

DIALOGUE, DEBATE, AND DISCUSSION

Debate on Informal Interpersonal Networks: *Guanxi* vs. *Wasta*

Johann Peter Murmann 

Department of Management & Strategy, University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland
Email: j.peter.murmann@unisg.ch

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MOR's D3 section seeks to stimulate dialogue, debate, and discussion among scholars. When I took over as editor of D3, MOR's editorial team brainstormed how to further develop the D3 feature. We agreed that in addition to seeking original articles, we also wanted to encourage debate on articles that have already appeared in MOR. In this issue, we publish a commentary on Shaalan, Eid, and Tourky's (2022) article 'De-Linking from Western Epistemologies: Using *Guanxi*-Type Relationships to Attract and Retain Hotel Guests in the Middle East'. The commentary, entitled 'Questioning the Appropriateness of Examining *Guanxi* in a *Wasta* Environment: Why Context Should Be Front and Center in Informal Network Research', has been written by Horak, Abosag, Hutchings, Alsarhan, Ali, Al-Twal, Weir, ALHussan, and AL-Husan (2023). As their title suggests, the commentators take issue with transferring the concept of *guanxi* into an environment in which another idea about informal interpersonal networks, *wasta*, already exists. I sense that the desire to write a critical comment was fueled by the fact that Shaalan et al. (2022) never referred to the concept of '*wasta*' in their original article. We invited the authors of the original article to write a rejoinder (Shaalan, Eid, & Tourky, 2023) in which they emphasize even further that they only argue that *guanxi*-type relationships exist in the Middle East and not that *guanxi* itself exists.

In my view, at the heart of the disagreement between the two sets of authors is a different conception of the central aim of social sciences (Murmann, 2014). For Shaalan, Eid, and Tourky, it is to develop concepts that are as generalizable as possible across different countries and times. Hence, their desire to transfer an idea from China to the Middle East. For Horak et al. (2023), the aim is to develop concepts that may be less generalizable but can better explain behavior in a particular context. We thank both sets of authors for engaging in this debate and allowing us to show that MOR is committed to stimulating debates about articles already published in the journal.

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