

## Local/foreign status, cultural background, and organizational citizenship behaviour: A study among foreign and local workers in the Netherlands

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### Local/foreign status, cultural background, and organizational citizenship behaviour: A study among foreign and local workers in The Netherlands

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## Local/foreign status, cultural background, and organizational citizenship behaviour: A study among foreign and local workers in The Netherlands

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A study in Singapore (Ang et al., 2003) found that foreign employees displayed a lower tendency to engage in Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) than their local counterparts. The explanation was that foreign employees often experience their employment relation as more disadvantageous. The present study attempted to investigate possible differences in OCB between foreign and local workers in The Netherlands. In addition, it aimed to ascertain what role the cultural dimension of “individualism–collectivism” plays in this connection. Contrasting the expectations, the foreign employees reported a higher propensity to pursue OCB than local workers. The difference in behaviour could not be explained by cultural differences. It was argued that economic and personal motives of foreign workers might have affected the self-reports of their organizational behaviour.

**Keywords:** Individualism; Collectivism; Organizational citizenship; behaviour; Local/foreign status.

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Due to shortages in labour supply the so-called developed countries increasingly recruit foreign workers. This situation calls for research looking at work behaviour of foreign workers. A study of Ang, van Dyne, and Begley (2003) in Singapore found negative job attitudes and behaviour among foreign employees. It was discovered that in comparison with local employees, foreign employees were less inclined to pursue work activities that are not prescribed or officially requested by the organization. The explanation for this was that foreign employees receive fewer inducements such as long-term benefits and opportunities for promotion. This is often due to the limited duration of their contracts because of the dependency on work permits. Therefore—the authors assumed—these foreign employees do not see a necessity to reciprocate any discretionary behaviour.

The present study continued the work of Ang et al. (2003) and investigated the differences between foreign and local workers in Europe, in The Netherlands in particular. Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) served as the focus of this study. OCB contains various activities of individuals that are not prescribed or officially requested by the organization. Besides, it is a form of work behaviour that finds its roots in cultural values and norms. Therefore, this study compared local Dutch workers with foreign employees who originate from collectivistically oriented countries. These are non-Dutch employees born and raised outside The Netherlands, who have recently come to the country from regions such as Eastern Europe (in particular Poland), Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

## THEORETICAL ELABORATION AND HYPOTHESES

Organ (1988) defined OCB as “individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (1988, p. 4). Farh, Zhong, and Organ (2004) listed nine major dimensions that have gained popularity in recent studies. Most of the behaviours described in these dimensions carry the meaning of “willingness to co-operate” (Moorman & Blakely, 1995, p. 128). The behaviour has affiliative, promoting, and cooperative outcomes for the organization in general.

Several studies used exchange models to explain OCB (see Coyle-Shapiro, 2002). Direct relations were found between work and social exchange and extrarole behaviour like OCB, whereas economic exchange was seen as not directly affecting such behaviours. Social exchange theory (SET) involves the perceptions of the employees of how the organization supports its employees (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). Whenever one enters a relationship some sort of expectation of reciprocity will arise in the second party. A study conducted by Witt (1991) discovered that employees who perceived their company as reciprocal were more inclined

to engage in social exchange with their company, for instance, by pursuing OCB.

The contracts for foreign workers in The Netherlands are not very attractive, comparatively speaking (Roodenburg, Euwals, & Ter Rele, 2003). Therefore, it can be assumed that foreign employees receive fewer inducements to engage in reciprocal relationships and discretionary activities. Less attractive contractual relationships imply fewer benefits, such as access to career development and contributions to retirement. Furthermore, foreign employees often end up in labour intensive sectors that require mainly low-skilled workers, which leads to under-employment. This may lead to unsatisfactory evaluation of their exchange relationship with the employer, creating inducements to contribute less to the company. Thus, in accordance with Ang et al. (2003), we expected that foreign employees would be less inclined to get involved in reciprocal relationships and therefore foreign workers would be less likely to describe themselves as performing high levels of OCB, compared to local workers.

*Hypothesis 1:* Compared to local workers, foreign workers in The Netherlands report a lower tendency to display OCB.

