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**Acculturation and Socialization of Migrants in Organizations – a  
Theoretical Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** Migration and integration are core future concerns with which work and organizational psychology have hitherto hardly addressed. Especially the integration of highly-skilled migrants in organizations has proven to be difficult.

**Design/methodology/approach** First, the authors review the research evidence on the relationship of acculturation and professional socialization. The object of our contribution is to link theoretically the process of socialization and acculturation of migrants in organizations with the process of intercultural adjustment and in particular to focus on the antecedents of these processes.

**Findings** As a result, we present a multidimensional model that aims to apply, modify and further develop current acculturation models in organizational psychology in the context of organizational socialization. Particular consideration is given to the role of social support and values. Consequences for inclusive organizations are discussed.

**Originality/value** The paper discusses issues that are of interest to all organizations

## **Problem**

Never before so many people have left their native countries to settle elsewhere. According to the UN Migration Report 2010, the number of migrants amounted to 214 million worldwide – in 2000 it was still 150 million and the prognosis for 2050 is an increase of even up to 405 million (International Organization for Migration, 2010).

An important factor for the professional success of work-migrants is adjustment to the work and life conditions in the host country as well as the provided social support. In the past decades, work migration policy concentrated solely on low-qualified work-migrants (Burkert, Niebuhr and Wapler, 2008), whereas research on the migration and integration of highly skilled work-migrants is new and incomplete. In the past, the relevant literature dealt with the recruiting process of the highly skilled and largely ignored integration in the job market (Nohl, Schittenheim, Schmidtke and Weiß 2009). As early as at the beginning of the 1990s, the number

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of highly skilled work-migrants in the western world increased due to the general trend toward globalization (Samers, 2010; Suarez-Orozco and Sattin, 2007). It is essential to examine the integration process of highly skilled work-migrants (Nohl et al., 2009) as in this group the integration process is often broken off.

In modern societies, organizations have taken on a double function: on the one hand, they organize uniformly in order to accomplish certain assignments and achieve certain targets; and, on the other hand, they are constantly organizing diversity, even disparity. The special achievement of organizations is making, in the form of leadership and diversity management, diversity an explicit objective of organizational practice (Glenn, 1999; West and Zimmerman, 1998).

According to Woods (2002) diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably. But diversity denotes the spectrum of human similarities and differences. Diversity is about people, inclusion, on the other hand about organization. Inclusion describes the way an organization configures opportunity, interaction, communication and decision making to utilize the potential of its diversity.

In the course of migration, globalization, regional differentiation and the widening gap in socio-economic differences in many western industrial nations, organizations are increasingly confronted with dealing with the growing heterogeneity of actors, orientation patterns, ways of life and competencies. Segregation and exclusion processes must be prevented and strategies for productive exploitation of social heterogeneity have to be developed. Particularly, in business organizations there are growing signs of a change in perspective and strategy, indicating more strongly than before the productive potential of social heterogeneity.

Despite its political and economic relevance and currency, there is a distinct deficit in research in the subject of highly skilled migrants in organizational and economic psychology. In work and organizational psychology, the subject of work-migrants has drawn little attention (e.g., Zikic, Bonache and Cerdin, 2010).

In recent years, research mainly focused on the outcomes of adjustment processes as a change in published articles and lectures at international congress demonstrates (Brouwers, van Hemert, Breugelmans and van de Vijver, 2004; Lonner, 2004). The reason for this is probably the worldwide increasing intercultural contact as well as the mutual influence of different cultures due to the

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globalization of markets. However, the antecedents and other influential factors of and on intercultural adjustment have been little investigated. The cultural aspect, respectively the migrant background, has hitherto not been addressed in professional socialization.

This article aims to apply existing adjustment models used in acculturation research to professional socialization. For this purpose, we developed a first model (Fig. 1). In the following, we will present a summary of the present state of the research on the central variables of acculturation of work-migrants – acculturation, cultural distance, social support, values and professional socialization.

## **Acculturation**

Providing an unequivocal general definition of the concept of acculturation is difficult because it is the subject of research of numerous related disciplines which focus on diverse aspects. Numerous definitions of the concept of acculturation can be found in the relevant literature (Rudmin, 2009). Gibson (2001, p.19), for instance, offers a very general definition: "Acculturation is the process of culture change and adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact". It assumes, as Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) already did, that when an immigrant enters a new country and its culture, theoretically a culture change may occur both for the local inhabitants and the immigrants. In immigration reality, it is however usually the members of the immigrant minority who have to adapt to the local majority (Rogler, Cortes and Malgady, 1991).

