

# Managing Scientific Journals: A Cultural Viewpoint

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**Abstract:** *The paper seeks to explore the role of Editors-in-chief (EiC) within the Library and Information Science, from a cultural view point. Specifically, the paper aims at identifying how the culture of EiC influences the course of a journal belonging to a publishing house. The research was conducted in the event industry. With 5 library events as a point of reference, the paper investigates the negotiation process between EiC of scientific journals and Library Event Organizers (LEO) so as to record the course and nature of negotiations among people with the same as well as different culture. Participant behavior is further tested through the websites of the libraries. Unexpectedly, low-context cultures have different reactions as an outcome of their working experience and their lasting interaction with researchers. Cultural differences can influence the outcome of the negotiation; however, they are dependent variables strongly associated with the work and professional experience of the counterparts involved.*

**Keywords:** *Library and Information Science, Library event, Culture*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Many papers have focused on several issues within the Library and Information Studies (LIS) such as the “image problem” (Badovinac and Juznic, 2011), the “hierarchy of action” (Jones, 2011) and the “philosophy of science” to name a few. The present paper concentrates on the management of scientific journals, a rather demanding task in nature for Editors-in-chief (EiC) and a great part of LIS. This issue has been explored in Omekwu’s paper (2007) in which the challenges that EiC face during the production of journals are highlighted among others. However, the present research focuses on the cultural viewpoint (Triantafyllopoulos, Konstantopoulos 2010) of the journal management.

Since EiC deal with the appropriate organization of resources and information so as to serve the needs of the target group, it remains unclear whether the cultural characteristics of managers foster or impede the behavior of end-users. The literature review reveals that there are two main categories of the cultural context: high-context cultures and low-context cultures. The difference between high- and low-context cultures

concentrates on the way information is disseminated across the interested parties (Adair, 2003). That is to say that, in low-context cultures, communication is direct and depends on the words spoken.

On the contrary, in high-context cultures communication is influenced by what lies behind the words spoken. Indirect communication is strongly affected by non-verbal expressions such as the tone of voice, gestures, body language and others. Gong (2009), among others, provides evidence of the adaptability of high-context cultures by concluding that they tend to be open and effective to e-services across nations. It goes without saying that high-context cultures can have greater chances of success, since they can handle situations with both high- and low-context cultures. Based on this, high-context cultures have the adaptability to communicate in a low-context orientated way so as to help the encounter to stay attuned, as opposed to low-context cultures.

After identifying the main characteristic that distinguishes one context culture from another, the paper focuses on two crucial features:

- a) What is the significance of the EiC cultural background when it comes to co-operations between scientific journals and library events?
- b) How does the cultural background of the EiC influence the decision making process of the end-users (event participants)?

It is assumed that the origin of the EiC influences the context of the journal, as his/her personal traits are incorporated in the vision of the journal. O’ Brien and Meadows (2003) contend the strong connection between CEOs and the vision as “the CEO put his mark on the process too, since it is he who decides whether it happens at all, how, when and where it happens, who should be involved and what methods, if any, should be adopted” (O’ Brien and Meadows, 2003, p. 494). Since the connection between CEOs and vision is a decisive factor in the development of an organization’s progress, it is assumed that the origin of EiC, which characterizes their way of thinking and acting, influences the context of the journal in which he/she belongs. Inevitably, the editorial board of the journal is influenced by the vision of the EiC, a vision that has been shaped by the cultural context of the EiC.

The research of the present paper was conducted during events that took place in public libraries. Therefore, the selected groups that submit or use the

articles of journals are not the only end-users. The Library event organizers (LEO) are also end-users since they interact with EiC of the supporting journals of libraries. The reason for conducting this type of research is based on the assumption that journal publications play an important role in the continual advancement of the career of academics (Falk, 2003). Therefore, it enables the authors of the present paper to measure and evaluate the way that the cultural background of EiC influences co-operations with library events as well as how the end users (participants) react to the difference in patterns.

## II. METHODS

### A. Material and Methods

The research was conducted during the negotiation phase of five public library events. 3 to 5 journals support the organization of each event, managing to ensure from 145 to 382 participants in each event and, approximately, an average of 3710 website visitor views for each one. Almost an average of 1650 unique views was received by each event. The average time that each visitor remained on each library website was 8 minutes and 9 seconds and the average percentage of the bounce rate was 29.87%.