Culture is a collective programming of the mind, which implies that the behaviour of humans is not random, but rather implicitly predictable. In order to distinguish different cultures, Hofstede (2001) defined several cultural dimensions, one of them being individualism–collectivism (IND-COL). IND-COL has been the most studied cultural dimension in management and organization studies (Earley & Gibson, 1998). This dimension has been used in the explanation of not just cultural variations in behaviours and attitudes, but also in cognition, norms, values, goals, and family structures (Triandis, 1995). It can best be explained as the way individuals see themselves. Individualism is used to describe orientation towards “self” as independent individual, whereas collectivism is used to describe “self” in relation to some ingroup.

The IND-COL dimension has often been used to explain cooperation between humans. The main finding of the various studies was that collectivism as a cultural difference is conducive to cooperation (Wagner, 1995). Other studies have already looked at the relation between IND-COL and OCB (Moorman & Blakely, 1995; van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham, & Cummings, 2000); the majority of these supported the theorised relationship between IND-COL and OCB, where orientation towards collectivism was found to be positively related to OCB.

Triandis (1995) argued that individuals can have individualistic as well as collectivist cognitive elements. However, if the culture of a population is

regarded as more collectivist, it will have a higher proportion of collectivist-oriented people and vice versa. Given the fact that the foreign workers in this study came from countries that are known to be collectivist, we expected the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* Foreign workers in The Netherlands show a higher collectivist orientation than local workers.

Furthermore, it was expected that a congruence or match between individual values and national values would strengthen the relationship between local/foreign status and OCB (Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004). Collectivists from collectivist countries would view themselves as performing lowest on OCB, and individualists who are local workers would see themselves as especially high in OCB. Thus, the individual values were expected to influence the relationship between 'local/foreign status' and 'OCB' (Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004). Accordingly:

*Hypothesis 3:* The IND-COL cultural orientation moderates the relationship between local/foreign status and OCB in such a way that a congruence between individual and national values strengthens the effects.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was based on a survey among local and foreign workers employed by different organizations in The Netherlands. In this study, the local workers originated from The Netherlands which is an individualistically orientated country, whereas the foreign workers originated from countries that are perceived to be collectivistically oriented (Triandis & Suh, 2002, p. 136 [in this study China, Morocco, Ghana, Congo]; Hofstede, 2001, p. 215 [in this study Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Japan, Philippines, Spain, Turkey]; Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede, & Dienes, 2003, p. 83 [in this study Poland, Hungary]). The reason for choosing foreign workers from collectivist countries was that "the majority of the world, roughly 70 percent of the population, is collectivist" (Triandis, 1995, p. 13) and these countries generate large migrant flows towards the developed countries.

With the help of a questionnaire, employees of eight international organizations were asked to self-report their work-related behaviour as well as their cultural orientation. A total of 411 questionnaires were distributed. In the distribution of the questionnaires it was taken into account that a target of on average an equal number of local and foreign employees having

similar positions should be reached. The number of returned questionnaires was 300, which is a satisfactory response rate of almost 75%. The gender composition of the sample was nearly in balance (148 males and 152 females). Of the total number of respondents 54% ( $N=162$ ) were foreign workers. More than a half of foreigners originated from Eastern and Central European countries ( $N=102$ ) with Poland as a leading country ( $N=88$ ). This was followed by respondents from Asia ( $N=21$ ), Latin America ( $N=19$ ), and Africa and the Middle East ( $N=20$ ). About 16% of the abroad-born respondents ( $N=26$ ) had acquired the Dutch nationality and could be categorized as hyphenated Dutch. To ensure a "clean" comparison between local and foreign workers, hyphenated Dutch workers were excluded from the analyses. Furthermore, 80% of the foreigners had lived in The Netherlands for more than 1 year and a comparable large proportion of the foreign workers said they intend to stay for at least 1 year and longer. Of the local workers 70% were employed in a full-time position, whereas among foreign workers this was only 40%. Almost half of the foreign employees were employed through temporary work agencies in contrast to 10% of the local employees.

The original questionnaire in English was translated into Polish, Turkish, and Dutch. The translation of the questionnaire was back-translated and necessary corrections were made to try to assure equivalence (Azevedo, Drost, & Mullen, 2002). The homogeneity of the subsamples was assured by using matched sampling. The local/foreign respondents were matched on the basis of their position and work within the company, hence avoiding comparisons between foreign and local employees who have different jobs.

Local/foreign status was operationalized by asking the respondents their country of origin and nationality. This allowed a distinction between Dutch (local) workers, hyphenated Dutch workers, and foreign workers.

