

## Research Article

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# Transnational Business Services, Cultural Transformation/Identity, and Employee Performance: With Special Focus on Migration Experience and Emigration Plan

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to analyze the impact of cultural identity centrality on stress, burnout, probability to leave the job, and job performance in the context of cultural transformation requirements, which is common in transnational business services. The key contribution of this analysis consists of controlling for the effects of migration experience and migration plan neglected so far in the relevant literature. This study also includes the first-time use of a random sample of 200 Kosovan call center employees. Findings indicate that individual identity centrality and organizational identity centrality are positively associated with stress and burnout. National identity centrality, however, reduces stress and burnout, but it is statistically significant only in the burnout model. As expected, empirical results suggest that migration experience reduces stress and burnout, while migration plan increases employee performance. Further results indicate that the probability to leave the job is enhanced by perceived job stress and reduced by perceived job satisfaction.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, cultural transformation, globalization, outsourcing, Kosovo, Maslach Burnout Inventory

**JEL Classification:** F14, F23, P33, P39

## Introduction

Pursuing to benefit, primarily from lower real estate, infrastructure, and labor costs, firms have increased the implementation of internationalization strategies through business process outsourcing operations (BPOs) in less developed countries. This has considerably attracted the attention of researchers, managers, and public-policy makers to understanding the mechanism and strength of the relationship between cultural identity and work performance among BPO employees. Although BPOs may be in the form of back-office and front-office operations, their most common form is call centers due to their flexibility and cost-effectiveness. In Kosovo, the majority of BPOs are call centers. Given these two arguments, the empirical analysis is based on a sample of 200 call center employees.

Studies that, either theoretically or empirically, examine the relationship between cultural identity and work outcomes within such cultural work environments neglect the importance of employees' migration experiences as well as their migration plans. To fill this gap in the literature, in the empirical investigation, special attention is paid to the impact of employees' migration experiences and their migration plans on

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work outcomes, such as performance, intention to leave, stress, and burnout. To better explain this relationship, a review of the definitions of economic globalization and cultural identity is provided in the following.

According to Grauman (“Soziale Identitäten, Manifestation Sozialer Differenzierung und Identifikation”) and Stets and Burke (“Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory”), cultural/social identity is a complex concept and is defined as the identification of an individual with specific values and the belonging to a group that shares these values. Identification is expressed in the form of identifying oneself, identifying with others, and identifying others (Hauser, “Cultural Identity in a Globalised World? A Theoretical Approach towards the Concept of Cultural Identity”). Being the self-conception and self-perception of a person, cultural identity may be built based on values relating to, among others, nationality, ethnicity, organization, and generation. Hauser (“Cultural Identity in a Globalised World? A Theoretical Approach towards the Concept of Cultural Identity”) considers cultural identity as a dynamic process full of conflicts which also builds on “non-identification or negation of other values.” In this sense, cultural identity not only identifies members, but also results in identifying non-members, i.e., those that do not share the specific values of the group (Stets and Burke, “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory”).

Hauser (“Cultural Identity in a Globalised World? A Theoretical Approach towards the Concept of Cultural Identity”) argues that the descriptions of culture provided by philosophy, sociology, ethnology, cultural sciences, and cultural studies have yet not led to an unequivocal definition of the concept. Hence, for the purposes of his research, he uses the differential (“differenzlogische”) culture concept developed by Hansen (“Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft”) wherein culture is defined as “a unity based on its differentiated nature.” Its common features include language and history, which are either experienced or passed on. Language as a communication tool is linked to perception and reason and is thus used to put things into context. Consequently, communities sharing a common language also share common perceptions of real life which promote cohesion within. History, too, is interlinked with perceptions of real life, thus determining thoughts, feelings, behavior, and action within a community sharing common history. So, the two common features, language and history, are interrelated. As such they are considered as lenses through which information is filtered and thus subconsciously impact communication, thought, feeling, behavior, expectations, and action (Cleveland et al., “Identity, Culture, Dispositions and Behavior: A Cross-National Examination of Globalization and Culture Change”).

Yet, as argued above, cultural identity is a dynamic process, as the individual has the freedom to choose to belong to different groups and more than just one group. Being exposed to groups sharing different values, especially through migration, migration networks, online media, and tourism, the individual may choose not to stick with the group in which his/her membership is established by birth, but join groups sharing other values, thus undergoing a process of cultural transformation.

According to Giddens (*Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*), globalization is a process of interactions between local and global social relations and social events irrespective of time and spatial distances. Such interactions are enabled through advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are being utilized by companies in the form of BPOs. Individuals do not develop social networks only locally at a given point in time, but interact with others irrespective of time and space. Using ICTs, individuals may also maintain social networks with family members living in different countries. So, ICTs serve as a platform for interconnecting cultures – local contexts, such as cultural identity, and global contexts. ICTs have set the stage for the process of sociocultural globalization whereby local cultures/events interact and may be affected by distant/global occurrences (Hauser, “Cultural Identity in a Globalised World? A Theoretical Approach towards the Concept of Cultural Identity”). Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), recognizing that different societies have experienced different levels of globalization, define it as “the intrusion of distance into local, everyday lives.” Accordingly, the ICT-enabled interaction between cultures may lead to cultural transformation, i.e., reduction in cultural identity centrality.

