Blaming leaders for organizational accidents: Proxy logic in collective- versus individual-agency cultures

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Abstract

The current research investigates whether observers blame leaders for organizational accidents even when these managers are known to be causally uninvolved. Past research finds that the public blames managers for organizational harm if the managers are perceived to have personally played a causal role. The present research argues that East Asian perceivers, who are culturally oriented to focus on the causal influence of groups [Menon, T., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (1999). Culture and the construal of agency: Attribution to individual versus group dispositions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 701–717.], blame managers based on the behavior of the group, not only based on the behavior of the individual managers. We argue that perceivers first assign responsibility to the collectivity, the organizational unit or some group within it, and then extend responsibility to the manager representing it. We tested this proposal in a series of studies with a community sample in Japan and matched student samples of Japanese and Americans. Results show that perceivers who are culturally oriented to focus on collective-level causality (Japanese, more so than Americans; Asian Americans, more so than European Americans) blame leaders through proxy logic. Implications of this intuitive logic and of the cultural difference are discussed.

Many of the worst accidents in industrialized societies result from the activities of corporations, or more literally from the actions that employees take in the course of their work. How do members of society assign blame for these accidents? Do they blame the corporations or individual persons within them? What simplifying logic do they use to reach definite conclusions about blame from these highly ambiguous events?

Previous findings hold that social perceivers assign blame to individuals through a logic that follows closely from their causal attributions to persons. Research has found that perceivers blame persons proximal to the harmful outcome (Shultz & Schleifer, 1983). For example, an oil spill might be blamed on the boat pilot who was at the wheel when the tanker hit the reef. Alternatively, it might be blamed on higher-level managers who indirectly caused the crash through actions or failures to act in their roles as managers (Hamilton, 1978a). For example, the spill might be blamed on a supervisor who relayed faulty navigation information or one who overlooked the pilot's drinking problem.

However, the comprehensiveness of this model of person-focused blaming is thrown into question by recent cross-cultural findings. Menon, Morris, Chiu, and Hong (1999) found that East Asian perceivers, compared to North Americans, are oriented to assume collective

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agency; they are more likely to causally trace ambiguous outcomes, such as an accident, to properties of collectivities rather than properties of individual persons. East Asians might causally attribute the oil spill to the oil firm's aggressive strategy or the tanker crew's lax safety norms. In the present paper, we call this psychological tendency to focus on the causal influence of groups (or organizations) *collective agency orientation*. We also use the term, collective-agency-oriented cultures, to refer to cultures where people on average have strong collective agency orientation. Collective agency orientation is more specific than the broader concept of collectivism: Collective agency orientation focuses on a cognitive tendency in causal perceptions, whereas collectivism also encompasses many social values and attitudes. Given that past evidence for collective agency orientation is limited to East Asians, we will focus our arguments on East Asians. The notion that East Asians are oriented for collective agency raises questions about how they assign blame: Given that they see collectives as having caused the accident, do they exonerate individual persons from blame? Or do they nonetheless blame individuals, but through a different blaming logic than that which has been identified in the traditional (largely Western) literature?

In the present research, we propose that East Asians use a different logic in assigning blame to individuals for accidents and other negative corporate outcomes. In this logic the first step is assigning responsibility[1] to the collectivity, the organizational unit in which the problem arose. But then, in a second step, blame is extended from this collectivity to an individual manager who represents it, such as the CEO or division head. In this judgmental process, the perceiver pins blame on the leader as a symbolic *proxy* for the culpable collectivity. This manager's responsibility comes from being viewed as representing the collectivity, not from being perceived as playing a role in causing the outcome. Hence, East Asians can assign responsibility to leaders without attributing causality to persons. Furthermore, as we shall see, this proxy logic guides East Asian perceivers to blame managers in scenarios where North American perceivers judge the managers to be entirely innocent.

In the current studies, we empirically document the phenomenon of proxy blaming for the first time. We find

that East Asian perceivers respond to accident scenarios by blaming the surrounding organizational unit and then extending blame to the managers perceived to represent it. A model of the underlying judgment process is developed and several specific hypotheses about its boundary conditions are tested. Before developing these hypotheses, it is worthwhile to review the past research on blaming and on causal attribution that provide the springboard for our theorizing.

Traditional models of responsibility assignment

Responsibility assignment, as Brickman et al. (1982) noted, can refer to judgments of responsibility for a problem (who is blameworthy or at fault?) or judgments of responsibility for its solution (who is to remedy the matter?). Researchers have focused on the former meaning—judgments of who is at fault. Drawing on Heider's (1958) analysis of person perception, social psychologists (Shaver, 1985; Shultz & Schleifer, 1983; Weiner, 1995b) have argued that responsibility judgments hinge on the causal attributions to a target person. This model explains why accidents are often blamed on the low-level employees most proximal to the negative outcome.

Organizational and legal psychologists have augmented this model by incorporating the notion of social expectations (or roles) (Hamilton, 1978a; Hamilton & Sanders, 1981; Lloyd-Bostock, 1983). In these models, perceivers sometimes blame supervisors perceived to have an indirect causal role (Hamilon, 1978b; Hamilton, 1986). For instance, managers are blamed when they are perceived to have been negligent in carrying out duties or obligations of their organizational or occupational role.

Further insights have come from management research on causal attributions and leadership perception (Calder, 1977). In these models, the perceiver assigns blame (as well as credit) to the leader of an organization based on a romanticized conception of the leader as controlling the outcomes (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Extremely good or bad outcomes increase perceivers' motivation to understand and explain the events and hence increases their tendency to attribute outcomes to the leader (Meindl et al., 1985). Compared to the psychological models, this assumes a less detailed causal analysis by the perceiver. Yet it still assumes that perceivers make responsibility judgments based on attributions to individual persons.

Despite their differing emphases, these traditional models share a common premise—responsibility assignment hinges on causal attribution to persons. This *personal causality* logic of blaming is undoubtedly a major current in people's intuitions about responsibility assignment. However, it may not be the only one. The focus on personal causality may reflect the individualism of the

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[1] Some theorists conceptually distinguish blame and responsibility according to criteria such as the following: (a) blame conveys emotional negativity whereas responsibility is affectively neutral (Weiner, 1995a), (b) actors can avoid blame by justifying their actions but they are still responsible for the harmful consequence (Shaver, 1985; Shultz & Darley, 1991), (c) the magnitude of the outcome affects blame more than it affects responsibility (Shultz & Darley, 1991; Weiner, 1995a). However, like most researchers, we used them synonymously. We study a class of outcomes—harmful organizational accidents—which are negative, never fully justified, and large in magnitude, so perceivers' responsibility judgments can be called blame.

Western cultures from which this research springs (Ho & Chiu, 1998; Sampson, 1977). Hence, other logics may be revealed by looking outside of these cultures.

Cultural variation

Recent cross-cultural research suggests that cultures vary in the orientation to encode individuals as opposed to collectivities as agents—see reviews by Morris, Menon, and Ames, 2001 and Yamaguchi, 2001. In Western culture individual persons are conceptualized to be agentic (i.e., autonomous and goal-directed actors) whereas collectivities are not. In East Asian culture collectivities, such as families, groups, and organizations, are conceptualized to be just as agentic as individual persons. Morris et al. (2001) have argued that the Western conception of personal agency is a legacy of the Western religious and philosophical tradition that emphasizes individual soul, individual rights, and individual freedom, whereas the East Asian conception of collective agency is legacy of the Confucian traditions of prioritizing the social order and the individuals' duties within it.

