way ... which was clearly reflecting the value system and behavioral patterns of the home country.” Gibson and Grushina (2021, p. 5) indicated such an approach prevailed in some of the global work encounters within a multinational mining company. When queried as to the role of cultural differences, several members indicated none were evident, although the teams had members from six countries. One commented, “I don’t think we are that different, we just do the work.” By ignoring cultural differences, the host culture often sets the tone for hybrid spaces. Hybrid spaces are analogous to “plural” organizations that focus on increasing diverse representation but with an expectation of assimilation to dominant norms (Davidson & Ferdman, 2001; Nishii, 2013). In summary, across the conditions that give rise to hybrid spaces, we posit the following:

Proposition 4: A hybrid interaction space is likely to ensue when (a) the encounter represents multiple culturally blind geographies, (b) work design results in no, or minimal, commonality as a basis for subgroups, and (c) there is an assumption that differences are to be discarded in favor of a shared culture.

Adaptation Processes in Hybrid Spaces

Hybrid spaces are marked by processes of adaptation (e.g., Pornpitakpan, 1999; Molinsky, 2007; 2013; Earley & Gibson, 2002), defined as modifying one’s mentality and behaviors for a communication partner, a modification communication scholars consider fundamental to social interaction (Burgoon et al., 2007; Toma, 2014). Research on interpersonal adaptation has accrued over decades and across academic disciplines (see Toma, 2014, for a review). Some theoretical perspectives have focused on the modification of nonverbal behaviors (e.g., gestures, eye contact) (e.g., Burgoon et al., 1995), but others have tackled verbal behaviors (e.g., accents, vocal rate) (e.g., Cappella & Planalp, 1981). Adaptation in hybrid spaces is often explained by structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984) and its variations, which propose that understanding social interaction requires understanding social structures and individual agency. For example, Maznevski and Chudoba (2000) drew upon adaptive structuration theory (AST), which explains the relationship between technology use and social interaction in organizations (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994).

The degree to which adaptation is conceptualized as a cognitive or enacted process varies. For example, Adair et al. (2006, p. 208) emphasized the cognitive components and posited that a hybrid space forms when members of multicultural teams “update their schemas and develop a shared understanding.” Similarly, Berry and colleagues, focusing on those who have migrated to a new culture, identified the cognitive strategies individuals may use when managing differences between their native cultural heritages and current cultural context (Berry, 1997, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2010). Other scholars have focused on behavioral adaptation. For example, Zakaria (2017) found many members of global teams modified their behaviors to accord with the purpose, roles, situations, and persons with whom they were communicating.

Cramton and Hinds (2014) described a dialectic process of adapting interpersonal communication norms in global teams. They drew upon *nested structuration* (Perlow et al., 2004), a theory of fit among structures at different levels (work group, organizational, and institutional) within a system in which fit is achieved through interaction that over time gradually aligns the structures. Cramton and Hinds (2014) illustrated how these processes are embedded in the local contexts of team members and influenced by the interaction between contexts. For example, an Indian team member may respond to German and U.S.

counterparts' calls to display more initiative and personal responsibility, but then get criticized by a local Indian boss who feels traditional roles are being usurped. The following proposition captures this process:

Proposition 5: Processes of adaptation during global work encounters result in hybrid spaces characterized by amalgamation through compromise.

Consequences in Hybrid Spaces

Individual Level (*Identity*). When global work encounters involve adaptation and a hybrid space, a superordinate identity takes root. This can bring challenges at the individual level because it requires compromise; values or perspectives some members hold dear may not be well represented in the space, possibly causing some individuals to feel a "lack of fit" (Heilman, 1983). In the Hajro et al. (2017) study, one company promoted "follow[ing] the corporate way of communicating and doing business which was clearly reflecting the value system and behavioral patterns of the home country (the U.S.)." Those not from the U.S. felt devalued and demotivated. An emphasis on all employees being equal was experienced as "pretending to be blind to cultural differences." As such, when a "third way" is actually a high-status way, hybrid spaces may feel much like cosmopolitan spaces to low-status members or to those from underrepresented groups.

Likewise, many of the global teams Gibson et al. (2022) investigated could be considered hybrid spaces in which the work encounter resulted in so much adaptation that the team itself became a source of identification. Individuals reported identifying with their national culture, the organization, the refinery they represented, their profession, and also the global team. But this created the possibility for intrapersonal identity conflict in which identifying with one social group conflicts with the norms of others. Under these circumstances, individuals often feel they must give precedence to one set of meanings, values, and behaviors to satisfy the expectations of a particular focal group and suppress any other identities they may hold (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018; Hewlin, 2009).

