

Case Report**From Languages to Competencies: Revisiting Multicultural Socialization in Personnel Selection****Pedro Emanuel da Costa Palmeira**

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This article revisits the empirical investigation of multicultural socialization as a predictor of work-related competencies, including social competence, achievement motivation, and intercultural competence. Based on an online study with $N = 595$ participants (Palmeira, 2016), which included a strong representation of employees from HUGO BOSS AG, key findings indicated that age was negatively related to flexibility ($r = -.27, p < .01$) and cultural empathy ($r = -.24, p < .01$), while the number of spoken languages correlated positively with open-mindedness ($r = .30, p < .001$), social initiative ($r = .20, p < .001$), and achievement motivation ($r = .17, p < .001$). Gender effects were also robust: women scored higher on empathy ($F(1,594) = 9.25, p = .002$) and social orientation ($F(1,594) = 18.18, p < .001$), while men scored higher on assertiveness ($F(1,594) = 20.47, p < .001$) and achievement motivation ($F(1,594) = 21.99, p < .001$). The article integrates more recent scholarship (2016–2024) on multilingualism, cognitive flexibility, multicultural personality, and cultural intelligence, critically reflects on methodological limitations, and provides updated implications for personnel selection. By combining statistical evidence and practical insights, this work underscores why multicultural socialization has become a critical factor for effective and fair HR practices in today's global workforce.

Introduction

Globalization and workforce diversity place multiculturalism at the forefront of organizational psychology and human resource management. While intercultural competence is widely recognized, broader competencies such as social competence and achievement motivation have received less systematic attention in relation to multicultural socialization [1,2]. This article builds on by integrating the original findings with insights from the past decade of research, highlighting their enduring importance for personnel selection and outlining directions for future study [3].

Theoretical Background

Multicultural socialization refers to formative experiences across cultural contexts. Following, the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) measures five facets: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility. Social competence (Kanning, 2009) and achievement motivation provide complementary work-relevant measures [2,4].

Recent Evidence

Bilingualism relates to cognitive flexibility and creativity [5]. Cultural variation in flexibility supports the link between diverse learning histories and adaptive cognition [6]. validated the MPQ- SF for longitudinal use. Meta-analytically confirmed that cultural intelligence predicts multiple work outcomes [7,8]. Connected language competence with intercultural communicative competence [9]. Together, these findings strengthen the empirical foundation for including multicultural indicators in personnel selection. However, despite these converging results, research is still fragmented across disciplines and methodological approaches. Further longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are needed to determine the developmental stability of these

effects, their boundary conditions across industries, and their incremental validity over established predictors such as personality and cognitive ability. Advancing this line of research could significantly enhance both theory and practice in personnel selection by clarifying when and how multicultural socialization becomes a decisive factor for professional success.

Summary of the Original Study [3]

The empirical study conducted in 2016 (Palmeira) employed a non-experimental correlational online survey (German/English) using established instruments (ISK-K, LMI-K, MPQ-SF [short form]). With a sample of $N = 595$ participants (71% female, $M_{age} = 35.5$), the study provided robust first evidence on the link between multicultural socialization and work-related competencies. A substantial part of the sample was recruited through HUGO BOSS AG, which may have introduced potential corporate culture effects.

Results

Key findings revealed several significant relationships. Age showed negative correlations with flexibility ($r = -.27, p < .01$) and cultural empathy ($r = -.24, p < .01$), as well as smaller effects on open-mindedness ($r = -.13, p < .01$), social initiative ($r = -.13, p < .01$), and achievement motivation ($r = -.10, p = .012$). Gender effects were consistent: women reported higher empathy ($F(1,594) = 9.25, p = .002$) and social orientation ($F(1,594) = 18.18, p < .001$), whereas men scored higher on assertiveness ($F(1,594) = 20.47, p < .001$), self-regulation ($F(1,594) = 5.69, p = .017$), and achievement motivation ($F(1,594) = 21.99, p < .001$). Multilingualism was positively associated with all measured competencies, most strongly with open-mindedness ($r = .30, p < .001$), followed by social initiative ($r = .20, p < .001$), cultural

empathy ($r = .18, p < .001$), and achievement motivation ($r = .17, p < .001$). By contrast, time spent in a country showed negligible effects, and educational level only a weak and non-robust association with openness.