Empirical evidence for the cultural difference in agency orientation comes from tasks in which people ascribe qualities to individual and group targets and from tasks in which people causally attribute outcomes of individual and group actors. An initial study of agency beliefs (Menon et al., 1999) found that Chinese participants ascribe autonomy to groups such as families or organizations to a greater extent than American participants. In a variant task, Kashima et al. (2005) asked participants to rate the extent to which an individual or a group target could be said to "intend," "decide," "wish," "plan," and so forth. On this measure, East Asians (Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese) rated groups to be equally agentic as individual persons, whereas North Americans and Western Europeans rated individual persons to be more agentic than groups.

In addition to this evidence from explicit ascriptions of agency, a number of studies have found cultural differences in tendencies to attribute outcomes to dispositions of individuals versus groups. When presented cases about negative outcomes following an individuals' actions, American participants have a stronger tendency to causally attribute to the individual's dispositions, whereas when presented with analogous cases about a group's actions, Chinese participants have a stronger tendency to causally attribute to the group's dispositions (Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Menon et al., 1999). Similar findings came from a content analysis of American as opposed to Japanese newspapers coverage of several corporate scandals—Japanese reporters were more likely than their American peers to make causal references to collective-level properties of the corporation (Menon et al., 1999; Study 1).

Yet does this tendency for East Asian perceivers to causally attribute to the collectivity mean that they exonerate individuals from blame? To explore this, let us consider some salient examples in which the Japanese public has directed blame for negative organizational outcomes to particular individuals (and it has been accepted).

- When a Japan Air Line jet crashed into a mountain in 1985 and caused the death of more than 500 people on board, one of the major newspapers immediately commented, "the CEO's resignation is unavoidable." The CEO actually apologized and resigned soon afterward, even though the cause of the accident was not identified then.
- When it came to light in 1996 that the Japanese Health Ministry's negligence had resulted in HIV contamination of blood products (and the death of hundreds of hemophiliacs), public outcry led the Minister to apologize publicly and accept a 20% pay cut, despite the fact that the Minister had just joined the organization recently, long after the harm was caused.
- The 2002 revelation of a medical accident and subsequent cover-up at a Tokyo hospital sparked public condemnation that led to the resignation of the hospital's director, who had started in this position after the cover-up had taken place.

These Japanese examples suggest that managers are blamed through a different logic than the one identified in Western literature, in which personal blame follows from the attribution of personal causality. Of course, examples do not prove this. Each case involved a wealth of details that perceivers might have used to construe the managers as somehow causally involved. For instance, in the first case, the CEO's policies may have been seen as having contributed to a causal chain that culminated in the accident. Yet the examples can guide us in hypothesizing about a blaming process that follows from a collective agency orientation.

We propose that the above examples reflect that perceivers assign blame to the organization and then extend it to the head manager. The manager is blamed as a proxy for the blameworthy collectivity, irrespective of whether the manager had any involvement in causing the harmful outcome. Perceivers who causally attribute outcomes to collective-level factors are led first to assign blame to the organization, as a collectivity. Yet this is not an endpoint in responsibility judgment, because it is often difficult to fully sanction an organization (Coffee, 1981) even when perceivers have the motivation to blame an organization for wrongdoing. As Coffee put it, organizations have "no soul to damn; no body to kick." Corporations are abstract legal entities; they are not humiliated by an observer's reproach; they cannot be incarcerated or otherwise made to suffer in proportion to

the suffering they have caused. The difficulty of punishing an organization may lead perceivers to extend blame from the collectivity to the individual who stands for it, the top manager. Consistent with this, Zemba (in press) found that the perceived responsibility of the innocent manager increased in proportion to the perceived responsibility of the culpable organization when directly punishing the organization was difficult, but not when it was easy. This suggests that the manager serves as a proxy for culpable collectivity, irrespective of any personal role in causing the problem. We can state this primary hypothesis as

H1: Perceivers who blame an accident on the organization as a collectivity are likely to extend blame, by proxy, to a head manager.

Having stated a primary hypothesis about the judgmental process, it is now important to draw hypotheses about factors affecting the blame assignment to the organization and the blame extension from the organization to its manager. First, we assume that perceivers blame an organization when they perceive the organization as acting agentically—that is acting to fulfill goals or intentions. Because an organization has no body, its goals and intentions are fulfilled through its employees' actions. Hence, an important antecedent of perceiving an organization as blameworthy is the perception that the employee caused the harm in fulfillment of the organization's goal, when they are on-duty as opposed to off-duty.

H2: Accidents are more likely to be blamed on the organization if they ensue from employee actions that fulfill the organization's mandate than from actions outside of the organization's mandate.

Another antecedent of blaming an organization pertains to the perceiver rather than the event perceived. Past research has found that perceivers are oriented toward collective agency in East Asia. Hence, in a small step from past findings, we propose

H3: East Asian perceivers are more likely than Western perceivers to blame an accident on the organization.

In addition to the factors affecting the blame assignment to the organization, our proposed mechanism suggests a factor affecting the blame extension from the organization to a manager. We assume that perceivers extend the blame to a manager to symbolically sanction the organization. If this assumption holds, organizational blame should be extended to a manager to the extent that the manager is perceived to currently represent or stand for the organization. Though perceived representativeness should be largely a function of a managers's hierarchical position, not all top managers are perceived to represent or personify their organization to the same extent. Proxy blaming will occur when the manager's role is perceived as representing or standing for the organization. Importantly, what should matter in the proxy logic is the manager's role, at the time that blame is placed, not the manager's role in the past, at the time the accident was caused.

H4: Blame is more likely to be extended from an organization to its head manager to the extent that the manager is perceived to currently represent the organization.

In sum, the foregoing hypotheses are illustrated in Fig. 1. The primary hypothesis is that perceivers who blame the organization as a collectivity extend their blame to its top managers (H1). The rest of the hypotheses concern conditions that govern the steps of this alternative mechanism for blaming managers. Blaming the organization should be more likely when the accident ensues from actions fulfilling the organization's mandate (H2) and when the perceiver is culturally oriented to per-
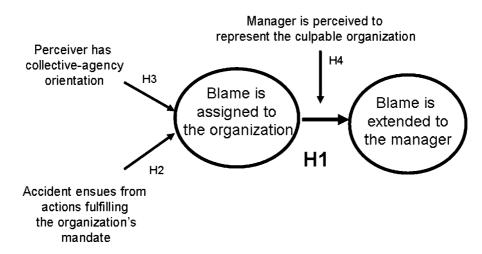

Fig. 1. Proposed judgmental path that underlies the proxy blaming. *Note.* Circles show steps of judgment in proxy blaming.

ceive collective agency (H3). Extending blame to the manager should be more likely when the manager is perceived as representing the organization (H4).

The present studies

We tested our proposal about the proxy logic of blaming managers in a series of studies. Study 1, using a Japanese community sample, explored the hypotheses that blame is extended to causally uninvolved managers (H1) and that this depends on the accident ensuing from actions fulfilling the organization's mandate (H2). Then, Study 2 compared student samples of Japanese and Americans, testing the primary hypothesis in a different accident scenario as well as testing the cultural hypothesis (H3) and the hypothesis that blame-extension depends on perceiving that the manager represents the organization (H4). Finally, in Study 3 we use a different accident scenario to once again test H3 and H4.