The structure of this article is as follows. First, a review is provided of the theory on the potential impact of cultural identity centrality and cultural transformation requirements on work outcomes, accompanied by a discussion on the mechanisms of this process in the context of BPOs. In the next section, the research

methodology is discussed, followed by the interpretation of empirical findings in the Empirical Analysis section. Concluding remarks and policy recommendations, including limitations and suggestions for future research, are highlighted in the final section.

## Literature Review

As argued above, both globalization and cultural identity represent dynamic processes. Hence, the impact of economic globalization, in the form of BPOs, on cultural transformation/identity, enabled through advances in ICTs, should rather be considered as a “complex process of intertwined cultural movements” (Cleveland et al., “Identity, Culture, Dispositions and Behavior: A Cross-National Examination of Globalization and Culture Change”). Cultures interact and are exposed to new social, economic, and political developments. Consequently, cultural identity undergoes a dynamic process of transformation/adaptation and/or resistance to new realities. Thus, work environments that require cultural transformation, depending on one’s cultural identity centrality, may be harmful for work outcomes. In the following pages, a review of the literature on the relationship between globalization and cultural transformation/identity is provided. Afterward, studies examining how cultural transformation requirements and identity centrality affect work performance are reviewed, in order to set the stage for the empirical analysis.

The two major opposing views on the impact of economic globalization on cultural transformation/identity include homogenization and fragmentation. The former suggests that societies adopt foreign cultural life styles, customs, and traditions, while the latter argues that economic globalization leads societies apart in terms of cultural identities. A more complex and realistic framework for analyzing the impact of globalization on cultural transformation/identity is developed by Berry (“Globalisation and Acculturation”). According to his acculturation framework, there are four different patterns of interaction between different cultures: i) *assimilation* occurs when foreign cultural and psychological aspects are adopted, resulting in loss of cultural tradition; ii) *separation or segregation* implies maintaining original cultural and psychological aspects while resisting and disregarding alternative aspects mainly by avoiding interaction as much as possible; iii) *integration* implies preserving existing cultures and behaviors while adopting foreign aspects through interaction; and iv) *marginalization* entails loss of original cultural and psychological aspects while simultaneously resisting foreign cultures and behaviors. Accordingly, the interaction between cultures enabled through ICTs in the context of BPOs may have different consequences in terms of cultural transformation/identity. Being exposed to a different culture by working in BPOs means an individual may show any of the four different patterns identified above, depending on their cultural identity centrality (Das et al., “The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”).

Economic globalization is being enabled through advances in ICTs. As a result, several multinational corporations have outsourced to certain BPOs aiming at increasing profits through lower real estate, infrastructure, and labor costs in other less developed countries (McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”). Providing a view into the experiences of call center employees – who, trying to enjoy monetary benefits, undergo certain pressures on their social and personal lives – the author defines BPOs as outsourced departments that provide inbound and outbound communication services in relation of business-to-customer and business-to-business. BPOs provide numerous services, such as customer care, web sales/marketing, billing services, database marketing, accounting, transaction document management, transcription, tax processing, HR hiring/administration, biotech research (McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”), radiology medical services, and tutoring/coaching and teaching services (Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalised World in the 21st Century*).

The literature on economic globalization focuses both on its economic and cultural implications. Given the focus of this article, the following review is limited to studies examining the impact of cultural identity centrality and cultural transformation requirements on employees’ work outcomes. The majority of the

studies examine the impact of cultural transformation requirements, and management thereof, on the work performance and well-being of employees while working in transnational business services (Das et al., “The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”; Deery et al., “Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”; McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”; Nath, “Aesthetic and Emotional Labour Through Stigma: National Identity Management and Racial Abuse in Offshored Indian Call Centres”; Van de Broek, “Globalising Call Centre Capital: Gender, Culture and Work Identity”).

In their empirical analyses of Indian BPO employees’ work experiences, studies argue that employees face very stringent work conditions, such as enduring long hours of monotonous work, promptly responding to orders, undergoing transformations in terms of persona, accent, diction, sleep cycle, as well as workplace identity (McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”; Van de Broek, “Globalising Call Centre Capital: Gender, Culture and Work Identity”; Cowie, “The Accents of Outsourcing: The Meanings of ‘Neutral’ in the Indian Call Centre Industry”; Das et al., “The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”; D’Cruz and Rayner, “Bullying in the Indian Workplace: A Study of the ITES-BPO Sector”; Nath, “Aesthetic and Emotional Labour Through Stigma: National Identity Management and Racial Abuse in Offshored Indian Call Centres”; Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to the Far Away Towns”). Further, they experience limited growth and career development opportunities (Budhwar et al., “HRM Systems of Indian Call Centres: An Exploratory Study”), extensive monitoring and tight performance targets, and hostility and racial abuse (Deery et al., “Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”; Koppman et al., “Third-World ‘Sloggers’ or Elite Global Professionals? Using Organizational Toolkits to Redefine Work Identity in Information Technology Offshore Outsourcing”). Such work environments are considered by employees as oppressive and leading to “depersonalized bullying” (D’Cruz and Noronha, “Ambivalence: Employee Responses to Depersonalized Bullying at Work”).