Molinsky (2007) offered further evidence of the possible struggles individuals' experience, introducing the concept of *cross-cultural code-switching* that he defined as "the act of purposefully modifying one's behavior, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting, to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior (p. 623)." Molinsky (2007) documented multiple possible outcomes from this adaptation,

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2 including fitting in, being liked, and winning respect and trust. However, individuals may also fear they lack
3 the skills to behave appropriately. Furthermore, required behavior may conflict with what feels authentic.
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6 To explain the skills needed for code switching, Molinsky (2013) introduced the concept of *cultural*
7 *retooling* in which individuals adapt their behavior to other cultures. In a cross-cultural MBA project, Molinsky
8 (2013) found that cultural retooling could lead to authenticity, ambivalence, or conflict. Some participants
9 focused on the ways they could feel natural and legitimate; others suppressed the conflict between their native
10 and new cultures and rationalized away any conflicts that arose. In another study, participants offered multiple
11 examples of “having to act in a manner that is inconsistent with one’s values, needs and preferences” (Kernis
12 & Goldman, 2006, p. 298). One participant described the experience of inauthenticity as having to “force
13 myself to be a person different than the real me.” Other studies have also documented how stress and struggles
14 often befall individual managers who are working to resolve contradictions. Cramton and Hinds (2014, p. 1076)
15 described how the resolution process can leave individuals in “cycles of surprise, desperate measures, search
16 for enlightenment, invention, hope, and often disappointment.” The authors also noted the dialectic process
17 involved in adaptation takes several iterations, so it can be slow, inefficient, and not necessarily even accepted.
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21 **Interpersonal Level (*Mutuality*).** A hybrid space involves a mutuality of norms, although their impact
22 is mixed. Adaptive processes within a hybrid space can support positive interpersonal dynamics through a
23 shared identity and communication. Earley and Mosakowski (2000) quotes a team leader who described their
24 team as, “a single team and not a bunch of groups forced together,” which supported an “esprit de corps and
25 strong senses of interdependence and a common fate” (p. 35). They noted positive interpersonal consequences
26 when teams used a combination of members’ first languages to communicate. Thai members, for example,
27 appreciated their Western colleagues’ efforts to learn their language and culture. Similarly, Hinds and
28 colleagues documented that a shared identity moderates the relationship between geographic distribution and
29 conflict (Hinds & Bailey, 2003; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005).
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33 However, when some members feel their spaces are a poor fit, there can be multiple negative
34 interpersonal consequences. Hajro et al. (2017) found that among a team of Americans, Japanese, and
35 Europeans, non-Americans often felt devalued, and this disunity resulted in screaming matches, questioning
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of each other's competence, and personal insults. Zaidman and Brock (2009) also described how the proposed rules of engagement were ultimately more comfortable and authentic for some team members than for others. Despite the Indian team's efforts to create a flat team structure because "the Israeli managers expect" it, one Israeli manager responded that Indian team members did not ask questions to his satisfaction. Hybrid spaces may also be lacking in trust (Tenzer et al., 2014; Hinds et al., 2014). Hence, the interpersonal outcomes resulting from hybrid spaces are both positive and negative.

Task Level (*Synthesized Knowledge*). The many factors can create an unstable synthesis of knowledge at the task level. When a hybrid space represents collectively constructed norms for knowledge sharing and integration, the consequences are positive. For example, Hinds and Mortensen (2005) noted that distributed teams with shared identity had spontaneous communication that supported leveraging of their knowledge to "solve things together" (p. 302). Similarly, Earley and Mosakowski (2000) observed teams that created a hybrid space completed "first-rate work" (p. 35).

However, when team members feel a hybrid space is not equally accessible to all of them, knowledge is not synthesized and task completion suffers. Hajro et al. (2017) noted that when not all team members felt a part of the hybrid space, their team missed objectives and deadlines. Cramton (2001) found that coordination became complicated when geographically distributed teams had adapted, but failed to communicate full knowledge of each other's situations. For example, tasks did not get completed when student teams either did not tell their counterparts in other countries that they would be on spring break — or when they did communicate, but the term "spring break" had no meaning to their counterpart.

Even when observable tasks are completed, knowledge may not be synthesized because the meaning associated with those tasks may be different. In the Värlander et al. (2016) study, teams in the U.S., India, and China each interpreted and enacted various practices differently based on a combination of logics. When both the meaning and practices were recontextualized so that new practices fit a local context, "radical re-contextualization" occurred. However, sometimes, teams updated their actions but did not consider the meanings. This could be problematic if it appeared to stakeholders such as management that changes had taken

place when they did not. Conversely, it could be that thinking and understanding have changed, but because the veneer of the practice appeared the same, management did not acknowledge changes.

In summary, hybrid spaces are adaptive, and individuals from different cultures come together to enact agreed upon means of collaborating. However, a true third way is often difficult to achieve—either because certain norms (e.g., those of headquarters) may dominate or because individuals feel inauthentic in adapting. Despite the positive aspirations of a hybrid space and the positive impact of a shared identity when one does develop, relationships may be strained and individuals may not share or synthesize the knowledge necessary to achieve the encounter’s desired outcomes. This leads us to the following proposition:

Proposition 6: Global work encounters characterized by hybrid interaction spaces can have (a) positive consequences for individuals (e.g., a shared identity develops), (b) mutual interpersonal interactions (e.g., shared communication norms are established) and (c) high levels of synthesized knowledge for task completion, when the hybrid way of working is collectively constructed. Hybrid spaces have outcomes similar to cosmopolitan spaces when collective construction does not occur.

OPTIMALLY DISTINCTIVE SPACES

The defining feature of optimally distinctive spaces is a sense of both uniqueness and commonality. Members actively incorporate elements of their own cultures, and each member or subgroup’s skills, understandings, and approaches are embraced. These encounters are predicted by Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991).

