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A Comparative Study of Organisational Commitment of Bank Employees in Ireland and China

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Is Organizational Commitment Culturally Bound?

- A Cross Cultural Comparison Between Ireland and China

Organizational commitment continues to be one of the most popularly researched subjects as it has significant effects on job performance and turnover (Chen & Francesco, 2003; Suliman & Iles, 2000), and subsequently on organizational performance (Benkhoff, 1997). Much has been done in the past few decades on the nature of organizational commitment (i.e. O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Porter, Steers & Boulian, 1974); its measure and the validity and reliability (i.e. Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnystsky, 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Sekimoto & Hanada, 1987); and its antecedents and consequences (i.e. Buchanan, 1974; Hrebriniak & Alutto, 1972; Takao, 1998). Since the 1990s, research has been extended into non-Western contexts to include countries such as Jordan (Suliman & Iles, 1999), China (Ling, Zhang & Fang, 2001; Wang, 2004) and Malaysia (Rashid, Sambasivan & Johari, 2003). More recently, comparative work has started to emerge, such as Cheng & Stockdale (2003) on organizational commitment differences between Chinese, Korean and Canadian employees, Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, and Topolnytsky (2007) on employment commitment and support for organizational change in Canada and India while Hattrup, Mueller and Aguirre (2008) have examined whether organizational commitment can be generalised across countries.

Inspired by the recent comparative studies, the present research sets out to compare organizational commitment of Irish and Chinese employees working for the same

organization. Ireland and China share a number of similarities that render a comparison between them appropriate. Firstly, both countries have achieved enormous economic success over the past two decades, with Ireland being branded as the Celtic Tiger and the latter having achieved overwhelming economic growth in double-digit rates for many years. Both countries have also benefited from inward investment from foreign multinationals. These foreign owned companies tend to provide attractive pay packages in comparison with indigenous businesses, this has subsequently changed both societies in many ways. However, according to Zimmerman, Liu and Buck (2007), foreign-owned companies' are likely to encounter high operating costs and poor retention of local staff. Therefore, it is worth investigating and comparing the organizational commitment levels of the Chinese and Irish employees working in the same industry.

In the following sections, we provide a review of the existing literature on organizational commitment with an emphasis on the theoretical developments of organizational commitment; the role of organizational commitment in Chinese and Irish contexts; and an examination of meta-analytical papers on cross-cultural studies of organizational commitment. Following this, we then present the research methodology and results from our data analysis. From this we compare the three components of organizational commitment within the two countries.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT & META-ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULRUAL STUDIES

Organizational commitment is a complicated concept. However it is primarily regarded as an attitudinal construct dealing with the perceived utility of continued participation in the employing organization (Hrebriniak & Alutto, 1972). In a similar vein, it has also been described, according to Buchanan, (1974), as a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values of an organization, and to the organization for its own sake; or according to Porter et al. (1974), as a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort into the organization, and a definite desire to maintain such employment relationship.

According to Meyer and Allen (1997), a committed employee tends to stay with the organization through ups and downs, attend work regularly, put in a full day, protect company's assets and therefore share the goals and values of the company. As such, organizational commitment has been found to affect job performance and turnover (Gregson, 1992; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). It is also claimed that organizational commitment has effects on societies as a whole as it affects job movement, community stability and national productivity (Porter et al., 1974).

One of the key areas in which there is little agreement is the how organizational commitment should be measured. Porter et al (1974) defined organizational commitment as 'the strength of an individual identification with and involvement in a particular organization' (p.604). In such a light, organizational commitment is measured as employees' motivation and identification with the values of the organization and their

intention to remain as an employee (Porter et al., 1974). O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) however, approached organizational commitment from the perspective of psychological attachment and believed that 'it reflects the degree to which the individual internalises or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization' (p.493). They proposed that the bond between an employee and an organization could take three forms: compliance, identification and internalisation. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), compliance attachment reflects instrumental behaviour designed to gain rewards; identification attachment occurs when employees behave because they want to maintain a relationship with an organization due to its attractive values or goals, and internalisation attachment occurs when behaviour is driven by internal values or gaols that are consistent with those of the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that the identification and internalisation dimensions discussed by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) have been difficult to distinguish from each other. As a result, Meyer and Allen (1991) produced the most commonly accepted three-dimensional organizational commitment model, comprising of affective, continuance and normative commitment (Wasti 2005). It should be noted that Meyer and Allen (1991) viewed these three forms as components rather than types of commitment. They are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it can be assumed that an employee might experience all forms of commitment to varying degrees. One employee might, for example, feel both a strong need (continuance commitment) and a strong desire to remain (affective commitment), but little obligation to the organization (normative commitment), while another employee might feel little desire, moderate need and a strong obligation (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In other words, employees who have strong affective commitment stay in an organization because they want to; those who have strong continuance

commitment remain as they need to and those who have strong normative commitment stay in an organization because they feel obliged to. This finding provides a subtle theoretical foundation to approach the three components separately.