One of the work practices/demands pointed out by the studies on Indian BPO workers is the night shift, which is unavoidable given the time zone difference between India and the UK (McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”; Das et al., “The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”). Such requirements may be perceived as a huge burden on conservative/traditional families, especially for daughters and wives.

Further, studies argue that irrespective of skill levels, the key requirements of BPO jobs include emotional and esthetic labor. This involves workers transforming their social attributes. Emotional labor entails workers’ manipulation of their emotions during interaction in order to meet client expectations (Van de Broek, “Globalising Call Centre Capital: Gender, Culture and Work Identity”). Strongly linked to this is also esthetic labor, which in the context of BPO work is related mainly to the esthetics of language and voice (Van de Broek, “Globalising Call Centre Capital: Gender, Culture and Work Identity”; Cowie, “The Accents of Outsourcing: The Meanings of ‘Neutral’ in the Indian Call Centre Industry”; Singh, “An Accent Improvement Model for the Non-Native English Speakers: A Voice and Accent Trainer Perspective”). Both types of labor have to be performed by BPO employees. One of the key requirements for BPO employment is that workers converse in the same language as the customers. Relating to this, workers are required to have specific and complex language and voice intonation and accent skills (Aneesh, “Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”; Singh, “An Accent Improvement Model for the Non-Native English Speakers: A Voice and Accent Trainer Perspective”). This is referred to as the neutralization process by Aneesh (“Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”).

To better meet client expectations, BPO workers have to control not just their language and accent but also their feelings. In doing so, they need to manipulate their emotions to be more responsive to their clients’ demands and to control their voice and other manners as they aim to provide services that are aurally more appealing to clients. Such skills are learned through trainings, particularly on cultural and social norms of the client countries. This process is referred to as mimesis by Aneesh (“Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”). Additionally, employees are provided with “tight scripts on set opening and close prompts” and undergo strict monitoring (Van de Broek, “Globalising Call Centre Capital: Gender, Culture and Work Identity”).

Studies also report that to coexist with the cultural contexts of the customers, it is mandatory for BPO workers to conceal their subjectively important social identities and so they undergo transformation in terms of voice intonation and accent, as well as persona. The transformation is implemented through change of Indian names to western ones and taking mandatory trainings, workshops, seminars, and direct coaching on written and oral language skills and accent. Additional requirements in this regard include understanding culture-specific colloquialisms and expressions. As a solution to this issue, BPOs develop “fictional personal profiles with residential roots in some prominent city in the US” to be adopted by employees, implying masking and concealing their social identities (McMillin, “Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”; Aneesh, “Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”). So, BPO employees, while at work, pretend to be someone else and to live in the client country where they are not physically located. Thus, they are even called virtual migrants (Aneesh, “Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”). Such work environments make employees perceive an identity threat (Koppman et al., “Third-World ‘Sloggers’ or Elite Global Professionals? Using Organizational Toolkits to Redefine Work Identity in Information Technology Offshore Outsourcing”).

In light of the higher wages compared to local rates, the incentives to accept such work requirements are probably very strong. Yet, such cultural transformation requirements, that is, requirements of cultural identity management, may imply a very high cost for employees who have a strong cultural identity centrality. Such workers experience identity conflict, i.e., difficulty to enact different identities, leading to them perceiving greater dissonance (Roberts, “Changing faces: Professional Image Construction in Diverse Organizational Settings”). This in turn negatively impacts employees’ performance and increases stress and burnout levels, as well as intentions to leave (Das et al., “The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”; Nath, “Aesthetic and Emotional Labour Through Stigma: National Identity Management and Racial Abuse in Offshored Indian Call Centres”; Deery et al., “Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”).

