AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF INDIVIDUAL DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the impact of an individual perception of the organizational change context, intensity and management process on the readiness for change of different categories of employees. Relying on a quantitative survey administrated to 241 managers across 33 nationalities, our research highlights how employee perceptions of organisational contexts, previous experiences of change management projects, and processes can influence individual readiness to change. Moreover, we have shown that nationality can be a moderating variable on the relationship between individual perception of context, previous change projects processes and intensity of change and individual readiness for change. Our findings give support to assertions that individual attitudes and perceptions including perceived organizational and management support toward change projects, contextual variables and nationality are instrumental in understanding individual readiness for change.

Keywords: readiness for change, cross-cultural management, organisational change, attitudinal predispositions.

Introduction

The need for organizational change is not new, but the pressures for change are more intense in a modern world, as they come from the multiple sources and in different forms (Morin et. *al*., 2016). According to many researchers (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999), successful organizational change is closely linked to the employee perception of his/her ability to cope with change (Armenakis et al., 1993) and organizational capacity to make those changes. The change management literature has addressed the concept of readiness for change during these last twenty years mainly within the organisational context (Vallejo-Garcia 2012) and payed less attention to employees' perception of the change project (Eby and al. 2010). The concept of readiness for change can been defined as a mental state of willingness to respond favourably and promptly to a given change (Walinga 2008).

Considering that organisations have been facing major changes which have affected their organisational processes and structures, it appears important to assess their employees' capability and disposition for change. Individuals interpret their environment and make assumptions about change processes and evaluate them before deciding what attitude to adopt toward any organisational change initiative (Rogers 2003).

Thus, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, regarding the extent to which changes are needed (Bouckenoogh et. *al*., 2009) as well as contextual factors, such as culture (Brewster *et al*., 2018; Farndale *et al*., 2017, Pudelko *et al*., 2015) or nationality (Hertlein, 2021) may determine employee behavioral support towards organizational change (Allaoui and Benmoussa, 2020).

Stahl and Björkman (2006) highlight the fact that the cultural approach argues that national values (although invisible to the actors involved) not only influence people's impressions and perceptions on readiness to change (Holt *et al.,* 2007), but also how they interact with others.

Consequently, cultural differences will necessarily come to the forefront as the question of leadership and managerial practices is addressed. Thus, nationality may serve as a significant proxy for culture (Taras *et al*., 2016, Minkov and Hofstede, 2012) and may explain and predict workplace behaviors (Taras *et al*., 2010).

The objective of this paper is to build on Armenakis *et al.,* (1993) and Eby *et al.,* (2010) research on readiness for change by examining specific variables that may impact individual disposition for change : First, we investigate the effect of employee perception about their organisational context, intensity and previous experiences regarding how change management projects were conducted on their change readiness (Armenakis *et al*., 1993; Holt *et al.,* 2007). Second, we examine the buffering role of nationality in employee perception about change and change readiness relationship (Brewter *et al.,* 2018, Farnadale *et al.,* 2017; Pudelko *et al.,* 2015).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

The relevance of individual readiness in the context of organisational change has been supported by many scholars (Choi and Ruona 2011). Grounded in Lewin's (1947) concept of unfreezing, the main idea underlying this approach is that organisations only change through their members as they are asked to alter their on-the-job behavior to support the change endeavour. Fuegen and Brehm (2004) argue that individuals may resist the imposition of change or the way it is imposed to them rather than on the change itself. By using the concept of readiness for change we can focus on the situational causes which are related to individual's concerns for change including evaluation of management support as well as the organisation's capability for change. The unfreezing step will only be successful when individuals are ready to engage in a change process.

The successful implementation of any change management project shall be contingent on the way in which individuals perceive and evaluate the context of organizational change as well as on the organization's change management process (Hutagaol 2012). Eby *et al*. (2000) show that individual perception of organization's readiness for change may increase through employee belief in organization's ability to cope with changing situations, and organizational policies that enable change (Eby *et al.,* 2000).

Perceived organizational readiness for change refers to flexible policies and procedures or trust in peers that may have a direct impact on different dimensions relating to motivation for change viz. personality attributes of leaders and staff, organizational resources and climate (Lehman, Greener and Simpson 2002). Armenakis *et al*. (1993) and Holt *et al*. (2007) highlight the importance of employees' perception of how organizational infrastructure can facilitate readiness to change and sustain these changes. By nurturing employee involvement in the change process, we can reinforce their sense of commitment to the organisation and increase their efforts to meet the organisational goals (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986).