The literature review has revealed that there is a clear demarcation in the countries that are included in high- or low-context cultures. Wurtz (2005), in her paper regarding the cross-cultural analysis of websites, categorizes Japan, China and Korea as high-context cultures whereas Germany, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries as low-context cultures. The culture of the United States is identified as low-context (Gudykunst, 1983; Money et al., 1998; Adair et al., 2001) while France (Biswas et al., 1992) and Italy (Van Everdingen and Waats, 2003) are classified as high-context cultures; Spain is regarded as a high-context culture by Simintiras and Thomas (1998).

The analysis was mainly focused on the interaction among members of the LEO negotiation team and EiC of both high- and low-context cultures.

A total of sixteen negotiators were asked to participate in this research. All possible research connections between the two parties in question were tested and analyzed, during the negotiation process. The perceptions of LEO of high-context cultures (HCL) while negotiating with high- (HCE) and low-context (LCE) EiC were recorded. The same procedure was followed for low-context LEO (LCL) with HCE and LCE EiC. By using a five-point Likert scale, they were all asked to evaluate the outcome of negotiation process based on their interaction with the encounter. The rating scale one to five (very negative to extremely positive) was based on the overall perceptions of each interested party regarding the ease of communication and the effectiveness of the negotiation process. The outcomes depict the internal evaluation process of the participants in the negotiation that emerges from their interaction with counterparts of similar or different context cultures.

Along with the analysis of the internal evaluation of the interested parties, the participants' reaction to the involvement of supporting journals in the library events was further noted down. It was considered important to include this data since the participants are the end-users of the services offered by the library events. According to this assumption, their cultural context may have an influence on their decision-making process regarding which journal to select for publication.

With the use of strategic maps, the rate of participants' online visits from high- and low-context culture countries was noted down. The flow of visits was recorded after the announcement of the participation of scientific journals of both high- and low-context EiC, based on figures from both high- and low-context countries.

### B. EiD and LEO Results

The average score of the interaction between HCLs and HCEs was five for both groups. High-context LEO and EiD have positive perceptions of the negotiation process without any impediments blocking their communication channels. A very high score is placed in HCLs' evaluations when negotiating with LCEs. In this case, LCEs also have high perceptions for their counterparts' negotiation style -a rather unexpected fact considering the difficulty in the ability of low-context cultures to adapt to the characteristics of high-context cultures.

The lowest scores were gathered when LEO were from low-context cultures. When LCLs negotiate with HCEs, the first group place very high scores, which was expected since high-context cultures may use direct communication so as to facilitate the communication process to low-context cultures. Only two out of five is the average score that HCEs place on LCLs, which indicates that the negotiation process is impeded by communication obstacles that have arisen. HCEs have very low levels of perceptions regarding their counterparts' negotiation style, a finding that indicates the LCLs' intention for the "fixed-pie" scenario. The most aggravating scenario of negotiation is found during the negotiation process of LCLs and LCEs. The small scores indicate that although there is a strong interaction among the negotiators, the communication is impeded by the negotiation tactic employed.

	HCE	LCE
HCL	5-5	4-4
LCM	4-2	2-1

Table 1. Average Interaction Score

### E. Library Participants Results

After the negotiation phase, the journals that managed to lead to a mutual agreement were announced on the library website, under the webpage "Publications". The first phase of the announcement included journals whose EiC belong to high-context cultures. After the announcement, an e-mail marketing strategy was

employed so as to inform potential participants regarding the new co-operation. It is assumed that the number of online visits to the specific webpage is an indication of the participants' predisposition to publish their papers in these journals. It is considered therefore important to identify if participant reaction is influenced by journals of high or low cultural context. The statistics were collected with the use of Google analytics. Google analytics is a statistical program for the detailed record of crucial elements regarding the visitors' perceptions, reactions and trends. It is a useful statistical tool which allows the introduction of benchmarking against competitive websites.

Norway		
April 15, 2009 - April 30, 2009		25
March 30, 2009 - April 14, 2009		15
% Change		66.67%
France		
April 15, 2009 - April 30, 2009		23
March 30, 2009 - April 14, 2009		7
% Change		228.57%

**Figure 1.** Low- and high-context cultures after the announcement of a high-context supporting journal

The analysis includes figures which illustrate the level of visits from one high- and one low-context culture (Figure 1).