Initial Conditions of Optimally Distinctive Spaces

Geography. In optimally distinct spaces, geographic distance and variety exists, but there is clarity regarding the rationale and resources that come from each location. Jang (2017) conducted an experiment in which the instructions specifically guided team members to draw upon one another’s geographically connected knowledge. Teams were told to act as planners for a multicultural wedding for a U.S.-Indian couple. Their only instructions were that the wedding must have elements of both cultures “and be creative” (p. 1002). Gibson (2022) studied community development initiatives by Australia’s largest corporations within remote

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3 Indigenous communities. Partnerships were specifically crafted so that corporations did more than offer “arms-
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6 length funding,” and teams were composed to ensure representation from a range of countries to work
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9 alongside Indigenous Australian community members. In such situations, it is clear to participants that there
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12 is value from different locations, skills sets, and perspectives, and this gives rise to optimally distinctive spaces.
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15 **Work Design.** Optimally distinctive spaces likely ensue when work is structured so that tasks that
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18 benefit the functioning of the larger team are completed within moderately strong subgroups. This entails
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21 task assignments that not only ensure important differences are represented on tasks, but also that some
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24 commonalities also exist. For example, when an encounter spans functions and locations, commonalities might
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27 be built around tenure or global experience. In this situation, Gibson and Vermeulen (2003) found the
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30 subgroups functioned as supportive “cohorts” without being divisive; members shared some demographic,
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33 locational, and cultural characteristics, but not all. Nevertheless, the shared characteristics enabled connections
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36 across different subgroups. In contrast, those strong subgroups that shared nearly all characteristics were
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39 unable to benefit from diversity, and intergroup conflict ensued. Moderate subgroups were present in Gibson
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42 (2022) when cohorts that were diverse in many regards (ethnic, cultural, and Indigenous experience), were
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45 formed such that they started their partnerships at the same time, in the same region, and often shared industry
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48 or project focus. The cohort subgroups created havens that enabled risk taking, openness, and support to
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51 leverage the team’s diversity.
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55 **Approach to difference.** When differences are considered a resource to be leveraged, and it is
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58 normative to include elements of each member or subgroup’s culture into work practices, optimally distinctive
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spaces are likelier to ensue. In this respect, optimally distinct spaces incorporate the “integration and learning” perspective introduced by Ely and Thomas (2001) to capture demographic diversity in a domestic context. They contended that within such a climate, diversity is viewed as a valuable resource the group can use to “rethink its primary tasks and redefine its markets, products, strategies, and business practices in ways that will advance its mission” (p. 240). Turning to global work, Hajro et al. (2017) described how in some of the multinational organizations they studied the “general attitude was that if the company valued individuals and individual diversity, it would have more ideas to draw on” and “relationships between employees were developed so as to be collegial and participative” (p. 361). Hajro et al. (2017) described the resultant climate as “engagement-focused” because workers engaged with the cultural diversity rather than simply ignoring or assimilating their differences, which was the case in other firms they studied. Chattopadhyay et al. (2004) also documented that individuals could bring their full identity to their work interaction—despite knowing those identities carried lower status in other business contexts.

Scholars have argued that a recognition of distinctiveness and commonality is the essence of creating a true sense of belonging (Ely & Thomas, 2001) or inclusion (Brewer, 1995; Shore et al. 2011). Nishii (2013: 1754) explained concisely why inclusion matters: “In inclusive environments, individuals of all backgrounds—not just members of historically powerful identity groups—are fairly treated, valued for who they are, and included in core decision making.” Notably, inclusion lets individuals leverage knowledge and social capital resources from their multiple identities to accomplish work-based tasks and activities (Creary, Caza & Roberts, 2015; Roberson, 2019; Shore, Cleveland & Sanchez, 2018). In sum, these conditions give rise to optimally distinctive spaces for global work encounters:

Proposition 7: Optimally distinctive interaction spaces are likely to ensue when (a) geographies involved intentionally engage multiple cultures, (b) work design creates functional moderately strong subgroups, and (c) it is assumed that differences can be leveraged.

Adjustment Processes in Optimally Distinctive Spaces

In optimally distinctive spaces, members from multiple cultures establish common ground through subtle adjustments and yet embrace and preserve cultural differences. The adjustments may involve changing one's impressions of, and reactions to, an interaction partner to acknowledge and respect differences and incorporate them into subsequent behavior (Sumpter & Gibson, 2023). Such adjustments are more understated than the conversions associated with the previously mentioned adaptive processes of hybrid spaces. This combination of retention and adjusting resembles the concept of dynamic balancing present in both Confucianism and Taoism (Gyamfi & Lee, 2019), which emphasizes both similarities and differences equally to foster collaboration.

