

## NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN THE SELECTION PROCESS OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

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### Abstract

Being employed by a multinational company can be an attractive opportunity for graduate entrants. Even if they do not start their careers abroad, they must adapt to a multicultural environment in their jobs in Hungary. When selecting new entrants, a successful combination of multicultural competencies may play an important role. A tool for measuring multicultural competencies can be the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ). First of all, employers should define the exact requirements and competencies that they need to be able to draw up an 'ideal profile' of employees. Our research aims to create this 'ideal profile' delineated by employers using the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) when selecting graduate entrants (or graduates with little experience).

*Method:* We used two versions of the MPQ in our research: the 91-item version in Hungarian and a direct five-dimensional questionnaire, also in Hungarian.

*Procedure:* The collection of data took place in spring, 2017 at three different venues in Debrecen, at Job Expos, where many employers were present, mainly from the region. (n=12; 14; 34). After collecting and cleaning the data, we analysed 31 questionnaires of the 91-item version and 45 questionnaires of the direct five-dimensional version (20 respondents filled in both versions).

*Results:* First we used the 91-item version of the questionnaire to evaluate employers' requirements, but after realising the difficulties, such as the complex nature of the questionnaire, we prepared a direct questionnaire for the evaluation of the five dimensions, which we applied successfully. We believe that the direct questionnaire for the evaluation of the five dimensions is an applicable tool for measuring employers' requirements for multicultural competencies in the following dimensions: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility.

**Keywords:** multicultural personality, selection, employers' requirements, MPQ,

### Introduction

One effect of transnational relocations is that employees, at almost all levels in an organisation, must be able to operate with co-workers from several different cultures or to work with them in multinational and therefore multicultural teams in foreign subsidiaries (Van Oudenhoven and Benet Martínez 2015). In organisations, the recruitment is the process of finding and engaging the persons the organisation needs. During the selection process, HR professionals try to reveal the candidate's personality traits relevant to the post advertised, in addition to their professional competence. They define the behaviour expected in the given position and based on

the candidate's results they try to predict the applicant's future suitability for the position. (Armstrong and Taylor 2017). The personal competencies of professionals taking part in the selection are also essential (internal education, trainings: Falkné Bánó Klára, 2012)

Multicultural effectiveness means excellent work performance, appropriate adjustment and general psychological well-being and satisfaction in a culturally new environment. It involves successful professional performance, personal adjustment and intercultural interactions. (Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven 2000). The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed to measure multicultural personality and effectiveness. Table 1 shows the use of the MPQ in selection. It describes which version of the MPQ was used, the group of respondents and the publications where the results were published. The questionnaire was used for selecting and training employees working in an international scope, and for evaluating employees who have to work with people or groups from different cultural backgrounds. It can be used for defining demands for improvement of the dimensions tested by the questionnaire and for evaluating the success of improvement. (Van Oudenhoven et al. 2007).

Table 1. International research for the use of the MPQ in employment

Participants in the research (number of items in the MPQ)	Where and what nationalities	Publication
Expatriates (78)	Western expatriates in Taiwan from 24 countries	Mol, S.T., Van Oudenhoven, J.P. & Van der Zee, K.I. (2003): Short Note Study of the adjustment of Western expatriates in Taiwan ROC with the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire in: <i>Asian Journal of Social Psychology</i>
Expatriate spouses (91)	In 29 countries (mainly in the UK, the USA, Australia, the Netherlands)	Ali A., Van der Zee K., Sanders G. (2003): Determinants of intercultural adjustment among expatriate spouses in: <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i>
Job applicants (91)	Applicants in the Netherlands and Belgium	Van der Zee, K. I., Zaai, J. N., & Piekstra, J. (2003). Validation of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire in the context of personnel selection in: <i>European Journal of Personality</i>
Employees trained for international positions (78)	21 nationalities (mainly from the Netherlands, Belgium, England, Germany, the USA)	Van Der Zee, K. I., & Brinkmann, U. (2004). Construct validity evidence for the intercultural readiness check against the multicultural personality questionnaire in: <i>International Journal of Selection and Assessment</i>
Expatriate children and adolescents (91)	From 21 different countries (mainly from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium)	Van Der Zee, K. I., Ali, A. J., & Haaksma, I. (2007). Determinants of effective coping with cultural transition among expatriate children and adolescents in: <i>Anxiety, stress, and coping</i>
Expatriates living in foreign countries (91)	From different countries of origin (mainly from the Netherlands, the UK, the USA, Canada)	Groeneveld, C., & van Hemert, D. (2007). How do you do: The influence of contacts and personality on sojourner well-being. <i>Research Paper</i>