To assess individualism/collectivism, 20 items of Wagner (1995) were used. The answers were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. OCB was measured by the scale of Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990). The scale consisted of 23 items. OCB was also measured on a 5-point scale.

As control variables, demographics and job characteristics were assessed. These included age (in years), gender (0 = male, 1 = female), education (years of formal education from age 4 to present), tenure (in current job in years), function (administrative, IT, production/manufacturing, research and development, cleaning/housekeeping, warehouse/logistics/transport, consulting, engineering), and type of contract. In addition, a 4-item "job satisfaction" scale from Bunderson (2001) was used with a 5-point Likert scale, since van Dyne et al. (2000) found a relation between job satisfaction

and OCB. To control for the effects of a misfit between personal capabilities and job demands the perception of underemployment was measured using two items from Khan and Morrow (1991): "My formal education overqualifies me for my present job" and "My talents are not fully utilized on my job" (1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"). Task interdependence was measured by one item "I have to work a lot in a team in order to complete my task" (1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"), following the suggestion of Triandis (1995) to control for the type of work a person is engaged in.

The discriminant validity of the measures of OCB, IND-COL, satisfaction, and underemployment was first assessed using principal components factor analysis with oblimin rotation. Twelve factors were identified (five OCB dimensions, five IND-COL dimensions, satisfaction, and underemployment) that explained 61% of the variance, and largely confirmed the expected structure. Since we wanted to use a global OCB and IND-COL measure, we performed confirmatory factor analyses and tested for invariance of the measures for the two subsamples. With respect to OCB all items were retained because they loaded on one factor, and a model that also assumed that errors of adjacent items were related had a good fit (RMR = 0.049, GFI = 0.90). With respect to IND-COL, seven items had to be dropped from further analyses because of low loadings on the factor. The resulting model fitted well (RMR = 0.070, GFI = 0.972). In addition, multigroup invariance of the OCB and IND-COL measures was tested for the two subsamples (locals and foreigners), following the procedure described by Byrne (2004). For OCB as well as IND-COL a model that assumed that the measurement weights in both samples were equal had a reasonable fit (OCB RMR = 0.059, GFI = 0.866; IND-COL RMR = 0.14, GFI = 0.94). Therefore, the structure of the measures can be considered as comparable between samples. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were satisfactory. In the whole sample and the subsamples of foreign and local workers the coefficients were for IND-COL .81, .86, and .74, for OCB .83, .80, and .85, for satisfaction .71, .76, and .63, and for underemployment .66, .61, and .72.

## RESULTS

Table 1 displays the descriptives and correlations between the core variables for the whole sample.

There was a significant difference between local and foreign workers ( $N$  local = 138,  $N$  foreign = 136) with regard to the self-report of OCB,  $T = -2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ . The foreign workers in The Netherlands reported a significantly higher mean for OCB (3.93 vs. 3.80). Hypothesis 1 (expecting foreign workers to report less OCB) must therefore be rejected.

TABLE 1  
Means and standard deviations for the subsamples, intercorrelations between variables, and reliabilities of scales

	Local		Foreign		Correlations								
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. Gender (woman)	0.37**	0.64**											
2. Age (years)	34.2	10.1	31.8	10.1	-.07								
3. Education (years)	15.5	4.2	15.4	3.5	-.02	-.15*							
4. Task interdependence <sup>a</sup>	3.29	0.95	3.30	1.18	-.07	.09	.07						
5. Satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	3.82	0.60	3.85	0.70	.06	.09	.02	.21**	(.71)				
6. Underemployment <sup>a</sup>	3.23*	0.95	3.46*	0.90	.07	-.15*	.12*	-.05	-.16**	(.66)			
7. Organizational citizenship behaviour <sup>a</sup>	3.78**	0.41	3.91**	0.39	.03	.14*	.02	.26**	.27**	.13*	(.83)		
8. Individualism/collectivism <sup>a</sup>	3.37	0.43	3.47	0.47	.05	.05	.02	.05	.16**	-.02	.12	(.78)	
9. Local/foreign (foreign)					.27**	-.12	-.02	.01	.02	.12*	.16**	.03	

<sup>a</sup>Scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". Cronbach's alphas of scales in the diagonal of the correlation table are in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , two tailed;  $N$  local = 138,  $N$  foreign = 136.

