

University of Groningen

The multicultural personality questionnaire

Van der Zee, K.I.; Van Oudenhoven, J.P.

Published in:
Journal of Research in Personality

DOI:
[10.1006/jrpe.2001.2320](https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.2001.2320)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2001

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Van der Zee, K. I., & Van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2001). The multicultural personality questionnaire: Reliability and validity of self- and other ratings of multicultural effectiveness. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 35(3), 278-288. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.2001.2320>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: Reliability and Validity of Self- and Other Ratings of Multicultural Effectiveness

Karen I. Van der Zee and Jan Pieter Van Oudenhoven

University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

Published online July 20, 2001

The present study considered the reliability and validity of the 78-item revised version of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, a multidimensional instrument aimed at measuring multicultural effectiveness among two student samples ($N = 210$). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses on self- and other ratings for an original set of 138 items revealed five reliable factors underlying the questionnaire: Cultural Empathy, Openmindedness, Emotional Stability, Social Initiative, and Flexibility. In addition, initial support for the validity of the instrument was obtained by showing convergence between self and other ratings on the scales. Moreover, the instrument was clearly able to discriminate between students with and without explicit international inspirations. The dimension of Cultural Empathy was least well supported. © 2001 Academic Press

In today's global business environment, executive work is becoming more international in orientation. Increasingly, employees have to be able to operate within foreign cultures. It is not easy to leave one's familiar surroundings—often with spouse and children—to start a new life in a different culture and to perform effectively within a work environment with different norms and rules. Several dimensions have been related to international success in the management literature. Nevertheless, few attempts have been made to develop sound and valid instruments aimed at measuring them. Most studies heavily rely on expert evaluations of the relevance of dimensions assumed to be important for overseas success. And, although several authors have stressed the potential usefulness of personality scales for predicting international success (e.g., Deller, 1997; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997), empir-

The authors thank Henk Kiers and Marieke Timmerman for their valuable help with the data analyses.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Karen I. Van Oudenhoven-Van der Zee, University of Groningen, Department of Psychology, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, The Netherlands. Fax: (050) 363-6304. E-mail: K.I.van.Oudenhoven-van.der.Zee@ppsw.rug.nl.



ical research in this field based on reliable scales is scarce. The few attempts that have been made rely on the Big Five framework and use general personality questionnaires for the Big Five such as Costa and McCrae's (1992) NEO Personality Inventory (see, for example, Deller, 1997). Hough (1992) suggests that the Big Five may be too broad to successfully predict occupational criteria (see also Ashton, 1998).

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed as a questionnaire aimed at measuring multicultural effectiveness. The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire has scales for Cultural Empathy, Openmindedness, Emotional Stability, Orientation to Action, Adventurousness/Curiosity, Flexibility, and Extraversion (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). *Cultural Empathy* is probably the most frequently mentioned dimension of cultural effectiveness. For example, Ruben (1976) defines cultural empathy as the capacity to clearly project an interest in others as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete and accurate sense of another's thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences. A second dimension that is frequently mentioned is *Openmindedness*, referring to an open and unprejudiced attitude toward out-group members and different cultural norms and values (e.g., Arthur & Bennett, 1995). Third, *Emotional Stability* refers to a tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances. Both Tung (1981) and Hammer et al. (1978) identify the ability to deal with psychological stress as a key dimension of intercultural effectiveness. Fourth, working in a multicultural environment requires an *Action Oriented* approach. McCall (1994) mentions "the courage to take action or to make things happen," as a clue in the early identification of international executive potential (see also Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997). The fifth dimension is *Adventurousness/Curiosity*. International employees should feel attracted to unknown situations and experience it as a challenge. In the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, *Adventurousness/Curiosity* is defined as a tendency to actively search and explore new situations and to regard them as a challenge (see also Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991; McCall, 1994). Sixth, several authors have stressed the importance of *Flexibility* (Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hanvey, 1976; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Smith, 1966; Torbiorn, 1982). The international assignee has to be able to switch easily from one strategy to another because the familiar ways of handling things will not necessarily work in a new cultural environment. *Extraversion*, finally, is defined as a tendency to stand out in a different culture. Several researchers have pointed at the relevance of the ability to establish and maintain contacts (Hawes & Kealey, 1981; Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991). More convincingly, empirical evidence underlines the relevance of this dimension (Abe & Weisman, 1983; Hammer et al., 1978).

