

Migrant Labor in the Workforce

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Abstract. We compared immigrant workers with native workers on several factors related to their perception of their work identity anchored in their psychosocial work environment, and the result of these factors on work stress and subjective health. The data for this study came from a survey among migrant laborers in the construction and cleaning business (N=125) and was compared to a native sample (N=654) we used in an earlier study. The present study showed that the migrant workers perceived more over-commitment and higher job stress than native workers. This finding was similar to the first study in relation to these two factors. In this study, however, the construction workers and cleaners did not have significant higher levels of mental health problems than native workers. The personal ambitions of the immigrants, measured as a higher level of over-commitment was seen as a driving force behind the patterns we found. In this new study, the construction workers and cleaners showed significantly lower commitment than the natives, but still a path from over-commitment to commitment was found and may function as a barrier from developing even more stress and mental health reactions over time.

Keywords: *Mental health, over-commitment, human capital, immigrant workers, work identity, organizational learning.*

Introduction

In a recent study, we found that immigrant workers settled in Norway perceived more over-commitment, more mental health problems and higher job stress than native Norwegian workers (Saksvik, Dahl-Jørgensen, Tvedt, and Eiken, 2010). The personal ambitions of the immigrants, measured as a higher level of over-commitment was seen as a driving force behind the pattern we found. In a follow-up study with a new sample of migrant workers from Poland to Norway we wanted to see if the findings from the first study could be replicated. Immigrant workers are in a situation where they have to rely on their own resources more than the collective resources, and thus, are at greater risk of experiencing negative stress and bad health if they perceive little support and respect in their work environment from their employer, boss, or colleagues. This in turn may have

consequences for the firm they work in both related to organizational commitment and to values. Becker (1993) discusses this in relation to human capital and says that employees cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets. Migrant workers bring new assets into our understanding of the work environment that may release the need for organizational (re)learning and knowledge transformation (Williams, 2007).

Work migration is a phenomenon that has increased significantly both in intensity and diversity over recent decades (Morawska, 2001; Okólski, in Wallace and Stola, 2002, p. 105). In the European context the expansion of 10 new EU member states in May 2004 actualized this topic when large numbers of migrants from Eastern and Central European Countries started migrating to the Western part of Europe. One of the most significant groups of migrant labourers moving to Norway after 2004 came from Poland. Poland has many factors that contributes to labour migration such as a long history of emigration that is connected to its geo-political situation and history of being vulnerable to invasion and domination (Magala, 2008); a very large population that is comprised of both highly educated and less skilled sectors, and a differential in wages and economic status between itself and the West (Kicinger and Weinar, 2007).

Migrant workers such as the Poles represent a low-cost labour supply, not just because their salaries are normally lower than those of native workers, but also because social and reproduction costs before they arrive in their new country are carried by the sending society. The present pattern of work migration adds dimensions to the field of study, for example, when it comes to ideas of identity, belonging and commitment. The concept of identity is one approach towards understanding the individual experience with work migration. Identity is defined as the ideas we have about who we are and what groups we belong to (Jenkins, 2008). Identity and a sense of belonging, then, are fundamental for shaping and mediating immigrant workers' experiences in the receiving society. Giddens defines identity as the ongoing sense the self has of who it is, as conditioned through its on-going interaction with others (in Matthews, 2000). While identity conditions the individual experiences of migration, these experiences in turn impact on identity.

According to Zeytinoglu (2002) the uncertainty of flexible work lives, as those experienced by immigrant workers, commonly causes problems such as low commitment, low autonomy, low opportunities for developing skills, and fewer

career opportunities. It seems that many employees with a short-term job perspective develop a more personal kind of work commitment than the more well-known organizational commitment. This more personal commitment seems to be directed towards the employees' own career or profession, not their present employer and the future of the company (Hecksher, 1995). However, as we found in the former study, the migrants use organizational commitment as a form of coping strategy. They have to rely on organizational commitment to compensate for strain and symptoms of health problems (Saksvik et al., 2010).

