



# The multicultural workplace: interactive acculturation and intergroup relations

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The paper's aim is to introduce the interactive acculturation model (IAM) of Bourhis *et al.* to predict how discordance in acculturation orientations between host community and immigrant workers relates to the quality of intergroup work-relations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The sample consisted of 141 host community (Dutch) and 41 non-western immigrant workers of a postal service company who filled out a questionnaire. Methods of analyses include analysis of variance and multiple regression.

**Findings** – In line with the IAM, results showed that a higher discordance in preferred acculturation orientations between host community and immigrant workers related to a poorer quality of intergroup work-relations. However, intergroup contact moderated this relationship differently for host community and immigrant workers.

**Research limitations/implications** – Data are cross-sectional and collected in one organization. Future studies should replicate the findings to other organizational contexts, cultural groups, and collect longitudinal data to determine causal effects.

**Practical implications** – Organizations should monitor discordance in acculturation orientations amongst host community and immigrant workers. A multicultural culture in organizations may reduce discordance in acculturation orientations between host community and immigrant workers.

**Originality/value** – The paper helps to explain the mixed findings in cultural diversity research so far, by demonstrating that discordance in acculturation orientations relates negatively to intergroup work-relations in a multicultural workplace.

**Keywords** Acculturation, Intergroup relations, Migrant workers, National cultures, The Netherlands

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, many workplaces are transformed into domains where culturally diverse groups of employees interact on a daily basis. It therefore becomes more and more important to understand how cultural diversity in organizations relates to important work-outcomes. Literature reviews on cultural diversity showed mixed results (Oerlemans *et al.*, 2008). For example, some studies indicated that cultural diversity in work-groups leads to benefits (e.g. enhanced creativity, innovation, and decision making; McLeod and Lobel, 1992; Watson *et al.*, 2002), whereas other studies showed that cultural diversity leads to negative work-outcomes (e.g. increased relational conflicts, a poorer quality of work-relations; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998).

One way to get more insight in the mixed effects of cultural diversity on work-outcomes is to study "deep-level" forms of cultural diversity in addition to examining "surface-level" forms of cultural diversity (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Wheeler, 2002). Surface level forms of



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cultural diversity encompass variations in ethnicity or nationality (Jackson *et al.*, 1995, 2003; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), whereas deep-level forms of cultural diversity encompass (differences in) cultural attitudes, norms, and values (Jackson *et al.*, 2003). Most research so far focused on examining surface-level forms of cultural diversity (Oerlemans, 2009). The main aim of this study is therefore to examine whether one aspect of deep-level cultural diversity, acculturation orientations, can explain why cultural diversity sometimes relates positively, and sometimes negatively to intergroup work-relations in multicultural workplaces.

### 1.1. Theoretical background

*Acculturation.* When people from different cultures come into first-hand contact with one another, this will trigger a process called acculturation. The first definition of acculturation was offered by Redfield *et al.* (1936, p. 149):

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena, which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.

Nowadays, the most popular theoretical model to study acculturation has been introduced by Berry (1997). Here, acculturation is based on two dimensions. The first dimension refers to culture adaptation; the degree to which immigrants are willing to adapt to the dominant culture of the “new” society. The second dimension refers to culture maintenance; the degree to which immigrants want to maintain their own ethnic culture in the new society. Based on these two dimensions, Berry distinguishes between four possible acculturation orientations. Integration is defined by a positive orientation towards culture adaptation and culture maintenance, whereas marginalization is defined by negative orientation towards the two domains. A positive orientation towards culture adaptation and a negative orientation towards culture maintenance is referred to as assimilation, whereas the reverse defines separation.

*Interactive acculturation and intergroup-relations.* Much historic work on acculturation focused solely on immigrant groups and their orientation towards the dominant culture of a host society (Berry *et al.*, 1987; Berry, 2006). However, Bourhis *et al.* (1997, 2009) argued that acculturation is more likely an interactive process between immigrant groups and the host community group in a society. For instance, people from the host community group are also likely to hold acculturation orientations towards immigrant groups in their society. Such orientations concern the degree to which immigrant groups should be allowed to maintain aspects of their heritage culture, and/or adapt to the dominant culture of the host society. Based on this premise, Bourhis *et al.* proposed a more dynamic interactive acculturation model (IAM) where they sought to integrate the following components:

- acculturation orientations adopted by immigrant groups in the host community;
- acculturation orientations adopted by the host community group towards specific groups of immigrants; and
- interpersonal and intergroup relational outcomes that are the product of combinations of immigrant and host community acculturation orientations.

According to the IAM, consensual relational outcomes are predicted when acculturation orientations between the host community group and the immigrant

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group are “concordant.” This is the case when both groups prefer assimilation, or when both groups prefer integration. Next, problematic relational outcomes emerge when acculturation orientations of the two groups are partially in conflict (i.e. Bourhis *et al.* refer to this as partial disconcordance). For example, this would be the case when one group prefers integration, whereas the other group prefers assimilation. As such, the two groups would share similar acculturation orientations on one dimension (e.g. culture adaptation) but not on the other dimension (e.g. culture maintenance). Finally, conflictual relational outcomes are predicted when the host community group and the immigrant group are in full disagreement as regards to their acculturation orientations (Bourhis *et al.* refer to this as full disconcordance). For example, one group prefers assimilation, whereas the other group prefers marginalization. As such, the two groups would share disagreement on both dimensions of culture adaptation and culture maintenance.