China has received attention in the study of organizational commitment not only because China has a population of 1.3 billion and its economy has been growing at two digits for more than two decades; but also because it has a strong collectivist culture and a culture in which power distance (Cheng & Stockdale, 2003) and collectivism scores are high (Chen & Francesco, 2003). Under the influence of Confucius, Chinese culture emphasises loyalty to the emperor (*zhong*), obedience to parents (*xiao*), loyalty to the spouse (*jie*), helpfulness to friends (*yi*) and conformity with social codes (*hemu*). As a result of these values, Yang (1993) observed that the Chinese people do not truly express themselves as individuals preferring to stay within the formalised system of roles. Tan and Akhtar (1998) argued that 'coupled with a strong emphasis placed on the network of relationship (*guanxi*) and reciprocal expectations of the proper behaviour (*li*), the Chinese are subjective to specific forms of behaviour consistent with his or her job role within the organization' (p.313). Accordingly, the normative commitment of the Chinese employees is high (Tan & Akhtar, 1998). In China, 'family remains as a basic unit of survival, a citadel of defence against hostile forces' (Tan & Akhtar, 1998: 313), thus Chinese employees might find it hard to see themselves part of an organization.

This pattern of behaviour has spurred a number of researchers to conduct research on organizational commitment within a Chinese context (e.g. Chen & Francesco, 2003;

Cheng & Stockdale, 2003; Tan & Akhtar, 1998). With the economic reform of China, significant changes have also occurred within society with people no longer ‘having an iron rice bowl’ (having a secured job in a state-owned enterprise) but ready for ‘frying squids’ (being made redundant); previously individuals welfare was looked after by state enterprises, however individuals must now pay for education and healthcare themselves. Given the fundamental changes in China in recent years, it is worth investigating the organizational commitment of the Chinese employees working for foreign-owned companies.

The economic landscape of Ireland has experience radical change in the last forty years. Up until the mid-90s huge numbers of the population emigrated to seek employment overseas. During this time, often the most educated, creative and innovative individuals were those to emigrate which subsequently led to the term ‘brain drain’ being coined (Fanning, 2001). Owing largely to the economic success in recent years the emigration pattern has been reversed with the country now experiencing an influx on migrants from across the globe. A number of studies have previously examined organizational commitment of Irish employees including farm workers (O’Driscoll & Randall, 1999; Randall & O’Driscoll, 1997). The findings from these studies have shown that affective commitment and job involvement of the Irish employees are positively associated with one another whereas, and emotional attachment to the organization is distinct from continuance commitment (O’Driscoll & Randall, 1999).

There are many antecedents that have been identified in the literature that impact upon organizational commitment. For example, according to Clugston, Howell and Dorfman (2000), work experience variables and personal characteristics have significant effects on affective commitment, employees' perceptions of alternative job prospects and the cost of leaving the organization affect their continuance commitment. One breakthrough in the cross-cultural studies of organizational commitment lies in the finding of culture being one antecedent of normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Wiener, 1982).

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) stated that commitment researchers are entering into an international phase. Randall (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 papers and associated Hofstede's framework of four dimension of culture with organizational commitment: power distance: acceptance of inequality in societies and organizations; individualism/collectivism: preference for working in groups and influence of reference groups; uncertainty avoidance: readiness of taking risk and ambiguity; masculinity/femininity: aspirations for success, achievement and assertiveness. Randall (1993) concluded that 1) affective commitment to organizations is greater in cultures that tend to have lower levels of conformity (i.e. individualistic, tolerant of ambiguity, and less authoritarian; 2) normative commitment is greater in more collectivist countries; and 3) continuance commitment is greater in feminine cultures. In a similar light, Clugston et al. (2000) tested the influence of culture on the three components of organizational commitment and three foci. Their finding confirmed that power distance is related to normative commitment across all foci; uncertainty avoidance is associated with

continuance commitment across all foci and collectivism is related three components of organizational commitment across workgroup only.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 presents some of the extant literature on the cultural effect on organizational commitment. Accordingly, we put forward three hypotheses for the study.