The term over-commitment is most often associated with, and studied within, the theoretical framework of the Effort–Reward Imbalance model (ERI-model) (Siegrist, 1996). An individual's tendency to over-commit to work results from a behavioural pattern, called Type A-behaviour, where one exaggerates the intrinsic effort one mobilizes to solve a problem. For a migrant worker the possibility of a large income for a period also has to be taken into consideration. Thus, migrant workers tend to accept long and hard work days and unsociable work hours, and in many cases keep silent about unacceptable work conditions. We therefore believe that migrant workers in general will obtain higher scores on over-commitment than native workers. Their precarious position in the labour market forces them to invest more of themselves to secure their possibilities for the future. We also find it likely that many migrant workers will experience fewer rewards than native workers, because they have less interaction with other colleagues and superiors.

The following hypotheses were stated:

H1: Immigrant workers perceive higher levels of over-commitment and lower levels of reward and report more work stress and mental health problems.

HII: Immigrant workers perceive organizational commitment on the same level as native workers.

HIII: The immigrant sample will show the same path from over-commitment to stress and mental health through commitment as was found in the 2010-study.

Methods

Participants and procedures

The immigrant sample consists of 125 Polish workers in the construction and cleaning business. Questionnaires were distributed and collected in a city in Norway by a Polish student who contacted the migrant workers attending the

Catholic Church and three different locations where Norwegian classes were taught to the workers. The respondents worked for different companies, however, 22% of them were unemployed at the time of the survey, but had former employment in Norway. The response rate was rather low, 31%, but we attribute this to the fear of disclosure that many experience since some of them worked in the illegal market. 38% of the sample was women and they dominate in the cleaning sector while the men were in the construction sector. Their mean age was 35. The majority of them worked full-time (80%) and the average working hours were 38, including overtime. A larger percentage of the males had a high school degree (80% males) compared to 49% among the females. A larger number of women compared to men had completed some years in college (47% women and 18% men).

The Polish sample was compared to the native workers from our former study in the food and beverage industry (N=654), representing 45 different firms. Participation in the study was voluntary. The firms were selected as being representative of the industry’s population, covered all geographical parts of the country, with production areas representative of the industry as a whole. The average response rate over the different firms was 59.4 %. The primary work task of 85.5% of the sample was production, 389 (42.1%) were women and 533 (57.7%) were men. The average age of the respondents was 40.6 years (SD = 11.58). Ninety-four per cent worked full-time, the rest were employed on a part-time or temporary basis. The participants worked on average 34.5 hours per week (SD = 13.2). Their work consisted mainly of tasks related to production, such as packing food or managing machines. Regarding the level of education, 27% had completed seven to nine years of education, and 63.7% had a high school degree. A small percentage of respondents, 8.7%, had completed one to six years in college.

Table 1: The two employment groups: number of employees, gender distribution, mean age, and seniority (mean).

Employment group	N	Male (%)	Female (%)	Age Mean (SD)	Seniority Mean (SD)
Native Employees	654	56	44	40.5 (11.8)	10.1 (8.7)
Immigrant Employees	125	62	38	(9.4)	1.5 (17.8)

Measures

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of a mixture of already validated scales and items developed for the purpose of this study.

Over-commitment: This index consisted of four items from the intrinsic effort dimension of Siegrist's (1996) ERI questionnaire. The index consisted of items that assessed the amount of intrinsic effort or commitment being invested at work. An example of an item from this index is: I only feel successful when I perform better than I expected. The Cronbach's alpha of this index was .80. The response categories were given on a four-point scale ranging from "false" to "true."

Reward: This index consisted of 11 items developed by Siegrist (1996) in his ERI questionnaire. The items reflect the perceived rewards received. An example of an item from this index is: I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .78. The measures had a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

The following indexes were collected from Karasek et al. (1998) and were used in this study as control variables. The Karasek model (Karasek and Theorell, 1990) still is the most common model to assess the quality of the work environment.

Job specific demands: This index consisted of three items that assessed how often the participants work with short deadlines, work quickly and under time pressure. One of the items was: How often do you work with constant time pressure due to heavy workloads? The response categories were given on a five-point scale ranging from "very seldom" to "very often." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .84.