Berry (1997) and Ward (1996), too, defined acculturation as a person growing into his/her cultural surroundings. Literally, acculturation means adjustment to a foreign culture and thus links the two terms adjustment and culture. According to Berry (1997), four different acculturation strategies can be differentiated defined by the question whether or not the minority group wants to/ should keep its own culture or whether or not there should be any form of contact between the majority and the minority group. If the answer is yes to both questions, Berry refers to this as integration, culture no/contact yes: assimilation, culture yes/ contact no: segregation or separation and if the answer to both questions is no: marginalization or exclusion.

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Safdar, Lay and Struthers (2003) developed an acculturation model, the so-called MIDA model meant to explain differences in individual acculturation processes. This model examines three of the main goals of immigrants in multicultural societies: retaining one's own culture, participation in the new society and retaining the physical and mental health. The predictor variables were psychological adjustment, family and cultural ties including perceived social support and experiencing daily hassles. They also investigated the two types of acculturation assimilation and separation (Safdar, Struthers and van Oudenhoven, 2009).

Far more comprehensive is Ward's model (1996) on which our heuristic 3-level model is based. This model differentiates between psychological and sociocultural adjustment and included certain predictors of acculturation. It describes acculturation as a comprehensive process in which the emotions, cognition and behavior of individuals of a culture are changed by contact with individuals of another culture (Moyerman and Forman, 1992). Antecedents, moderating factors and adjustment consequences are demonstrated in a dynamic, acculturative process model. This model differentiates between societal and individual levels and postulates individual and situational characteristics as moderating factors of successful adjustment.

The role of time (phase of sojourn as well as temporary vs permanent migration) and the company's integrating measures turn out to be important factors in the acculturation of individuals in companies. Previous models (e.g., Ward, 1996, Safdar, Struthers and Van Oudenhoven, 2009) did not consider these variables. For this reason, we have included them in our research model.

## **Cultural distance**

The degree of cultural distance, also included in Ward's model, is an important predictor for foretelling successful integration. Cultural distance (Hofstede, 1980, Church, 1982) is the degree to which groups differ culturally measured by ethnographic indicators or by individual perceptions of differences.

Cultural distance may be described and measured both on the individual level and on the national level. On the individual level, it is assumed that adjustment is more difficult if great cultural distance is felt, i.e., the more distant or different the culture of a host country is from the culture of an expatriate, the more difficult the adjustment

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(Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh and Tangirala, 2010). On the national level, cultural distance describes the dissimilarity of two encountering cultures. An example of cultural distance values on a national level is found in the GLOBE study (e.g., Chokar, Brodbeck and House, 2008).

## **Social support**

The concept of social support can be defined as “the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships” (Viswesvaran, Sanchez and Fisher, 1999) and has been analyzed in various contexts such as family, friends, professional socialization, culture (Glazer, 2006).

Numerous national studies have shown that there is a relationship between social support and mental health, respectively psychological well-being (e.g. Ducharme and Martin, 2000). Social support is particularly relevant in work-related contexts (e.g. Bhanthumnavin, 2003, Madjar, 2008; Ng and Sorensen, 2008) and for immigrants (e.g., Bhattacharya, 2008; Garip, 2008; Hovey, 2000; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, and Siara, 2008; Vohra and Adair, 2000).

Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen's meta-analysis (2003) describing the preconditions and consequences of adjustment, shows that support by the family in addition to self-efficacy and interpersonal skills is a central predictor of successful adjustment. Research studies have shown that support by individuals from the host country have a positive effect on expatriates' perceived adjustment (Toh, 2003) and work satisfaction (Wang and Sangalang, 2005) and relate positively to their acculturation strategies (Pooyan, 1984).

Conceptually, social support can be divided into two main categories: emotional/affective and informational/material/instrumental (Bhanthumnavian, 2003; Ducharme and Martin, 2000; Madjar, 2008).

According to the goodness-of-fit model (Forsythe and Compas, 1987), problem-focused coping (e.g., in the form of instrumental help and information) is best suited for events that are perceived as controllable, whereas emotion-focused coping is best suited for events experienced as uncontrollable (e.g., in the form of emotional concern and experience).

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Due to the fact that immigrants and expatriates are exposed to many stressors (new situation, life-work interference, language problems and cultural distance), socio-emotional support is of particular significance (Cunningham and de la Rose, 2008, Black et al., 1991).

Controllable stress is reduced by instrumental support from sources that are able to provide instrumental help, whereas less controllable stress is reduced by socio-emotional support from sources that help to disengage from negative experiences. Thus, specific strains are reduced if the right kind of support from the right source of support matches the type of stressor. This has also been termed the "matching/specificity hypothesis" (Viswesvaran et al., 1999, p.318). To sum up, social support is not only important for the subjective well-being and performance of expatriates (Findler et al, 2007; van der Zee et al., 2005; Wang and Sangelang, 2005) as well as the work satisfaction and commitment of culturally diverse co-workers but also the ability to successfully integrate in the new cultural environment (Amuedo Dorantes and Mundra, 2007).