Bourhis *et al.* (1997) proposed that the quality of intergroup relations on a social-psychological level includes verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communications; interethnic attitudes and stereotypes, intergroup tension, acculturative stress, and discrimination. Furthermore, consensual, problematic, and conflictual relations should not be interpreted as three distinct clusters of relational outcomes, but rather as a single continuum ranging from consensual to conflictual relations.

In line with the IAM, a study of Jasinskaja-Lahti *et al.* (2003) demonstrated that immigrants who differed in their acculturation orientations from the host population experienced either more discrimination or more stress than immigrants with more concordant acculturation orientations. Similarly, Zagefka and Brown (2002) showed in their study that a mismatch in preferred acculturation orientations between hosts and immigrants increased the perception of in-group bias and discrimination while decreasing the quality of intergroup relations for both groups.

*The role of intergroup contact and group vitality.* The definition of acculturation states that sustained first hand contact is required for consequences of acculturation to occur (Redfield *et al.*, 1936). An extensive review of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) demonstrated that intergroup contact reduced feelings of prejudice and led to more consensual intergroup relations. Hence, intergroup contact is likely to positively moderate the negative relationship between disconcordance in acculturation orientations and intergroup work-relations.

In addition, the host community group usually enjoys what Bourhis *et al.* (1997, 2009) referred to as a “strong vitality position,” whereas immigrant groups often have a “weak vitality position.” Group vitality is defined as that what makes the group likely to act as a collective entity within a particular context (Giles *et al.*, 1977). Several factors such as demographics (i.e. the number of people belonging to the same ethnic group), institutional control (i.e. whether groups gain representation in decision making levels) and status (i.e. sociohistorical status and prestige) contribute to the relative strength and vitality of ethnic groups. As a consequence, immigrant groups often experience pressure to adapt to the cultural values of the host community group. As a result, immigrant groups may be more prone to experiencing poorer intergroup relations as a consequence of disconcordance in acculturation orientations compared to the host community group.

### 1.2. *The present study*

*Interactive acculturation in the workplace.* In this study, we applied the IAM of Bourhis *et al.* (1997) to the workplace to examine if disconcordance in acculturation orientations

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impact the quality of intergroup work-relations. We specifically focussed on acculturation orientations of host community (Dutch) workers versus immigrant workers from “non-western cultures.” Cultural values between Dutch workers and non-western immigrant workers are likely to be higher compared to immigrants who originated from western cultures (Hofstede, 1984).

Furthermore, we examined “blue collar workers” for two reasons. Non-western immigrant groups are overrepresented in blue-collar jobs in The Netherlands (CBS, 2007), but at the same time this group is underrepresented in organizational research (Peeters and Oerlemans, 2009). Second, selection procedures at higher levels in organizations often suffer from “cultural bias” (van de Vijver and Tanzer, 2003). Cultural bias stimulates the recruitment of personnel that is culturally similar to the dominant (host community) group. As such, this would reduce the probability of finding differences in acculturation orientations between the two cultural groups.

*Hypotheses.* Non-western immigrant groups in The Netherlands usually prefer integration above assimilation, whereas segregation and marginalization are the least preferred acculturation orientations. The Dutch usually prefer immigrants to assimilate towards the Dutch culture, followed by integration, while segregation and marginalization are least preferred (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2003, 2004; Ouarasse and van de Vijver, 2005). Therefore, we first hypothesized that:

- H1.* Assimilation is the preferred acculturation orientation of Dutch workers, followed by integration, while separation and marginalization are the least preferred acculturation orientations.
- H2.* Integration is the preferred acculturation orientation of non-western immigrant workers, followed by assimilation, while separation and marginalization are the least preferred acculturation orientations.

In this study, we conceptualized discordance in acculturation orientations in two ways. First, we examined discordance on a location level by examining variations in acculturation orientations between the group of non-western immigrant workers and the group of Dutch workers across four locations of one organization. Second, we examined discordance on a relational level by comparing acculturation orientations of individual workers to their out-group (i.e. host community or immigrant group) at the same locations. Based on the IAM model of Bourhis *et al.* (1997), we hypothesized that:

- H3.* Discordance in preferred acculturation orientations between the host community group and the non-western immigrant group results in a poorer quality of intergroup work-relations on a location level.
- H4.* The higher the degree of discordance in preferred acculturation orientations between individual workers compared to their out-group (i.e. host community or immigrant group) at the same location, the poorer the intergroup work-relations as perceived by individual workers.