Experts on intercultural contacts, white-collar employees and advanced students (91)	The Netherlands, Australia, Germany	Herfst, S. L., Van Oudenhoven, J. P., & Timmerman, M. E. (2008). Intercultural effectiveness training in three Western immigrant countries: A cross-cultural evaluation of critical incidents in: <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i>
Managers working in an expatriate assignment  or in a job dealing with subordinates of different cultural backgrounds (91)	Managers from different nationalities (mainly Dutch) working in 13 countries at the subsidiaries of a Dutch multinational company	Van Woerkom, M., & De Reuver, R. S. (2009). Predicting excellent management performance in an intercultural context: a study of the influence of multicultural personality on transformational leadership and performance in: <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>
Canadian technical advisors and project team personnel that work overseas within international development projects (91)	Canadians working in 11 different countries	Simkhovych, D. (2009). The relationship between intercultural effectiveness and perceived project team performance in the context of international development.in: <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i>
Business professionals working in a Dutch agricultural multinational company (78)	35 different nationalities (mainly the Netherlands, the USA)	Korzilius, H., van Hooft, A., Planken, B., & Hendrix, C. (2011). Birds of different feathers? The relationship between multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery in business professionals working in a Dutch agricultural multinational in: <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i>
Managers who have experience in interviewing job candidates (78)	Norwegian managers in Norway	Horverak, J. G., Sandal, G. M., Bye, H. H., & Pallesen, S. (2013). Managers' selection preferences: The role of prejudice and multicultural personality traits in the assessment of native and immigrant job candidates in: <i>Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée/European Review of Applied Psychology</i>

As we can see from the main parameters of previous research, two versions of the MPQ were used in connection with hiring and selection. These are the 78-item and the 91-item versions of the questionnaire. Some questions were left entirely out from the 78-item version, but the applied questions were the same in the two versions (and in a third, 48-item version which was used for testing students.)

We found that the MPQ has been used in research of employees in managerial positions and also of subordinate professionals. We could not find a source in the relevant literature as for which methods were used in the project to define the employers' requirements in connection with the dimensions. There is one source in Hungary concerning the use of the MPQ, a university thesis by Edina Kiss about globalisation in education, but she studied the MPQ dimensions of students and not the use of the MPQ in employment. (Kiss, 2010) There were examinations

measuring employers' expectations of recent graduates in the North Plain region of Hungary already in 2006 with a focus on foreign language proficiency including intercultural competence (Hajdu, 2008). Foreign language departments of higher education institutions include intercultural competencies in their study programs as essential tools of effective communication. The creative application of this skill in foreign language contexts and communicational situations contributes to a good level of foreign language knowledge (Hajdu and Czeller 2016).

### **Materials and methods**

The need for an empirical approach to assess effectiveness in a multicultural environment led Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven to the development of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) as a measure of intercultural competencies (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven 2000, 2001; Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee 2002). They summarised a large number of relevant intercultural personality characteristics to five dimensions of intercultural competence. The MPQ consists of 5-point Likert scales for the next dimensions:

#### *1. Cultural empathy*

Cultural empathy refers to the capacity to identify with the feelings, thoughts, attitude and behaviour of individuals from other cultures (van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven 2000).

#### *2. Open-mindedness*

Open-mindedness assesses the capacity to be open. Open-minded individuals efficiently acquire the rules and values of a new culture and are keen on the perspectives of different cultural subgroups (van der Zee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004).

#### *3. Social initiative*

Social initiative shows a tendency to access social situations actively and to take the initiative. (Ekehammar and Akrami 2007).

#### *4. Emotional stability*

Emotional stability denotes the tendency of behaviour in stressful situations (van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, & De Grijns, 2004).

#### *5. Flexibility*

Flexibility assesses the ability to adjust behaviour to new and unknown situations, and reflects the opposite of rigidity (van der Zee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004).

Sample items for MPQ dimensions:

*„Emotional stability*

Keeps calm at ill-luck.

Takes it for granted that things will turn out right.

*Social initiative*

Takes the lead.

Easily approaches other people.

*Flexibility*

Works mostly according to a strict scheme (reversed)

Starts a new life easily” (Van Oudenhoven, and Benet-Martínez 2015: 51)

After reading the relevant literature and evaluating the results, we found the 91-version of the MPQ the most suitable for our research. This decision was also confirmed by the correspondence with the author of the test (van Oudenhoven). The author himself put the key to the test at our disposal. We translated the questionnaire into Hungarian.

We used R statistical software for analysing the results.

