

Worldminded Attitudes of International Division Managers

Robert W. Boatler
Texas Christian University

Abstract

This study examined international tolerance levels, as measured by the Sampson and Smith worldmindedness scale, among managers in the international divisions of two major Dallas-Fort Worth firms. Worldmindedness was found to be positively related to foreign birth and educational level. Managers with specialized professional skills (finance/accounting, marketing, technical) were more worldminded than those who identified themselves as having more general administrative skills. Age had a significant negative relationship with worldmindedness. As young business school students at Texas Christian University have mean worldmindedness levels approximately equal to that of older international division managers, only highly selective employment of such students is likely to maintain existing levels of worldmindedness among managers in international divisions.

Introduction

Effective work in international business requires more than the development of specific business skills for the international environment: respect toward and tolerance of foreigners are also essential. A degree of consensus has been reached among many researchers, according to Kealey and Ruben (1983), that such personality traits as empathy, open-mindedness, flexibility and tolerance are associated with cross-cultural success. These traits are often specified as requirements for effective work abroad by expatriate business managers (Hays 1971; Heller 1980; Tung 1981). Tolerant attitudes toward foreigners as measured by a "worldmindedness scale" developed by Sampson and Smith (1957) have been found to be associated with the willingness of professional buyers to purchase from foreigners (Crawford and Lamb 1982) and the propensity of chief executive officers (CEOs) to sell abroad (Langston 1976).

A recent study of students at Texas Christian University (Boatler 1992a) indicated that business majors may not be attitudinally prepared to contribute in the international divisions of prospective employers. Business students had worldmindedness scores significantly lower than those of students majoring in other areas. Moreover, a declining trend of worldmindedness by age was observed for business students, while

worldmindedness scores of non-business students rose as their ages increased.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to extend understanding of the determinants of worldmindedness by means of a mail survey of the international divisions of two large Dallas-Fort Worth firms, one a major exporter and the other a major importer. Implicit or explicit variables in the literature on worldmindedness to be evaluated include foreign birth, residence experience abroad, age, education, and the nature of professional business specialization. The study will also contrast the worldmindedness levels of these Dallas-Fort Worth international business managers with those of Texas Christian University business students, potential future international business managers.

Literature Review

Worldmindedness Scale

Sampson and Smith (1957) identified worldminded individuals as those who favor a world view of the problems of humanity, whose primary reference group is humankind, rather than American, French, or Chinese. The worldmindedness scale (W-scale) that they

developed consists of 32 Likert-type attitude choice items, scored from 7 (representing "strongly agree") to 1 (representing "strongly disagree"). Sample items include: "Some races ought to be considered naturally less intelligent than ours"; and "Our country should permit the immigration of foreign people even if it lowers our standard of living." The numerical neutral point on the W-scale is 96. The W-scale was reported to have a high negative relation with Adorno's (1950) ethnocentrism measure.

The mean score of 102 business majors at TCU was 92.97, while that of arts and sciences majors was 104.65 (Boatler 1992). Exporting CEOs of Virginia manufacturing firms had a mean worldmindedness of 112.53 (Langston 1976).

Foreign-Born Experienced Managers

Axinn (1988, 64) has observed that "research indicates that when a firm has managers who are immigrants or who have lived or worked overseas, the firm is more likely to export." Immigrants may bring a higher level of worldmindedness to U.S. firms. There is some evidence that foreign university students in the United States have higher worldmindedness than do native students. The mean worldmindedness of 91 foreign students at Texas Christian University was 116.44, a value significantly higher than the 99.92 mean of 295 United States students examined at the same time (Boatler 1992b).

Foreign residence experience in itself may be associated with worldmindedness. Langston (1976) found a positive relation between prior foreign residence and CEO worldmindedness, but research on Texas Christian University students has indicated only either a marginally significant (1991) or an insignificant (1992a) impact of foreign residence on worldmindedness.

Age

Among teachers, age has not been found to be related to worldmindedness (Wilson 1975). For CEOs, Langston (1976, 115) observed that "although executives 55 years of age or older appear to be somewhat less internationally oriented than executives under 55 years of age, the differences between the means (worldmindedness) are not significant." Boatler (1992a) found a declining trend of worldmindedness by age for university business students, while worldmindedness scores of non-business students rose, resulting in a gap of increasing and significant magnitude.

Education

Evidence on the impact of educational levels on worldmindedness is not consistent. Langston (1976) found a significant effect of educational levels on CEO

worldmindedness. However, Garnham's (1975) study of foreign service officers showed only a positive, but insignificant, relation between worldmindedness and level of education. Secondary school teachers with graduate education had lower worldmindedness scores than those with no graduate education, but the difference was not significant (Ernster 1976).