There was no significant difference between foreigners and locals with regard to orientation towards individualism or collectivism,  $T = -0.53$ , *ns* (3.26 vs. 3.22). The second hypothesis therefore must also be rejected.

Table 2 presents the results from hierarchical regression analyses that predicted OCB in several steps. In a first step we included only demographic and job control variables. The  $R^2$ -square change was .09, with an  $F$ -change of 1.64 (not significant). In the second and third step we added the control variables suggested by earlier studies, task interdependence, and satisfaction together with underemployment. Task interdependence explained an additional 5.0% of the variance,  $F$ -change = 113.6,  $p < .01$ , satisfaction and underemployment an additional 8.0%,  $F$ -change = 11.9,  $p < .01$ .

TABLE 2  
Regression results with dependent variable OCB<sup>a</sup>

Step	Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
1	Gender (woman)	.03	.03	.02	.01	-.04	-.04
	Age (years)	.21**	.18**	.18**	.17**	.18**	.18**
	Education (years)	.08	.06	.01	.01	.02	.02
	Work status						
	Part-time	-.05	-.05	-.11	-.12	-.08	-.09
	Temporary	.03	.05	-.00	-.00	-.08	-.08
	Contractor	.03	.04	.07	.08	.06	.06
	Function						
	IT	.04	.03	.00	-.00	-.02	-.03
	Production	.11	.02	.01	.01	.01	.00
	R&D	-.11	-.11	-.08	-.09	-.11	-.12
	Cleaning	.15	.17	.15	.14	.15	.14
	Logistics	-.04	-.10	-.10	-.10	-.10	-.10
	Consulting	.01	-.01	.05	.05	.03	.03
	Engineering	.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.00
Tenure (years)	-.15*	-.10	-.11	-.12	-.10	-.11	
2	Task						
	Interdependence <sup>b</sup>		.24***	.18**	.18**	.18**	.18**
3	Satisfaction <sup>b</sup>			.28***	.28***	.28***	.28***
	Underemployment <sup>b</sup>			.17**	.17*	.15*	.15*
4	IND-COL orientation <sup>b</sup>				.07	.06	.07
5	Local/foreign					.18*	.19*
	status (foreign)						
6	Interaction L/F						-.04
	status* IND-COL						
	$R^2$	.09	.14**	.22***	.22***	.24***	.25***
	$R^2$ change	.09	.05***	.08***	.00	.02*	.00

<sup>a</sup>Standardized regression coefficients. <sup>b</sup>Scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $N$  local = 138,  $N$  foreign = 136.

Steps 4 and 5 included the main variables of this study, IND-COL and local/foreign status, respectively. IND-COL explained no additional variance,  $F\text{-change} = 1.23$ , *ns*, and local/foreign status an additional 2.2%,  $F\text{-change} = 6.6$ ,  $p < .05$ . In the last step, the interaction between IND-COL and local/foreign status was added, but this did not increase the percentage of explained variance. Together the independent variables explained 24.5% of the variance in OCB. The most powerful predictor in explaining OCB was job satisfaction, followed by task interdependence, age, local/foreign status, and finally, underemployment. The results showed that cultural orientation was not a significant predictor in explaining the variance in OCB. Also, the interaction between local/foreign status and IND-COL orientation was not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 had to be rejected.

## DISCUSSION

This study tested whether, compared to local workers, foreign workers report a lower tendency to display OCB (Hypothesis 1), and whether foreign workers showed a higher collectivist orientation than local workers (Hypothesis 2). In addition the moderating effect of IND-COL cultural orientation on the relationship between local/foreign status and OCB was examined (Hypothesis 3).

With respect to Hypothesis 1, the results of this study demonstrated that foreign workers in comparison to local workers significantly differed in self-reported work-related behaviour. In contrast to what was expected, the foreign workers reported a significantly higher tendency to perform OCB than their Dutch colleagues did. This was found despite the fact that more than a half of the foreign respondents were employed through a temporary work agency in comparison to only 10% of the Dutch employees and that significantly more foreign employees reported to be underemployed.