Affective commitment (AC)

Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization and its goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The attachment is reflected in one's role, task management and social interaction in relation to the organizational goals and values (Lee, Allen, Meyer & Rhee, 2001). According to Hofstede (1980), people coming from more individualistic cultures tend to be more idiocentric (Earley, 1989) and more calculative on self achievement (Randall, 1993). They feel committed due to the job itself or the compensation system provided by their employer (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991). According to FINFACTS (2009), the salary level in the industry chosen for the study in Ireland during that year was ranked the highest in Europe, therefore we assume that the Irish employees were satisfied with their pay checks. Accordingly, their affective commitment should be assumably higher as prescribed in Randall (1993). The relatively lower scores of power distance in the Irish culture also indicate that Irish people are more affective towards their organizations (Randall, 1993).

In contrary, people from collectivist cultures like China are committed as a result of closely-knit ties with their co-workers, managers or owners (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991). Although Chinese culture has a higher score in collectivism than the Irish, we believe that the Chinese employees find it hard to extend the sense of 'family' into a work group (Tan & Akhtar, 1998). Therefore, we propose:

H1: Affective commitment of Irish employees is higher than that of Chinese employees.

Continuance commitment

Continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the costs and risk the employees associate with leaving the organization. As such, the fewer alternative employment opportunities an employee has, the higher the continuance commitment is perceived. Randall (1993) argues that individualism is associated positively with continuance commitment as both constructs emphasise a cost-benefit approach to behavioural intention. The Chinese culture is more group-oriented (Hofstede, 1980) and so they are more likely give up their individual needs to satisfy the group interests for the sake of the organization. Hence, we propose:

H2: Continuance commitment of Chinese employees is higher than that of Irish employees.

Normative commitment

Normative commitment refers to employees' feelings of obligation, duty or loyalty to remain with the organization, even when the organization suffers some problems (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is believed that this type of commitment will be influenced by an individual's experiences both prior to cultural socialisation and following organizational socialisation entry into the organization. According to Randall (1993), normative commitment is lower 1) in the country with high collectivism; and 2) in the country with higher uncertainty avoidance. The Chinese culture has a higher score than the Irish culture on uncertainty avoidance, according to Hofstede (1980). Therefore,

> **H3**: Normative commitment of Chinese employees is higher than that of Irish employees.

METHOD

Data and Sample

Data was collected in Ireland and China by two separate researchers on the same day. The same questionnaire was administered in two branches of one multinational corporation. Respondents in Shanghai received the Chinese version and the Irish employees in Dublin got the English version. The questionnaire was originally designed in English by bilingual researchers and then was translated into Chinese by another researcher. A back translation was performed from Chinese into English by another bilingual researcher to ensure the two versions were consistent as this can be an issue in cross-cultural studies (Brislin, 1970). As the participation was agreed in advance through personal contacts and the

questionnaire was filled in at the presence of the researchers, the response rate was 100%. 82 questionnaires were returned from the Irish branch and 118 from the Chinese one. 51.2% respondents were female in the Irish sample compared to 44.9% female respondents in the Chinese sample. 60.9% respondents in the Irish sample were aged below 34 compared to 68.1% in the Chinese sample. 65.9% respondents in the Irish sample had worked in the organization for less than 18 months compared to 85.3% in the Chinese sample. 26.8% Irish respondents had a salary level lower than 30,000 Euro compared to 77.9% in the Chinese sample.

HYPOTHESES

The test hypotheses for this paper are:

H1: Affective commitment of Irish employees is higher than that of Chinese employees.

H2: Continuance commitment of Chinese employees is higher than that of Irish employees.

H3: Normative commitment of Chinese employees is higher than that of Irish employees.

VARIABLES

The dependent variables are three components of organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured by using the revised 18-item three-component scale of affective, continuance and normative commitment (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002), which has been adopted in a myriad of studies, such as Jacobsen (2000), Rashid et al. (2003), Cheng and Stockdale (2003). Sample questions for the three components of organizational commitment are ‘I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career

working with this organization', 'It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to', and 'I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer'.

ANCOVA AND COVARIATE

In a cross-cultural study, it is recommended to control economic factors to test for the effect of other factors (Dawar & Parker, 1994). In the study, the focus is to investigate the differences of the organizational commitment of Irish and Chinese employees working in one multinational corporation. Data were compared using ANCOVA with income level being chosen as the covariate. As previous studies have shown that tenure is a significant variable on organizational commitment, it was treated as the second covariate in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first step, the two sets of data were merged into one for comparative analyses with a new variable created, Country, for which Ireland was coded as 0 and China was coded as 1. Factor analysis was performed and oblique rotation was adopted. To have three factors generated, 3 items were dropped as their factor loadings were less than .40. The reliability of the 3 factors was examined using Cronbach's alpha. Results are presented in Table 2. The standardised factor scores were used in the subsequent ANCOVA analysis.