Although in many accident scenarios a given manager might be blamed either by the logic of personal causality or by the proxy logic, our scenarios were designed to isolate the proxy blaming process. In the first two studies, this was done through a condition of the experiment in which the top manager was described as having just recently taken office, after the time when the accident would have been caused. This newly arrived manager would be seen as currently representing the culpable organization but *not* as having been in control at the time the accident was caused. In Study 3, we isolate proxy blaming through a different structure. Unlike in the prior studies, the scenario describes a manager who has been at the helm of the organization for a long time. However, in one condition the organization has only recently acquired in a merger the units from which the problem originated. Again, this is a condition where the manager is seen as currently representing the culpable organization units but *not* as having been in control at the time the accident was caused. In sum, although we assume the proxy blaming logic is applied very broadly, our experiments focused on specific scenarios where it applies but the personal causality logic does not.

Study 1: The shipper's traffic accident

Study 1 presented Japanese participants with scenarios about a traffic accident involving an employee of a shipping company. We manipulated whether or not the accident ensued from actions that fulfill the organization's mandate (whether the employee was driving on-duty vs. off-duty). We examined the extent to which perceivers assign responsibility for the accident to the organization and to the manager. Our prediction was that blame would be assigned to the organization and by

extension to the causally uninvolved manager (H1) but that this should only be true when the accident ensues from actions that fulfill the organization's mandate (H2).

Method

Respondents

The questionnaire was sent to a probability sample in Kashiwa, a neighboring city of Tokyo. Kashiwa is a city with a population of 328,000, and its major industry is commerce. The sample of 1000 people, ages 25–69, was selected using two-stage probability proportionate sampling: selecting sampling areas in Kashiwa at the first stage and a probability proportionate sampling conducted within each area at the second stage. Fifteen out of 1000 mailings failed to reach respondents due to change of address or other reasons. Four hundred fifteen people sent back the survey—yielding a 42.1% response rate. Three-fourths of these respondents were assigned to the conditions of this experiment, whereas the others answered different questions and are not participants in this study. The mean age of the respondents who participated in the experiment was 49.7 years ($SD = 12.44$, $N = 325$), and 50.8% of them were female.

Scenario

Respondents read the following information about the accident:

An employee of a shipping company hit a person while speeding. The victim suffered an injury that took a week to heal completely. The company has a policy emphasizing safety more than anything. Speeding is strictly prohibited and employee's pay is reduced if he/she causes a big accident. The employee, however, had the habit of speeding.

Manipulation of the accident context

The context of the accident was manipulated in the scenario: The accident occurred either while the driver was driving his own vehicle on a holiday, helping his friend to move; while the driver was driving his own vehicle on a holiday, helping his supervisor to move; or while the driver was driving on the job. This final on-duty condition was predicted to differ from the two off-duty conditions. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of these three conditions.

Judgments about causality and responsibility

Causal perception was assessed by asking respondents to what extent they thought that the company created an environment that encouraged the employees to speed. Responsibility judgments were assessed by asking respondents to judge the responsibility of the following targets for what happened: the driver, the company, the driver's direct supervisor at the time of the accident (i.e.,

the former manager), and the driver's new supervisor (i.e., the causally innocent new manager). In assessing perceived responsibility of each target, we used Hamilton and Sanders (1983) single-item scale of responsibility judgment (*not at all responsible—fully responsible*).

The key targets of responsibility to test the hypotheses were the company and the new manager. This new manager was described to have taken the position as the driver's supervisor when the former manager retired, just after the accident, and therefore, was causally uninvolved in the incident. If the pattern of responsibility assignment to the new manager corresponds to that of the company, this indicates that the new manager is blamed based on a proxy logic.

In addition to the measures of causal perception and responsibility judgments, more specific judgments related to new manager responsibility were assessed: (1) to what extent the new manager should strengthen safety driving education, (2) to what extent the new manager should strengthen the system to monitor the behavior of the members in this division, (3) to what extent the new manager should undergo a pay reduction, (4) to what extent the new manager should be fined by the law, (5) to what extent the new manager should apologize. All questions including causal perception, responsibility judgments, and other measures, were assessed on scales ranging from 1 to 4.

Results

Causal attribution

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant effect of the accident context manipulation on the judged organizational causality, $F(2, 319) = 27.48$, $p < .01$. Post hoc comparisons revealed that significantly greater cause was attributed to the organization (i.e., the company) (Scheffe tests, $p < .05$) in the on-duty condition ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.04$) than in the off-duty/helping-friend condition ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.82$) and the off-duty/helping-former-manager condition ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.95$). This indicates that an on-duty accident is more likely to be perceived as organizational harm than an off-duty accident is.

Responsibility assignment

We predicted that the blame assigned to the organization extends to the causally uninvolved manager (H1) and that blame is likely to be assigned to the organization to the extent that the accident ensues from actions that fulfill the organization's mandate (H2). As predicted, the judgments of organizational responsibility were paralleled by judgments of new-manager responsibility (see Table 1 and Fig. 2). Results of one-way ANOVAs with Scheffe contrasts showed that the organization was rated as more responsible in the on-duty condition than in the two off-duty conditions ($p < .05$, for each Scheffe comparison) (H2 supported). Corresponding to this pattern, the rating of new-manager responsibility was significantly higher in the on-duty condition than the other two conditions ($p < .05$, for each Scheffe comparison) (H1 supported).

To test our model more comprehensively, we examined if the effect of accident context on judged new-manager responsibility is mediated by judged organizational responsibility. We followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure of testing mediation by conducting regression analyses. In the analyses, the accident context was recoded into a dummy variable: the on-duty context was coded as 1, and the two off-duty contexts were coded as 0. New-manager responsibility was significantly affected by the accident context ($\beta = .31$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .10$) and company responsibility was also significantly affected by the accident context ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .40$). When new-manager responsibility was regressed on accident context and company responsibility, the effect of accident context became non-significant ($\beta = .06$, $p = .37$, partial $R^2 = .002$), and only the company responsibility remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .39$, $p < .01$, partial $R^2 = .19$), indicating that the company responsibility fully mediated the effect of accident context. A Sobel test of the mediational role of perceived company responsibility was significant ($z = 5.36$, $p < .001$). These results show that the more harm that comes from an employee's actions fulfilling an organizational mandate, the more the organization is blamed and consequently the blame extends to the causally innocent manager. In sum, results supported H1 and H2.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) for effects of accident contexts on perceived responsibility of the company, managers, and the driver (Study 1)

Variable	Off-duty, helping a friend		Off-duty, helping a former manager		On-duty		*F*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Company	1.78$_a$	0.93	1.99$_a$	1.05	3.52$_b$	0.62	107.72***
New manager	1.50$_a$	0.79	1.48$_a$	0.76	2.06$_b$	0.89	15.22***
Former manager	1.95$_a$	0.95	2.35$_b$	1.07	3.11$_c$	0.79	36.66***
Driver	3.95	0.32	3.91	0.43	3.98	0.21	1.15

Note. Higher means indicate greater responsibility scores on a 4-point scale (1, *not at all responsible* and 4, *fully responsible*). Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Scheffe comparison.
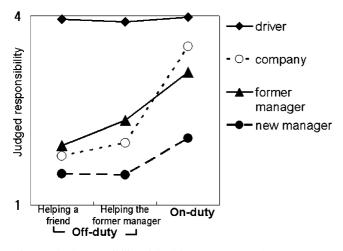
*** $p < .001$.