Thus, we also assume that social support is significant for work migrants although we differentiate between support given by the family and support offered by the organization. The question here is which form of support contributes best to a P-O fit (person-organization fit).

## **Professional socialization**

By means of socialization, the individual adjusts to the work organization as part of a process, the individual being is supported by socialization, respectively by human resources development measures. The company initiates socialization strategies, e.g., special initiation trainings, (Jones, 1986). Thus, a positive relationship between institutional social strategies and P-O fit was determined (Kim, Cable and Kim, 2005). Similarly, however, the work needs to be adjusted to the individual: humane work, work places and forms of organization so that there is no risk of health hazards or personal harm occurring.

There are various phase models (Kuckartz, 2007; Nerdinger, Blickle and Scharper, 2011) for the professional socialization process comparable to the phase models for the adjustment to a new culture. The phase models have in common the division into a pre-encounter, encounter and metamorphosis phase (Landy and Conte, 2007). The pre-encounter phase corresponds primarily to selection by others as well as selection by oneself. The encounter phase is often connected with traumatic experiences, referred to as praxis or industry shock (Cherniss, 1999). In this phase, the newcomers are

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tested to see if they “fit” the organization. Accordingly, it is the biggest and most important challenge for the beginner to find his/her way around and to be accepted. The first months in an organization can have far-reaching consequences for subsequent commitment to the organization and the whole professional development. (Spieß and von Rosenstiel, 2010). Thus Frese (1983) differentiates between the initial effect thesis and the exposure effect thesis: the initial efficacy hypothesis stresses the organization's sustainable socialization effect in the first months following encounter. For migrants, this means that a successful start in a new job may also relate positively to integration. On the other hand, the exposure effect hypothesis stresses the individual's long-term assimilation in the organization. For migrants that could mean that they develop long-term perspectives in the organization and society. The metamorphosis phase relates to the transformation process in which a new member advances to “full membership” and assumes the values and attitudes prevailing in the organization: thus socialization has occurred. Furthermore, human resources development can contribute to socialization by offering relevant socialization measures – e.g., training and continued education courses. For professional socialization, values (both the individual's as well as the organization's) are very important for the member.

## **Values**

In our model (Fig. 1) values are of essential significance, they influence both the individual level and the organizational level. In addition, they also steer the individual's actions. Moreover, they play an important role in research as every individual is formed by his/her cultural values (Schwartz, 1992). The subject of values has been increasingly gaining significance in more recent intercultural research (Schwartz, 2011, Schwartz and Bisky, 1990; Sagiv and Schwartz, 200; Maio, Cheung, Pakizeh and Rees, 2009) with questions pertaining to measuring values and national differences in cultural value dimensions being discussed in depth (Knafo, Roccas and Sagiv, 2011). Well backed up empirically and interculturally valid is Schwartz's structure of values (1992; 2011), according to which fundamental human values can be ordered on a circular continuum, opposite pairs of values lying juxtaposed. Benchmarks in this continuum are two opposite pairs of values: openness for changes vs. conservatism, and as a second dimension selflessness vs. self-centeredness. Most likely, ethical values play a decisive role in acculturation processes, because they are of essential significance

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for personal identity (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, and Workman, 2011).

The following figure illustrates the question at issue and the central variables. Acculturation of work migrants occurs on three levels: the societal and cultural level (culture of origin and culture of the host culture), the organizational level and the individual level. The latter can be differentiated in characteristics of the individual and the situation.

- please insert figure 1 about here -

Insert Figure 1: Heuristic three level model of acculturation of work migrants

The model postulates the following relationships: both the individual level and the organizational level are characterized by the culture of the country of origin and the culture of the host country and their central values. Highly skilled individuals with a migration background join an organization (they selected themselves or they themselves were selected), experience various types of socialization measures and social support. The P-O fit, i.e. the extent to which the individual is successfully integrated in the organization, satisfaction with work, living conditions and cultural content are the dependent variables.

Based on this theoretical model of cultural adjustment, which is essentially an extension of Ward's model (1996) by adding the aspect of organization, we derive the propositions which personal and situational factors enable highly skilled migrants to adjust/integrate in organizations.

At the top are the values and the culture of the respective society of origin and host society. On the personal side there are, for example, acculturation attitudes, values, personal initiative, language skills, on the situational side, for example, cultural distance, duration of sojourn, social support.

As previous research in the area of foreign assignments determined that social support influences adjustment and well-being, we, also in extending Ward's model (1996), postulate the role of social support in the process of integration of highly skilled work migrants. Of interest is what type of support (instrumental, emotional) is

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especially helpful and who should provide which type of support for integration to be successful.