Job specific control: Job specific control was measured with four items, one of them was: How often can you influence decisions about your own work? Scale reliability was .85 and the response alternatives ranged from "very seldom" to "very often".

Job specific support: This index consisted of four items and one of them was: How often do you receive help and support from your co-workers? Cronbach's alpha was .79 and the response categories were given on a five-point scale ranging from "very seldom" to "very often."

Organizational commitment was measured by the short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979). The OCQ is a nine-item scale subsuming (1) a desire to maintain

membership in the organization, (2) belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization, and (3) a willingness to exert extra effort on behalf of the organization. Cronbach's alpha was .92.

Perceived job stress reactions were measured with two different scales. One of them is Cooper's Job Stress Scale (1981). We used 22 questions from this scale with six response categories ranging on a scale from "no stress at all" to a "great deal of stress." The overall scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .92.

Mental health reactions were measured with five items based on items used by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Using a four-point scale the questions measure if their work has caused: stress, headaches, general fatigue, and sleeping problems, ($\alpha = .72$). Responses were given on a four-point scale ranging from "seriously afflicted" to "not afflicted".

Statistical analysis: The analyses were conducted using SPSS (PASW Statistics 18). A t-test was conducted to compare the means of each variable used in the SEM analysis. Using AMOS software (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999), SEM (structural equation modelling) analysis was performed for Hypothesis III. Prior to the SEM analysis, the sample was screened for missing data. Cases with missing data after index computation were deleted.

Fit indices: As model evaluation continues to be an unsettled issue in SEM analysis (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999), a mixture of fit indices was used to evaluate the models in the present paper: The traditional χ^2 , the normed χ^2 (χ^2/df), AGFI (adjusted-goodness-of-fit index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis coefficient), (CFI) (comparative-fit-index), and RMSEA (root-mean-square error of approximation). According to Browne and Cudeck (1993), values of .05 or less indicate a close fit, and values of about .08 indicate a reasonable error of approximation.

Results

Table 2 shows the mean scores and correlations on the study's variables for each employment group. The table shows that there exist significant differences in levels of over-commitment, commitment, reward, demands, and stress between the groups. Immigrant workers perceived more over-commitment, higher job stress, less reward, but lower demands and lower commitment than native workers. Hypothesis I was partially confirmed;

immigrant workers perceived more over-commitment, higher job stress and less reward, but did not perceive more mental health problems. Hypothesis II was not supported, but the result was in line with the original hypothesis from the first study; immigrants had significantly lower commitment than native workers.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the employment groups and correlation matrix for the study variables

	Mean (SD) ^a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Demands	IE: 2.96 (1.24)** NE: 3.43 (.87)	-	-.28**	-.13	-.34**	.00	-.41**	-.44**	.44**
2. Control	IE: 3.11 (.99) NE: 3.43 (.94)	-.05	-	.44**	.46*	.28**	.33**	.11	-.11
3. Support	IE: 3.45 (.90) NE: 3.48 (.89)	.01	.45**	-	.49**	.02	.14	.10	-.28**
4. Reward	IE: 3.07 (.60)** NE: 2.95 (.49)	-.16**	.33**	.42**	-	.06	.49**	.42**	-.50**
5. Over-commitment	IE: 2.76 (.51)** NE: 1.99 (.54)	.22**	.12**	-.03	-.21**	-	.19*	-.38**	.32**
6. Commitment	IE: 2.75 (1.23)** NE: 3.09 (.67)	-.08	.30**	.34**	.46**	.03	-	.31**	-.15
7. Mental health reactions	IE: 3.26 (.55) NE: 3.40 (.51)	-.26**	.20**	.19**	.37**	-.20**	.21**	-	-.51**
8. Stress	IE: 2.49 (.92)** NE: 2.11 (.78)	.31**	-.11**	-.28	-.56**	.40**	-.30**	-.50**	-