Critical Reflections and Limitations

The generalizability of the findings is constrained by several factors. First, the sample was heavily shaped by employees of HUGO BOSS AG, raising the possibility of corporate culture effects and limiting external validity. Second, the voluntary online design may have attracted participants with greater intercultural openness, introducing potential self-selection bias. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data precludes causal inference, restricting conclusions to correlational patterns. Finally, the use of shortened measurement scales may have reduced construct coverage and attenuated validity. Although many associations reached statistical significance due to the large sample size, only flexibility, empathy, and open-mindedness demonstrated effect sizes of clear practical importance. Distinguishing between statistical and substantive significance is therefore essential for both the interpretation of the results and their application in personnel selection contexts.

Integration with Recent Research

The relationships identified between multilingualism and work-related competencies are consistent with broader empirical evidence. Research on bilinguals shows that multilingual experience fosters cognitive flexibility and creative problem solving [5]. Cross-cultural comparisons highlight how diverse learning histories shape executive functions, underscoring the developmental roots of adaptive cognition [6]. The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire short form (MPQ-SF) has been validated for longitudinal use, enabling reliable tracking of multicultural dispositions over time [7].

Meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that cultural intelligence predicts a range of work outcomes, including task and contextual performance [8]. Finally, recent findings in education confirm that language competence contributes directly to intercultural communicative competence [9]. Taken together, these studies not only substantiate the plausibility of the present findings but also suggest fertile avenues for future research on the mechanisms linking multicultural socialization to professional success.

Practical Implications for HR and Personnel Selection

For personnel selection, multicultural indicators should be incorporated in a structured and evidence-based manner. Structured interviews can include standardized prompts about multilingualism and intercultural experiences, evaluated with anchored rating scales to ensure fairness and reliability [10]. Validated instruments such as the MPQ-SF or cultural intelligence measures can complement traditional assessments where roles require cross-cultural collaboration [7,8].

Multilingualism and international exposure should be documented as potential predictors of adaptability and social competence, provided that evaluations remain criterion-focused and job-relevant. Importantly, HR practitioners should distinguish between statistically significant but practically negligible effects and those with substantive impact. Emphasis should therefore be placed on competencies where moderate effect sizes were observed (e.g., flexibility, empathy, open-mindedness), as these dimensions have the greatest potential to improve prediction of professional success. Integrating these practices not only strengthens the validity of selection systems but also advances fairness and inclusivity in increasingly diverse workplaces.

Future Research Directions

Future research should move beyond single-industry samples and replicate these effects across diverse organizational and cultural contexts to establish external validity. Longitudinal designs are needed to examine the developmental stability and potential causal mechanisms of multicultural competencies, while experimental field studies could test the incremental value of multicultural indicators in actual selection decisions. Multilevel approaches that explicitly model organizational culture as a contextual moderator would further clarify boundary conditions. Finally, continued psychometric refinement of shortened scales such as the MPQ-SF remains essential to balance construct validity with feasibility in applied research and practice.

Conclusion

By integrating the original empirical evidence with a decade of subsequent research, this article advances a robust and verifiable case for treating multicultural socialization as a meaningful predictor of work-related competencies in personnel selection [3]. The findings demonstrate that age, gender, and multilingualism systematically shape key competencies—particularly flexibility, empathy, and open-mindedness—that are increasingly critical for professional effectiveness in globalized workplaces. Beyond their academic relevance, these results highlight a pressing need for HR systems to incorporate multicultural indicators into evidence-based selection frameworks. Doing so will not only improve the predictive validity of hiring decisions but also strengthen fairness and inclusivity in diverse labor markets. In this sense, multicultural socialization emerges as both a scientific construct of enduring interest and a practical lever for shaping the future of work.

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