Fig. 2. Judged responsibility of the driver, company, and managers as a function of whether an accident ensued from actions in the work context (Study 1).

Testing an alternative interpretation

Study 1 results were consistent with our account, but there is an alternative interpretation that respondents in the on-duty condition are merely asserting that the new manager has the obligation to remedy the problem. To examine this possibility, we examined correlations among perceived new-manager responsibility and more specific judgments about the new manager: (1) the new manager should remedy the problem (a. strengthen the safe driving education/b. strengthen the system to monitor the members of the department), (2) the new manager should receive financial punishments (a. a pay reduction/b. a fine), and (3) the new manager should apologize. Before calculating the correlations, we created a summary variable for remedial obligations by averaging the two items tapping them ($r_{\text{remedial obligation}} = .59$, $p < .001$), and a summary variable for financial punishments by averaging the two items tapping them ($r_{\text{financial punishments}} = .62$, $p < .001$). To exclude a possible confound among the three specific judgments (1. remedial obligations, 2. financial punishments, and 3. apology), we examined the pattern of correlations between perceived new-manager responsibility and each of the three specific judgments by using partial correlation coefficients, which controlled for the remaining two specific judgments about the manager. The perceived new-manager responsibility was significantly correlated only with financial punishment (partial $r = .43$, $p < .01$) and apology (partial $r = .42$, $p < .01$), not with remedial obligation (partial $r = .05$, *ns*), indicating that people who assigned responsibility to the new manager thought that he should accept the blame and should be punished, rather than having an obligation for remedy. So, we dismissed the remedial obligation interpretation.

Other findings

In addition to the focal targets, we explored the responsibility judgments for the causally involved orga-

nizational members: (1) the driver (i.e., the employee who was driving the car), (2) the former manager (i.e., the driver's direct supervisor at the time of the accident) (see Table 1 and Fig. 2). The driver was rated as highly responsible across all conditions, which is not surprising given his direct role in the accident. The former manager was rated differently in each condition—the degree of responsibility assigned was low in the helping-friend condition, medium in the helping-former-manager condition (in which the former-manager indirectly promoted the occurrence of the accident), and high in the on-duty condition (in which the former-manager failed to prevent the occurrence of the accident) ($p < .05$, for each comparison). These results indicate that Japanese perceivers use the personal causality logic as well as an additional proxy logic.

Discussion

Study 1 supported the prediction that the more harm that ensues from actions employees take to fulfill the organizational mandate, the more the organization is blamed, and consequently the blame extends to the causally innocent manager. This finding suggests that even East Asians, who are culturally oriented for collective agency, are unlikely to use the proxy logic when the harm ensues from actions employees take off-duty. Hence, our next studies focused on accidents resulting from actions employees take while on duty.

Before moving to Study 2, one limitation of Study 1 should be noted. Perhaps respondents to Study 1 inferred that the "causally uninvolved new manager" in the scenario still had some control over the incident at the time of the incident. To demonstrate the proxy blaming more clearly, Study 2 used a scenario in which the new executive joined the organization after the incident, and thus could have had no causal role in creating it.

Study 2: The tainted school lunch

We designed Study 2 with three goals in mind. First, we wanted to replicate our primary hypothesis that the blame is extended to causally uninvolved managers (H1) with a scenario that more clearly teased apart the proxy blaming and personal-causality-based blaming.

Second, with this conceptually cleaner scenario, we wanted to test our prediction about the relationship between culture and the proxy logic—if the proxy logic is more common among perceivers who are culturally more oriented for collective agency. Comparing responsibility judgments by Japanese and American perceivers, we predicted that Japanese perceivers would assign greater responsibility to the target organization (H3), and consequently to the causally innocent manager than would American perceivers (H1).

Third, we wanted to test if the organizational blame extends to its manager to the extent that the manager is perceived to be in a position that represents the organization. The proxy blaming model assumes that perceivers extend the organizational blame to its manager to symbolically sanction the organization. This assumption leads to the prediction that perceivers would extend the organizational blame to its manager to the extent that they perceive the manager as in the position to represent the organization (H4). We tested H4 by measuring the perceived role representativeness of the causally innocent manager.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduates attending Stanford University in the United States and Gakushuin University in Japan. The 56 American students (22 male, 33 female, 1 unreported gender) had an average age of 20.5 ($SD = 3.91$). The ethnic composition was 42.6% European American, 31.5% Asian American, 11.1% African American, 9.3% Hispanic, and 5.6% other ethnicities. The 60 Japanese students (31 male, 27 female, 2 unreported gender) had an average age of 18.7 ($SD = 0.76$) and were all Japanese.

Scenario

The scenario and questions were initially constructed in Japanese and were translated into English. The equivalence of the materials in both languages was checked by committee approach (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Participants read the following information about food poisoning:

A pupil suffered from food poisoning when she had lunch prepared by her school. The cause of the food poisoning was the bacteria in the eggs, which propagated because the cook forgot to put the eggs in the refrigerator. The victim's hospital fee cost $1000 (100,000 yen in Japanese version) that health insurance did not cover.

Manipulation of the manager's controllability

In addition to culture, Study 2 had another independent variable. In the scenario, whether or not the food poisoning was controllable by the present principal was manipulated. In the change condition, in which the former principal retired after the recent incident and the present principal joined, the occurrence of the recent food poisoning was uncontrollable by the present principal. In the no change condition, in which the present principal has been running the school for 5 years and the former principal had run it for years before then, the food poisoning was controllable by the present principal. Participants were randomly assigned to either of these conditions.

Manipulation check

As a manipulation check, participants were asked if they thought that the new principal could have prevented the food poisoning.

Judgments about causality, responsibility, and role representativeness

Causal attribution was assessed by asking participants what they thought was the major cause of the food poisoning (*the cook's carelessness—poor school management*). Responsibility judgments were assessed by asking participants to what extent they thought that the following targets are responsible for the food poisoning: the cook, the school, the former principal, and the present principal. Perceived role representativeness of the present principal was assessed by asking participants to what extent they thought that the present principal is in the position to represent the school. Finally, we also measured to what extent participants thought that the present principal should be punished by salary reduction. All questions including the dependent variables and manipulation check were assessed on scales ranging from 1 to 4.

Results

Manipulation check

To check if the respondents in the change condition understood the scenario correctly, we examined the question that asked if they thought that the new principal could have prevented the food poisoning. Two American participants in the change condition were excluded from the analyses because they answered affirmatively (i.e., They chose either "I think so" or "somewhat so.").

Causal attribution

Consistent with previous research (Menon et al., 1999), Japanese respondents were more likely than Americans to consider the organizational factor (poor school management) rather than the proximal individual (cook's carelessness) as the major cause of the food poisoning, $M_{JP} = 2.25$, $SD_{JP} = 1.02$; $M_{US} = 1.57$, $SD_{US} = 0.78$; $t(109) = 3.9$, $p < .01$.