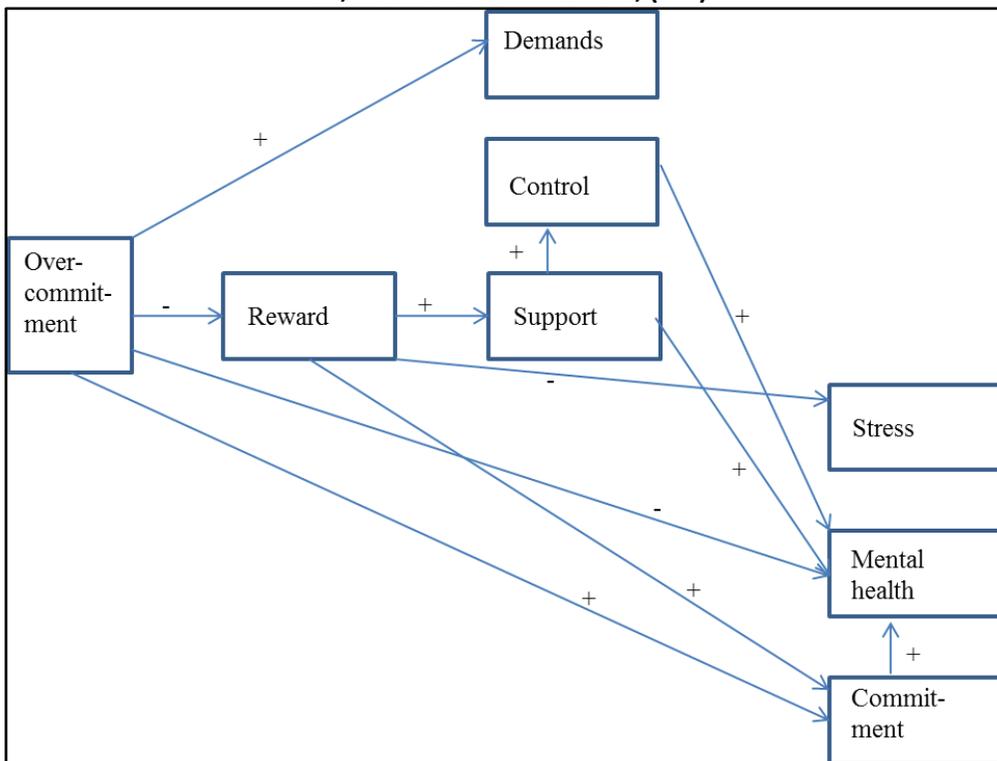
Note: NE = Native Employees, IE = Immigrant Employees. Correlations for the immigrant group are shown above the diagonal, for the natives below the diagonal. * = $p < .05$, **= $p < .001$, ^a: differences between means were calculated by 2-tailed t-test

The correlation matrix shows that reward and over-commitment correlate highly with all three dependent variables for both employee groups. In general the correlations were modest and in the predicted direction.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis was performed to test Hypothesis III. One important assumption associated with SEM analysis that is often ignored in the research literature, is the assumption of multivariate normal distribution (Byrne, 2001). Thus, the first step of any SEM analysis should be an assessment of multivariate normality. Accordingly, an assessment of the immigrant sample indicated moderate non-normality, and a bootstrapping procedure was employed because this sample was only of medium size. Bootstrapping works by basing inferential procedures on a

concrete sampling distribution from the sample at hand, rather than the traditional sampling distribution created by a hypothetical infinite number of samples from the population of interest (Efron, 1982). The concrete sampling distribution thus reflects the distribution of the sample, rendering the assumption of normality superfluous. A bootstrap sample of 1000 was drawn (with replacement) and used for the analysis of Hypothesis III.