Professional Specialization

Among business students, Boatler (1991) found that the "number-oriented" finance and accounting majors have lower worldmindedness than students majoring in the more "people-oriented" fields of management and marketing. One could anticipate a similar distinction among practicing business managers.

Method

Worldmindedness questionnaires were distributed in-house and returned by mail from managerial level respondents in the international divisions of two major Dallas-Fort Worth companies, one a major exporter and the other a major importer. In the exporting firm, 65 questionnaires were distributed; 31 were returned, 29 of which were complete, for a usable response rate of 45 percent. In the importing firm, 100 questionnaires were distributed; 56 were returned, 53 of which were complete.

Demographic information included citizenship (U.S. born, naturalized U.S. citizen, foreign), gender, age, education, nature of professional specialization, and international travel and residence experience. As the number of responses to individual items varies, the size of the treatment group will change by variable considered. The demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Sample Demographics

Gender:		Birth Nationality:	
Male	59	United States	68
Female	19	Other	14
Age:		Education:	
45 and over	34	Advanced Degrees	22
Under 45	44	University or Less	59

W-scale Validity and Reliability

In a survey of *Measures of Political Attitudes*, Robinson, Rusk and Head (1968, 203) concluded that "research use of the scale shows commendable concern and good criterion-related, known group, and predictive

validity, as well as more than adequate reliability." The W-scale was reported by Sampson and Smith (1957) to have a high reliability, a split half coefficient of .93. The coefficient alpha of the 81 W-scale responses in this study was .88.

Analysis

Because the number of observations in the sample is limited, evaluations of pair-wise differences in the worldmindedness of treatment groups are made with t-tests. The age-worldmindedness relationship is also examined by regression analysis. The distribution of sample worldmindedness scores has been reported to be not inconsistent with a normal distribution by Langston (1976) and Crawford and Lamb (1982).

Analytical Limitations

Although inferential statistics have been used as a guide to the magnitude of difference between treatment groups, the extent to which these results can be extended to non-respondents and other populations is not clear. Langston (1976), with a similar survey procedure, found no evidence of a non-response bias. The response rate in this study was quite high, but information on non-respondents is lacking.

Both the international manager survey and the TCU student sample referenced in this study are samples of convenience. As such they may serve more as a guide to future research than as a reliable inference to broader populations. However, it should be noted that studies have found no evidence of regional biases in worldmindedness, contrary to popular assumption. Studies of region of origin effects on worldmindedness levels of foreign service officers (Garnham 1975) and students at Texas Christian University (Boatler, in press) did not find any significant influence.

Results

The mean W-scale score of the 82 respondents in the study was 95.68, with a standard deviation of 24.60 and a range of 45 to 150. The W-scale mean for the 29 exporting division respondents was 99.59 and that of the 53 importing division respondents was 93.55. The mean worldmindedness of the 45 most internationally active respondents, those who travel abroad, was 101.58. In contrast, the mean worldmindedness of 102 Texas Christian University business majors at 92.97 was significantly lower ($t(145) = -2.10, p = .019$) than that of most internationally involved business managers.

Foreign-Born Experienced Managers

The worldmindedness level of managers in these

international divisions indeed seems to be influenced by the presence of foreign-born managers. The 14 foreign-born managers (6 naturalized, 8 foreign) had a mean worldmindedness of 106.64, a value clearly higher ($t(80) = 1.85, p = .067$) than the 93.43 mean worldmindedness of 68 native-born United States managers.

Moreover, native-born U.S. managers do not seem to acquire higher worldmindedness through foreign residence. The 19 native-born United States managers who indicated they had resided abroad had a mean worldmindedness of 93.37, only marginally above the 92.54 mean of 48 managers who had not lived abroad.

Age

There was a significant difference in mean worldmindedness by age among international division managers. The mean worldmindedness of 44 managers less than 45 years of age was 101.05, a value significantly higher ($t(75) = 2.56, p = .006$) than the 86.15 mean of 34 managers 45 years of age and older. The difference in worldmindedness by age was significant for both foreign-born and U.S.-born managers examined separately. For purposes of comparison to United States students, however, a regression analysis of the age-worldmindedness relationship for only U.S.-born managers may be more useful. The regression was highly significant ($F(62) = 7.23, p = .009$) and indicated a decline in worldmindedness of one point per year of age, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Worldmindedness-Age Regression

Variable	B	T	Sig T
Age	-1.06	-2.69	.009
Constant	136.83	8.07	.000

Twenty-year-old Texas Christian University business students had a mean worldmindedness of 92.97, only slightly below the 93.43 mean worldmindedness of U.S.-born international division managers who had a mean age of 42. Further analysis of the worldmindedness of 20-year-old students over time would be necessary to ascertain the impact of the process of aging on worldmindedness.