Responsibility assignment

We predicted that Japanese compared with Americans would assign greater blame to the organization (H3) and consequently assign greater blame to its causally uninvolved manager (H1). The key dependent variables to test our prediction were responsibility ratings for the school and the present principal, especially in the change condition. As expected by H1 and H3, Japanese assigned greater responsibility to the school and to the present principal than did Americans, regardless of the conditions (see Table 2 and Fig. 3). Results of a 2

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and ANOVA for effects of culture, condition (change vs. no change), and their interaction on perceived responsibility of the school, principals, and the cook (Study 2)

Variable and condition	US		Japan		ANOVA F		
	M	SD	M	SD	Culture	Condition	Cult $\times$ Cond
School					33.47***	4.56.	0.06
Change	2.94$_a$	0.85	3.84$_b$	0.37			
No change	2.65$_a$	0.98	3.48$_b$	0.91			
Present principal					23.51***	23.90***	0.02
Change	1.29$_a$	0.69	2.16$_b$	1.04			
No change	2.17$_a$	0.94	3.00$_b$	1.04			
Former principal					17.77***	86.38***	1.64
Change	2.32$_a$	0.91	3.13$_b$	0.96			
No change	1.13$_a$	0.46	1.55$_b$	0.69			
Cook					2.86†	0.22	0.34
Change	3.94	0.25	3.87	0.43			
No change	4.00$_a$	0.00	3.86$_b$	0.35			

Note. Higher means indicate greater agreement (1, *I don't think so*; 2, *not much*; 3, *somewhat so*; 4, *I think so*) upon the statement that the target (cook, school, former principal, present principal) is responsible for the incident. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at *$p < .05$ by t-test.
*** $p < .001$.
† $p < .10$.

(culture) $\times$ 2 (condition) ANOVA on judged school responsibility and on judged responsibility of the present principal revealed significant main effects of culture ($F_{school}(1, 113) = 33.5$, $p < .01$; $F_{present\ principal}(1, 113) = 23.5$, $p < .01$) and condition ($F_{school}(1, 113) = 4.56$, $p < .05$; $F_{present\ principal}(1, 113) = 23.9$, $p < .01$).[2] The cultural effect on perceived responsibilities of the school and the present principal was present in both of the conditions ($p_{school} < .01$ for both; $p_{present\ principal} < .01$ for both). Moreover, Japanese, more so than Americans, judged that the present principal should be punished with salary reduction (change condition: $M_{Japan} = 1.84$, $M_{America} = 1.03$, $t(31.8) = 4.27$, $p < .01$; no change condition: $M_{Japan} = 3.03$, $M_{America} = 1.52$, $t(50) = 6.70$, $p < .01$), indicating that Japanese were really blaming the manager more than did Americans.

To test the relationship between culture and the blaming process more comprehensively, we next examined if the effect of culture on judged responsibility of the causally innocent principal is mediated by judged school responsibility. We conducted the mediation test within the change condition, because the present principal was causally innocent only in the change condition. We again

[2] To examine the possibility that the main effects of culture were produced by a scale response bias, we conducted the same ANOVA after standardizing (or ipsatizing) across the ratings using this response scale. The only difference standardization made was that the cook's responsibility rating became significantly greater for Americans than for Japanese, $F(1, 109) = 14.48$, $p < .01$. The rest of the responsibility patterns remained the same. Japanese compared to Americans assigned greater responsibility to the school, $F(1, 110) = 21.15$, $p < .01$; to the former principal, $F(1, 110) = 6.82$, $p < .05$; and to the present principal, $F(1, 110) = 11.78$, $p < .01$. Because of the absence of evidence of scale biases in critical variables, we used raw scores in the analyses.

followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure, and conducted regression analyses. In the analyses, culture was recoded into a dummy variable: Japan was coded as 1, and US was coded as 0. The responsibility of the causally innocent principal was significantly affected by culture ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .20$) and school responsibility was also significantly affected by culture ($\beta = .57$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .33$). When the present principal's responsibility was regressed on both culture and school responsibility, the effect of culture became marginal ($\beta = .25$, $p = .07$, partial $R^2 = .04$), and only the school responsibility remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .36$, $p < .05$, partial $R^2 = .25$). A Sobel test of the mediational role of perceived school responsibility was significant ($z = 2.39$, $p < .05$), although the mediation was partial (i.e., the effect of culture remained marginally significant even after controlling perceived school responsibility). These results show that Japanese assign greater responsibility than Americans to the target organization (H3 supported), and consequently extend more blame to the causally innocent manager (H1 supported).

Moderating effect of role representativeness

Next we tested whether extending blame from the organization to the principal depends on the extent to which the principal is seen to represent the school (H4). We conducted an analysis regressing the new principal's judged responsibility on (1) perceived school responsibility, (2) perceived representativeness (perception that the principal is in a position to represent the school), and (3) the interaction of perceived school responsibility by perceived representativeness, (4) perceived control of the new principal over the incident, and (5) the interaction of perceived control by perceived school responsibility.
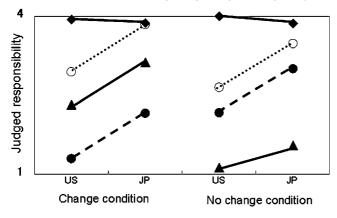
Fig. 3. Judged responsibility of the cook, school, and principals as a function of country differences in perceiver agency orientation (Study 2).

The fourth and the fifth terms were included to examine if the representativeness, not causal control, explains the blame extension from the school to the principal. The results revealed main effects of perceived school responsibility ($\beta = .54$, $p < .01$) and perceived representativeness ($\beta = .25$, $p < .05$), and an interaction effect of school responsibility by representativeness ($\beta = .30$, $p < .05$) (Table 3). This interaction effect indicated that the effect of perceived school responsibility on perceived new principal's responsibility was stronger when the new principal was perceived to be in a position to represent the school than not being perceived as such (H4 supported). The perceived control of the principal and the interaction of perceived control by school responsibility had no significant effect on the principal's judged responsibility. These results clearly indicate that in proxy blaming, leaders are blamed because they are perceived to be in the position to represent the organization, not because they are perceived to have causal control over organizational activities.

Other findings

In addition to testing hypotheses for the proxy logic, we explored whether the personal causality logic is used in both cultures. The results indicated that the personal causality logic is used regardless of culture. In both cultures, the direct cause of the harm—the cook—was per-

ceived as highly responsible (see Table 2 and Fig. 3). In both cultures, the cook was perceived to be more responsible than the former principal (US: $t(53) = 15.52$, $p < .01$; JP: $t(58) = 9.81$, $p < .01$) and the current principal (US: $t(53) = 18.68$, $p < .01$; JP: $t(58) = 8.33$, $p < .01$). Further, in both cultures, the principals were perceived as more responsible to the extent that they had control over the incident: The present principal was perceived as more responsible in the no change condition than in the change condition (US: $t(39) = 3.82$, $p < .01$; JP: $t(58) = 3.14$, $p < .01$), and vice versa for the former principal (US: $t(47) = 6.31$, $p < .01$; JP: $t(58) = 7.29$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that the personal causality logic is a dominant logic in both cultures, yet Japanese additionally use the proxy logic.