Insert Table 2 about here

In order to proceed with ANCOVA, z scores, the linearity for each group and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked. There were no outliers or abnormalities detected. ANCOVA was performed to analyse data with income and tenure being set as the covariates. The two covariates were compared using a t-test by using country as the grouping variables (see Table 3 for results).

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 showed an obvious difference between the two groups in their income levels. The Irish employees enjoy much higher income than their Chinese counterparts, *t* being –10.234 at the significance level of .000. But there is no significant difference in tenure between the Irish and Chinese employees.

Results for ANOVA analysis of affective commitment are shown in Table 4; results for continuance commitment are shown in Table 5; and results of normative commitment are shown in Table 6.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 4 showed that the Chinese employees have higher levels of affective commitment than their Irish counterparts. This is not in support of H1 and Randall (1993), Clugston et al. (2000) in which employees from a more individualist culture tend to have higher affective commitment. This is not in support of Tan and Akhtar (1998) in which the Chinese people in general find it hard to extend their strong family sense to organizations they work for. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), affective commitment is associated with the emotional attachment of employees to their employer and the goals and values of the employer. It can be inferred that the organizational goals and values are better transmitted to the Chinese employees and as a result they are more emotionally attached to their employer than the Irish employees. Nevertheless, the effect of one of the covariates, tenure should be addressed. The results reinforce a number of studies dating back to the 1970s (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebriniak & Alutto, 1972; Stevens et al., 1978), wherein affective commitment is largely a result of work experiences. Table 2 confirmed the fact that there is no significant difference of tenure between the Chinese and Irish employees. Therefore, the country difference of affective commitment is not as a result of tenure.

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 5 showed that there is no country difference of bank employees' continuance commitment in Ireland and China. This is very interesting as continuous commitment is about whether an employee feels he or she needs to stay as result of analysing the alternatives (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Neither the Chinese nor the Irish employees see finding an alternative employment as costly thus the finding does not support H2. However, since Clugston et al. (2000) found out that uncertainty avoidance is to do with continuous commitment, we think that both the Chinese and Irish people are both risk-taking people (Hofstede, 1980) and therefore both nationalities do not associate changing jobs with risk or cost. It is worth noting that income has a significant effect on continuance commitment at .00. Although the Irish employees have higher levels of income than their Chinese counterparts, their continuance commitment is not higher.

Insert Table 6 about here

Table 6 showed interesting results. Both the covariates, Income and Tenure, have significant impact on normative commitment. This is certainly supporting those studies including salary or pay as the antecedent to organizational commitment (i.e. Buchanan, 1974; Hrebriniak & Alutto, 1972; Stevens et al., 1978). In addition, there is a country difference detected among the Irish and Chinese employees' normative commitment. The *F* value is 89.37 at the significance level of .00, indicating that the Chinese employees demonstrate higher level of normative commitment than the Irish employees thus supporting H3. As normative commitment deals with one's feeling of commitment

towards an organization as an obligation, duty or loyalty, it is interesting to see that the Chinese employees see being loyal to their employer as an obligation. Income is positively associated with normative commitment although it is the case that the Chinese employees' income level is significantly lower than their Irish counterparts, as indicated in Table 2. This is to confirm that the Chinese employees are normally more committed to their employers than the Irish employees despite the fact that they have lower income than their Irish counterparts.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present research set out to investigate whether organizational commitment is culturally bound. It compared a three-dimensional model of organizational commitment across Irish and Chinese employees working in the same multinational corporation using Herschcovit and Meyer's (2002) 18-item scale of organizational commitment. ANCOVA was performed to analyse the data with the results providing a number of insights. Firstly, the Chinese employees' affective commitment is higher than that of the Irish employees. It does not support Randall (1993) or Clugston et al. (2000) in which the Irish employees should have higher levels of affective commitment than their Chinese counterparts as their individualism scores are much higher than the Chinese. Accordingly, the cultural effect seems to do little in understanding affective commitment. Instead, we argue that affective commitment is about ones role in relation to the organizational goals and values (Meyer & Allen, 1991), therefore, it can be inferred that the multinational corporation in concern needs to communicate well its organizational goals and values to their Irish employees if possible to make them more emotionally attached to the organization. Employee retention