McMillin (“Outsourcing Identities: Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India”) concludes that Indian BPO employees put higher value on the economic benefits from working in transnational business services, although they recognize the negative implications for their interpersonal familial and social interactions. Similarly, D’Cruz and Noronha (“Ambivalence: Employee Responses to Depersonalized Bullying at Work”) argue that depersonalized bullying leads to targets facing stress, but the job-related benefits induce the targets to cope with the oppressive work environment and hence to not leave the job. Nath (“Aesthetic and Emotional Labour Through Stigma: National Identity Management and Racial Abuse in Offshored Indian Call Centres”), based on interviews, concludes that while some Indian employees considered this process of negating one’s individual and cultural identity to be repressive, others believed it assisted their social advancement. Several of the studies reviewed deploy econometric techniques. Results in Das et al. (“The importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”) suggest that a stronger national identity centrality (NIC) leads to workers perceiving more dissonance, leading to lower performance, greater stress, and burnout levels, and higher probability to leave. Similarly, Das (“Effects of Identity Variables and Job Performance on Employee Intentions to Leave: An Empirical Study in Indian Call Centers”), analyzing the propensity to leave only, found that NIC increases the likelihood of quitting, while organizational identity reduces it. Deery et al. (“Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”) and Das et al. (“Feeling Unsure: Quit or Stay? Uncovering Heterogeneity in Employees’ Intention to Leave in Indian Call Centers”) examine only the determinants of the intention to leave but deploy different techniques. The former study found that difficulty to modify accent, stigma consciousness, and racial abuse increase the intention to quit the job. According to them, both difficulty in modifying accent and stigma consciousness lead to agents perceiving emotional strain, which in turn adversely affects their ability to successfully complete tasks and increases their likelihood to quit. Results in Das et al. (“Feeling Unsure: Quit or Stay? Uncovering Heterogeneity in Employees’ Intention to Leave in Indian Call Centers”), among others, suggest that job satisfaction reduces the propensity to quit among those wanting to stay, leave, and in those who are not sure about quitting. In sum, the majority of findings hint at the fact that employees who find it difficult to manage cultural transformation are more likely to quit, perform worse, and perceive more stress.

## Empirical Analysis

The empirical analysis is based on a random sample stemming from a survey with 200 employees of three Kosovan call centers. The employees completed the questionnaires through face-to-face interviews in 2020. A sample of three call centers was drawn randomly from the business register kept at the Kosovo Business Registration Agency. At each call center, all employees participated in the survey.

Table 1 gives the variable labels, variable definitions, and the respective summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables. A discussion on the definitions and theoretical expectations of the variables is also provided in Table 1.

## Dependent Variables

Borrowing from Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), the empirical investigation focuses on the determinants of four different dependent variables, namely job performance, intention to leave the job, stress, and burnout.

**Table 1:** Variable label, variable definition, and descriptive statistics

| Variable label                             | Variable definition                                                                                                                                                         | Mean                    | Standard deviation |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Dependent variables</b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                             |                         |                    |
| <i>Work performances</i>                   | Perceived level of work performance; dummy variable = 1 if the respondent chose “I have exceeded performance targets” or “I have achieved performance targets,” 0 otherwise | 0.90                    | 0.31               |
| <i>Stress</i>                              | Level of stress created via factor analysis                                                                                                                                 | $6.75 \times 10^{-10}$  | 1.00               |
| <i>Burnout</i>                             | Level of burnout created via factor analysis                                                                                                                                | $-1.37 \times 10^{-9}$  | 1.00               |
| <i>Intention to leave the organization</i> | Level of intention to leave created via factor analysis                                                                                                                     | $-5.90 \times 10^{-10}$ | -1.29              |
| <b>Independent variables</b>               |                                                                                                                                                                             |                         |                    |
| <i>IIC</i>                                 | Level of individual identity centrality created via factor analysis                                                                                                         | $-1.02 \times 10^{-8}$  | 0.98               |
| <i>OIC</i>                                 | Level of organizational identity centrality created via factor analysis                                                                                                     | $1.93 \times 10^{-9}$   | 0.87               |
| <i>NIC</i>                                 | Level of national identity centrality created via factor analysis                                                                                                           | $8.70 \times 10^{-9}$   | 0.96               |
| <i>MigPlan</i>                             | Equals 1 if the employee plans to emigrate                                                                                                                                  | 0.76                    | 0.42               |
| <i>MigExp</i>                              | Equals 1 if the employee has lived abroad in the past                                                                                                                       | 0.17                    | 0.38               |
| <b>Individual characteristics</b>          |                                                                                                                                                                             |                         |                    |
| <i>Gender</i>                              | Equals 1 if female                                                                                                                                                          | 0.50                    | 0.50               |
| <i>Age</i>                                 | Age of the employee in years                                                                                                                                                | 24.82                   | 5.43               |
| <i>Education</i>                           | Equals 1 if Bachelor or Master’s Degree, 0 otherwise                                                                                                                        | 0.61                    | 0.49               |
| <b>Job characteristics</b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                             |                         |                    |
| <i>Wage</i>                                | Wage of the employee in Euros                                                                                                                                               | 622.14                  | 99.72              |
| <i>Tenure</i>                              | Number of years with the organization                                                                                                                                       | 2.53                    | 1.3                |
| <i>BonusProm</i>                           | Equals 1 if the employee is paid bonuses and/or has promotion opportunities                                                                                                 | 0.91                    | 0.29               |
| <i>Job satisfaction</i>                    | Level of satisfaction created via factor analysis                                                                                                                           | $-9.22 \times 10^{-11}$ | 0.90               |

## Subjective Performance

Unlike Das et al. (“The importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), we do not have access to accurate performance measures of employees. Instead, this study relies on a constructed, subjective performance measure based on employees’ perceptions about the extent to which they have met organizational targets: “The targets set by the organization I have \_\_\_\_\_” for which the following response options were available: i) exceeded; ii) achieved; iii) partially achieved; and iv) had problems to achieve. The four response options have been amalgamated into two categories to create a dummy variable. Accordingly, this dependent variable takes the value one if the respondent chose “I have exceeded performance targets” or “I have achieved performance targets,” zero otherwise.