We also explored whose responsibility extended to the causally innocent present principal (i.e., the present principal in the change condition). Our model assumes that the organizational responsibility extends to the manager. However, the similarity in the patterns of former principal's responsibility and new principal's responsibility suggests that the new principal's perceived responsibility could be inherited from that of his/her predecessor rather than from the school. When the perceived new principal's responsibility was simultaneously regressed on perceived school responsibility and perceived former principal's responsibility within the change condition, only the school responsibility was a significant predictor of the new principal's responsibility ($\beta = .57$, $p < .01$, $VIF = 1.51$), and the former principal's responsibility had no significant effect on the new principal's responsibility ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .36$, $VIF = 1.51$).

Conclusions for Studies 1 and 2

So far we found that organizational managers are blamed as a proxy for the organization. The more the harm is done through actions fulfilling the organization's mandate (H2), and the more the perceivers are culturally oriented for collective agency (H3), the more perceivers blame the organization and consequently extend the blame to a causally innocent manager (H1). Importantly, the blame is extended to the manager to the extent that this manager is perceived to represent the organization (H4). Further, different from the phenome-

Table 3
Summary of regression analysis for variables predicting the new principal's responsibility (Study 2)

Variable	B	SEB	β	p
1. Perceived school responsibility	.66	.15	.54	.0001
2. Perceived representataiveness (of the principal)	.22	.10	.25	.03
3. Perceived school responsibility × perceived representativeness	.32	.13	.30	.01
4. Perceived control of the principal over the incident	.33	.35	.11	.35
5. Perceived control of the principal × perceived school responsibility	.18	.45	.05	.69

Note. The analysis was conducted within the change condition. Predictor variables were centered prior to analysis.
$R^2 = .39$.

non of the romance of leadership (Meindl et al., 1985), proxy blaming does not accompany overestimation of the manager's causal control (Study 2).

The studies presented so far have a feature in common. They involve situations with newly arrived managers as a way to tease apart the proxy versus personal causality logics, and they provide definitive evidence for the former. However, since most managers are not newcomers to their firms, it is important to know whether the proxy logic also contributes to the blaming of managers who have been in the firm for awhile. To investigate this, our final study used a different story structure.

Study 3: The toxic chemical mix

Study 3 investigated the proxy blaming in a case where the organizational boundary changes between the time the harm was caused and the time of judgment. The story described harmful pollution caused by the interaction of wastes released by two factories on opposite sides of a lake. The wastes were released 4 years ago, but the harm had just manifested itself recently. Depending on the experimental condition, the factories either belonged to the same company, belonged to separate companies, or belonged to formerly separate companies that had recently merged. In all versions, the same two individuals have been running the companies the whole time—either as co-CEOs of one company or CEOs of separate companies.

The personal causality logic suggests that the leaders should be more culpable in the same-firm condition than the separate-firms condition. That is, perceivers expect that leaders could have and should have anticipated problematic interactions of two events within the boundaries of their firm, but not that leaders anticipate and manage all problems caused by factors outside of their firm. Yet what about the merger condition? By the personal causality logic, leaders of the merged company (who headed two separate companies at the time the harm was caused) are no more culpable than leaders of two separate companies. By the proxy logic, however, leaders of the merged company are like leaders in the same company condition—they are currently in a role representing the compound of organizational units that created the problem, and hence they can serve as proxies for this collectivity.

Using this case, Study 3 conceptually replicated the findings from Study 2 that perceivers who are culturally more oriented for collective agency (i.e., Japanese more so than Americans) assign greater blame to the target organization (H3) and that the blame extends to the manager as a function of his current position as the organizational representative (H4). Combining the prediction that Japanese assign greater blame to the organization than do Americans (H3) and the prediction that

the blame extends to the manager as a function of his/her current position (H4), we specifically predicted the following: Japanese observers will treat the executives of the merger like executives in the one-company condition, whereas Americans will treat them like executives of each respective company in the two-company condition (Combination of H3 and H4).

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduates attending Stanford University, the University of California Berkeley, and the University of South California in the United States, and Gakushuin University in Japan. The experiment was a 2 (culture) × 3 (condition) between-subjects design with 27 participants per cell. The 81 American students (33 male, 47 female, 1 of unreported gender) had an average age of 21.3 ($SD = 3.91$). The ethnic composition was 39.5% European American, 30.8% Asian American, 6.1% African American, 13.5% Hispanic, and 10.1% of other ethnicities. The 81 Japanese students (42 male and 39 female) from Gakushuin University had an average age of 18.8 ($SD = 1.01$).

Scenario

The English version and the Japanese version of the materials (i.e., scenario and questions) were developed simultaneously to enhance the cultural relevance. The equivalence was checked by committee approach (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Participants read a scenario of an environmental accident. The following is the summary of the scenario:

Two factories on a lakeside respectively released a harmless waste for 2 years (this occurred 4 years ago), which unexpectedly produced a new toxic substance when mixed, and led to disease among lakeside residents recently. At the time when the waste products were released, the creation of the new toxic matter was not predictable even by the most advanced scientific technology.

Manipulation of the organizational structure

In the scenario, the organizational structure was manipulated. In the first condition, the two factories belonged to two separate companies at the time of waste release as well as at the time of responsibility judgments (two-company condition). In the second condition, the two factories belonged to two separate companies at the time of waste release, but the two companies had recently merged before the harm was discovered (merger condition). In the third condition, the two factories always belonged to the same company (one-company condition). In all conditions, the current CEOs (the CEOs at time of the responsibility judgments) were the

same people that led the company (or companies) at the time of the waste release. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

Judgments about causality and responsibility

Perceived organizational causality was assessed by asking participants to rate the importance of the following factors as causes for the disease (*Not important at all—Very important*): (a) the company's (companies') lack of understanding of the risks of the waste, (b) an insufficient exchange of the information between the two factories. Company responsibility and executive responsibility for the outbreak of the disease were each assessed using the Hamilton and Sanders' (1983) single item responsibility measure (*Not at all responsible—Fully responsible*). The organizational causality measures were 7-point scales ranging from 1 to 7, and the responsibility measures were 11-point scales ranging from 0 to 10.

Results

Perceived organizational causes and responsibility

The two ratings of organizational causes were highly correlated, $r = .52$, $p < .01$, so a summary variable was created by averaging them. Japanese participants ($M_{JP} = 5.90$, $SD_{JP} = 1.40$), compared to Americans ($M_{US} = 5.40$, $SD_{US} = 1.65$), perceived a higher degree of organizational causality ($t(160) = 2.08$, $p < .05$). Japanese were also higher in a measure of perceived organizational responsibility. Compared to Americans ($M = 7.67$, $SD = 2.40$), Japanese ($M = 8.37$, $SD = 2.11$) assigned greater responsibility to the company(s) for the outbreak of the disease ($t(160) = 1.98$, $p < .05$), and thus H3 was supported. Menon et al.'s (1999) findings were again replicated.

Perceived managerial responsibility

To test the prediction that Japanese observers would treat the executives of the merger like executives in the one-company condition, whereas Americans would treat them like executives of each respective company in the two-company condition, we conducted a 2 (culture) × 3 (condition) ANOVA on judged executive responsibility,

combined with simple effects analyses within each culture (Table 4). The expected culture by condition interaction was significant ($F(2, 156) = 4.9$, $p < .01$). Simple effects analyses within each culture revealed that judgments of executive responsibility by Japanese and Americans differed in response to the merger condition. For Japanese participants, perceived CEO responsibility in the merger condition was significantly greater than that in the two-company condition ($p < .05$) but did not differ from that in the one-company condition. For American participants, perceived CEO responsibility in the merger condition was significantly lower than that in the one-company condition ($p < .05$) but did not differ from that in the two-company condition. Overall, Japanese responses to the merger condition and one-company condition were more similar, whereas American responses to the merger condition and two-company condition were more similar (Combination of H3 and H4 supported).