We assume that, in accordance with Schwartz's studies (1992; 2011), at the beginning of the socialization process the values of migrants differ from those of co-workers from the host country.

In accordance with Ward's model (1996), we differ between different levels of analysis. Cultural distance and values exist both on the individual level and on the societal level. Between these two levels is the organization, which has different values. We assume that adaptation of values promotes integration, whereas non-adaptation leads to marginalization (Stroppa, 2011).

Social support from both the company and the family as well as the circle of friends has special significance in joining an organization or starting a new job, which allows finding first relationships between successful and unsuccessful integrations. However, this period may be confounded by the shock of starting a new job, which should be overcome after about two years.

In keeping with Frese's initial effect hypothesis (1983), we postulate a sustainable socializing effect of the organization during the first months after joining. There is a positive relationship between institutional socialization activities, for example special indoctrination trainings or socialization support from co-workers, and P-O fit (Kim, Cable and Kim, 2005). If socialization activities are available in the company, we assume that the values of work migrants and co-workers from the host country will converge.

Voluntary social interaction with the host society relates positively with acculturation process and thus with the feeling of belonging to the members of the host country (Masgoret and Ward, 2006). Safdar, Struthers and van Oudenhoven (2009) show that outgroup contact and cultural competence lead to more outgroup contact, whereas support from the ingroup and strong ethnic identity lead to more ingroup contact. Inter-ethnic friendships can reduce prejudices toward foreign groups (Pettigrew, 1998). Intensifying factors are the duration, intensity and quality of contact. It is not important where this occurs, for example in a work environment, in a school context or at leisure activities with friends. Social support takes on a central role in successful integration. Different sources of social support

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have different functions in adjustment (Stroppa and Spieß, 2010; Stroppa and Spiess, 2011).

A study by Spieß, Schaaf and Stroppa (2009) has shown that social support from the family is an important influential factor in adjustment. We assume that support from the family also has a positive effect on/ relates positively to the mental and physical health of work migrants.

## **Discussion**

The aim was to link the process of professional integration to intercultural adjustment and clarify theoretically in particular the influential factors for successful adjustment, respectively socialization in organizations. The point of departure is our research model (Fig. 1) based on the acculturation models developed in intercultural psychology (Berry, 1997; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Safdar, Struthers and van Oudenhoven, 2009; Ward, 1996). In our model, studying values plays a significant role as do the respective cultural distance, social support and socialization activities prevailing in the organization.

The question arises to what extent the predictors on the individual and situational level lead to work migrants adjusting successfully to an organization's culture and the P-O fit is successful. We should take into account the constant tension that immigrants might have to deal with regarding different identities, which represent varying degrees of cultural integration. As employees in a workgroup, immigrants can draw on these identities to influence social, organizational, group, and individual outcomes (Shore, Chung-Herrera, Dean, Ehrhart, Jung, Randel, and Singh, 2009).

Intergroup relations at work become more complex with the cultural diversification of societies. A diverse workforce can be at the same time a competitive advantage and a source of internal organizational conflicts. Therefore, it is important to know the conditions that link intergroup contact to the emergence of an inclusive organizational culture (Brouwer and Boros, 2010).

In the past decade, there has been growing evidence indicating that diversity and inclusion are critical predictors of employee behaviors and outcomes. Theory and research indicate an important link between diversity characteristics and inclusion in the workplace. Several studies also document that demographic characteristics contribute to people's perception of inclusion/exclusion in Western

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culture. Researchers have demonstrated that employees outside the corporate mainstream, such as women and members of ethnic minority groups, are more likely to feel excluded from important workplace interactions and opportunities. For example, in a series of organizational studies. Mor Barak and her colleagues found that men and Caucasians feel more included in the organizational decision-making processes and social networks than do women and non-Caucasians. Mor Barak and her colleagues specifically identify the term "inclusion" as a "bridge," connecting different demographic characteristics with an individual's behavior in the organization (Mor Barak, 2000). Therefore, once employees identify themselves in the corporate mainstream, they feel included and their perception of inclusion positively affects job performance (Cho and Mor Barak, 2008).

### Practical implications

Examination of our research model allows deriving measures which can improve integration of work migrants.

In an inclusive organization, visible and invisible heterogeneity is present throughout all departments and all levels of responsibility. Human differences and similarities are welcomed, valued and utilized at all levels. An inclusive organization is one in which all employees are viewed and respected as whole persons with identities (Woods, 2002).

Inclusive organizations should be open for highly qualified migrants, they should offer e.g. trainings, language courses to help them to adapt to the organizational culture.

### Future research directions

The central question can be best studied in a panel design. How do these values change during the adjustment process and what influence does cultural distance have? The aim is ultimately to be able to predict with our model what influence the different levels – individual, organizational, cultural – have on the integration of expatriates. Inclusive organizations may foster the process of integration.

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