Education

An examination of educational levels among international division managers indicates a positive relationship with worldmindedness, consistent with the study of CEOs by Langston (1976). The 22 managers

with master's or doctoral degrees had a mean worldmindedness of 106.32, a value significantly higher ($t(79) = 3.08, p = .003$) than the 91.02 mean worldmindedness of 59 managers with only a bachelor's degree or less. For the most part, this was a comparison of respondents with bachelor's degrees (56 with a mean worldmindedness of 91.50) and those with master's degrees (18 with a mean worldmindedness of 104.39), but the 82.00 mean worldmindedness of 3 high school graduates and the 115.00 mean worldmindedness of 4 respondents with doctoral degrees were also consistent. With a mean age of 41.6, managers with graduate degrees were only slightly, insignificantly younger than those with less education who had a mean age of 43.3.

Professional Specialization

Mean worldmindedness among international managers by nature of professional specialization is shown in Table 3. Contrary to expectations from previous work with business majors (Boatler 1991), respondents in finance and accounting had the highest mean worldmindedness and those in general management had the lowest mean worldmindedness. The difference in worldmindedness levels between general management

Table 3
Worldmindedness by Professional Specialization

Specialization	Number	Mean WM
Finance/Accounting	19	103.42
Marketing	22	99.23
Management	17	82.12
Other Technical	13	96.46
Non-Management	54	100.04

Table 4
Summary: Treatment Group Differences in Worldmindedness

Group	Foreign Born	Under Age 45	Master Ph.D.	Specialist
n	14	44	22	54
Mean WM	106.64	101.05	106.32	100.04
Significance	.067	.006	.003	.004
Mean WM	93.43	86.15	91.02	82.12
n	68	34	59	17
Group	U.S. Born	Age 45 and Over	University, High School	General Mngmnt.

and all other specializations was significant ($t(69) = 2.70, p = .009$). The mean age of both groups was virtually identical, 42.31 and 42.76 respectively for

specialists and general managers, but a slightly higher percentage of specialists had graduate education (35 percent) than general managers did (24 percent).

A summary of significant differences in treatment group worldmindedness is presented in Table 4.

Discussion

There is evidence that foreign and foreign-born managers in international divisions contribute more than just specific knowledge of their home countries to their companies. This study suggests that they have attitudes of international tolerance—worldmindedness levels—that exceed those of native-born U.S. managers. Since U.S.-born managers who have resided abroad have no greater worldmindedness than those who have not, the development of native professional “expats” may be problematic.

Higher worldmindedness among international managers may be achieved by the employment of younger and better educated managers in international divisions of companies. The inverse relation found in this study between worldmindedness and age provides support for decisions by a growing number of global-minded U.S. companies to give “fast-track managers a global orientation much sooner in their careers. . . . Some U.S. corporations have found that early overseas assignments enable managers to widen their perspectives before they get paralyzed by parochial attitudes” (Lublin 1992). As 20-year-old business students already have mean worldmindedness levels comparable to those of 42-year-old international division managers, it might be advisable to make managers of the significantly more worldminded arts and sciences students, rather than to attempt to convert more “business oriented” students into internationalists.

That managers with more specialized business skills in finance/accounting, marketing, or other technical areas have higher worldmindedness than those in more administrative, people-managing positions, as shown in this study, may seem counter-intuitive. However, administrative skill and responsibility may be associated with greater acceptance and enforcement of organizational and social values. In contrast, managers with specialized skills, including those gained from education, may have less devotion to organizational values as they are in a better position to be able to acquire equivalent status in other companies. Green (1992) has observed less employee turnover when supervisors have expert power rather than positional power. Companies may have less reason to be concerned about attitudes appropriate for the international effectiveness of specialists than of administrators.

Conclusion

In the selection of managers with attitudes of high worldmindedness that are most likely to contribute to effective international work, favorable attributes suggested by this study are foreign birth, higher educational achievement, and youth. Evidence of declining worldmindedness with age implies the advisability of international assignments for younger rather than older managers. It also suggests that in the initial recruitment of students to become international division managers, worldmindedness levels above the norm, particularly for business students, are desirable.

The nature of the sample from which this evidence is drawn limits the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn. Additional research on the worldmindedness of students and international business managers is both necessary and warranted.

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