Thus, the relationship between the employee perception of the organization's change process, the context of change and its impact on his/her readiness for change, may be influenced by the organizational and individual culture (see: Bookenoogh, 2008; Schein 1985). The process of change reveals how change is dealt with and how change is implemented and can be considered as a key predictor of people's attitudes toward change (Bookenoogh, 2008).

Individual cognitive and perceptual orientations (Quinn and Soneshein, 2008) directly impact readiness for change, but cannot be isolated from the organization's change process, context and content. Individual readiness has been previously tested as an attitude (Desplaces, 2005) or as a predisposition (Oreg, 2003), which should be analysed in connection with the organizational change context. Indeed, any change project induces an attitudinal predisposition

to change which is highly contingent on the perception of organizational context as well as the perceived organizational support for the change (Eisenberg *et al*. 1986) and perceived membership readiness to adopt change (Desplaces 2005). Barabel and Meier (2010) highlight the importance of taking into consideration the variety of change forms including its extension, its depth and its rhythm knowing that the process of organisational transformation can be marginal or radical (Hafsi and Fabi (1997) and impact the whole organisation or parts of it.

In line with Armenakis *et al*. (1993), Holt *et al*. (2007) and Eisenberger *et al*., (1986), this research posits the following positive relationships between individual's perception of the change context, process, intensity, and their readiness for change:

H1: Employees' perception of previous experiences of change management processes is positively related to their readiness for change.

H2: Employees' perception of change management context is positively related to their readiness for change.

H3: Employees' perception of change intensity is positively related to their readiness for change.

Considering that ideologies, behavior and practice vary across countries (Bass, 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Haire *et al*., 1966), we notice that the national origin of managers significantly influences their managing choices with regards to their decision-making processes or delegation of power mechanisms (Suutari, 1996). Haire *et al*. (1966) argue that one third of the variance in work goals and managerial attitudes could be explained by the employees' country of origin. More recently, cross-cultural research has widely acknowledged that cultural characteristics, such as language, beliefs, values, and religion affect people's behavioural and attitudinal preferences in leadership and managerial styles (Park *et al*. 2019; Hofstede *et al*., 2010, House *et al*., 2004).

Thus, it seems important to understand that how culture can affect people's behaviour and preferences towards management modes. This understanding helps leaders to adopt the most

relevant leadership style aligned with the host culture (Javidan *et al*., 2006). Hwang (2015) highlights that cross-cultural management studies have concluded that if some managerial modes seem to be effective across cultures, others would need to be adjusted to the local cultures to be successful (House *et al*., 2004). In this regard, Muczyk and Reimann (1987) argue that the effectiveness of participation (i.e., the degree to which employees are involved in the work-related decisions) and direction (i.e., the amount of follow-up or directive behaviour regarding the execution of a decision) vary from one culture to another. For example, Dorfman *et al.* (1997) found that directive leadership behaviours showed positive effects on satisfaction and commitment of employees in Taiwan and Mexico, while participative leadership behaviours only showed a positive impact in the United States and South Korea.

Schneider and De Meyer (1991) have largely discusses the effect of culturally loaded values on organizational behavior and have shown that when individuals have some task to carry out, they will typically borrow from those models, which they value and are familiar to them (Trompenaars and Woolliams, 2003, Laurent, 1986). They will actively interpret and respond to what is happening in their environment (Greehalgh et *al.*, 2004) and adjust their on-the-job behaviors.

The present study posits that an employee's readiness for change would be influenced by his/her country of origin. In the present study, we analyze employees in the managerial cadre across Europe, Africa, Gulf, and Asia subcontinents. Relying on recent studies conducted in different parts of the world such as the GCC region (Kemp and Williams, 2013), Asia (Chen, Watkins, and Martin,2013) and Africa (Cronjé, 2011), culture can influence attitudes and organisational practices as well as perceptions of trust and communication (Mockaitis, Rose, and Zettinig, 2012), and more generally leadership styles (Zander and Butler, 2010). Therefore, we test the impact of nationality as moderating variable on the relationship between individual perception

of context, previous experiences of change projects processes and intensity of change and individual readiness for change.