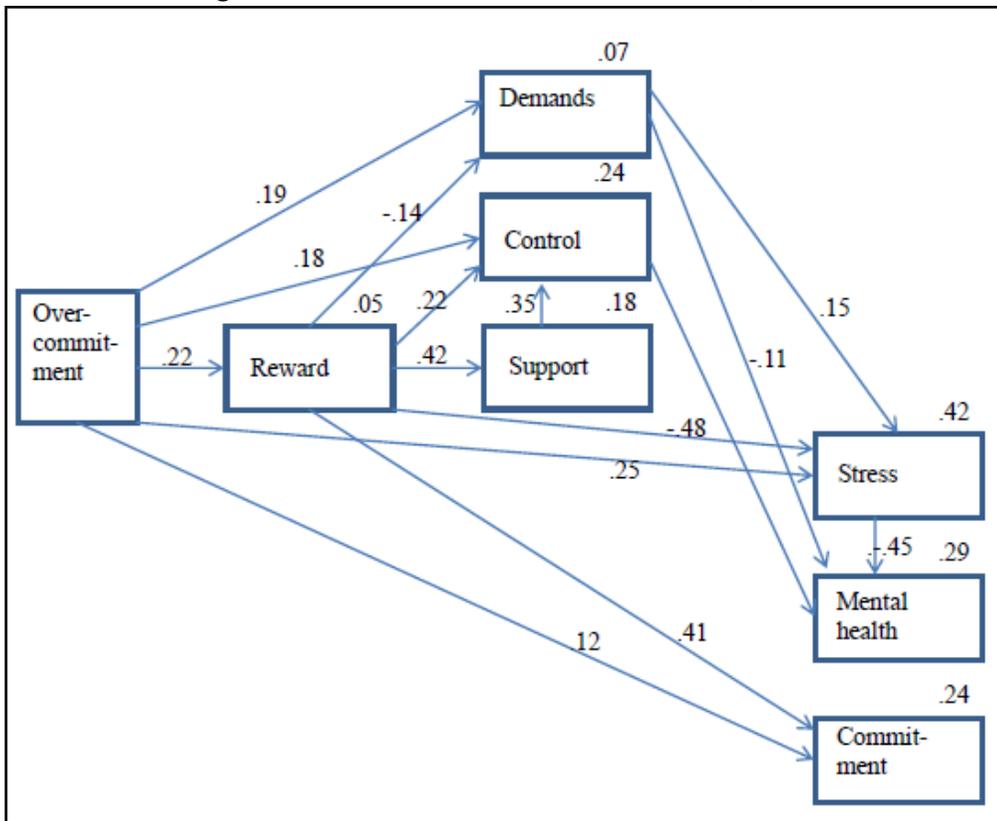
Figure 1: Model for the prediction of mental health in immigrant workers by ERI, DCS, stress and commitment, (HIII)



The original model specified by III, yielded a poor fit ($df = 15$, $\chi^2 = 96.648$, $\chi^2/df = 6.443$, $AGFI = .646$, $TLI = .487$, $CFI = .725$, $RMSEA = .213$). Furthermore, several of the hypothesized paths were not significant with 90% confidence intervals using bias corrected bootstrap estimation, and were deleted in the interests of parsimony. Following the advised procedure of Byrne (2001), modification indexes were inspected. This suggested that a new negative path be specified from Demands to Commitment and from Over-commitment to Stress. In addition, new paths were suggested such that both Over-commitment and Reward

show paths to all dimensions of the Karasek model (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). All new suggested paths are reasonable in a theoretical sense according to the work environment models used here (see discussion for details). The model was then re-specified to include the estimation of these new regression paths, pictured in Figure 2. A model with reasonable fit was then achieved ($df = 11$, $\chi^2 = 16.182$, $\chi^2/df = 1.471$, $AGFI = .896$, $TLI = .956$, $CFI = .983$, $RMSEA = .063$).

Figure 2: Standardized coefficients for Model 3, HIII



Note: Observed variables are shown in rectangles. All values are based on bias corrected bootstrap estimation. Only significant values are reported using bias-corrected percentile method with 90% confidence intervals.

In the first study, we found that the native sample showed a traditional pathway also found in other studies from over-commitment through demands and job stress to mental health, and from over-commitment through stress to mental health (Saksvik et al., 2010). As hypothesized in HIII, and in accordance with the first study, the immigrant sample showed alternative paths of reward

and over-commitment on mental health through commitment as well as a direct effect of over-commitment on mental health. Still, only partly in accordance with HIII, both reward and over-commitment had significant direct effects on stress, which mediated the effects to mental health. Contrary to the hypothesized model where over-commitment only predicted demands and reward only predicted support, additional paths were included such that both over-commitment and reward show paths to the demands, control, and support dimensions. On the other hand, none of the effects from these dimensions were significant; instead, there was an effect of demands on commitment, which is not in accordance with the hypothesized model, but is nevertheless compatible with hypothesis III in that it follows the alternative commitment route to mental health.

