Multiculturalism and innovative work behavior: The mediating role of cultural intelligence

Hubert Korzilius [a],[*],[1], Joost J.L.E. Bücker [a],[1], Sophie Beerlage [b]

[a] Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, P.O. Box 9108, 6500 HK Nijmegen, the Netherlands
[b] Deloitte Nederland, Gustav Mahlerlaan 2970, 1081 LA Amsterdam, the Netherlands

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Innovative work behavior is a key organizational competence. Informed by a framework for describing the role of cultural competences as an antecedent for international business performance this study seeks to explicate the connection between individual multiculturalism and innovative work behaviors, with cultural intelligence as a mediating variable. The empirical tests, using a culturally diverse sample of 157 employees of a large, international, Dutch-based staffing agency, reveal that cultural intelligence fully mediates the effect of multiculturalism on innovative work behaviors. The mediation appears robust to various individual and departmental characteristics. These outcomes have implications for the selection and development of employees in innovative organizations and for innovation and international business research.

1. Introduction

Innovation is an important driver for organizations that seek to compete globally, and in particular, "Employee innovative behavior (e.g., developing, adopting, and implementing new ideas for product and work methods) is an important asset that enables an organization to succeed in a dynamic business environment" (Yuan & Woodman, 2010; p. 323). Managerial capabilities and organizing principles contribute to innovation (Volberda & Van Den Bosch, 2004), and although various antecedents of individual innovative behavior have been studied, precise evidence about how individual and contextual antecedents influence such behavior remains inconclusive (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). For example, innovative work behavior (IWB) might stem from a diverse workforce, which can create flexibility, help detect problems, and stimulate problem-solving creativity (De Waal, 2012; Østergaard, Timmermans, & Kristinsson, 2011). Diversity reflects the degree to which people within a group differ (Jackson, 1992; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), on any attribute, though most research focuses on differences in gender, age, tenure, educational background, functional background (Van Dijk, Van Engen, & Van Knippenberg, 2012; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), or cultural background, including race, ethnicity, and nationality (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010).

In addition, cultural backgrounds usually are studied at the group (e.g., team, firm) level. With this study, we instead consider cultural background from an individual perspective and focus on people acculturated within two or more cultures, such that they have a bicultural (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Furusawa & Brewster, 2015) or multicultural (Nguyen &

---

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: h.korzilius@fm.ru.nl (H. Korzilius), j.bucker@fm.ru.nl (J.J.L.E. Bücker), sbeerlage@deloitte.nl (S. Beerlage).
[1] The first two authors equally contributed to the manuscript.

Benet-Martínez, 2010) identity. Increased global mobility and cross-cultural interactions allow more people to develop such multicultural identities, and we propose that the cognitive strengths possessed by this emerging demographic change may constitute a key benefit of multiculturalism in contexts that seek greater innovation and creativity. That is, multicultural experience enhances creativity (Leung, Maddux, Galinski, & Chiu, 2008); we study the relationship between multiculturalism and IWB specifically. By clarifying this relationship, we can better "illuminate the mechanisms by which positive outcomes linked to multiculturalism may arise" (Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009, p. 106).

People who maintain two or more cultural orientations can engage in cultural frame switching (Hong, 2010; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000), shifting across different, culturally based, interpretative lenses in response to various cultural cues (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Among the many definitions of multicultural people, we adopt a broad definition from Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2010, p. 89); based on Berry, 2003; Hong et al., 2000; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Padilla, 2006).

Those who are mixed-race and mixed-ethnic, those who have lived in more than one country (such as expatriates, international students, immigrants, refugees, and sojourners), those reared with at least one other culture in addition to the dominant mainstream culture (such as children of immigrants or colonized people), and those in inter-cultural relationships may all be considered multicultural. [. . .] More specifically, multiculturalism can be defined as the experience of having been exposed to and having internalized two or more cultures.

We further posit that cross-cultural competencies are vital in international business, as a means to ensure effective communication across countries (Ting-Toomey, 2012). Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006) describe a framework of cross-cultural competencies that includes cultural intelligence (CQ) and its cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (see also Bücker, Furrer, Poutsma, & Buyens, 2014). Cultural intelligence refers to a person's ability to adapt to other cultural environments (Brislin, Worthley, & Macnab, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003). Traditionally, CQ has been measured at an individual level, such as in expatriate management research that presents it as an antecedent of cultural adjustment and, arguably, a source of better expatriate performance (Van Driel & Gabrenya, 2013). As an extension of intelligence studies, CQ is related to but distinct from emotional intelligence (Moon, 2010). Accordingly, we integrate empirical research on IWB, multiculturalism, and CQ to develop our conceptual model and related hypotheses. Although biculturalism appears as a relevant influence in psychology literature (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), we find few empirical studies in international business literature (Furusawa & Brewster, 2015).

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Innovative work behavior

Innovation is a necessary component for organizational performance (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005). Cummings and O'Connell (1978, p. 33) consider innovation as "a subset of organizational change in which new products, technologies, or structures are introduced" to improve organizational effectiveness. Innovation traditionally has focused on products; services seemingly could not be innovative (Elche & González, 2008), because they were assumed to be non-productive activities. Today though, they are recognized as an important part of any economic system, and service firms require qualified, innovative professionals (Elche & González, 2008). The special features of services, including their intangibility, short duration, and heterogeneity, also imply that they require a distinct innovation process, relative to that applied by manufacturing firms. Furthermore, the ability to innovate products and processes continuously is crucial and resides mainly with an organization's employees (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2008), who constitute organizational learning capability. That is, individual actions define the continuous innovation and improvement associated with the term "innovative work behavior" (Janssen, 2000; Van de Ven, 1986).

Janssen (2000, p. 288) defines IWB as "the intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization", which includes rethinking and changing the underlying principles of organizational work. Innovative work behavior thus is a dynamic, context-bound construct, reflecting "the sum of physical and cognitive work activities carried out by employees in their work context, either solitarily or in a social setting, in order to accomplish a set of tasks that are required to achieve the goal of innovation development" (Messmann & Mulder, 2012; p. 45). Scholars have identified various benefits of IWB (Bunce & West, 1996; Janssen, 2000; Janssen, Van de Vliert, & West, 2004), particularly in that innovative employees may enjoy more job satisfaction, achieve better performance in the workplace, develop better relationships with other colleagues, experience less stress, enjoy more personal growth (West & Anderson, 1996), and produce positive conflict (Janssen et al., 2004). In addition to individual benefits, innovation can exert valuable influences on the effectiveness and long-term survival of organizations (Amabile et al., 2005; Ancona & Caldwell, 1987; Mumford, 2000; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). In this sense, innovation represents an overall organizational learning orientation, in which success is defined less by specific innovation projects and more by a general goal to produce innovative capabilities (Siguaw, Simpson, & Enz, 2006). Organizational innovativeness then is key to competitive advantages and strategic renewal (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Overall, it appears crucial for organizations to encourage and stimulate innovation among their employees, by creating a climate that fosters and cultivates such innovation (Ernst, 2002).