In order to check whether the culture by condition interaction effect on CEO responsibility was mediated by perceived organizational responsibility, we next added perceived organizational responsibility as a covariate, and conducted an ANCOVA. The covariate (i.e., perceived organizational responsibility) was significant, $F(1, 155) = 84.18$, $p < .01$, and the culture by condition interaction effect became nonsignificant, $F(2, 155) = 2.49$, *ns*, indicating that the culture by condition interaction effect operated through perceived organizational responsibility. This finding supported our model (Fig. 1).

Other findings from Japan–US comparison

Results of the above ANOVA (Table 4) revealed not only the interaction effect, but also a condition main effect ($F(2, 156) = 4.63$, $p < .05$) and a culture main effect ($F(1, 156) = 24.3$, $p < .01$). The condition main effect, combined with Tukey's post hoc comparisons, showed that ratings in the one-company condition were significantly greater than in the two-company condition ($p < .05$), whereas the ratings in the merger condition did not differ from ratings in either of the other conditions ($M_{one} = 7.22$, $M_{two} = 6.43$, $M_{merger} = 6.69$). The culture main effect was that the perceived CEO responsibility

Table 4

Means, standard deviations, and ANOVA for effects of cultures, condition (two company, merger, one company), and their interaction on perceived executive responsibility (Study 3)

Culture	Two company		Merger		One company		ANOVA F		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	Culture	Condition	Cult × Cond
							24.29***	4.63*	4.90**
US	5.93$_{ab}$	2.99	4.96$_a$	2.77	7.22$_b$	2.10			
Japan	6.93$_a$	2.73	8.41$_b$	1.53	8.22$_{ab}$	1.48			

Note. Higher means indicate greater responsibility scores on 11-point scales (0, *not responsible at all*; 5, *somewhat responsible*; 10, *fully responsible*). Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Tukey's post hoc comparison.

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

was significantly greater for Japanese than for Americans ($M_{JP} = 7.85$, $M_{US} = 6.04$). This finding is consistent with our Study 2 finding: Japanese assign greater responsibility to individual managers than do Americans. We again checked if this culture main effect on perceived CEO responsibility was mediated by the perceived organizational responsibility. When perceived organizational responsibility was added as a covariate, the culture main effect remained significant, $F(1, 155) = 20.27$, $p < .01$, although there was some reduction in its F value (it reduced from 24.29 to 20.27). Most of the culture main effect was due to factors other than perceived organizational responsibility, which was inconsistent with the finding from Study 2. This result may have been caused because factors other than collective agency orientation were not controlled in the cross-cultural comparison (e.g., available legal sanctions for chemical companies may be quite different across countries), and this may have strongly affected the responsibility judgments. To overcome this limitation of comparing national samples, we explored whether there were ethnic group differences within the US sample.

Ethnic group comparison

The present research assumes that the cultural difference in blaming is driven by the cultural difference in psychological orientation (collective agency orientation). However, there is an alternative interpretation that the cultural difference in blaming has nothing to do with psychological orientations, and that it is in fact driven by institutional differences across nations: Japanese participants may have referred to Japanese organizations and the Japanese legal system when making judgments, whereas American respondents may have referred to those in the US. Because the Study 3 sample was large enough to examine ethnic group effects within American sample, we conducted an ethnic group comparison (Asian vs. European Americans), which allowed us to control the social context of judgments, and to look at the effect of culture on responsibility judgments. If Asian Americans, not European Americans, show a similar pattern to the Japanese pattern, it means that the cultural difference in blaming is related to a cultural difference in psychological orientation.

As expected, the Asian American pattern was more similar to Japanese pattern than was the European American pattern. First, Asian Americans perceived higher level of organizational causality than did European Americans ($M_{\text{Asian Americans}} = 5.84$, $M_{\text{European Americans}} = 4.70$, $t(53.8) = 2.82$, $p < .01$), and the mean score of the perceived organizational causality by Asian Americans was close to that of Japanese in Japan ($M = 5.90$). Second, the pattern of CEO responsibility ratings by Asian Americans (Table 5) were in between the Japanese pattern (Table 4) and the European Americans' pattern (Table 5). The perceived CEO responsibil-

Table 5

Ratings of executive responsibility by European Americans and Asian Americans (Study 3)

Ethnicity	Two company		Merger		One company	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
European Americans	5.56	3.61	3.91	3.15	6.25	2.49
Asian Americans	5.13	2.30	6.14	2.48	8.00	1.33

Note. Higher means indicate greater responsibility scores on 11-point scales (0, *not responsible at all*; 5, *somewhat responsible*; 10, *fully responsible*).

ity in the two company condition was smaller than that in the merger condition for Japanese perceivers, somewhat so for Asian American perceivers, but not for European American perceivers. To statistically test the similarity between the Japanese pattern and the pattern of each ethnic group, we conducted planned comparisons comparing the CEO responsibility rating in the two company condition with that in the other two conditions, combined with a one-way ANOVA within each ethnic group (Asian Americans, European Americans). The results revealed that the perceived CEO responsibility was significantly smaller in the two company condition than in the other two conditions for Japanese in Japan, $t(78) = -2.95$, $p < .01$, and for Asian Americans, $t(22) = -2.24$, $p < .05$, but not for European Americans, $t(29) = 0.40$, ns. In sum, the resemblance of Asian Americans' judgments to the Japanese patterns suggests that these patterns reflect a cultural difference in psychological orientation (i.e., collective agency orientation) rather than merely a difference in assumed legal and corporate institutions.

General discussion

Contributions of the present research

The primary contribution of the present research lies in identifying an alternative blaming logic (i.e., blaming an individual member as a proxy for a group), which is used by East Asians. Prior research had shown that compared with North Americans, East Asians attribute ambiguous outcomes more to collective level causality and less to individual level causality (Menon et al., 1999), but the consequences of this cultural difference in causal attribution were relatively underexplored. Chiefly, it was not known how this cultural difference in causal attribution affects the way people blame organizational members. It was also not known whether East Asians are reluctant to blame individual members in an organization, whether they are willing to blame every organizational member equally, or whether they are willing to blame certain organizational members based on certain criteria. The present research showed that East Asians do not blame every member equally. Like North Ameri-

cans, East Asians blame members according to each member's causal contribution to the harmful outcome (personal causality logic) (Study 2). What is more important, however, is that East Asians also use a proxy logic, in addition to the personal causality logic. Their cultural orientation to focus on collective level causality leads them to blame an accident on the organization and to blame managers as proxies for the culpable organization. For causally involved managers, East Asians apply both the personal causality logic and the proxy logic in assigning blame (Study 3), and for causally innocent managers, they apply the proxy logic (Studies 1 and 2).

The present studies provided compelling evidence for the use of this proxy logic. The three studies consistently showed that perceivers who blame an accident on the organization as a collectivity are likely to extend blame to a manager. Blame is assigned to the organization to the extent that the harm was done in fulfilling organizational mandate (Study 1) and to the extent that the perceiver is culturally oriented for collective agency (Studies 2 and 3). Once the blame is assigned to the organization, managers are blamed beyond their causal involvement (Studies 1–3). And this blame extension occurs as a function of their current role of representing the organization. That is, managers are blamed based on their current position within the organization (Studies 2 and 3), not based on their degree of control over the harmful events at the time they unfolded (Study 2).

