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# Predicting multicultural effectiveness of international students: the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire

Jan Pieter Van Oudenhoven\*, Karen I. Van der Zee

*Department of Psychology, University of Groningen, Grote Kruisstraat 211, Groningen 9721 TS, The Netherlands*

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## Abstract

The present study considered the reliability and validity of the 78-item revised version of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, a multidimensional instrument aimed at measuring multicultural effectiveness of expatriate employees and students. The questionnaire includes scales for cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility. Participants were native and foreign students of an international business school ( $N = 171$ ) in the Netherlands. The MPQ scales appeared to be more strongly predictive of adjustment of international students as compared to native students. Moreover, the instrument was able to explain variance in students' adjustment beyond self-efficacy.

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*Keywords:* Multicultural effectiveness; Multicultural Personality Questionnaire; International students; Open-mindedness; Cultural empathy; Flexibility; Social Initiative; Emotional stability

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## 1. Introduction

In today's global business environment, executive work is becoming more international in orientation. Increasingly, employees have to be able to operate within foreign cultures. As a consequence business schools, in particular, have become more aware of the need to internationalize their curricula and their customers. Many schools recruit students from all over the globe. The students leave

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\*Corresponding author. Tel.: +31-50-3636426; fax: +31-50-3636304.

*E-mail address:* j.p.l.m.van.oudenhoven@ppsw.rug.nl (J.P. Van Oudenhoven).

their familiar surroundings to spend several years in a different culture; not all of them perform effectively within an environment with different norms and rules (e.g., Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Because of the high financial costs associated with failures and the threat it poses to students' sense of well-being and to their self-esteem it is important to gain insight into the factors that are associated with a successful international education. The present study examined personality characteristics that may be associated with the success or failure of international business students.

Several dimensions have been related to successful adaptation of expatriates, primarily of expatriate employees. Nevertheless, few attempts have been made to develop sound and valid instruments aimed at measuring them. Most studies heavily rely on expert evaluations of the relevance of dimensions assumed to be important for overseas success. And, although several authors have stressed the potential usefulness of personality scales for predicting international success (e.g., Deller, 1997; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997), empirical research in this field based on reliable scales is scarce. The few attempts that have been made use general personality questionnaires for the Big Five, which, as Hough (1992) suggests, may be too broad to successfully predict occupational or educational criteria (see also Ashton, 1998).

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed as a questionnaire aimed at measuring multicultural effectiveness. An instrument for multicultural effectiveness may be used for the selection and training of international students, and employees who have a job with an international scope, whether in an expatriate assignment or in a job dealing with international issues more generally (Schaeffer, 1985). The MPQ has scales for cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The MPQ scales are more tailored to predictions regarding multicultural success than general personality questionnaires. In large, the MPQ questions refer to behavior in multicultural situations, making the relation between test behavior and the aspired job or academic career transparent, thereby enhancing the face validity of the instrument. Even the MPQ scales that closely correspond with Big Five-scales are designed to cover more specifically those aspects that are of relevance to multicultural success.

### 1.1. The MPQ scales

*Cultural empathy*, also referred to as 'sensitivity' (e.g., Hawes & Kealy, 1981), is probably the most frequently mentioned dimension of cultural effectiveness (Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Cleveland, Mangone, & Adams, 1960; Ruben, 1976). Ruben (1976) defines cultural empathy as "the capacity to clearly project an interest in others, as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete and accurate sense of another's thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences". In other words, this dimension refers to the ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of members from different cultural groups.

Second, *open-mindedness* refers to an open and unprejudiced attitude towards outgroup members and towards different cultural norms and values. Arthur & Bennett (1995) classify open-mindedness among the relational skills and use items

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