Next to this main effect, also control variables such as age, level of task interdependence, job satisfaction, and underemployment played a role in predicting OCB. The increase of age resulted in a rise of OCB. This effect was also found in other studies (Stamper & van Dyne, 2001). An explanation of this finding could be the higher tenure among older people. Furthermore, as the age increases people have a higher need for social relations (Triandis, 1995, p. 62) and by performing OCB one can strengthen his or her social network (see also Peterson & Spiker, 2005).

The importance of task interdependence had already been recognized in earlier studies of OCB (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Knowing that the level of collectivism had a positive relationship with OCB, it is not surprising that the task interdependence was an important predictor of OCB. The results with regard to job satisfaction and its positive influence on OCB were not surprising either. Preceding studies (see Moorman &

Blakely, 1995; Payne & Webber, 2006) had already shown that job satisfaction has a positive relationship with extrarole behaviour. No difference was found in job satisfaction between foreign and local workers in The Netherlands. One explanation for this could be that labour migrants often base their decision to emigrate on economic calculus (Tsuda, 1999). Probably, the economic motive of emigration could be more important than the awareness of their low status in the host country. It can be assumed that foreigners work towards achieving their goal and this would be likely to serve them as a reference point for forming their job satisfaction. Finally, the comparison with their previous job in the home country might also affect the job satisfaction of a labour migrant.

With respect to Hypothesis 2, this study expected that individuals, born and raised in a collectivistic country, would be collectivistically oriented themselves. This, however, was not confirmed. The different outcomes of this study and the study by Ang et al. (2003) can probably be attributed to differences in the sample composition and the context in which the study was done. Ang et al. kept the nationality/ethnicity constant (all Chinese people), whereas in this study the sample was composed of foreigners from collectivistic countries and local workers from an individualistic country. Furthermore, the study of Ang et al. took place in Asia. The emphasis of the Ang et al. study was on the effects of being a foreigner, whereas in this study the focus was on differences in the culture.

In our view, the results we did find could be attributed to the mechanisms of self-selection among foreign workers. Foreign workers cannot be seen as a random sample of the population in their home country (Liebig & Sousa-Poza, 2004). According to Triandis (1995), travelling abroad is generally related to the characteristics of individualists. This implies that emigrants might differ in their character, ambition, and abilities from “home stayers” (de Coulon & Piracha, 2005). The other way around, the local workers in this study might have been more collectivistically oriented than the average Dutch working population because the respondents were matched with respect to job position with the foreign workers in this sample. As the majority of the foreigners occupied lower skilled jobs (e.g., production, logistics, and cleaning), so did the local workers. There is a correlation between low income and collectivism (Triandis, 1995).

Hypothesis 3 was on a moderating effect of IND-COL cultural orientation on the relationship between local/foreign status and OCB. This effect was not confirmed in this study. Economic motives might serve to the foreign employees as a reference point for all their work-related behaviour. As Tsuda (1999) explained, earning money is the highest reward for these people and other issues—unskilled and low-status work—plays a less important role in their work-related behaviour. In situations where such a strong motivation becomes a drive to act, the assumptions of social

exchange theories seem to become less relevant. This is not the whole story though. The behaviour of the foreign people might be also induced by their desire to belong to the group of locals and be recognized as “one of them”. People from other countries are and always stay seen as strangers. In the words of Simmel (1980), they are “near and far at the same time” (1980, p. 240). By working hard and engaging in extrarole behaviours, however, these foreign workers could want to prove themselves and in this way become accepted as one of the group. It is like fighting for their legitimacy.

This study had several limitations. The use of a one-item measure for task interdependence and moderate reliabilities for underemployment might have weakened the results. Moreover, there might be a social desirability effect implying that foreigners might be more prone than locals to display positive answers on OCB-type questions. However, when social desirability would have played an important role, it would be expected that differences between local and foreigners would occur on all attitude variables (for example, also on job satisfaction, underemployment). This was not the case, however. It should be noted that the results might be context specific and therefore cannot be generalized without considering the specifics of the context to other countries. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study did not allow inferences on the causal order of the relations.

All in all, this study provided a much needed signal in current times when immigrants are still often being seen as a threat instead of a welcome contribution to the further development of Western societies (e.g., van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006). It has already been recognized in mass media that labour migrants from Eastern Europe (for instance, Poland) excel in their eagerness to work hard. The most important finding of this study was that foreign employees reported themselves to be equally good workers when it comes to extrarole behaviour, after controlling for a variety of other factors.

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