## Stress

Occupational stress is commonly experienced by employees who cannot cope with their occupation-related demands. The key sources of stress include working conditions and the nature of the job (heavy workload, time pressure, emotional demands, and physical demands), the roles that are fulfilled, relationships at work (including exposure to bullying/harassment), organizational climate, and career development. For the purposes of this research, this variable is constructed using 42 out of the 50 items from the Occupational Stress Index developed in Srivastava and Singh (“Construction and Standardization of an Occupational Stress Index: A Pilot Study”). Each item has five alternative responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Similar to the *intention to leave* variable, the dependent variable *stress* is generated using factor analysis.

## Burnout

According to Maslach and Jackson (“The Measurement of Experienced Burnout”), burnout syndrome is a form of emotional exhaustion and cynicism common usually among employees who are in direct contact with clients/patients (people work). The key characteristics of employees experiencing burnout syndrome include increased feelings of emotional exhaustion, as well as negative and cynical attitudes and/or feelings about their clients/patients. To construct this variable, the nine items relating to emotional exhaustion from the Maslach Burnout Inventory are used (Maslach and Jackson, “The Measurement of Experienced Burnout”). Each item has seven alternative responses, including “once a year,” “several times a year,” “once a month,” “several times a month,” “once a week,” “several times a week,” and “every day.” The dependent variable *burnout*, too, was constructed using factor analysis.

## Intention to Leave

Intentions or actual decisions may have important implications, both theoretically and empirically, as there may be possible differences between the two decisions. In other words, intentions are not necessarily a predictor of future behavior. Yet according to Ajzen’s (*EBOOK: Attitudes, Personality and Behaviour*) theory of reasoned action, intentions are predictors of actual behavior under the following assumptions: a) correspondence between the measurement of intentions and behavior with respect to time, context, action, and target, b) the decision-maker having volitional control over the behavior in question, and c) behavioral intentions being stable over time. Additionally, studies examining the determinants of employee turnover

have consistently provided support for the hypothesis that employees' intentions of leaving are a predictor of actual decisions to leave (Cotton and Tuttle, "Employee Turnover: A Meta-Analysis and Review with Implications for Research"; Lee and Mowday, "Voluntarily Leaving an Organization: An Empirical Investigation of Steers and Mowday's Model of Turnover"; Michaels and Spector, "Causes of Employee Turnover: A Test of the Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino Model"; Steel and Ovalle, "A Review and Meta-Analysis of Research on the Relationship between Behavioral Intentions and Employee Turnover"). The intention to leave scale, developed in Rosin and Korabik ("Workplace Variables, Affective Responses, and Intention to Leave Among Women Managers"), is used to construct this variable. For comparability with the previous two dependent variables, the four items of this index are scored on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Again, factor analysis was used on this index to generate the continuous dependent variable *intention to leave*.

## Key Explanatory Variables

### National Identity, Organization Identity, and Individual Identity

Guided by Das et al. ("The Importance of being 'Indian': Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India"), the analysis controls for national, organizational, and individual identity. To avoid repetition, this study does not provide a detailed elaboration on how the variables are measured. For the same reason, the theoretical explanations of these three variables are discussed only briefly. Following the literature review provided above and the arguments in Das et al. (The Importance of being "Indian": Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India), strong NIC and individual identity centrality (IIC) are expected to enhance the threat perceived from having to undergo cultural transformation in terms of accent, behavior, and persona required from working in BPOs. This in turn is expected to have a negative impact on the well-being of employees leading to lower performance, greater stress, and burnout levels, and increased likelihood to leave the job. On the other hand, strong organizational identity centrality (OIC) is expected to enhance work performance and reduce burnout and the intention to leave the job. Unlike their analysis, though, here religious centrality is not included, given that the coexistence among the three religions in Kosova has always been excellent, and thus no significant differences are expected.

### Migration Experience and Emigration Plan

As stated above, migration experience is controlled for in the burnout and stress models, and migration plan is included in the performance and intention to leave models. The control for these two explanatory variables represents the major contribution of this analysis to the literature on the relationship between cultural identity and work outcomes.