Discussion

The t-tests showed much of the same picture for the Polish sample as for the immigrant sample of the study we used as comparison (Saksvik et al., 2010). The significantly lower commitment, seen in connection with high levels of over-commitment and stress, may be considered a threat to the future health situation of the Polish sample. So far, however, we found no indication of impairment on their mental health, which can be explained by the findings of the path analyses.

The SEM analyses demonstrate that apart from the common strong and general effect of reward, the Polish samples incorporate very different explanatory routes for mental health in accordance with the immigrant sample from the 2010-study and contrary to the native sample, which illustrated a traditional demands-stress route for mental health. The Polish sample showed an interesting additional route via commitment towards mental health, as well as a direct effect of over-commitment reducing mental health problems. The reward to commitment route in the immigrant sample and the direct effect of over-commitment on mental health sheds new light on the immigrant situation. It points to immigrants' mental health as more dependent on internal drive than external performance demands and stress experience. And further, that the Polish immigrants have a beneficial indirect effect of reward via increased commitment that increases their mental health. I.e. their mental health benefits from commitment in a way not found in native employees.

These results are easily understood by viewing immigrants as not wholly integrated in the native culture. It is fair to assume that these results are the product of cultural interpretational frames more strongly determining individual ratings of actual working environments than is usually assumed in most studies of predominately homogenous worker samples. Also, not being wholly integrated in the native culture, the affective commitment to the workplace becomes more crucial for the immigrants' mental health; they are more vulnerable to experiences of lacking inclusion and belongingness. This was also reported in the former study with another immigrant sample (Saksvik et al., 2010), but the paths were slightly different probably because the Polish sample had stayed a shorter time in Norway and have practiced a form of 'circular migration' much more than the other sample and thus, had not been so integrated in the work culture.

Implications on the organizational level

The implication of our findings for organizations employing labour migrants is that their managers have to be aware of the differences between the staff they have, and those coming from other cultures. The organizational learning of the firms may involve both better insight in how commitment develops and functions among this group, and also how they are motivated in the form of salary and status. This change is so fundamental that double loop learning, i.e. challenging the established norms of the firm, has to be on the agenda (Argyris and Schön 1996). If managers are unaware of the different identity-building functions of over-commitment and commitment for immigrants, then they will likely not have the necessary social competence to understand and communicate in a type II congruent manner. Not being sensitized to the different interpretational frames, the managers will likely both misinterpret immigrant behavior as well as fail to address immigrants in a way conducive to them responding in a type II manner. Any language problems are likely to amplify this problem. If managers are able to balance addressing cultural differences and maintaining an inclusive and open cultural stance, different identity-building functions of over-commitment and commitment might be exploited to address general discussions about internal norms and values; treating both native and immigrant cultural stances with the "strange tribe" perspective often taken in anthropological studies of western work cultures (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001).

It has been found that employing workers with temporary contracts, who are committed to the company to a lesser degree, may be a threat to the internal systematic occupational health and safety work (Eiken & Saksvik, 2009). The lack of interest in the company itself to the expense of personal ambitions and commitment should therefore be a signal the organization has to take precautions towards. It seems that many temporary employees develop a more personal kind of work commitment than the more well-known organizational commitment. This more personal commitment seems to be directed towards their own career or profession, not their present employer and the future situation for the company (Heckscher, 1995). Measuring different kinds of commitment, personal career commitment versus organizational emotional commitment among the employees on a regular basis, may prevent a negative development.