is an important issue as we found that the longer an employee has been working in the organization, the higher affective commitment they demonstrate. Secondly, there is no country difference between the Irish and Chinese employees on continuance commitment. Once again, cultural impact is weak. Since continuance commitment is associated with the costs of leaving the organization or the alternatives in the job market (O'Driscoll & Randall, 1999), it indicates that both the Irish and Chinese employees have the same feelings towards the cost of leaving the organization or getting an alternative job at the time of the survey. However, our finding showed that income has a positive effect on continuance commitment. Therefore, offering the employees a competitive salary is important to keep employees committed. This finding confirmed the importance of linking internal marketing with organizational commitment. Thirdly, the Chinese employees have higher levels of normative commitment compared to their Irish counterparts, which is the only dimension wherein there is a cultural difference and that supports H3. As discussed earlier, Chinese people are unlike the Irish in that they are influenced by Confucius philosophy with people are very much to loyalty to the emperor (*zhong*), obedience to parents (*xiao*), loyalty to ones spouse (*jie*), helpfulness to friends (*yi*) and conformity to social codes (*hemu*). Therefore, by nature they are much more loyal people than the Irish. As the normative commitment is about employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization, it might also suggest that the organization has done a brilliant job in making the Chinese employees acquainted with their job descriptions in the Shanghai office.

In the present research, one of the covariates, tenure, was found to predict affective and normative commitment significantly. With regards to its impact on continuance commitment, it suggested that it does not matter how long an employee has worked in an organization. Once an alternative opportunity comes up or it is time to quit, the employee is likely to consider a new position elsewhere. The other covariate, income, however, is significant in explaining continuance and normative commitment. The competitive payroll provided by employers can put employees on the thought of leaving the organization and therefore making them more obligatorily committed.

The present research started with the arguments that cultural differences can predict different dimensions of organizational commitment. However, the findings in the present research supported only one assumption on normative commitment. The results reinforced the literature that highlights the antecedents of organizational commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebriniak & Alutto, 1972; Stevens et al., 1978), such as the duration of organizational service, social interaction with organization peers and superiors, job achievement and hierarchical advancement. Researchers are suggested to use them even in comparative work.

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TABLE 1

Table 1 Review of meta-analysis of the cultural impact on the three components of organizational commitment

		Affective Commitment		**Continuance Commitment**		**Normative Commitment**	
Individualism	China: 10	L	Randall 1993	H	Clugston et al 2000	H	Randall 1993
	Ireland: 64	H	Boyacigiller and Adler 1991	L		L	Clugston et al 2000
Power distance	China: 78	L	Randall 1993			H	Stanley et al 2007
	Ireland: 22	H				L	Clugston et al 2000
Masculinity	China: 50			L	Randall 1993		
	Ireland: 63			H			
Uncertainty avoidance	China: 36	H	Randall 1993	H	Clugston et al 2000		
	Ireland: 30	L		L			

TABLE 2

Table 2 Factor analysis of the organizational commitment

Items	Affective commitment	Continuance commitment	Normative commitment
1	.60		
2	.54		
3	.70		
4	.56		
5	.67		
7		.59	
8		.64	
10		.60	
11		.72	
12		.56	
13			.62
14			.73
16			.79
17			.68
18			.72
Cronbach α	.75	.76	.83

TABLE 3

Table 3 t-test of the Income levels and Tenure of the Irish and Chinese employees

	t-test for equality of means	
	t	**Sig.**
Income	-10.234	.000
Tenure	-.962	.337

TABLE 4

Table 4 ANCOVA analysis of affective commitment for the Chinese and Irish employee

	Mean square	**F**	**Sig.**
Tenure	**14.87**	**19.16**	**.00**
Income	.79	1.02	.32
Country	**20.53**	**26.44**	**.00**
Gender	.24	.31	.58

TABLE 5

Table 5 ANCOVA analysis of continuance commitment of the Chinese and Irish employees

	Mean square	**F**	**Sig.**
Tenure	.16	.18	.67
Income	**11.20**	**12.32**	**.00**
Country	.00	.00	.26
Gender	1.14	1.25	.96

TABLE 6

Table 6 ANCOVA analysis of normative commitment of the Chinese and Irish employees

	Mean square	**F**	**Sig**
Tenure	**3.07**	**4.94**	**.03**
Income	**12.64**	**20.30**	**.00**
Country	**55.64**	**89.37**	**.00**
Gender	.06	.09	.77