Furthermore, we examined whether intergroup contact would moderate the relationship between discordance in preferred acculturation orientations and intergroup work-relations. The organizational context usually provides important conditions, e.g. striving towards common goals, intergroup cooperation – for optimal outcomes of intergroup contact to occur (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

As a consequence, disconcordance in acculturation orientations may relate less strongly to poorer intergroup work-relations under conditions of high intergroup contact between host community and immigrant workers. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

- H5.* The negative relationship between disconcordance in acculturation orientations and intergroup work-relations is positively moderated by the frequency of intergroup contact.

Finally, host-community workers in this sample had a stronger vitality position compared to immigrant workers. For instance, host community workers had a higher organizational tenure, were in the numerical majority, and were overrepresented in higher functional levels compared to immigrant workers. Based on this discrepancy in vitality positions, we expected that immigrant workers would be more prone to experiencing poorer intergroup work-relations as a consequence of disconcordance in acculturation orientations compared to host community workers. To our knowledge, there are no studies that tested such a hypothesis before. Therefore, we formulated the explorative question that:

- Explorative question 1.* Do immigrant workers experience poorer intergroup work-relations compared to host community workers as a consequence of disconcordance in acculturation orientations?

## 2. Method

### *Sample and procedure*

The data were collected in a postal service company in The Netherlands. The company had no specific information about the cultural diversity of their workforce. Based on information provided by location managers about the degree of cultural diversity within their locations, we selected four locations that were to some degree multicultural. Participants filled out a paper and pencil questionnaire during a break from work. Questionnaires were not translated into other languages based on the fact that translation itself can also diffuse interpretations (van Oudenhoven, 2002). Research assistants were present at each location, and emphasized that answers would be treated confidentially by university researchers. The research assistants visited the four locations during multiple days, allowing participants to take their time and fill out the questionnaire.

The response rate within each location was 50 percent ( $n = 25$ ), 58 percent ( $n = 29$ ), 27 percent ( $n = 54$ ), and 38 percent ( $n = 82$ ). The sample consisted out of 49 non-western immigrant workers and 141 Dutch workers. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2007) in The Netherlands identifies persons as non-western immigrants when a person originated from countries in Africa, South America, Asia, or Turkey. About 43 percent of the non-western workers had a Surinamese, 23 percent an Indonesian, 16 percent a Turkish, and 14 percent a Moroccan background. Furthermore, 78 percent were "first generation," and 22 percent were "second generation" immigrants. First generation immigrants are born in the respective countries of origin, whereas second generation immigrants are born in The Netherlands, but one or both parents were born in non-western countries.

The sample mainly consisted out of "blue-collar" workers. Their jobs encompassed tasks such as sorting mail, labelling mail, offloading, and reloading trucks.

About 72 percent of the workers had a lower secondary or a lower vocational degree, and 59 percent of the sample was male. The average age was 45 years, ranging from 18 to 61 years. Participants had a mean organizational tenure of 19 years, ranging from 1 to 40 years. The immigrant group and the Dutch group of workers had similar educational levels and gender distributions. However, immigrant workers were significantly older ( $m = 46.2$ ) compared to Dutch workers ( $m = 40.2$ ;  $F(189, 1) = 12.658$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Also, Dutch workers had a significantly higher organizational tenure ( $m = 20.1$ ) compared to immigrant workers ( $m = 12.2$ ;  $F(189, 1) = 18.530$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

### Measures

Acculturation orientations were measured with the acculturation scale developed by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2000). This scale follows a so-called “two-statement measurement method,” where two items are formulated per domain. One refers to adopting the mainstream culture and the other to maintaining the heritage culture. One item example for culture maintenance is: “Immigrants must try to honour the customs and traditions of their own culture.” One item-example of culture adaptation is: “Immigrants should raise their children according to the Dutch norms and values.” In total, ten items referred to five different life-domains: Contact, upbringing, language, culture and education. Respondents answered on a five-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree). Cronbach’s alpha for culture maintenance was 0.78 for Dutch and immigrant employees. Cronbach’s alpha for culture adaptation showed good statistical reliability for Dutch employees (0.81) and a fair reliability for immigrant workers (0.63). As proposed by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2000, 2006), Euclidean distance scores were used to calculate the four acculturation orientations:

$$\sqrt{[(\text{ideal score on adaptation scale} - \text{real score on adaptation scale})^2 + (\text{ideal score on culture maintenance scale} - \text{real score on culture maintenance scale})^2]}$$

The ideal score for assimilation is 5 on the culture adaptation scale and 1 on the culture maintenance scale. For separation the ideal score is 1 on adaptation and 5 on maintenance, for integration it is 5 on both the adaptation and maintenance scale and for marginalization the ideal score is 1 on both scales. Scores were deducted from a maximum score ( $\sqrt{32} = 5.66$ ) so that a high score indicates a small distance, whereas a low score refers to a large distance.

Disconcordance in acculturation orientations on a location level was measured by comparing means regarding the four acculturation orientations between the group of immigrant workers and the group of host community workers at each of the four locations.