Migration experience implies having valuable information on the modes of migration, living conditions, job opportunities, food, shelter, or even financial means to overcome the liquidity constraints (Stark and Bloom, "The New Economics of Labor Migration"; (De Jong, "Expectations, Gender, and Norms in Migration Decision-Making"; Gibson and McKenzie, "The Microeconomic Determinants of Emigration and Return Migration of the Best and Brightest: Evidence from the Pacific"; McKenzie and Rapoport, "Self-Selection Patterns in Mexico-U.S. Migration: The Role of Migration Networks"). In the context of this research, migration experience, in the form of residence in the host country as employed or unemployed, implies having information and knowledge of language, life style, as well as consumption behavior. In sum, it implies knowledge about the components of cultural identity of the host country. Accordingly, individuals with migration experience are less likely to experience identity conflict, and hence less likely to

perceive threats to their cultural identity. In turn, they are expected to be less likely to perceive stress and burnout from performing their jobs. Yet, Van Dalen et al. (“Out of Africa: What Drives the Pressure to Emigrate?”) argue that conditional on the type of migration experience, positive or negative, migrants may or may not have sufficient information specific to the host country culture. Thus, the impact of migration experience on perceived stress and burnout from work is inconclusive.

The impact of migration plans both on work performance and intention to leave is a priori ambiguous. According to the disincentive effect, in the prospect of emigration, individuals perceive emigration as a competing strategy to their current jobs. Put differently, the possibility of emigration reduces the opportunity cost of losing the job. Hence, individuals planning to emigrate put less effort into achieving work targets and keeping their jobs. As a result, migration plans are expected to lead to lower performance and greater intentions to leave. Yet, individuals with emigration plans may be more concerned about improving their skills and getting good recommendation letters, which may be valuable in the host country labor market. Consequently, those planning to emigrate may put more effort into performing well and keeping the job up to the point of emigration.

As is common in studies examining the determinants of work outcomes, individual characteristics and job characteristics are also controlled for in this empirical analysis. The former set of variables consists of gender, age, and education level, while the latter includes wage, bonuses, promotion options, tenure, and job satisfaction.

The empirical investigation is based on two different techniques: ordinary least squares (OLS) and probit. Probit is deployed to examine the determinants of work performances, as it is constructed as a binary variable, whereas OLS is used in analyzing impacts of the explanatory variables on the other three work outcome indicators, namely stress, burnout, and intention to leave.

**Table 2:** Determinants of performance, stress, burnout, and intention to leave the job

| Variable label                    | Performance     | Stress              | Burnout             | Intention to leave the job |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| IIC                               | 0.29 (0.25)     | 0.11 (0.08)         | 0.35*** (0.08)      | −0.02 (0.06)               |
| OIC                               | 0.25 (0.29)     | 0.59*** (0.07)      | 0.42*** (0.07)      | −0.27*** (0.06)            |
| NIC                               | 0.47** (0.24)   | −0.11 (0.07)        | −0.41*** (0.07)     | 0.17*** (0.06)             |
| MigPlan                           | 1.05*** (0.45)  |                     |                     | 0.08 (0.11)                |
| MigExp                            |                 | −0.39** (0.17)      | −0.29* (0.17)       |                            |
| <b>Individual characteristics</b> |                 |                     |                     |                            |
| Gender                            | 0.04 (0.389)    | −0.13 (0.12)        | −0.05 (0.12)        | −0.07 (0.09)               |
| Age                               | −0.0005 (0.04)  | −0.15* (0.08)       | −0.11 (0.08)        | −0.02** (0.009)            |
| Agesqr                            |                 | 0.002* (0.001)      | 0.002 (0.001)       |                            |
| Education                         | 0.17 (0.42)     | 0.13 (0.12)         | 0.12 (0.13)         | 0.05 (0.10)                |
| <b>Job characteristics</b>        |                 |                     |                     |                            |
| Wage                              | 0.03*** (0.008) | 0.0006 (0.0006)     | 0.002*** (0.0006)   | 0.0002 (0.0005)            |
| Tenure                            | 0.07 (0.09)     | −0.03 (0.05)        | −0.04 (0.05)        | −0.03 (0.04)               |
| BonusProm                         | −1.11 (0.93)    | 0.13 (0.21)         | 0.014 (0.21)        | 0.16 (0.15)                |
| Job satisfaction                  | −0.25 (0.27)    | 0.12 (0.08)         | −0.07 (0.08)        | 0.11* (0.06)               |
| Stress                            | −0.38 (0.33)    |                     |                     | 0.32*** (0.08)             |
| Burnout                           | 0.26 (0.30)     |                     |                     | 0.26*** (0.06)             |
| Number of observations            | 200             | 200                 | 200                 | 200                        |
| LR $\chi^2(14)$                   | 70.04           |                     |                     |                            |
| Prob > $\chi^2$                   | 0.000           |                     |                     |                            |
| Pseudo $R^2$                      | 0.52            |                     |                     |                            |
| Log likelihood                    | −32.16          |                     |                     |                            |
| F-test                            |                 | $F(13, 186) = 9.18$ | $F(14, 185) = 8.46$ | $F(13, 187) = 11.34$       |
| Prob > F                          |                 | 0.000               | 0.000               | 0.000                      |
| Adj. $R^2$                        |                 | 0.35                | 0.34                | 0.40                       |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Levels of significance: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

## Empirical Findings

Table 2 reports the empirical results for the four different models, namely performance, stress, burnout, and intention to leave the job. In the following paragraphs, the interpretation of the empirical results will be presented by dependent variables, and the signs and statistical significances of their respective determinants are discussed. Whenever relevant, comparisons will be made across models.