For example, Debebe (2008) described ways of adjusting in a new environment, including probing while calibrating others' receptivity and selectively shifting one's response. As one example of adjustment, Jang (2017) found multicultural team members engaged in *cultural brokerage* on behalf of monocultural team members. She defined cultural brokerage as the "act of facilitating interactions between actors across cultural boundaries" (p. 993). How multicultural team members brokered, however, depended on *cultural overlap*, which Jang (2017) defined as "the extent to which an individual shares cultural membership with others in the team" (p. 995). "Cultural insiders" (those whose backgrounds overlapped with other team members') brokered by *integrating* knowledge from different cultures, but "cultural outsiders" (those without any cultural overlap) brokered by *eliciting* knowledge from different cultures. Both types contributed to teams' creativity. Our eighth proposition captures the adjustment processes that occur within hybrid spaces:

Proposition 8: Processes of adjustment during global work encounters result in optimally distinctive spaces characterized by mutuality in which participants incorporate elements of their own culture, while at the same time building common approaches and belongingness.

Consequences of Optimally Distinctive Spaces

Individual Level (*Identity*). Global work encounters that result in optimally distinctiveness spaces create opportunities for individuals to maintain their identities and corresponding authentic behaviors while

learning from others. In other words, multiple identities can coexist. Gibson, Dunlop, and Raghav (2022) documented that when members of multicultural collaborations were able to bring their multiple identities to their work, this increased thriving, the combination of learning and vitality. Similarly, Hajro et al. (2017) found that in teams in which optimally distinctive spaces were created, minority team members still had space to retain a strong sense of identity and all employees felt supported in voicing country-specific values.

Interpersonal Level (*Mutuality*). Within optimally distinctive spaces, at the interpersonal level, there is mutuality of norms and processes that result in learning, trust, and psychological safety. In describing what is possible within such spaces, Hajro et al. (2017) noted how one team’s oscillations between cooperative and assertive knowledge exchanges enabled the team to solve interpersonal problems and create healthy relationships among its members. Teams that did not develop this optimally distinctive space had mixed interpersonal results. Trust is a hallmark of optimally distinctive spaces. Indeed, Jarvenpaa et al. (1998) documented an ability to create “swift trust” that helped a virtually distributed team to maintain trust among members while dealing with ambiguity and vulnerability. Zakaria and Mohd Yusof (2020) examined the development of trust in global teams over the stages of a project. They saw willingness to engage in constructive conflict and responsiveness when issues arose as the key to signaling reliability and therefore, to initiation of cycles of increased trust-building. Finally, psychological safety—the “degree to which a collective is perceived as being safe for interpersonal risk-taking” (Edmonson, 1999, p. 350)—is an interpersonal consequence of optimally distinctive spaces. Gibson and Gibbs (2006) found increased psychologically safe communication moderated a linear, negative relationship between national diversity and innovation in global virtual teams. Similarly, Kirkman, et al. (2013) found psychological safety moderated a curvilinear relationship between national diversity and team performance.

Task Level (*Synthesized Knowledge*). Ample evidence exists that encounters characterized by optimal distinctiveness promote alignment to synthesize knowledge for task completion. Hajro et al. (2017) found that in optimally distinctive spaces, “time and resources were dedicated toward task completion, and the resulting task and goal congruence enabled individuals to accomplish their goals on time and led to high team effectiveness (p. 362).” In contrast, other teams’ relational goals came to supersede their task goals to their

detriment. Jang (2017) documented how in spaces that could be said to be optimally distinct, interaction partners assembled or synthesized information, ideas, or knowledge from different cultures into a novel whole. Gibson and Vermeulen (2003) found such spaces were conducive to learning behavior—and thus to optimal performance on team tasks. Gibbs et al. (2021) documented that in global teams in which both uniqueness and belonging were achieved, engagement reflected mutual support and recognition that all locations contributed unique expertise; these teams were more effective overall than those teams in which a single location or demographic was dominant. In summary, adjustment in optimally distinctive spaces has the highest potential for individuals to bring not only their full cultural identities to work, but also for them to learn from one another, synthesize knowledge, and ultimately accomplish task objectives. This leads us to our next proposition:

Proposition 9: Global work encounters characterized by optimally distinctive spaces have (a) positive consequences for individual identities (e.g., individuals can bring their full identity to work), (b) mutual interpersonal outcomes (e.g., individuals learn from one another) and (c) high levels of knowledge synthesis to support task outcomes.

EVOLUTION BETWEEN SPACES

Although each space is made likelier by the conditions identified above, we contend global work encounters can evolve from one space to another. Given the advantages of optimally distinctive spaces for identity, teamwork, and task performance, we examined how organizations might shift toward these spaces through deliberate job crafting, increasing global experience, and developing intercultural competence. However, we note that firms have multiple goals to consider (Laplume, Sonpar & Litz, 2008). These result in different starting points for global encounters. For example, market and resource access may supersede concerns about status differences, resulting in work encounters across the North-South divide that resemble the cosmopolitan spaces. Yet maintenance processes are not inevitable, and individual agency plays a large role in the evolution of spaces because collaborators and leaders bring skills and perspective and establish the processes that support coordination in diverse teams (Srikanth et al., 2016). In the next section, we delineate how job crafting, global experience, and intercultural competence prompt shifts in global encounters. Although we treat each one in a separate proposition, we nevertheless posit that use of these levers in conjunction with one another can be even more powerful in achieving and maintaining optimally distinct spaces.