Disconcordance in acculturation orientations on a relational level was measured by calculating a standard deviation (SD) for each individual worker. We hereby compared acculturation orientations of individual workers ( $X_i$ ) to their out-group ( $\bar{X}$ ) at the same location:  $\sqrt{[(X_i - \bar{X})^2]}$ .

*Intergroup contact.* Participants were asked to report the total number of colleagues with whom they worked together on a daily basis. Furthermore, participants were asked to report how many of these colleagues had a Dutch and a non-western immigrant background. A definition of non-western immigrants was included in the questionnaire. For Dutch workers, intergroup contact was calculated by dividing the

number of immigrant colleagues with the total number of colleagues. For immigrant workers, intergroup contact was calculated by dividing the number of Dutch colleagues with the total number of colleagues.

*Intergroup work-relations.* We measured intergroup work-relations by using a six-item scale of van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994). We hereby included the two target groups (i.e. Dutch workers and immigrant workers) in the questions, resulting in a total of 12 items. Two item examples are: "Do you feel appreciated by your *Dutch* colleagues?" and "do you feel appreciated by your *immigrant* colleagues?" Respondents answered on a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = always). For the target group of Dutch workers, Cronbach's alpha was 0.77 for Dutch and 0.77 for immigrant workers. For the target group of immigrant workers, Cronbach's alpha was 0.75 for Dutch workers and 0.74 for immigrant workers. From the above two scales, one overall measure for intergroup work-relations was created. For Dutch workers, scores were included that measured work-relations with immigrant colleagues. For immigrant workers, scores were included that measured work-relations with Dutch colleagues.

### *Analyses*

First, we performed paired *t*-tests to examine the hierarchy in acculturation orientations for the immigrant and Dutch groups (*H1* and *H2*). Next, we performed analyses of variance to test whether discordance in acculturation orientations between Dutch and immigrant workers related to intergroup work-relations on a location level (*H3*). Thereafter, we performed multiple regression analyses to test whether discordance in acculturation orientations was associated with intergroup work-relations on a relational level (*H4*), and whether intergroup contact (*H5*) and ethnic group (Dutch versus non-western immigrant) moderated this relationship (Explorative question 1).

## **3. Results**

### *Descriptive statistics and preferred acculturation orientations*

Means, SDs, and correlations regarding the study variables are displayed in Table I. Results concerning the hierarchy in acculturation orientations of Dutch and non-western immigrant workers are presented in Table II.

We first hypothesized that assimilation was the most preferred acculturation orientation for Dutch workers, followed by integration, whereas separation and marginalization would be the least preferred acculturation orientations (*H1*). Confirming this hypothesis, Table I indeed showed that assimilation was the preferred acculturation orientation among Dutch workers ( $M = 3.71$ ), followed by integration ( $M = 3.00$ ), marginalization ( $M = 2.04$ ), and separation ( $M = 1.65$ ). Paired sample *t*-tests in Table II indicated that the means for each of the four acculturation orientations differed significantly for the Dutch group of workers.

Next, we hypothesized that integration was the preferred acculturation orientation for non-western immigrant workers, followed by assimilation, while separation and marginalization would be the least preferred acculturation orientations (*H2*). Table I indeed showed that immigrant workers preferred integration ( $M = 3.68$ ) above assimilation ( $M = 2.98$ ), followed by separation ( $M = 2.08$ ) and marginalization ( $M = 1.73$ ). Paired *t*-tests in Table II indicated that each of the acculturation orientations differed significantly for the immigrant group of workers.

Measures	Dutch ( <i>n</i> = 141)		Immigrant ( <i>n</i> = 49)		Correlations <i>F</i> -test	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD								
1. Assimilation	3.71	0.92	2.98	0.78	16.642***	-						
2. Integration	3.00	0.84	3.68	0.94	14.698***	-0.63***	-					
3. Separation	1.65	0.79	2.08	0.61	8.241**	-0.86***	0.32***	-				
4. Marginalization	2.04	0.71	1.73	0.87	4.074*	0.12	-0.80***	0.24***	-			
5. Intergroup contact	0.09	0.14	0.42	0.35	73.807***	-0.18*	0.22*	0.21*	-0.10	-		
6. Disconcordance assimilation	0.86	0.67	1.01	0.58	1.405	0.29***	-0.21*	-0.42***	-0.16	-0.03	-	
7. Disconcordance integration	0.79	0.59	0.98	0.60	2.458	-0.02	-0.12	-0.25**	-0.03	-0.11	0.69***	-
8. Intergroup work-relations	3.97	0.59	4.05	0.70	0.363	-0.09	0.09	0.14	0.03	0.06	-0.22*	-0.25**

**Notes:** Significance at: \**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01, and \*\*\**p* < 0.001; abbreviations: Dutch, Dutch workers; immigrant, non-western immigrant workers; SD, standard deviation

**Table I.**  
Means, SDs, and correlations of the study variables



*Disconcordance in acculturation orientations on a location level*

Next, we performed analyses of variance across the four locations to test the hypothesis that disconcordance in acculturation orientations would result in poorer intergroup work-relations on a location level (*H3*). Results are displayed in Table III and indicated that Dutch and immigrant groups of workers shared concordant acculturation orientations at the first and the second location. Conversely, there was disconcordance in acculturation orientations between the Dutch and immigrant groups at the third and the fourth location. At the third location, Dutch workers preferred assimilation to a higher degree compared to immigrant workers. Also, immigrant workers preferred integration and separation to a higher degree compared to Dutch workers. At the fourth location, assimilation was more preferred by Dutch workers compared to immigrant workers, whereas immigrant workers preferred integration to a higher degree than Dutch workers.