The authors compiled the direct five-dimensional version of the questionnaire in Hungarian using the MPQ dimensions. We made a description of the definitions of the dimensions to make sure the respondents understand them fully. The questionnaire without the demographical part can be found in the Appendix. There have been several studies confirming the advantages of using mixed methods in research. Considering the recommendations of a Hungarian research project (Balázs and Hógye- Nagy 2015), we decided to complete our quantitative research with qualitative research methods using a focus group interview. This study does not include the details of the focus group interview.

### **Data collection procedure**

The collection of data took place in spring, 2017 at three different venues in Debrecen, at Job Expos, where many employers were present, mainly from the region. We used personally assisted data collection procedure. Data collection procedure was the same in both studies. The researchers asked the competent HR representative(s) of the companies to fill in the questionnaires. They were given some oral instructions beforehand. We asked them to think about a graduate entrant applying for a position at the company, and we also tried to make it clear that they should answer the questions keeping in mind the qualities that such an applicant should have. They were all given the same instructions by the researchers at all venues. Some respondents promised to send back the questionnaire by e-mail, and we received 5 of them this way. Some companies’ representatives (altogether 4) refused to fill in the questionnaire citing the company’s policy, according to which any questionnaires can only be answered following previous consent by the company’s headquarters.

#### *Study one (as “Pilot”)*

Place: Faculty of Informatics (DEIK); Fórum, an event venue in the city centre (F)

Tool: 91- item version of the questionnaire

Number of respondents: 26 people (12, DEIK; 14 F)

The respondents found that filling in the questionnaire had taken too long. They said that it was complicated for them to disregard their personal opinions, especially in case of questions about emotions. So after realising the difficulties, such as the complex nature of the test, we made a direct questionnaire for the evaluation of the five dimensions and asked the respondents to fill it in as well.

*Study two*

Place: DE Job Expo and Career Day

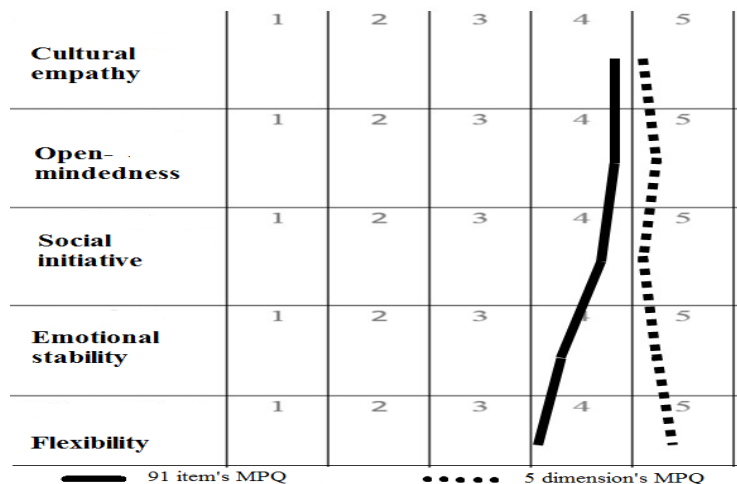
Tools: 91- item version; 5- item direct dimensional version of the questionnaire

Number of respondents: 34 people; out of which: 4 respondents filled in the 91- item version; 30 respondents filled in the 5- item direct dimensional version of the questionnaire.

**Results**

In Figure 1 we show the results of the 91-item version and the direct five-dimensional version of the MPQ in one ideal profile.

*Figure 1. Ideal profile for a graduate entrant in the MPQ dimensions*



The results show that employers find all the dimensions of the MPQ very important for graduate entrants: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. In their opinion, the most essential dimension was open-mindedness in both questionnaires.

However, we found some differences in requirements regarding emotional stability and flexibility depending on whether they defined them in the 91- item version or in the direct five-dimensional version of the questionnaire. These differences probably result from the specific questions which belong to the dimensions in each test. In

case of these specific items, the personal emotions of the respondents can have more influence on the answers. In case of the direct five-dimensional questionnaire, it is easier to formulate the requirements for the applicant irrespective of the respondent's personality. It was confirmed that the direct five-dimensional version of the questionnaire is suitable for formulating requirements in the MPQ dimensions. Drawing up an ideal profile can help HR professionals in the selection process.

## **Conclusion**

This study presents previous international research where the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was used in employment. We found that this method is suitable for testing both managers and subordinates. It is also applicable for examining the multicultural competencies of project team members, for defining aims of development, and for pre- and post-testing. In our research in 2017, we examined the possibility of using the MPQ for formulating employers' requirements in the MPQ dimensions: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility for a potential graduate entrant. In the research, we used the Hungarian version of the 91-item MPQ in the form of personally assisted data collection at regional job expos in Debrecen. The respondents found the questionnaire considerably long, and some of them said that it was difficult for them to disregard their personal opinions in answering some questions. We made a direct five-dimensional questionnaire based on the MPQ dimensions, with short explanations about the meaning of the specific dimensions.