Although the primary contribution of the present research is to introduce the proxy logic, the present research also contributes by replicating prior findings of cultural variation and invariance in judgments of causality and responsibility. First, there have not been many replications of Menon et al.'s (1999) finding that East Asians are relatively more likely than North Americans to focus on the causal influence of groups and organizations. The present research (Studies 2 and 3) replicated this finding using different scenarios and samples. The present research also replicated the prior finding of cultural universality in the use of the personal causality logic: Hamilton and Sanders (1983), for example, showed that both Americans and Japanese blame an individual based on what he/she did and what he/she should have done. The analyses of the causally involved organizational members in the present research replicated their findings. Both cultural samples blamed the employee who directly caused the harm most, and blamed causally involved supervisors more than causally uninvolved supervisors (Study 2). These findings suggest that the personal causality logic governs responsibility judgments even for collective agency oriented perceivers, so long as they understand individuals' causal roles. However, in everyday judgments of responsibility, perceivers often lack such understanding, so the proxy logic plays an important role. They lack this understanding because information about the causal circumstances of accidents is concealed or because it involves interaction effects too complex to interpret.

Future research

Blame and credit. One of the issues to be analyzed in the future is whether a proxy logic is used to assign responsibility for positive outcomes, that is, to assign credit. There are reasons to suspect that proxy crediting occurs less frequently than proxy blaming. First, positive organizational outcomes may be less likely to happen accidentally than negative outcomes. Tracing personal causality is easier for intended than accidental outcomes. Second, positive outcomes are not threatening and therefore people have less motivation to assign responsibility for the outcome. Third, positive outcomes, accompanied by positive feeling, are less likely to evoke counterfactual thinking than negative outcomes, accompanied by negative feeling (Roese, 1997). Despite the above listed reasons to doubt the prevalence of proxy crediting, a preliminary study by Zemba (2006) showed a pattern of proxy crediting. In this study, it was examined whether Japanese perceivers credit a causally uninvolved organizational executive for a "positive accident" caused by an organization (the executive joined the organization after the outcome was caused). The results showed a positive correlation between assigned credit to the organization and assigned credit to the causally uninvolved executive. Although this finding suggests that the use of proxy logic depends on the cognitive orientation toward organizational causality (rather than on positive or negative affect), further research with different domains and methods needs to be done before confirming this finding.

Proxy logic and the feeling of guilt. The present research focused on the use of proxy logic by outside observers. In future research, it would be interesting to examine if this logic is used by those inside the organization which caused the harm. Researchers of collective guilt have shown that people can experience guilt based on the action of their group even when they made no personal contribution to it (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). The relationship between collective agency orientation and the experience of collective guilt is not known, but it is quite plausible that perceivers with stronger collective agency orientation are more susceptible to collective guilt, because stronger collective agency orientation would lead one to encode in-group members' wrongdoing in terms of the whole in-group (rather than the individual in-group members). Also, because collective agency oriented perceivers use the proxy logic, their felt collective guilt may be reduced by singling out an organizational proxy (e.g., a top manager) as being responsible and deserving of punishment. Whether or not there is such relationship between cognitive process of the proxy logic and the emotional experience of guilt should be examined in the future.

Cultural generalizability of proxy blaming. In the present paper, we focused on East Asia when arguing about the cultural orientation for collective agency. However, it is possible that collective agency orientation exists in other collectivist cultures (e.g., Latin cultures) and that people from these cultures use the proxy logic. This possibility should be explored in the future. Further, we suspect that even Americans may use the proxy logic when reasoning about special kinds of organizations. For example, Gamson and Scotch (1964) argued that American baseball teams' field managers can be fired for the poor performance of their teams, even if the managers had no causal responsibility for the outcomes. Perhaps Westerners encode collective agency for *teams*, because the members are highly interdependent. Future research should delineate when the proxy blaming and the personal-causality-based blaming is used within each culture.

Functions of blaming across cultures. The present research examined the cultural difference of the use of proxy blaming in terms of perceivers' cognitive orientation—whether they have a cultural orientation to focus on individual causality or organizational causality. However, another cultural factor may be related to the differential use of proxy blaming across cultures. East Asians' proxy blaming may fit with a restorative rather than retributive view of punishment. Hamilton and Sanders (1988) showed that Japanese emphasize the relationship-restorative function of punishment in their choice of punishments and rationales for punishment, whereas Americans emphasize the retributive function of punishment. Proxy blaming may promote the restoration of the public's trust in a corporation after a scandal or accident. The public outcry that the company president should resign allows the public to voice its perception of the magnitude of the harm. The president's apology and resignation, in turn, conveys to the public that the corporation takes the public reaction seriously; it intends to accept the blame and to improve (See Pfeffer, 1981, for an analysis of symbolic management). Proxy blaming may provide a corporation a means of recovering public trust through voluntarily taking responsibility (See Nakayachi & Watabe, 2005; for arguments about how organizations can restore public trust). Future research should explore whether proxy blaming actually restores public trust, and whether proxy blaming is more preferred by observers who endorse the relationship-recovery function of blaming.

Proxy blaming and East Asians' sensitivity to situational influences. Another issue concerning culture and proxy blaming is how proxy blaming relates to East Asians' sensitivity to situational influences. It may appear contradictory that East Asians, who are sensitive to situational influences on individual behavior (Knowles, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 2001), still assign blame to individuals. East Asians' sensitivity to situational influ-

ence and their use of proxy blaming, however, do not contradict: the proxy blaming occurs not because perceivers overattribute the cause to personal dispositions, but because perceivers perceive the individual as representing, or answering for, the culpable group. Sensitivity to situational influences, indeed, may lead to the use of proxy blaming. People who are more sensitive to situational factors would be inclined to notice organizational factors that affect members' behavior (e.g., a corporation's policies, culture, decision making system, etc.). As a consequence, people who are more sensitive to situational factors may be more to assign responsibility to organizations and use the proxy logic. Whether such a relationship exists should be examined in the future.

Practical implications

The present findings of cultural differences may have practical implications for international businesses. American firms operating in East Asian settings may be able to manage the crisis of an accident or scandal more effectively by following the proxy logic. By taking responsibility, a top manager can send the message to the public that firm listens and understands, which may promote the restoration of public trust in the firm. If, by contrast, top management refuses to accept responsibility because they are free of any causal role, East Asian observers may code this as an injustice, a shirking of responsibility. That said, it is important to remember that proxy blaming is not the only blaming logic in collective agency oriented cultures—the personal causality logic is also used. Therefore, the most effective way for an organization in East Asia to restore its public image may be to sanction both causally involved employees and an executive who represents the organization as a whole.

Conversely, managers of East Asian firms working in the United States may also benefit from being aware of the cultural difference we have documented. Responsibility-taking actions, such as apologizing or cutting one's own salary, are interpreted by the East Asian public as the company's accepting its responsibility. Yet these same responsibility-taking actions would be interpreted by Americans (especially, by European Americans) as an indication of personal culpability–that this manager caused the harm. Research on cultural differences in strategies of social inference and impression management can help managers and firms avoid miscommunicating with the increasingly diverse array of cultural audiences that they face.

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