Based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of an original set

of 138 items the MPQ was revised into a 78-item measure that assesses five constructs: *Emotional Stability*, *Social Initiative*, *Openmindedness*, *Cultural Empathy*, and *Flexibility*. Items from the original scales for Adventurousness and Flexibility collapsed into one factor, which is referred to as Flexibility. In a similar vein, items from the scales for Extraversion and Orientation to Action appeared together in one factor, which is labeled Social Initiative. The Appendix shows examples of items for each construct. The purpose of the present study is to further introduce the MPQ and describe the psychometric properties of the final 78-item version. In addition, we provide some initial validity information by showing convergence between self- and other ratings on the scales and by comparing the scale scores of students with and without explicit interest in international experiences.¹

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The present findings were based on two samples. First, a group of 119 1st-year psychology students participated in the study. Students were approached at the beginning of a lecture on social psychology and filled out the questionnaire at home. Sixty percent of the students returned a completed questionnaire together with a second questionnaire that was filled out by a person that was close to them (for example their partner, a close friend, or a family member). The students were free in choosing the person that provided the other ratings. In the instruction to the participating others it was stressed that their evaluations had no consequences for the assessed person and that the ratings would be treated confidentially and would not be revealed to the person they had assessed. The other ratings were returned in a sealed envelope provided by the researchers. The age of the students varied between 17 and 51 years ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 4.7$). Seventy-nine percent of the students were female, 21% were male. Ninety-four percent of the sample were of Dutch nationality; the nationality of the remaining 6% varied (Austrian, British, Danish, and German). Other ratings were obtained for all participants. The largest number of other ratings (41.1%) was obtained from parents (12% of them were fathers and 88% of them were mothers), 24.3% from close friends, 21.7% from partners, 7.0% from siblings, 1.7% from other relatives, and finally 3.5% from roommates. The age of the others varied between 14 and 74 years ($M = 32.3$, $SD = 14.9$). Sixty percent of the acquaintances were female, 40% were male. Again, almost all of them were of Dutch nationality (97%); the nationalities of the remaining 3% varied. All students who participated in the study received feedback regarding their personal test results.

The second sample consisted of 92 students who were approached for the study at a yearly seminar that was organized for students who intend to go abroad for study purposes. These students only received a self-report questionnaire, which they could fill out at home. After completion, the students could return the questionnaire in a stamped addressed envelope. Students from various faculties participated in the study. The largest groups consisted of business administration, economics, or international management students (32.1%), social sciences students (24.1%), and art students (18.4%). The age of the students varied between 17 and 57 years ($M = 21.4$, $SD = 5.6$). Seventy-two percent of the students were female, and 28% were male. Eighty-nine percent of the sample were of Dutch nationality; the nationality of the

¹ For the complete item set and scoring key, please contact the authors.

remaining 11% varied (British, Yugoslavian, Peruvian, and German). Again, all students who participated in the study received feedback regarding their personal test results.

Instruments

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). In the Appendix, sample items are presented for the five MPQ dimensions. Participants could give their answers on a 5-point-scale, running from *not at all applicable* (1) to *totally applicable* (5). It took participants approximately 15 min to complete the entire questionnaire of 138 items. Scale scores were obtained by taking the unweighted mean of the item scores, after first recoding the items that were mirrored. In case of missing values, the personal mean over the remaining scale items was computed, provided at least half of the items were answered.

Indicators of international involvement. To examine whether the MPQ scores are associated with students' international involvement, in the second sample, a number of additional questions were included in the questionnaire. These students were asked to rate their aptitude for an international career ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .76$) on a 5-point scale ranging from *unable* (1) to *very much capable*, respectively (5). In addition, students were asked whether they had been living abroad at some point in their life. Forty-one percent of the students had lived abroad.