Job Crafting

Existing research provides evidence that job crafting—the self-initiated behaviors that employees take to shape, mold, and change their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001)—is potentially a promising way to shift global work encounters. Job crafting can involve shaping task boundaries (either physically or cognitively), or relational boundaries (who interacts with who), or both (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Although job crafting has rarely been applied to global work, changing the way tasks are completed may affect how global work encounters unfold because doing so can address geographic divides, soften subgroups, and bridge differences.

As noted, task assignment is one way in which status hierarchies are reinforced or multiple contributions are welcomed. In particular, when tasks are relatively independently accomplished (i.e., there is little passing of work back and forth), cosmopolitan spaces are reinforced. For example, Metiu (2006) described how team members in the Global North prevented their counterparts in the Global South from “owning the code,” and Koppman et al.’s (2016) found that not only Western colleagues, but also Western clients, would not even speak with the Indian developers. In these studies, cosmopolitan spaces were entrenched because tasks were crafted to be conducted independently.

In contrast, jobs can be crafted to be more interdependent—when multiple individuals interactively complete work (Wageman 1999; Bindel et al. 2019). Gibson et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of process evolution in global work encounters to sustain effectiveness over time. Effective teams in their study reacted to cues that interaction requirements were shifting and that cultural challenges were being raised by changing their work processes and the use of technology. In doing so, common meanings were created and a “third way” of working often developed, indicative of hybrid spaces. Leadership can explicitly call for the incorporation of each participant’s unique cultural perspective, resulting in optimally distinct spaces, as Jang (2017) explored. Our literature review found cosmopolitan spaces are likely to evolve toward optimally distinct spaces when tasks are crafted to be conducted interdependently. As such we propose:

Proposition 10: The more job crafting introduces interdependence in tasks, the likelier that global work encounters will evolve toward optimally distinct spaces.

Global Experience

Extensive research suggests that as global experience increases, encounters are likely to evolve toward optimally distinct spaces. Global experience brings knowledge and skills that can help correct the often

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2 inaccurate portrayal of “locals” as incompetent or unprofessional, can soften the strong divisive subgroups that
3 may form along the North-South divide, and can shift assumptions that differences are engrained, ?thus?
4 showing their malleability. Cramton (2001) concluded that missing contextual information in globally
5 distributed teams was an explanatory factor for inaccurate attributions and poorer quality decisions.
6 Orlikowski’s (2002) study of global software companies found employees with direct experience of their
7 distant partner sites were more generous in sharing resources and expertise. Mortensen & Neeley (2012)’s
8 study of collaborations between Europe and Asia found that increased knowledge of globally distributed team
9 members enhanced trust. In each of these situations, the group developed a way of working that superseded
10 any individual group and coalesced as a work unit.

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12 Research suggests that travel to sites is an especially effective form of global experience. Hinds &
13 Cramton (2014) found that travelers (the people who visited sites in other global locations), compared with
14 hosts (the people who hosted the site visits in their home offices and countries), described more lasting and
15 deeper situated coworker familiarity as a result of having been embedded in the context of their distant team
16 members. Specifically, travelers more frequently mentioned the value of observing coworkers at work and in
17 social settings. They were likelier to talk about gaining familiarity with the work styles, roles, and practices of
18 their distant colleagues, including the pressures they faced. As is typical of optimally distinct spaces, the
19 contributions—and even constraints—of each subgroup became visible to the whole group through site visits.
20 Hinds & Cramton’s findings on global experience reveals a means of resolving status entrenchment.

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22 *P11: As global experience increases, global work encounters are likely to evolve toward optimally*
23 *distinct spaces.*

24 **Intercultural Competence**

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26 Intercultural competence is a final lever for moving between spaces. It enables the incorporation of
27 multiple cultural perspectives and creates a sense of belonging, while simultaneously preserving those unique
28 views. *Intercultural competence* is defined as a set of perceptual, relational, and self-management behaviors
29 and skills that support effective and appropriate interaction with those who are culturally different from oneself
30 (Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens, & Oddou, 2010; Furuya et al., 2009). Notably, intercultural competence can be
31 distinct from global experience. Furuya et al. (2009) followed over 300 managerial employees on global
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2 assignments and found variances in intercultural competency: Those with higher levels of repatriation
3 demonstrated greater job motivation and better work performance. Gibson (2022) found that over time,
4 corporate secondees developed the perceptual competency of *social flexibility* (ability to modify ideas,
5 compromise, and be receptive to new ways of doing things, Renner, 2006); the relational competency of
6 *interpersonal engagement* (degree to which people have a desire and willingness to initiate and maintain new
7 relationships, Goldberg et al., 2006); and the self-management competency of *emotional sensitivity* (awareness
8 and understanding of emotions, Martin et al., 1996). To the extent they developed these competencies, they
9 engaged in cultural adjustment, the critical process in evolving to optimally distinctive spaces.
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19 Other scholars have focused on *cultural intelligence* (CQ), a construct composed of metacognitive
20 abilities (e.g., awareness of being in a cross-cultural setting), cognitive abilities (e.g., knowledge of rules and
21 customs in various settings), motivational abilities (e.g., effort and attention directed to intercultural learning),
22 and behavioral abilities (e.g., capacity to behave as expected in a foreign setting) (Bird et al., 2010; Szkudlarek,
23 Romani, Caprar, & Osland, 2020; Thomas et al., 2015). Dyne and Ang (2019) found team members likelier
24 to express new information or voice disagreement if either they themselves or their leader had high CQ; these
25 processes are important for optimal distinctiveness. Intercultural competence is often a characteristic of
26 multiculturals, who themselves defy categorization as belonging to a single culture (Lücke, Kostova, & Roth,
27 2014). Vora, Martin, Fitzsimmons, Pekerti, Lakshman & Raheem (2019) defined multiculturalism as “the
28 degree to which someone has knowledge of, identification with, and internalization of more than one societal
29 culture” (p. 499). Multicultural individuals are likely to act as cultural brokers (Jang, 2017) and engage in
30 bridging behaviors (Ng, et. al, 2020), which is likely to enable the evolution toward optimally distinct spaces.
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44 Our final proposition captures this:

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47 *PI2: As intercultural competence increases, global work encounters are likely to evolve toward*
48 *optimally distinct spaces.*
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50 **DISCUSSION**

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52 In this paper, we present a meta-theory of global work encounters by integrating three theoretical
53 traditions. The meta-theory encompasses encounters in *cosmopolitan spaces* in which procedural norms and
54 status hierarchies are entrenched and maintained, as predicted by the expectation states theory (Correll &
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Ridgeway, 2004; Ridgeway, 2014); *hybrid spaces* that entail amalgamation, including adaptation with compromise in a novel third way, as predicted by theories of intercultural interaction and structuration (Earley & Gibson, 2002; Giddens, 1979, 1984); and *optimally distinctive spaces*, which entail individual adjustment processes to establish commonality while preserving unique cultures and identities (Brewer, 1991). Initial conditions shape which kind of encounter is likely to occur, but we also have indicated where leverage can prompt evolution from one type of space to another and outlined the consequences of each space for individuals, interpersonal dynamics, and task completion.

Theoretical Contribution

This meta-theory contributes to multiple scholarly debates and literatures, advancing a more specific and refined definition and understanding of global work. First, we delineated that the three distinct encounter spaces to date have all been considered “global,” but considering them all as the same phenomenon presents problems when the assumptions and processes associated with each one are not understood. For example, we have highlighted the importance of status dynamics and the assumptions about difference that are unique to each type of encounter. Our theoretical model for global work encounters suggests, as does domestic diversity research (Ely & Thomas, 2001), that “optimal distinctiveness” (Brewer, 1991) is the rarest and hardest to achieve—but may also most consistently result in positive outcomes across individuals, interpersonal relationships, and organizations. We offer a conceptual framework so that leaders understand the trade-offs between different spaces and can make informed choices about how they structure global work encounters.

Second, we considered how collaborations across cultural differences are similar to, but distinct from, collaboration across other dimensions of diversity—such as sex, gender, race or age—that have generally been studied in a domestic context. Much of that work has focused on diversity perspectives and climates (Ely & Thomas, 2001). We view these climates as one possible influence on global work encounters, captured in our approach to differences in initial conditions. However, this prior work does not address the encounter level, nor is it comprehensive in understanding other initial conditions, and the range of maintenance, adaptation,

and adjustment processes that may occur. Notably, only one of the three spaces that we identified maps onto a diversity perspective identified by Ely and Thomas (2001); their “learning and integration” climate shares initial conditions in optimally distinctive spaces. However, the cosmopolitan and hybrid spaces we described have no direct analogy in their diversity framework. By integrating ideas from global work and diversity research, we have brought important insights into power and status relevant to diversity to bear on global work; in addition to demography, we explored how culture and geographic bases can create fault lines and subgroups (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Thus, our theory shows how concepts regarding sex, gender, race, and age can also apply to other dimensions of identity that are salient in global work encounters.

Third, we identified how the spaces relate to each other. Specifically, we explored how one space can evolve into another space. In doing so, we add to a dynamic perspective on global work encounters (e.g., Cramton & Hinds, 2014; Gibson et al. 2022; Hinds, Liu, & Lyon, 2011) and of diverse teams (e.g., Srikanth et al. 2016). Specifically, our model deepens our understanding by clearly distinguishing between processes of adaptation and adjustment. In adaptive encounters, a group may not fulfill its proclaimed goal of a third way because a location with more power can dominate the norms of the group. In this instance, the hybrid space resembles a cosmopolitan space. However, as more change is embraced, the interaction could evolve into an optimally distinctive space, characterized by adjustment rather than adaptation, in which all participants have an opportunity to engage fully and thus learn from one another. Our model also illustrates that even when change does occur, much is still happening “below the surface” to maintain status hierarchies (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway, 2014). Social psychologists have identified these maintenance processes, but scholars of global work have focused much more on change and adaptation (e.g., Cramton & Hinds, 2014). We posit that it is important to understand both the processes of resistance as well as those of change.