Norway belongs to low-context cultures whereas France to high-context ones. Based on Figure 1, Norway increased its visits after the announcement of the high-context journal on one library website by a percentage of 66.67%. After the announcement of the journal, France showed an increase almost fourfold in size. However, the overall number of visits is less than those of Norway. Although there is a tendency of high-context cultures to publish their papers in high-context journals, low-context cultures are also interested in publishing their papers in these journals.

The second phase of the announcement involved the participation of journals whose EiC belong to low-context cultures. E-mail marketing communication was once more employed, highlighting the involvement of a low-context culture journal in one library event. Based on Figure 7.2, the United States, which is a low-context culture, had low levels of online visits before the announcement; the darker the shade of grey is, the more visits a state has.

In Figure 2, the map overlay demonstrates only a few states which are grey in color. Only one country appears to have a satisfactory level of visits.

After the announcement of the new co-operation, the levels of visits multiplied (Figure 7.3); the statistics of the country's online visits increased by 440%. In Figure 7.3, the grey parts correspond to visits made by the users of the website.

The differences that appear in the layouts of Figures 7.2 and 7.3 are evident and encouraging enough, considering the relatively short period that the new co-operation is online.



**Figure 2.** The level of online visits after the announcement of low-context journals



**Figure 3.** The level of online visits before the announcement of low-context journals.

Italy, which belongs to high-context cultures, had a similar reaction; however the increase was much smaller. Figure 7.4 illustrates online visits before the announcement of the co-operation of supporting journals on one library website.

Figure 7.4 indicates that online visits were relatively few before the announcement of the co-operation of supporting journals and the release of the e-mail marketing communication strategy. As in the case of the

United States, Italy increased its online visits after the announcement (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5 indicates that the level of online visits has risen after the announcement of the new co-operation. However, even though there is an increase of 43.33% in the region, it is lower than the level of increase in online visits in the United States.



**Figure 4.** The level of online visits before the announcement of low-context journals

Overall, participants' online visits increased in both situations, irrespective of the level of increase. Based on the figures, there is a positive growth rate in online visits, a fact that provides support to the importance of participants in the involvement of supporting journals in library events.



**Figure 5.** The level of online visits after the announcement of low-context

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence of the present research reveals that the negotiation process strongly depends on the cultural context of counterparts since communication is distributed in different ways. High- and low-context cultures do affect the way that the end-users in library

events react based on the EiC's cultural background. The importance of the intra- and inter-cultural nature of negotiations in the establishment of trust between the interested parties, as stated by Elahee and Brooks (2004), influences the negotiation outcome, in a different way though, in each cultural group.

High-context cultures invest on trust when negotiating with cultures of the same context, since they aim at approaching win-win negotiation outcomes. However, the same is not solicited by low-context cultures when negotiating with other low-context ones. When performing business with the same cultural context, low-context cultures do not invest on mutual trust and gain, but seek approaches that ensure them the best possible advantages.

The present study shed light on the adaptability of high-context cultures when involved with cultures of low-context. The possible win-win outcomes between HCLs and LCEs provide support to this statement. However, the research reveals that there are occasions in which low-context cultures can perform satisfactory negotiation outcomes when involved in the negotiation process with high-context cultures. These occasions may occur when the level of working experience and interaction with members of different cultural background is high. Even in the case of HCEs and LCLs, the perceptions of the first group were very low, thus encouraging the finding regarding how working experience influences LCLs behavior.

The research further reveals that participants are influenced by the same cultural background of EiC. However, this influence is not the motivating factor for publishing papers. The preference in journals is not restricted by the EiC cultural background but by the purpose that the journals serve. Academics have the experience to address to journals of different a cultural context than their own, since they have high levels of interaction. This interaction has cultivated the field for publishing in any cultural context journals, although a slight tendency towards high-context journals is noted by both cultures.

The importance that needs to be placed on cultural similarities and dissimilarities is of the essence when conducting library events. The cultural background of the interested parties does play an important role and configures the negotiation style employed. Underestimating the background of encounters may lead to negotiation failure. However, within the event industry, the constant interaction among researchers and the experience obtained throughout the years also influence the negotiation style, process and outcome.

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