RESULTS

Scale Characteristics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and scale inter-correlations for self- and other ratings on the five resulting scales. Both for self- and for other ratings, internal consistencies were high. Scale means were all slightly above the midpoint of the scale. Particularly for Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness high means were found, pointing at a possible susceptibility of these two scales to social desirability bias. Compared to the self-ratings the intercorrelations between the five dimensions were higher. With respect to the other ratings, the scales for Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness were highly interrelated.

MPQ and International Involvement

In addition to the internal structure of the MPQ, we were interested in the validity of the instrument. We examined whether the MPQ dimensions were able to discriminate between students with and without explicit intentions to go abroad. As expected, a MANOVA revealed a clear effect of sample on the results, $F(5, 197) = 21.07$, $p < .001$ (Table 2). As may be expected, students with explicit intentions to go abroad obtained better results on the MPQ. Psychology students scored lower on all scales with the exception of Cultural Empathy, on which they obtained higher scores than the internationally oriented students. The last column of Table 2 presents the effect sizes for the five dimensions. Cohen (1977) characterizes effect sizes of $\eta^2 = .01$ as small, $\eta^2 = .06$ as medium, and $\eta^2 = .14$ as a large, indicating noteworthy effects for openmindedness and also for social initiative and flexibility.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistencies, and Scale Intercorrelations for Self- and Other Ratings
on the MPQ Dimensions ($N = 210$)

	Self-ratings ($N = 210$)					Other ratings ($N = 119$)								
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	2	3	4	5
1. Cultural Empathy (13 items)	4.12	.35	.81	.29	.01	.25	.08	4.02	.48	.88	.63	.19	.29	.25
2. Openmindedness (14 items)	3.82	.49	.86	—	.28	.42	.41	3.57	.50	.84	—	.29	.40	.31
3. Emotional Stability (20 items)	3.40	.56	.91	—	—	.44	.42	3.34	.60	.91	—	—	.31	.39
4. Social Initiative (17 items)	3.51	.55	.90	—	—	—	.30	3.56	.64	.91	—	—	—	.25
5. Flexibility (13 items)	3.29	.50	.80	—	—	—	—	2.95	.49	.74	—	—	—	—

Note. Scale intercorrelations $> .20$ were significant at $p < .01$.

TABLE 2
MPQ Results for Psychology Students and Students with Explicit International Inspirations ($N = 210$)

	Psychology students		International studies students		$F(1, 201)$	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Cultural Empathy	4.18	.35	4.07	.35	5.69*	.03
2. Openmindedness	3.65	.46	4.04	.41	40.33***	.17
3. Emotional Stability	3.27	.59	3.49	.51	7.26**	.04
4. Social Initiative	3.34	.54	3.71	.48	25.81***	.11
5. Flexibility	3.13	.52	3.48	.39	28.11***	.12

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Consistency between Self- and Other Ratings

Next, we were interested in the correspondence between self- and other ratings. Scale means were compared for the self- and the other ratings. As Table 3 shows,² for three of the five scales, the other ratings were lower than the self-ratings. This is consistent with the general finding that individuals tend to present a view of themselves that is positively biased. Interestingly, others gave higher ratings for Social Initiative than the focal persons themselves. For Emotional Stability no differences were found in the scale means for self- and other ratings. Table 3 also shows the correlations between self- and other ratings. All the values on the principal diagonal with the exception of the correlation between self- and other ratings for Cultural Empathy ($r = .18$) exceed the so-called .3 barrier (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1989). Moreover, for all scales, self-ratings showed the highest correlation with other ratings on the corresponding scales. The highest correlation between self- and other ratings was found for Emotional Stability.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the present study was to examine the psychometric qualities of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire. Factor analysis on an initial item set of 138 items revealed five underlying factors: Cultural Empathy, Openmindedness, Emotional Stability, Social Initiative, and Flexibility. The gain of the present study lies in the fact that as opposed to earlier

² It must be noted that the scale means reported in Table 1 are based on the whole sample, whereas the results of multivariate analyses are based on the subsample for which both self- and other ratings were collected.