We compared the mean scores for intergroup work-relations at the first and second location, characterized by a concordance in acculturation orientations, with the third

**Table II.**  
Hierarchy in  
acculturation orientations  
among Dutch and  
non-western immigrant  
workers

Paired differences	$\Delta M_i$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta M_d$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Assimilation-integration	-0.57	-2.28	*	0.92	6.80	**
Assimilation-separation	0.99	4.37	**	2.40	16.79	**
Assimilation-marginalization	1.31	8.53	**	1.92	19.64	**
Integration-separation	1.56	10.10	**	1.48	21.48	**
Integration-marginalization	1.88	7.34	**	1.00	9.04	**
Segregation-marginalization	0.32	2.14	*	-0.47	-6.72	**

**Notes:** Significance at: \**p* < 0.05 and \*\**p* < 0.001; abbreviations:  $\Delta M_i$ , differences in means for non-western immigrant workers;  $\Delta M_d$ , differences in means for Dutch workers

**Table III.**  
Differences in  
acculturation orientations  
between Dutch and  
non-western immigrant  
workers across the four  
locations

Location	Acculturation orientations	$M_i^a$	$M_d^a$	<i>F</i> -test	<i>p</i>
1.	Assimilation	3.40	3.70	1.09	
	Integration	3.17	3.09	0.07	
	Separation	2.00	1.66	1.38	
	Marginalization	2.12	2.08	0.02	
2.	Assimilation	2.96	3.38	1.34	
	Integration	3.50	3.29	0.39	
	Separation	2.21	1.85	1.28	
	Marginalization	1.82	1.88	0.03	
3.	Assimilation	2.98	4.04	18.42	**
	Integration	3.92	2.97	17.81	**
	Separation	2.11	1.35	14.83	**
	Marginalization	1.57	1.87	3.65	
4.	Assimilation	3.11	3.98	6.05	*
	Integration	3.49	2.86	3.94	*
	Separation	1.74	1.43	1.15	
	Marginalization	1.69	1.99	1.40	

**Notes:** Significance at: \**p* < 0.05 and \*\**p* < 0.001; <sup>a</sup>abbreviations:  $M_i$ , means for non-western immigrant workers;  $M_d$ , means for Dutch workers

and fourth location, characterized by disconcordanance in acculturation orientations. As predicted, analysis of variance indicated that the perceived quality of intergroup work-relations was higher in the first and second location compared to the third and fourth location ( $F(133, 1) = 5.762; p < 0.018$ ). This confirmed the third hypothesis.

*Disconcordanance in acculturation orientations on a relational level*

We performed hierarchical regression analyses to test *H4*, *H5*, and Explorative question 1. Results are displayed in Table IV. We only included workers who worked on a daily basis with one or more colleagues from the opposite group. Out of 131 Dutch workers, 77 reported to work with immigrant colleagues, and 36 out of 43 immigrant workers reported to be working with Dutch colleagues. Furthermore, all workers preferred either integration or assimilation. Therefore, we analyzed the effects of disconcordanance for these two types of acculturation orientations separately in Table IV. In the first step, we included a dummy variable for the immigrant group (versus the Dutch group) of workers, disconcordanance scores, and intergroup contact. We also controlled for the main effect acculturation orientations (i.e. assimilation and integration).

We hypothesized that a higher degree of disconcordanance in preferred acculturation orientations between individual workers compared to the out-group at the same location (i.e. host community or immigrant group) would relate to poorer intergroup work-relations (*H4*). Table IV (Model I) showed that a larger disconcordanance in assimilation related negatively to the perceived quality of intergroup work-relations ( $\beta = -0.22; p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, a larger disconcordanance in integration related negatively to intergroup work-relations ( $\beta = -0.26; p < 0.05$ ). This confirmed *H4*. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in intergroup work-relations as perceived by immigrant and Dutch workers. Likewise, intergroup contact, and assimilation/integration as preferred acculturation orientations were not related to intergroup work-relations.