Most of the employers who filled in the questionnaire directly evaluating the five dimensions assessed all five multicultural competencies as essential requirements in selecting graduate entrants. We did not find any differences in the answers regarding the requirements either by the nature of the company (service or manufacturing) or by the nationality of ownership (Hungarian or multinational).

In analysing the results, a need emerged for a focus group interview. This focus group interview proved our assumptions:

- the direct 5-dimensional questionnaire can be used in personnel selection
- the 'ideal profile' should be defined for a particular position of the organisation

The next step of the research will draw up an MPQ 'ideal profile' for a particular position within a specific organisation with the help of HR professionals using the direct 5-dimensional version of the questionnaire.

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## Appendix

### 1. Questionnaire for the dimensions (without the demographical part of the questionnaire)

We would like to know that in your opinion what is the 'ideal' employee like who would be suitable in the dimensions regarding the multicultural personality at your company, supposing the adequacy of the professional competencies or any other personal competencies outside the scope of this questionnaire.

**We gave precise descriptions of the endpoints of the dimensions.**

**Please indicate the appropriate number according to you for the 'ideal' employee. You can also indicate values in between.**

**Example: Loyalty**



		IZR	1
		NED	1
<b>Service companies</b>	9	HUN	2
		GER	1
		FRA	1
		USA	3
		GB	2
<b>IT companies</b>	15	HUN	5
		GB	2
		USA	3
		SVE	2
		GER	2
		IND	1
<b>Employment agencies</b>	7	HUN	4
		GB	2
		NED	1

## MULTIKULTURÁLIS KOMPETENCIÁK IRÁNTI IGÉNY NEMZETKÖZI HÁTTERŰ VÁLLALATOK TOBORZÁSÁBAN

Lázár Tímea – Bene Ágnes

Egy vállalat, különösen egy multinacionális új belépőinek kiválasztásánál szerepet játszhat az interkulturális kompetenciák előnyös kombinációja. A mérés egyik módszere lehet a Multikulturális Személyiség Kérdőív (Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, MPQ).

Mindenekelőtt szükség van a konkrét kompetenciák (dimenziók), az elvárások tisztázására, az „ideál profil” megrajzolására a munkáltatói oldalon.

A vizsgálatunk célja az volt, hogy az MPQ dimenzióinak felhasználásával egy ilyen munkáltatói „ideál profil” meghatározásának lehetőségeit vizsgáljuk meg pályakezdő (vagy kevés munkatapasztalattal rendelkező) diplomások kiválasztásában.

*Módszer:* Az MPQ két változatát használtuk a kutatás során: a 91 item-es magyar nyelvű MPQ változatot; és a direkt 5 dimenzió mentén való értékelést, szintén magyar nyelven.

A kvantitatív vizsgálatot szakértői fókuszcsoportos kutatással egészítettük ki.

*Adatfelvétel:* Az adatfelvétel 2017 tavaszán három debreceni helyszínen történt Állásbörzéken, ahol a munkáltatók széles köre képviseltette magát elsősorban a Régióból (n=12; 14; 34; 5).

Az adatok tisztítása után az elemzést a 91 itemes MPQ esetén  $n=31$ ; a direkt 5 dimenziós MPQ esetén  $n= 45$  mintán végeztük el (mindkét változatot 20 válaszadó töltött ki).

A fókuszcsoporthoz 5 szakértővel zajlott.

*Eredmények:* A teljes (91 itemes) tesztet alkalmaztuk munkáltatói elvárások meghatározására, majd a nehézségeket felismerve, - mint maga a teszt jellege, készítettünk egy direkt 5 dimenziós MPQ kérdőívet, amit sikerrel alkalmaztunk.

A direkt 5 dimenziós MPQ kérdőívet alkalmas eszköznek találtuk a munkáltatói elvárások feltárására a multikulturális kompetenciák területén. A kulturális empátia; nyitottság; társas kezdeményezőkézség; érzelmi stabilitás; rugalmasság, együttesen alkotják az ideál profil dimenzióit egy konkrét pozícióval kapcsolatos elvárások megfogalmazásában.

Azon munkáltatók, akik kitöltötték a direkt dimenziós kérdőívet, egységesen nagyon fontos elvárásként ítélték meg az 5 multikulturális kompetenciának felmérését a pályakezdő diplomás munkavállalók kiválasztásában.