TABLE 3
Means for Self- and Other Ratings and Their Intercorrelations

	Self		Other		Self-ratings					Other ratings					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> (1, 118)										
1. Cultural Empathy	4.18	.35	4.02	.48	10.05**	.18	.15	-.08	.12	.02					
2. Openmindedness	3.66	.47	3.57	.50	4.16*	.11	.47	.11	.14	.25					
3. Emotional Stability	3.29	.57	3.34	.60	<1	-.14	.06	.54	.09	.16					
4. Social Initiative	3.36	.54	3.56	.64	12.86**	-.02	.19	.15	.48	.14					
5. Flexibility	3.13	.52	2.95	.49	14.02**	.10	.24	.19	.12	.48					

Note. All correlations $>.20$ were significant at $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

findings (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000), Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness appeared as separate factors. The ability to empathize with others is related to openness to new ideas or different cultural backgrounds, but is clearly a different concept. Moreover, because both Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness seem to be the MPQ dimensions that are most specific to *international* success of employees as opposed to success in general, it is important to have separate measures for both dimensions. The present study presented support for the internal consistency of the five dimension and also provided some initial evidence for the validity of the instrument.

The dimension that seemed most problematic was Cultural Empathy. First, particularly for this dimension, elevated scale means were found both for self- and for other ratings. Possibly, the ratings on Cultural Empathy may have suffered from social desirability bias. Social desirability may seriously disturb test results. It is unclear, however, whether the high means reflect a social desirability or that people tend to behave in a socially desirable way (Edwards, 1953). The other ratings of Cultural Empathy were significantly lower than the self-ratings, and the same was found for Openmindedness and Flexibility suggesting that to the extent that the MPQ ratings suffer from bias, this bias may less strongly affect other ratings than it affects self-ratings. Second, although the instrument was clearly able to discriminate between students with and without explicit international inspirations, for Cultural Empathy it discriminated in the wrong direction. Psychology students obtained higher scores on Cultural Empathy than students who explicitly intended to go abroad. However, by virtue of their profession, it may be expected from Psychology students that they are capable of empathic responding.

Third, Cultural Empathy was also the only dimension for which correlations between self- and other ratings failed to reach the so-called .3 barrier (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1989) pointing at the validity of other versus self-ratings. A first explanation may be that, in part, items from this scale refer to perceptions that may be hard to observe by others (e.g., "Has problems assessing relationships"). Second, one could argue that because Cultural Empathy concerns the interpersonal domain, the perspective of close others with respect to this dimension is that of the receiver rather than that of the observer. Parents, partners, and siblings are either the fortunate receivers of effective empathic behaviors or the victims of nonempathic responding. Probably, the congruency in ratings between actors and receivers is lower than the congruency between actors and observers. Although such alternative explanations for these unexpected findings with respect to Cultural Empathy may sound plausible, it is important to focus further studies on the validity of this dimension.

The present study was performed among a student sample. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain data on actual success because the respondents had no concrete short-term plans to go abroad. For example, Emotional Sta-

bility and Cultural Empathy were not very potent discriminators among both groups. It seems likely that these two factors start to exert their influence in the real intercultural context, but are not of real importance in affecting a priori intentions to go abroad. Of course, the most important criterion for evaluating both self- and other ratings lies in their ability to predict success. In the case of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire this means that the external validity of both self- and other ratings on the MPQ has to be established against external criteria because that is the measure of success for international employees in their assignment and in adjusting to the new cultural environment.

APPENDIX

Definitions and Sample Items for the Five MPQ Dimensions

Cultural Empathy (14 items)

The ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals from a different cultural background versus an inability to do so

- Notices when someone is in trouble (+)
- Understands other people's feelings (+)
- Takes other people's habits into consideration (+)
- Has problems assessing relationships (+)

Openmindedness (14 items)

An open and unprejudiced attitude toward different groups and toward different cultural norms and values

- Gets involved in other cultures (+)
- Finds other religions interesting (+)
- Seeks contact with people from a different background (+)
- Has a broad range of interests (+)

Emotional Stability (20 items)

The tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances

- Can put setbacks in perspective (+)
- Keeps calm at ill-luck (+)
- Is afraid to fail (-)
- Takes it for granted that things will turn out right (+)

Social Initiative (17 items)

A tendency to approach social situations in an active way and to take initiatives

- Is inclined to speak out (+)
- Is often the driving force behind things (+)
- Takes the lead (+)
- Easily approaches other people (+)

Flexibility (13 items)

A tendency to regard new and unknown situations as a challenge and to adjust one's behavior to the demands of new and unknown situations

Avoids from adventure (–)

Works mostly according to a strict scheme (–)

Feels uncomfortable in a different culture (–)

Starts a new life easily (+)

REFERENCES

- Abe, H., & Weisman, R. L. (1983). A cross-cultural confirmation of the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *7*, 53–67.
- Arthur, W., & Bennett, W. (1995). The international assignee: The relative importance of factors perceived to contribute to success. *Personnel Psychology*, *48*, 99–114.
- Ashton, M. C. (1998). Personality and job performance: The importance of narrow traits. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *19*, 289–303.
- Cohen, J. (1977). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (Rev. ed.). New York: Academic Press.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) Professional Manual*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Deller, J. (1997). Expatriate selection: Possibilities and limitations of using personality scales. In D. M. Saunders & Z. Aycan (Eds.), *New approaches to employee management* (Vol. 4, pp. 93–116). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Edwards, A. L. (1953). The relationship between the judged desirability of a trait and the probability that the trait will be endorsed. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *37*, 90–93.
- Gullahorn, J., & Gullahorn, J. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, *19*, 33–47.
- Hammer, M. R., Gudykunst, W. B., & Wiseman, R. L. (1978). Dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *2*, 382–393.
- Hanvey, R. G. (1976). Cross-cultural awareness. In E. C. Smith & L. F. Luce (Eds.), *Towards internationalism: Readings in cross-cultural communication* (pp. 44–56). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Hawes, F., & Kealy, D. (1981). An empirical study of Canadian technical assistance: Adaptation and effectiveness on overseas assignment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *4*, 239–258.
- Hough, L. M. (1992). The Big Five personality variables—construct confusion: Description versus prediction. *Human Performance*, *5*, 139–155.
- Kets de Vries, M., & Mead, C. (1991). Identifying management talent for a pan-European environment. In S. Makridakas (Ed.), *Single market Europe* (pp. 215–235). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McCall, M. (1994). Identifying leadership potential in future international executives: Developing a concept. *Consulting Psychology Journal*, *Winter*, 49–63.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1989). Different points of view: Self-reports and ratings in the assessment of personality. In J. P. Forgas & M. J. Innes (Eds.), *Recent advances in social psychology: An international perspective* (pp. 429–439). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

- Ones, D. S., & Viswesvaran, C. (1997). Personality determinants in the prediction of aspects of expatriate job success. In D. M. Saunders & Z. Aycan (Eds.), *New approaches to employee management* (Vol. 4, pp. 63–92). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Ruben, B. (1976). Assessing communication competence for intercultural adaptation. *Group and Organization Studies*, **1**, 334–354.
- Ruben, I., & Kealey, D. J. (1979). Behavioral assessment of communication competency and the prediction of cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, **3**, 15–17.
- Smith, M. B. (1966). Explorations in competence: A study of Peace Corps teachers in Ghana. *American Psychologists*, **21**, 555–566.
- Spreitzer, G. M., McCall, M. W., & Mahoney, J. D. (1997). Early identification of international executive potential. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **82**(1), 6–29.
- Torbiorn, I. (1982). *Living abroad: Personal adjustment and personnel policy in the overseas setting*. New York: Wiley.
- Tung, R. L. (1981). Selection and training of personnel for overseas assignments. *Columbia Journal of World Business*, **16**, 68–78.
- Van der Zee, K. I., & Van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2000). The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: A multidimensional instrument of multicultural effectiveness. *European Journal of Personality*, **14**, 291–309.