In Model II, we tested the hypothesis that intergroup contact would positively moderate the negative relationship between disconcordanance in acculturation orientations and intergroup work-relations (*H5*). In addition, we explored whether

Acculturation orientations Model	Intergroup work-relations ( $n = 113$ )					
	Assimilation			Integration		
	I	II	III	I	II	III
Immigrant worker (0 = Dutch, 1 = immigrant)	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.07	0.06	-0.05
Intergroup contact	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.04	0.07	0.11
Acculturation orientation	0.07	0.24	0.25	0.04	0.15	0.39
Disconcordanance	-0.22*	-0.27*	-0.08	-0.26**	-0.30*	0.07
<i>Two-way interactions</i>						
Immigrant × intergroup contact		-0.22	-0.27		-0.15	-0.33
Intergroup contact × disconcordanance		-0.13	0.36		-0.16	0.58*
Immigrant worker × disconcordanance		0.09	0.11		0.07	-0.05
<i>Three-way interactions</i>						
Immigrant × intergroup contact × disconcordanance			-0.62**			-0.80***
Adjusted $R^2$ (%)	2	1	10	3.9	3.5	12.9

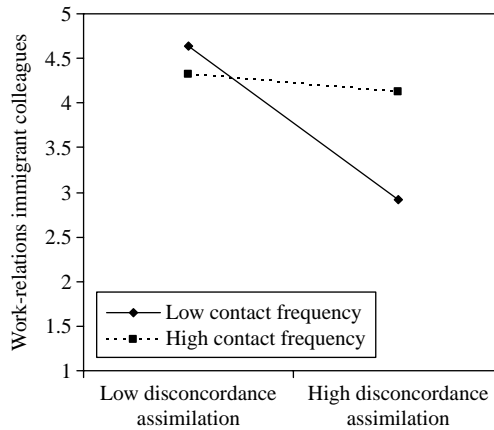
**Note:** Significance at: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , and \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table IV.** Multiple regression analyses on disconcordanance and intergroup work-relations at a relational level

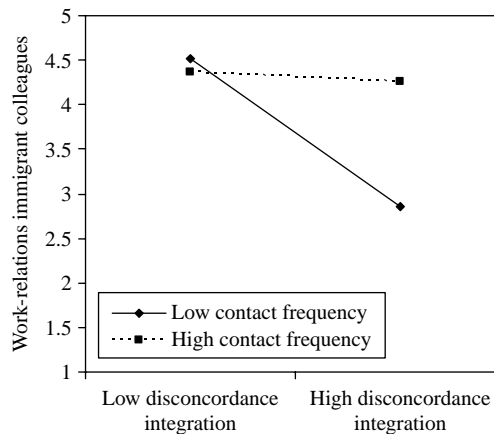
immigrant workers would experience poorer intergroup work-relations as a consequence of discordance compared to host community workers (Explorative question 1). Results in Model II showed that none of the two-way interactions were significant. This rejected *H5*. Also, based on Model II, the negative relationship between discordance and intergroup work-relations appeared to be similar for immigrant and Dutch workers.

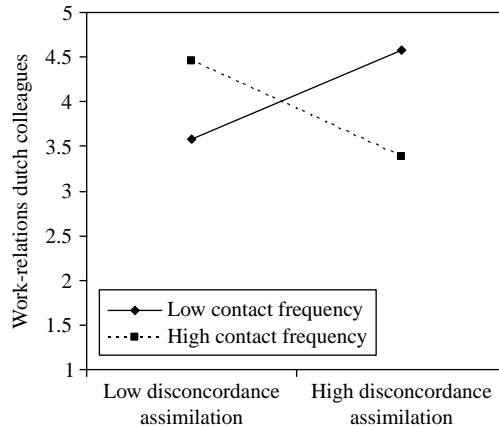
In the third and final model, we explored whether the moderation effect of intergroup contact on the relationship between discordance and intergroup work-relations differed for Dutch workers compared to non-western immigrant workers. Interestingly, this appeared to be the case. Results in Model III showed that intergroup contact moderated the relationship between discordance (in either assimilation or integration) and intergroup work-relations differently for the immigrant workers compared to the Dutch workers. We plotted the interaction effects for Dutch and immigrant workers in Figures 1-4 to examine the nature of this three-way interaction in more detail.

**Figure 1.**  
Discordance  
in assimilation and  
intergroup contact for  
Dutch workers

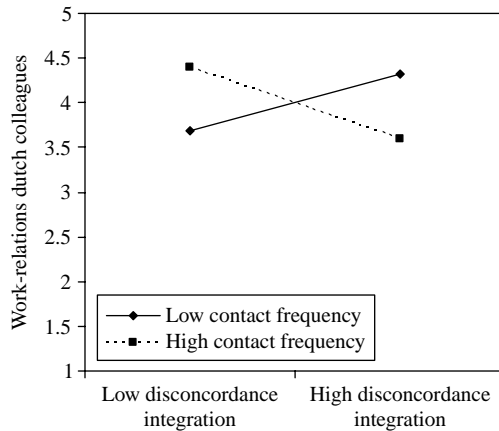


**Figure 2.**  
Discordance  
in integration and  
intergroup contact for  
Dutch workers





**Figure 3.** Disconcordanace in assimilation and intergroup contact for immigrant workers



**Figure 4.** Disconcordanace in integration and intergroup contact for immigrant workers

For Dutch workers, Figures 1 and 2 show that more disconcordanace related to a poorer quality of intergroup work-relations under conditions of low intergroup contact. Conversely, under conditions of high intergroup contact, disconcordanace had almost no effect on the perceived quality of work-relations. For immigrant workers, Figures 3 and 4 show that disconcordanace related to poorer intergroup work-relations under conditions of high intergroup contact. In contrast, disconcordanace related to better intergroup work-relations under conditions of low intergroup contact.