Finally, by identifying not only the defining features of different global encounter spaces, and the levers for evolving from one to another, we offer a theory that can be used as a diagnostic road map. Many

features of global work feel inevitable—such as the compounding fault lines of contractors in the Global South and full-time employees in the Global North. But these are not inherent to global work. In fact, we posit that all three types of encounters may exist within a single firm. This aligns with Ely and Thomas' (2001) research documenting considerable within-firm variability on approaches to diversity. We extend that by examining the variance likely to occur at the level of the global work encounter. Depending on the structure and design of the work, as well as assumptions about difference, participants in a global work encounter may view collaborations as rigid interactions that limit their potential contributions and feel unappreciated, or they could experience collaborations as opportunities to bring their unique local perspective and fully participate.

Future Directions

Our model suggests numerous paths for future research. We have highlighted the need to study global work encounters longitudinally to further explore how spaces are established, subsequently evolve, or are maintained. Are all three spaces equally feasible as a starting place for global encounters? Or are hybrid spaces most likely to occur as a transition to an optimally distinctive space? Our theorizing suggests hybrid spaces are the least stable because interactions there involve significant adaptation and are the most sensitive to mediating conditions. As such, recognition that an encounter is a hybrid space may offer diagnostic potential for leaders and scholars, signaling that evolution toward an optimally distinct space should occur if the encounter is to sustain effectiveness. We also encourage future research to consider if there are levers beyond those we have identified that can be used to transform from one space to another. Future research might consider the role of the leader (e.g., Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011), group perceptions of diversity (e.g., Homan, et al., 2007), shared goals (Rico, et al., 2012), negotiation approaches (e.g., Bowles, Thomason & Bear, 2019), and

reciprocal respect (Gibson, 2022) in establishing and maintaining optimally distinct spaces. Finally, our model raises the question: How long does it take for a space to take root? And what are the challenges to maintaining a desired space? Future research could, for example, consider if the model we present is recursive, much as diversity scholars have begun to explore (Stephens, Rivera, & Townsend, 2021).

Second, the literature on global work has incorporated surprisingly few systematic assumptions about differences (DiTomaso et al. 2007), especially given their extensive treatment in the diversity literature (see Chattopadhyay et al. 2004; 2020; Jackman, 1994; van Knippenberg et al. 2004; 2013). We encourage research on global work to continue incorporating concepts from the diversity, equity, and inclusion literature, with an eye toward understanding how global work encounters can be inclusive. Research on relational demography could inform predictions of how individuals in global work relate to similar and different individuals (Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly, 1992; Zhang, George, and Chattopadhyay, 2020).

One relatively recent question in the diversity research is how different categories of difference manifest in the same or unique ways. Some research has found gender (as opposed to race) is a better predictor of inequality (e.g., Nishii, 2013; Turco, 2010). Other research has found that although ignoring differences may facilitate gender equality ("gender blind"), a comparable approach does not minimize racial inequality ("race blind") (Martin, 2018; Martin & Phillips, 2017; Torres & Martin, 2018). Relatedly, egalitarian advocacy predicts lower endorsement of sexism and racism, but not ageism (Martin & North, 2022). Not only is there much more intellectual soil to sow to understand the differences between diversity and inclusion both domestically and globally, it will also be useful to continue taking an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1988) to understand how categories such as sex, gender, race, age, culture and other dimensions coexist and shape individuals' experiences at work. Such explorations will build on calls from the global work literature, such as Zander's (2015) highlighting of the challenges of creating inclusion within global teams. With grounding from

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3 foundational theories of social identity (Haslam, 2001), we encourage research to continue exploring inclusion
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6 in global teams.
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9 Third, just as literature on global work could benefit from further incorporation of concepts from the
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11 diversity literature, concepts from global work can enrich the literature on diversity. We noted that because
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13 many cultural and national differences are not easily observable, those interacting in a global work encounter
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15 may make incorrect assumptions about other parties in the interaction. This is well-documented in the
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17 international management literature (e.g., see Kirkman et al. 2020 for a review), and can inform research on
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19 the constructed nature of social identities such as those associated with race and gender.
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22 Some specific concepts from cross-cultural work could be explored in the context of work within a
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24 single country. For example, our theorizing raises the question of whether hierarchies between locals and
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26 cosmopolitans occur only between people residing in different countries. We encourage a broader examination
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28 of diversity at work that acknowledges that even individuals within the same country can incur pressures,
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30 tensions, and challenges of cultural adaptation and adjustment such as when people identifying with different
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32 cultures may be pressured to meet a “global standard” (e.g., Al Dabbagh et al., 2016; Neeley, 2013). The
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34 concept of locals could also apply to domestic contexts such as native Hawaiians working in the business
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36 district of Honolulu or New Haven “townies” competing for jobs with Yale graduates. How is working as a
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38 local in global and domestic contexts similar and different? Research on organizational culture might also
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40 explore how women and nonbinary individuals experience, adapt to, and change masculine work cultures
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42 (Cooper, 2000; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; O’Neill & Rothbard, 2017). And our exploration of the consequences
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44 by level (individual, interpersonal and task) could be fruitful scaffolding for the literature on diversity, equity,
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46 and inclusion at those points where scholars are split between the human rights (Van Dijk, Van Engen &
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48 Paauwe, 2012) and business perspectives (Herring, 2009) on diversity. We encourage dialogue between the
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50 global work and diversity literatures instead of efforts to contrast race and gender versus culture and country.
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54 Finally, our review of the literature on global work highlights the continuing prevalence of a Western
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56 perspective (Valdes, Thomason, Bentancor, Jeria & Troncoso, 2022; Hinds et al., 2011) and Western,
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58 Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) samples (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).
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Thus, the call from Hinds et al. (2011) to “put the global” in the study of global work remains pertinent. A focus on a specific region not only overlooks a broader population of workers but also risks hampering theory development (Chen, Leung, and Chen, 2009). For example, cosmopolitan spaces are much less likely to occur when WEIRD populations collaborate with one another; examination of other contexts is required to reveal these dynamics. Furthermore, different organizational structures and norms can offer new social processes that might not occur in samples of conventionally WEIRD populations (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). The work of Thomason (2022) in the Middle East and Gibson (2022) in Indigenous Australia are examples of research on global work encounters in underrepresented contexts. Future research should continue in novel contexts to uncover additional assumptions, overlooked elements of work, and collaboration strategies.