H4.a: Nationality moderates the relationship between employees' perception of previous experiences of change processes and readiness for change

H4.b: Nationality moderates the relationship between employees' perception of change context and readiness for change

H4.c: Nationality moderates the relationship between employees' perception of change intensity and readiness for change

Method

This confirmatory-based research is based on a quantitative survey of executives enrolled in managerial training programs and working in corporations in Europe, Asia, Africa and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). We aimed to assess the impact of their perception of organizational change context, previous experiences of change processes on their readiness for change as well as the impact of nationality as moderating variable on the relationship between their individual perception of change and their readiness for change.

We used readiness for change as a dependent variable which allowed us to assess employees' perception of a change situation which they encountered (Desplaces and Beauvais, 2004). Following Bouckenooghe (2009) and Said and Abilash (2021), our measurements items assess three dimensions of readiness for change cognitive including the positive impact of change projects on employees, the level of mastery of capabilities and skills required to successfully conduct organizational change projects ; intentional measured through the level of energy dedicated to the change process and emotional measured through the degree of excitement related to the change projects conducted by the organization.

Regarding the context of change, we chose not to focus on a specific situation or case of change but rather on employees' perception of their organization's context (Desplaces, 2005; Eby *et*

al., 2000) in terms of trust in the leadership as well as in terms of organizational cohesion (Bouckenooghe *et al*., 2009). We assessed the perception of the level of trustworthiness of top management through their ability to practice what they preach, to keep their promises as well their level of honesty and fairness towards the different departments and business units of their organization.

The perception of previous experiences of change processes was captured through three items related to perceived support, understanding and involvement from superiors in the change process (Bouckenooghe *et al*., 2009). We assessed especially three dimensions related to the participation level of employees and the attitude of top management toward organizational change by focusing on the level of support and understanding from supervisors through the initiated change process, the level of support of the management of the change initiatives as well as the level of involvement of managers in the change project.

We considered also nationality as a moderating variable. Nationality was measured directly through nominal modalities (Africa, Asia, Europe and GCC). In addition, we controlled for age, education and gender as demographic variables. Except nominal variables (gender and nationality), All the item-measurements was captured using five-point Likert-type measures ranging from 1 "never" to 6 "always".

Before studying the relations between constructs and to control statically for CMBs, it was necessary to conduct confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess the overall reliability and validity of variables and measures. We then used the structural equation modelling and multigroup analyses to test our model. The CB-SEM approach was adopted (reflective model) via AMOS for hypothesis testing. This approach is suitable for testing theories and confirmatory studies (Gaskin and Lowry, 2014)

Our final sample contains 241 valid responses received from a total of 330 questionnaires administered, indicating a 73% response rate.

The questionnaire was designed in two steps. In the first one, we designed a preliminary version based on literature review. In the second step, we submitted the questionnaire to experts for validation purposes. Then, adjustments were made drawing on their feedback and a new version was designed to be addressed to our targets.

To avoid the Common Method Biases (CMB), we followed some of Podsakoff *et al.*'s recommendations (2003) regarding the separation of measurement, the protection of respondent anonymity, evaluation apprehension reduction as well as counterbalancing question order, improving scale items, using different response formats, etc. As the research's aims was to compare international managers' perception of, and readiness for, change, it was seemed suitable to adopt a self-reporting-based questionnaire in line with Shalley *et al.* (2009) and Chan (2009).

Results

Descriptive statistics. The study's sample surveyed both female and male respondents from different regions, of different age, hierarchical positions and education level. In terms of gender, 41% of this sample consists of females versus 59% of males. In terms of age, most respondents were respectively in the age group of 25-35 (39%) and 35-45 (23%). The distribution in terms of hierarchical position indicates 48% of responses come from employees, then 22% from senior managers, 19% for middle managers and 10% for top managers. Close to 75% of the participants are post graduates (Bac+5). Regarding nationalities, our survey comprises participants from Southern Europe (37%), Africa (30%), the Gulf countries (25%) and Asia (7%). The table below presents the demographic characteristics of our sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted CFA to analyze the measurement model. For internal consistency, we measured the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach Alpha coefficient. We then conducted a test of Construct validity, especially convergent and discriminant validity, by computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

The results in Table 2 indicate that all the constructs show a good reliability as Alpha and CR are all higher than 0.7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and convergent and discriminant validity as AVE is higher than 0.5 and greater than the corresponding inter construct correlation (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent and discriminant Validity of constructs