High over-commitment is a threat to the immigrant worker's health and work environment, but strengthening the commitment of the firm may compensate the problem. The strategies of the firm to achieve this can be to:

- Integrate the immigrants better in the work environment, e.g. strengthen their coherence as units or work groups with both natives and immigrants based on mutual trust (see e.g. Bijlsma-Frankema, 2001)
- To have internal discussions about internal norms, values and identity in order to include the perspectives of the migrant workers, i.e. also change the attitudes and behaviors of the natives (see e.g. Cox Jr., 1991)
- To investigate how a supportive climate in general can be strengthened without necessarily building on the emotional driven commitment to the firm. Building on positive psychological capital has been found to mediate the effects of a supportive climate (Luthans, Norman, Avolio and Avey, 2008).

An opposite strategy may of course be to accept the higher over-commitment among the immigrants, i.e. treat them unlike native workers, but watch their stress level close and even consider stress reduction interventions on group or individual level (Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Quinlan, & Bohle, 2000). This calls for very different organizational learning strategies and it is probably not possible to combine with inclusion strategies.

The importance of over-commitment and reward had the most solid and dominating explanation of effects found also in the native sample. Hence, these two factors may be of more significance towards understanding how work can best

be organized in a modern work life. This can be seen in connection to findings related to how justice is perceived (Hammer, Bayazit & Wazeter, 2009). Justice is important for how loyalty develops and when the imbalance between what you invest, in the form of hard work, and what you get back, in the form of salary and status, is high, the possibility of lower loyalty exists. This seems to be of equal importance for native and immigrant workers, but may be of special importance for migrants since they cannot rely so much on alternative paths.

It has been shown that the way migrants often are employed, through precarious employment, is associated with several subjective health problems (Benavides, Benach, Diez-Roux, and Román, 2000). On a higher level the firm can develop a policy on how to use the human capital of migrant workers; what their long term strategy is. If they, for example, want to hire only contract workers for shorter periods of time, they may treat them as subgroups and treat them individually. If they want to have them for longer periods of time, they should develop a policy for integration starting with the recruitment process, how to socialize them, how to develop good teams or work groups where variation is accepted (Brett, Behfar, and Kern, 2009), and to have a system for wages not creating distance between migrants and others (Hammer et al., 2009).

Methodological considerations

The variables in this study were measured using the same method (i.e., self-reports) and the same source (i.e., employees). The dependence on self-reports through questionnaires causes various problems (e.g., Frese, 1985; Frese and Zapf, 1988; Kasl, 1998; Spector, 1992). Mono-method and common-source biases may account for parts of the relationships we found in this study, but we argue that the relative intensity of relationships would still hold although the absolute strength of relationships may have an upward bias.

The relatively small sample size of immigrants created some problems because the observed differences between the groups were not very large although they turned out to be significant for some of the variables. Further studies with larger samples from more sectors have to be conducted to confirm the findings of this study, but our replication with a Polish sample indicated that the differences observed in the first study, might be found in general.

A word of caution is necessary here in relation to the limitations of SEM analyses. They cannot test the causality of the modeled structures, so the

directions of relationships given in the models cannot be taken for granted. Here the present study suffers from being limited to cross-sectional data.

Conclusion

The personal ambitions of the immigrants, measured as a higher level of over-commitment, plays an important role in explaining the work identity of immigrant employees. This could have been a possible threat to an increased level of stress leading to mental health problems, but commitment to the firm they work in has a compensating effect. We found, however, that the path from over-commitment to commitment was not exactly alike in the two immigrant samples, what we interpreted as having something to do with differences in length of stay in Norway between the two samples. For those with the shortest stay commitment to the firm had no compensating effect and this increases the risk for health problems. For both natives and immigrants, reward was an influential factor and may have something to do with the feeling of (in-) justice in the modern work life for all employees. To fully understand work identity and commitment and the association with stress and health, other models may have been considered, but it is important to take into consideration the interesting difference between the samples shown here when interventions to strengthen the work identity and prevent health problems are discussed. Migrant workers represent a different human capital to modern working organizations and the best organizational learning strategy should be decided; whether it is best that the migrants should be fully integrated, treated as a subgroup and given stress coping interventions or be hired as contractors', either as self-employed or from an employment business. If no learning occurs in the firm they work in, the migrants may represent a burden for the society in the long run due to their lack of work identity and the health problems they develop and even from the society they came from if they return.

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