### Performance Model

These findings suggest that among the three key identity centrality variables, only NIC has a statistically significant impact on work performance. Contrary to expectations and results in other studies, however, Kosovan call center employees with higher NIC are found to have better performance at work. An explanation for such behavior may be found in the third cultural interaction pattern of Berry's ("Globalisation and Acculturation") acculturation framework, discussed in the literature review. Accordingly, Kosovan call center employees probably manage to integrate the foreign culture into theirs, leading them to preserve their culture and behavior while adopting foreign aspects. Thus, even though they have a high NIC, they still perform well in work environments characterized by foreign cultures and behavior.

As explained above, this analysis is the first to control for the impact of emigration plan or migration experience on the four different work outcomes. In the performance model, the impact of migration plan is considered. Theoretically, the impact of this variable is inconclusive. Evidence shows that planning on emigrating has a positive and highly statistically significant impact on work performance. This supports the view that Kosovan call center employees, who plan to emigrate, perform better hoping to improve their language and job skills and/or get a better letter of reference from their employers which they may plan to use in the foreign labor market.

In line with the incentive-effect hypothesis, wage has a positive and highly statistically significant impact on work performance, suggesting that employees consider wages to be a very strong incentive for them to perform better at work. The other job characteristics, tenure, bonuses, and promotion opportunities that are usually used to incentivize workers are not statistically significant.

Variables introduced to capture the impact individual characteristics do not show any significant influence on work outcomes. This finding holds for all four models. The lack of significant influence of individual characteristics may be due to jobs in the call center sector not imposing any strict criteria related to gender, age, and education, but rather requiring a minimum level of communication skills and language skills.

### Stress Model

As regards the stress model, empirical results suggest that only OIC has a statistically significant impact. Contrary to expectations, though, employees with a higher OIC perceive their jobs to be more stressful. One explanation for this could be that employees who identify more with the organization put in more effort, leading to them being constantly more stressed about their work performance compared to those with lower OIC. This view is partly supported by the positive, yet statistically insignificant, effect of this variable on work performance.

In this model, migration experience rather than emigration plan is considered relevant. Theoretically, the impact of this variable is inconclusive. Empirical results provide support for the hypothesis that employees who have migration experience are better equipped with knowledge about the foreign culture, including language, colloquialisms, and social norms and customs; through this, they easily adopt their work roles, and thus perceive less stress at performing their tasks.

## Burnout Model

Unlike in the other three models, in the case of burnout all three variables controlling for identity centrality are statistically significant. As expected, support is found for the hypothesis that employees with higher IIC perceive higher burnout levels. Contrary to expectations, but similar to the results in the stress model, employees with higher OIC perceive higher burnout levels. The explanation for this could be the same as that provided under the stress model, that is, employees with higher OIC put more effort into their work performance, which leads to them experiencing a higher level of burnout. Results on NIC, too, are contrary to expectations – employees with higher NIC experience lower burnout levels. The same argument used in the performance model could serve as an explanation for this evidence. Accordingly, employees may have managed to integrate the foreign culture into their culture very well while still preserving their own culture. Therefore, although they have a higher NIC they experience lower levels of burnout.

Similar to the stress model, here too migration experience is considered to be a more relevant determinant than migration plan. The theoretically expected impact of this variable on burnout is inconclusive. Empirical results are similar to those in the stress model and provide support for the hypothesis that employees who have migration experience are better equipped with knowledge about the foreign culture, including language, colloquialisms, and social norms and customs; through this, they easily adopt their work roles and thus experience less burnout.

Wage is found to have a statistically significant impact. Yet, contrary to the incentive-effect hypothesis, the correlation between wage and burn out is negative. One possible explanation for this could be that employees have performance-based contracts, whereby they are paid per unit of the work they do. Hence, to reach a higher wage, they must put in more effort to be able to complete more units within the same time period. This implies a higher work load per unit of time, leading to employees experiencing higher burnout levels.

## Intention to Leave Model

In the intention to leave model, among the identity centrality variables, OIC and NIC are statistically significant. In line with expectations, results suggest that having higher OIC is correlated with a lower intention to leave the job, and having a higher NIC is negatively related to it. As regards IIC, it is negatively related to intention to leave, which is in line with expectations. Yet its impact is statistically insignificant.

Unlike Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), in this empirical investigation of intention to leave, stress perceptions and burnout levels are considered to be relevant determinants and thus have been controlled for. As expected, empirical evidence shows that both perceiving more stress and experiencing higher burnout levels are positively correlated with the intention to leave. Empirical findings do not provide support for the hypothesis that having a migration plan is positively related to the intention to leave or the view that wages have an incentive effect expected to reduce the probability of leaving the job.