To complete the CFA, we tested for CMB to establish that such a bias did not distort our data. For Podsakoff *et al*. (2003, p.879), the common variance refers to *"variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent"*. For this purpose, we first conducted the Harman's single-factor test that examines if a single factor accounts for the majority of the variance in the model. The results indicate that the total variance explained is about 28% which is less than 50% (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) and 40% (Guide and Ketokivi, 2015). Another method that is the Common Latent Factor (CLF) approach. Indeed, we compared the standardized regression weights with and without the common latent factor. Standardized weights without the CLF are expected to be greater than standardized weights with CLF hence we subtracted standardized weights with CLF from the standardized weights without CLF. For all the variables, difference between the two was found to be less than 0.2 as recommended by (see: Gaskin, 2012).

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We tested also for possible multicollinearity by estimating the variance inflation factor (VIF). For Kock (2015), "*the occurrence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is proposed as an indication of pathological collinearity, and also as an indication that a model may be contaminated by common method bias. Therefore, if all VIFs resulting from a full collinearity test are equal to or lower than 3.3, the model can be considered free of common method bias*." (p.7). All VIF values found are comprised between 2.7 and 1, indicating low correlation among independent variables.

These results suggested that our data did not suffer from common variance, hence the possibility of a common method bias is rejected (Table 3).

Table 3. Common method bias's tests

In order to ascertain the best model fit, we estimated a set of fit indices following Hair et al's recommendations (2010). The estimated values of these indices indicate a good model as shown in the table below.

Table 4: Model Fit summary for measurement model

Hypothesis testing. Our findings reveal that the employees' readiness for change is affected by the change management process as well as the intensity of change. On the one hand, the results show that the willingness to change is higher when individuals feel supported and see their superiors involved in the change process. On the other hand, the results indicate that readiness for change is higher when employees perceive that change implies important organizational impacts (coordination, structure and culture). As a result, the hypotheses H1 and H3 are supported. However, the perception of the context of change doesn't seem to affect the individuals' willingness to change. Thus, the hypothesis H2 is rejected. Our results are summarized in table5.

Table 5. Regression Estimates

We attempted, as a second step, to explore the moderating effect of nationalities on the relationship between individual perception of context, content and intensity of change and individual readiness for change. For this purpose, we computed a multigroup analysis.

The findings show that nationality moderates the impact on readiness for change (table 6), supporting the 4th hypothesis.

Table 6. Model significance of multigroup analysis (nationality)

For European countries, change process still affect positively readiness for change, while intensity of change no longer has any impact on readiness. However, the context of change seems to be negatively related to readiness for change. In the African, Asian and Gulf Arab countries, intensity of change still positively related to readiness for change, while change process seems to be no longer determinant of readiness. In addition, the context of change appears to affect also positively individuals' willingness to change. Detailed results are provided in table 7.

Table 7. Moderating effect of nationality

The following figure (1) summarizes the structural model and the related hypotheses.

Figure 1. Structural model

Discussion

Results of the study indicate that change process and intensity are positively related to individual readiness for change. Employees may perceive their organizational readiness for

change depending on their perception of their top management's attitudes toward change (Bouckenooghe *et al*., 2009; Armenakis & Harris, 2002).

Top managers' support and commitment towards organizational change implementation may influence individuals' propensity or predisposition, to engage in change. In this context, top managers' involvement in change projects may trigger organizational readiness to change and success in change projects implementation. The management ability to present change meaningfully and understandably (Gioaia & Chittpeddi, 1991), which refers to 'change sense giving' (Fiss & Zajac, 2006), appears to influence individual's sensemaking of organizational reality (Gioaia & Chittpeddi, 1991)

Moreover, readiness for change seems to be also related to the perceived legitimacy or importance of change. When changes are perceived as necessary or when they imply major adjustments in terms of coordination, control and structure modes, individuals are likely to accept and support change. Therefore, when individuals perceive that change is needed to solve a problem or required to cope with a new situation/context, then they may show more acceptance to change. By perceiving significant changes in their work settings, members will be convinced that the organization is ready for change including the perception that others in the organization are ready for change (Eby *et al*., 2000).