#### 4. Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine whether the IAM of Bourhis *et al.* (1997) is useful to predict intergroup work-relations in a multicultural workplace. This appears to be the case. In line with the IAM model, this study shows that disconcordanace (i.e. disagreement) in acculturation orientations between host community and immigrant workers relates to a poorer quality of intergroup work-relations. However, intergroup contact appears to moderate this relationship differently for Dutch workers

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compared to immigrant workers. These findings are discussed in detail below, together with limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

As hypothesized, host community (Dutch) workers had a different hierarchy of acculturation orientations compared to immigrant workers. Dutch workers appear to prefer assimilation above integration, while marginalization and separation are least preferred (confirming *H1*). Put differently, Dutch workers want immigrants to completely adapt to the Dutch culture, without maintaining aspects of their heritage culture. Conversely, immigrant workers prefer integration above assimilation, while separation and marginalization are least preferred (confirming *H2*). Immigrant workers thus prefer a dual-orientation in which they both adapt to the host culture and maintain aspects of their heritage culture at the same time. As such, this study generalizes findings from previous studies performed in the society at large (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2003, 2004; Ourasse and van de Vijver, 2005) to a workplace context.

It is important to note that this study was performed among blue collar workers. Peeters and Oerlemans (2009) recently performed another study on acculturation orientations and job-related well-being among Dutch and non-western immigrant workers with higher occupational levels. Surprisingly, immigrant workers in this sample preferred assimilation and integration to the same degree. Higher educational and occupational levels might thus coincide with immigrants' acceptance of the host culture. Future research is needed to determine the relationship between educational and occupational levels on the one hand, and acceptance of the host culture among immigrant workers on the other hand.

Furthermore, this study successfully replicated assumptions based on the IAM (Bourhis *et al.*, 1997, 2009) to the domain of work. We hereby considered discordance in acculturation orientations on a location level and a relational level. In both instances, a higher degree of discordance in acculturation orientations related to poorer intergroup work-relations (confirming *H3* and *H4*). It is important to mention that we controlled for the main effect of acculturation orientations on intergroup work-relations. Thus, discordance, rather than the degree of preference for assimilation or integration, predicts the quality of intergroup work-relations.

Next, this study shows that intergroup contact buffers the negative relationship between discordance and intergroup work-relations for host community (Dutch) workers (confirming *H5* for Dutch workers). An explanation for this buffering effect among host community workers may be that intergroup contact reduces feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and threat on how to approach and communicate with immigrant groups (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Feelings of anxiety grow out of concerns about how host community members should act, how they might be perceived, and whether they will be accepted by the immigrant group (Stephan and Stephan, 1985). For instance, recent studies demonstrated that intergroup anxiety mediated the relation between intergroup contact and intergroup relations (Paolini *et al.*, 2004; Stephan *et al.*, 2002). As intergroup contact is generally low for host community members, an increase in intergroup contact would reduce feelings of anxiety and threat towards immigrant workers, and result in better intergroup work-relations.

In contrast, this study shows that intergroup contact aggravates the negative relationship between discordance and intergroup work-relations for immigrant workers (disconfirming *H5* for immigrant workers). One explanation for this unexpected finding might be related to the difference in vitality positions between immigrant and

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host community groups. Immigrant groups usually have a weaker vitality position compared to the host community group (Bourhis *et al.*, 1997; Phinney *et al.*, 2001). It is therefore more likely that immigrant groups experience pressure from the host community group to assimilate to the host culture, and not vice versa. Especially, under the condition of high intergroup contact, immigrant workers may be confronted with pressures from host community workers to assimilate to the host culture, leading to poorer intergroup work-relations.

A second explanation might be that there are variations in cognitive styles between western and non-western groups. According to Witkin *et al.* (1974), people from western, industrialized cultures tend to be more field-independent (FID) while people from non-western cultures are more field-dependent (FD). Field dependence refers to the degree to which perception of an object is influenced by the background or environment in which it appears. The difference between FID and FD shows in regard to being more analytical-critical foreground oriented versus being more holistic, background-contextual-harmony oriented. FID people tend to be more autonomous, pay more attention to concrete facts and are equipped with higher cognitive restructuring and analytic abilities compared to FD people (Yiu and Saner, 2007). As such, host community workers could perceive disconcordance in acculturation orientations as less problematic because they are more analytical-critical and autonomous, whereas non-western immigrant workers may perceive disconcordance as a disruption of the contextual harmony between the two groups.

#### *Limitations and recommendations for future research*

No study is without limitations and this study is no exception. The sample size is fairly small, and this study is limited to one organization. We therefore recommend that future research replicates these findings to other organizations, and includes larger groups of non-western immigrant workers. Furthermore, despite the explicit notion of confidentiality (e.g. as verbally expressed by the research assistants), social desirability could have played a role for some workers. Also, as we worked with a Dutch questionnaire, misinterpretation of the questions cannot be ruled out (Meloan and Veenman, 1990). This being said, research assistants were present to explain survey questions. Also, the constructs used in this study show sufficient statistical reliability for both host community and immigrant groups of workers. Furthermore, as the data are cross-sectional, we cannot determine the causality of the relationships described in this study. For example, poorer intergroup work-relations could feed back to a higher disconcordance in acculturation orientations. Future studies should collect longitudinal data to determine the causality of such relationships.

Another consideration refers to the measurement of acculturation orientations. In this study, we used a two-statement measurement method to assess acculturation orientations (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2000). However, the manner in which acculturation orientations should be measured is hotly debated. Participants may be distributed differently across the four acculturation orientations, depending on differences in the conceptualization of acculturation orientations (Snauwaert *et al.*, 2003), or differences in studied life-domains (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2006). It would help organizational research a great deal if specific acculturation measures are developed that are aimed at studying acculturation within the domain of work.

Future research may extend this research by including other important work-outcomes besides intergroup work-relations. For instance, recent research suggests that an integration orientation – both on a personal and a team level – relates positively to creativity, performance, and employee well-being in multicultural teams (Oerlemans, 2009). Such promising findings should be further examined.

#### *Managerial implications*

This study shows that disconcordance in acculturation orientations between host community and non-western immigrant workers relates to poorer intergroup work-relations. Managers in organizations should therefore monitor such differences in acculturation orientations among culturally diverse groups of workers.

Furthermore, research shows that acculturation orientations are – in part – dependent on cultural factors in the society at large (Berry, 2006; DeZwart and Poppelaars, 2007). For instance, on a societal level, Berry (2006, p. 28) distinguishes between “melting pot” societies and “multicultural” societies. Melting pot refers to:

[...] a single dominant or *mainstream* society, on the margins of which are the various *minority* groups. The common assumption is that culturally diverse groups absorb into the mainstream culture in such a way that they essentially disappear.

Instead, in a “multicultural” society “[...] individuals and groups retain their cultural continuity and a sense of their cultural identity and, on that basis, they participate in the social framework of the *larger society* (p. 28).” Obviously, the melting pot context exerts greater pressure on cultural minority groups to assimilate to the dominant culture compared to the multicultural context. In addition, types of context may shift over time. For instance, The Netherlands recently shifted from a multicultural society towards a melting pot society (DeZwart and Poppelaars, 2007).

Similarly, acculturation orientations of workers are likely to be influenced by the existing organizational culture. For example, Cox and Blake (1991) distinguish between three types of cultures on an workers by changing their existing organizational level: monolithic, plural, and multicultural organizations. Monolithic and plural organizations are focussed on recruitment of ethnic minority employees, but ethnic minority groups are ultimately expected to assimilate to the dominant organizational culture. Conversely, in multicultural organizations, cultural differences are appreciated and used for organizational and personal gain. Recent studies seem to suggest that only in the latter context organizations can benefit from its cultural diversity (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Luijters *et al.*, 2008; Oerlemans, 2009).

Changes in the organizational culture towards the multicultural model could be implemented with small gestures, like being sensitive to variations in food (take into account cultural or religious preferences), create facilities to exercise one’s religion (e.g. locations for praying) or by supporting cultural and religious activities of non-western immigrant workers (e.g. Ramadan). As non-western immigrant workers usually prefer an integration orientation, an organizational culture that is multicultural may result in non-western immigrant workers feeling more appreciated and included.

Furthermore, as host community workers in organizations are more and more confronted with a multicultural workforce, it might be wise to implement programs aimed at training intercultural competencies (Bhawuk, 2001; Cushner and Brislin, 1996). However, in our opinion, such training programs should first be carefully

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evaluated on their effectiveness as there are some dangers towards implementing such programs. For example, people might start to oversimplify variations in culture, using stereotypes to fully attribute specific behaviour of colleagues as typical for their cultural group.

This study also demonstrated that intergroup contact may facilitate intergroup work-relations. Managers could therefore stimulate interethnic co-operation in teams, for instance by re-organizing tasks to include culturally diverse groups of workers and by giving positive feedback to culturally diverse groups (Jung and Sosik, 1999).

## 5. Final conclusion

This paper successfully applied the IAM (Bourhis *et al.*, 1997) and “Intergroup contact theory” (Pettigrew, 1998) to an organizational context, to explain differences in the quality of intergroup work-relations as experienced by host community and non-western immigrant workers. As such, it should be regarded of as a first step towards explaining the mixed findings in cultural diversity research (Oerlemans *et al.*, 2008; Williams and O’Reilly, 1998). By focussing on “deep-level” aspects of cultural diversity in addition to “surface level” aspects, we are able to shed more light on the complex relationships between cultural diversity in organizations and work-outcomes.

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