## Concluding Remarks

Using a sample of 200 call center employees in Kosovo, this analysis has sought to examine the impact of IIC, OIC, and NIC on work outcomes. Given the high migration incidence in and the high propensity to emigrate from Kosovo, the empirical analysis controls for the relevance of migration experience and emigration plans. This research contributes to the existing literature in two ways. To the best of my knowledge, this analysis is the first to investigate this relationship using Kosovan data. The other novel feature is that, in addition to controlling for the impact of IIC, OIC, and NIC, this research controls for the relevance of migration experience and emigration plans on work performances.

Results suggest broad support for the influence of variables capturing the effects of identity centralities. OIC is found to have the strongest impact on all four dependent variables among the identity centrality variables. Contrary to expectations and the findings in Das (“Effects of Identity Variables and Job Performance on Employee Intentions to Leave: An Empirical Study in Indian Call Centers”), OIC is positively correlated with intention to leave. Further, contrary to expectations and the findings in Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), OIC is positively correlated with stress and burnout as well. This suggests that Kosovan employees who identify more with the organization put in more effort, thus perceiving more stress about their work performance and being more likely to quit. Kosovan employees who have a stronger NIC are more likely to leave their jobs. Similar results are found in Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”) and Das (“Effects of Identity Variables and Job Performance on Employee Intentions to Leave: An Empirical Study in Indian Call Centers”). Yet, unlike findings in Das et al. (“The Importance of being ‘Indian’: Identity Centrality and Work Outcomes in an Off-Shored Call Center in India”), results here suggest that employees with a stronger NIC are inclined to experience less burnout and show better work performance. An explanation for such behavior among Kosovan employees is provided by the third cultural interaction pattern of Berry’s (“Globalisation and Acculturation”) acculturation framework. Compared to the other two types of identity centrality, IIC is found to be the least important determinant of work outcomes. Contrary to expectations, it has a positive and significant impact on burnout only. To explain this, one could possibly again borrow from Berry’s (“Globalisation and Acculturation”) acculturation framework. Accordingly, employees who have a higher IID manage to preserve their individual identity, while simultaneously adopting foreign aspects, and thus perceiving less burnout.

An important finding is that both migration experience and emigration plan are important determinants of work behavior of Kosovan call center employees. Migration experience is negatively correlated with both stress and burnout, suggesting that employees who have accumulated social and cultural capital while abroad are better able to cope with their new work roles. Emigration plan is positively associated with work performances and intention to leave, supporting the view that in prospect of emigration employees perform better in order to get better references to use in foreign labor markets. Yet it has significant impact only on work performance.

For Kosovan call center employees, wage is found to be the key job characteristic to determine work outcomes. Support is found for the hypothesis on the incentive-effect of wages on work performance. Yet, contrary to expectations, and similar to the findings of Deery et al. (“Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”), results do not provide support for the incentive-effect hypothesis of other job characteristics, such as bonuses, promotion opportunities, and tenure, on work outcomes. Further, contrary to expectations, there is no evidence that individual characteristics are correlated with work outcomes, apart from age. Similar findings are reported in Deery et al. (“Why do Off-Shored Indian Call Centre Workers Want to Leave Their Jobs?”).

In sum, work-related behaviors of Kosovan call center employees are largely determined by OIC and NIC, migration experience, and emigration plans, and less so by IIC. With the exception of wages, other job characteristics and individual characteristics are not found to determine work outcomes.

## Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As is common in survey analyses, the qualitative and subjective nature of the data and the issues relating to self-declaration are a limitation of this research. All variables are self-reported, and not taken from any company-produced register. Further, all four dependent variables and the majority of the independent variables are based on subjective value judgments, and thus represent personal perceptions. In cases of misreporting or misperceptions, the empirical investigation may suffer from measurement errors. Within this context, due to questionnaire design, unlike the other dependent variables which are based on the

Likert scale, the dependent variable controlling for performance has been introduced as a dummy variable. This may lead to mismeasurement errors, and thus representing a limitation. Another limitation of the empirical investigation is that it is based on data for one country only, and within the country, only on three, although randomly chosen, BPOs. Given these issues, the concluding remarks may be limited by country-specific bias, as well as by BPO-specific bias. Despite these limitations, this survey is still one of the most adequate and comprehensive sources of information for analyzing this relationship in the context of Kosovo, because it has been specifically tailored to the aim of this research by the author.

Given these shortcomings, future research may consider a larger data set consisting of more than three call centers to improve the representativeness of the sample. Further, combining company-produced data, particularly data relating to job characteristics and work performance, with self-reported data to avoid potential bias due to measurement errors would strongly benefit future research. Using the Likert scale to create the dependent variable controlling for performance would be more adequate compared to introducing it as a dummy variable. To get more insight into the social processes of how cultural transformation requirements affect work outcomes, depending on identity centrality, the ethnography of Kosovan call centers as conducted by Aneesh (“Emerging Scripts of Global Speech”) is recommended.

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