Our results confirm also the findings of Porras and Robertson (1992) who mention that employees' beliefs regarding their organizational environment energize, direct and regulate their attitudes and behaviors (Bernstein and Burke, 1989). Therefore, perceptions of important changes in work settings seem to be key determinants of individual attitudes and behaviors related to change (Kroon and Reif 2021).

However, change context appears not to have a substantial impact on readiness for change. This can be explained by the fact that employees do not associate their general organizational context with specific change projects conducted in their organization and more specifically in their work settings (Said and Nair, 2021). These findings should be qualified in the light of the multigroup analysis which was undertaken. Indeed, our results show that nationality can be considered as a relevant proxy for culture, as we found homogenous answers based on the geographical and socioeconomic criteria (Africa, Asia, Europe and GCC,).

Our results are consistent with the findings of Park *et al*. (2019) and Hofstede *et al*. (2010) who have highlighted that people's behavioural and attitudinal preferences in managerial styles may be influenced by their cultural background. Successful implementation of any change management project shall be contingent upon considering the context of an organisation, both objective and as perceived by employees based on their cultural background which in turn will influence their readiness for change

Our results corroborate the findings of Minkov and Hofstede (2012) and Taras *et al.* (2016), who have highlighted that group stereotypes can combine demographic and socioeconomic environment characteristics. European employees seem to value significantly how the change process is conducted while employees in the African, Asian and Gulf Arab countries seem to be very sensitive to the general organisational context and the intensity of change which determines their readiness for change. The concept of "person-organisation" (Kristof-Brown 2005) fit seems less important in Europe as employees seem to focus on how the change process is conducted rather than on their perception of their general organisational context. We can assume that European managers will support a proposed change only if it is rationally justified and conducted (Chin and Benne, 1985). They shall undergo rational informational processing related to the projected organisational change and will support it especially when they feel that

their organisation is poorly managed and structured and needs to be repositioned to face new challenges. In the contrary, employees from Africa, GCC and Asia have tendencies to increase their readiness for change when they have a positive perception of their organisational context. We can suppose that employees engage in change projects regardless of the way the change process is conducted when they are aligned with their organisational norms, values and management styles. Employees derive meaning from their subjective perception of their organisational context especially when significant changes are happening which affects positively their personal readiness to change.

Conclusion

Conducting changes projects has become today very challenging for organisations facing more and more complex situations. Considering that the path towards the successful implementation of any change project is highly dependent on organisational members' disposition to change, our research uncovers the potential impact of individual perceptions on their readiness for change. By analysing the antecedents of readiness to change, we explored how employee perceptions of organisational contexts, experience of previous change management projects and processes can influence individual readiness to change. Our results show that staff perceptions, attitudes and previous experiences in change management projects may influence their readiness for change which, in turn, can impact the overall organisational readiness for change. Moreover, we have shown that nationality can be a moderating variable on the relationship between individual perception of context, previous experiences in change management projects and intensity of change and individual readiness for change. Our findings give support to assertions that employees' willingness to change is affected by their individual perceptions of their organization context and management mode including perceived organizational and management support toward change projects. Thus, our findings provide a useful way to assess

individual readiness to change and their drivers in a cross-cultural context. Future research should examine the interconnections over time between these different drivers and assess their influence on individual readiness to change. In addition, future studies should distinguish the dispositional variables from the contextual variables as well as the objective measures of organizing arrangements regarding change to grasp the complexity of the antecedents of readiness for change drivers.