In conclusion, global work can take many forms. By delineating the theoretical explanations for encounters that create cosmopolitan, hybrid, or optimal distinctive spaces, scholars can more precisely understand the opportunities and challenges individuals, teams, and organizations face in global work. Furthermore, we hope our theory of global work encounters will support not only international collaborations, but also other work encounters across many kinds of difference.

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Table 1. Comparing Concepts That Address Interaction Across Cultures and Nations

Construct	Definition	Comparison
Global Work Encounters (GWE) (current paper)	Those instances in which individuals associated with different cultural, national or geopolitical institutional contexts interact for the purpose of completing organizationally sanctioned tasks.	NA
Intercultural Interaction Space (Zellmer-Bruhn & Gibson, 2014)	The physical, cognitive and affective features of the situational context in which people of different cultures interact	More specific than GWE; focusing on the situation in which interaction across cultures occurs
Cross-national Collaboration (Hinds et al. 2011)	Situations where workers are collaborating across national boundaries	More specific than GWE; focusing on collaboration occurring across formally defined nations
Intercultural Interaction (Thomas & Ravlin, 1995)	A process involving perception-behavior-response cycles among individuals from different cultures	Broader than GWE; involves interaction across cultures, but not limited to the work setting
Multicultural experiences (Maddux et al. 2021)	Exposure to elements or members of a different culture(s)	Broader than GWE, does not require interaction and may be outside of a work setting (i.e., could be as result of tourism or education)
Acculturation (Berry, 2005)	The process of change that occurs in the behavioral repertoire, value system, and personal identity of individuals upon migration	Broader than GWE, can occur with mere exposure to another party, does not require interaction and may be outside of a work setting

Table 2. Three Archetypes of Global Work Encounters

	Cosmopolitan	Hybrid	Optimal Distinctiveness
Initial Condition: Geography	Spans low- and high-status geographies	Geography is culturally blind	Geography is culturally strategic
Initial Condition: Work Design	Strong subgroup	No subgroup	Moderate subgroup
Initial Condition: Assumption of Difference	Engrain	Discard	Leverage
Defining Feature	Status Entrenchment	Amalgamation	Uniqueness & Commonality
Processes	Maintenance	Adaptation	Adjustment
Theoretical Foundations (Key Citations)	Expectation States Theory - Ridgeway & Correll (2004) Status Hierarchy - Metiu (2006)	Intercultural Interaction Theory - Earley & Gibson (2002) Structuration Theory - DeSantis & Poole (1994)	Optimal Distinctiveness Theory - Brewer (1991) Diversity - Ely & Thomas (2001)
Summary Description	Members, especially those with high status, maintain status hierarchies and procedural norms in which the global is higher status than the local.	Individuals adapt and compromise to craft a hybrid or “third” space.	Members actively incorporate elements of their own culture, and yet the group as a whole embraces and applies each member or subgroup’s skills, understandings, and approaches.
Examples of Empirical Research	Al-Dabbagh, Bowles & Thomason (2016) - Interview & experiment Metiu (2006) - Interview & observation Neeley (2016) - Interview & observation	Cramton & Hinds (2014) - Interview & observation Hajro, Gibson & Pudelko (2017) - Interview & observation Molinsky (2013) - Qualitative analysis of MBA students’ written responses	Gibson, Dunlop, Majchrzak & Chia (2021) - Interview, observation, written communication Jang (2017) - Interview & experiment Kirkman, Cordery, Mathie, Rosen & Kukenberg (2013) - Interviews & survey
Outcomes Individual (<i>Identity</i>) Interpersonal (<i>Mutuality</i>) Task (<i>Synthesized knowledge</i>)	Individual: Identity is attached to home country; usually negative for low-status “locals”; mostly positive for high-status “cosmopolitans.” Interpersonal: Lacking mutuality Task: There is little synthesized knowledge because some participation is not accepted.	Individual: An individual may identify with the superordinate team or organizational identity; some individuals experience a lack of fit. Interpersonal: There may be a mutuality of norms, but when norms are not authentic to all, conflict may ensure. Task: The synthesis of knowledge is unstable, and contingent on collective processes.	Individual: Multiple identities can co-exist. Interpersonal: Mutual learning takes place. Task: Knowledge is synthesized because the contributions of all members are welcomed and valued.

Figure 1. Model of Global Work Encounters