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Figures & Tables

Figure 1. Structural model
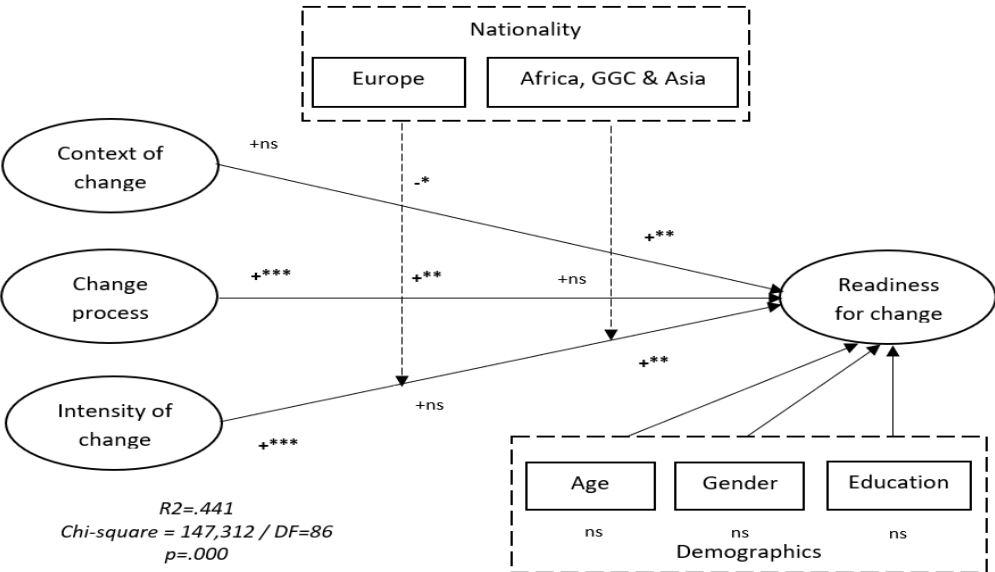
Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Demographics	Levels	Percentage
Gender	Male	59%
	Female	41%
Age	<25 years	21.8%
	25-35 years	39.5%
	35-45 years	23,52%
	>45 years	15.18%
Position	Top Management	10%
	Senior managers	22.50%
	Middle managers	19%
	Employees	48.5%
Education	Bac+8	6.58%
	Bac+5	73.25%
	Bac+3	20.17%
	High School diploma	0%
Nationality	Europe	37.20%
	Africa	30%
	GCC	25.40%
	Asia	7.40%

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent and discriminant Validity of constructs

	Alpha	CR	AVE	Intensity	Context	Process	Readiness
Intensity	0.792	0.81	0.6	**0.76**			
Context	0.874	0.87	0.629	0.083	**0.793**		
Process	0.787	0.77	0.534	0.226	0.691	**0.730**	
Readiness	0.804	0.76	0.522	0.346	0.465	0.585	**0.722**

Table 3. Common method bias's tests

	Theoretical value	Effective value
Harman's single Factor	< 0.50 (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986); < 0.40 (Guide et Ketokivi, 2015).	0.28 (unrotated, 1st factor)
Common Factor Latent (CLF) approach	< 0.2 (Gaskin, 2012)	<0.2
VIF test	< 3.3 (Knock, 2015)	1< VIF <2.7

Table 4: Model Fit summary for measurement model

	Recommended Value Hair et al., 2010)	Index value
Goodness of Fit index (GFI)	>0.9	0.932
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	>0.8	0.892
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>0.9	0.961
Root mean square residuals (RMSR)	<0.1	0.054
Root mean square error of Approximation (RMSEA)	<0.08	0.054
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	>0.9	0.912

Table 5. Regression Estimates

	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P
Process	0.423	0.113	3.751	***
Context	0.125	0.134	0.934	0.35
Intensity	0.239	0.068	3.515	***
EducCtrl	-0.044	0.059	-0.742	0.458
AgeCtrl	-0.047	0.034	-1.376	0.169
GenderCtrl	0.112	0.111	1.008	0.313

Note: ***, ** and * denote significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively

Table 6. Model significance of multigroup analysis (nationality)

Model	DF	CMIN	P
Structural weights	15	39.113	***

Note: ***, ** and * denote significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively

Table 7. Moderating effect of nationality

	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P
Europe				
Process	1.698	0.663	2.561	**
Context	-0.919	0.527	-1.743	*
Intensity	0.028	0.313	0.088	n.s
EducCtrl	0.208	0.136	1.532	n.s
AgeCtrl	-0.122	0.073	-1.669	*
GenderCtrl	-0.043	0.131	-0.329	n.s
Africa				
Process	0.172	0.113	1.514	n.s
Context	0.44	0.178	2.468	**
Intensity	0.168	0.07	2.417	**
GCC				
Process	0.172	0.113	1.514	n.s
Context	0.44	0.178	2.468	**
Intensity	0.168	0.07	2.417	**
Asia				
Process	0.172	0.113	1.514	n.s
Context	0.44	0.178	2.468	**
Intensity	0.168	0.07	2.417	**
EducCtrl	-0.122	0.073	-1.668	**
AgeCtrl	0.011	0.04	0.27	n.s
GenderCtrl	-0.043	0.131	-0.329	n.s

Note: ***, ** and * denote significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively