

Employment relationship in context

Commitment-based HR practices in the UK and Thailand

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This paper examines the role of institutional and cultural differences in the link between employees' satisfaction with HR practices and their affective commitment by focusing on counter clerks in financial services workplaces in the UK and Thailand. The results show that while the connection between satisfaction and commitment is of similar magnitude in the UK and Thailand, that level of commitment is linked with different HR practices. The results are consistent with cultural and institutional differences between the two countries and serve as a reminder that managers should consider the specific conditions in which they operate rather than simply adopting a best-practice approach to HRM.

Introduction

Understanding why a given set of human resource (HR) practices does not always deliver the same results is a key question facing human resource management (HRM) researchers and professionals. Attempts to answer this question have examined complementarities between practices (MacDuffie, 1995), and suggested that contextual factors are important for understanding the variety observed in the impact of any given bundle of HR practices. Paauwe and Boselie (2003, p. 67) suggest a shift of focus from the 'organisational level and internal regulation' to a wider focus that adopts a more interactive view of the relationship between organisation and the institutional environment. This paper addresses these issues by examining the role of national cultures in shaping the relationship between two attitudes that can be influenced by HR practices: job satisfaction and affective commitment. The presence of meaningful environmental differences in the nature of satisfaction with employment practices and organisational commitment would suggest important strategic considerations for HRM policy and practice. In particular, this would be further evidence in favour of a configurational view of HRM (Ostroff and Bowen, 2000) rather than a 'best practice' approach (Pfeffer, 1998). Existing

research has already investigated differences in the commitment responses associated with transformational leadership (Lo *et al.*, 2010), employees' shared values of the organisational culture (Taylor *et al.*, 2008), gender (Russ and McNeilly, 1995) and occupation (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000). Others have argued that the way employees are treated should depend on their strategic value to the organisation (Lepak and Snell, 1999). This paper argues that institutional and cultural factors should also be considered in the design and implementation of appropriate combinations of HR practices. A social exchange theory lens is applied to data on commitment and satisfaction in order to show that the organisational commitment of workers facing different institutional and environmental influences is linked with different facets of employment satisfaction. The authors argue that these differences are consistent with differences in power distance, uncertainty avoidance and individualism/collectivism identified by Hofstede (1980), as well as with key differences in the national institutional structures facing employees. This is accomplished by comparing the impact of satisfaction with eight employment practices and organisational commitment in two samples of employees in financial services workplaces: one in the UK and one in Thailand. These samples focus on employees from the same four-digit standard occupation code (SOC 4123) in order to control for differences based on job characteristics thereby allowing us to focus on differences in the institutional and cultural environment. By doing so, this paper expands the understanding of the specific nature of these considerations in a non-Western setting.

Literature review

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment is a psychological state that drives employees' affective attachment to the organisation, which in turn, governs the employee's decision to continue their membership with the organisation (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Commitment is linked with discretionary effort and behaviours which have been linked with organisational outcomes (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Previous research demonstrates that commitment is correlated with levels of job satisfaction, which may be driven by organisational attempts to provide supportive work environments and job conditions, including: job design, teamwork and communication, pay, promotion, job security and training (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

Satisfaction with HR practices

The distinction between intended HR policies and employees' experiences of these policies is a well-recognised feature of the HRM literature (e.g., Purcell *et al.*, 2009), and a key linkage in work investigating HR-performance linkages is the connection between the HR practices experienced by employees and their attitudinal and behavioural responses (*ibid.*). Understanding employee perceptions of HR practices is ultimately necessary to understand any links between HR and performance. Employee satisfaction with HR practices has been used in the construction of job satisfaction measures (Spector, 1997;

Kersley *et al.*, 2005: 33) and these measures have been linked to employee commitment responses (e.g., Kinnie *et al.*, 2005; Purcell *et al.*, 2009).

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory posits that reciprocal relationships between parties develop felt obligations to repay exchange parties with something of equivalent value (Blau, 1964). In other words, well-perceived employment practices create felt obligations to reciprocate with valuable contributions. Hannah and Iverson (2004: 339) argue that employees view HR practices as a personalised commitment to them by the organisation, which is reciprocated through positive attitudes and behaviours. Hence, employees are expected to reciprocate employer provision of resources like equitable pay, training, autonomy, etc, with the development of affective commitment and the positive exercise of job discretion. Empirical investigation of the value of the employment proposition has facilitated an understanding of the relationship between employees and employers and suggests the organisational provision of employment practices can improve commitment responses, job performance, extra-role behaviours, absenteeism and turnover (Innocenti *et al.*, 2011; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). This suggests that employees will give extra effort and loyalty to the organisation in return for satisfying job conditions and work environments. This leads to the hypothesis:

H1: Higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of affective commitment.

Cultural and institutional differences and employee commitment: Thailand and the UK

Social exchange theory also suggests that the strength of felt obligations depends on the value of the benefits received and the cultural setting in which the exchange takes place (Gouldner, 1960). Put differently, the value placed on the contents of a social exchange is contingent on the recipient's frame of reference, and this frame is influenced by social experiences and cultural backgrounds. This means that the same set of employment practices may be valued differently by recipients from different backgrounds and could generate different levels of obligation. The external context helps shape the set of HR practices that conform to the legal and social expectations of key constituencies in the management of people at work (Jackson and Schuler, 1995). This context may include: culture, labour markets, regulations, unions, industry characteristics, etc. Additionally, differences in national cultures and social values could also affect the way employees respond to any the employment management process (Aycan *et al.*, 2000). This view is echoed in cross-national research demonstrating that employees, bound to institutional and cultural values of a specific society, may respond differently to a given set of HR practices than counterparts in other cultures (Rad and De Moraes, 2009). Hofstede (1980) argued that culture can be viewed as a set of shared meanings, transmitted by a set of mental programs that affect individual responses in a given context. As such, culture shapes the cognitive schema that assigns

meaning and values to motivational variables and guides people in their choices, commitments, and standards of behaviour. Table 1 illustrates substantial differences between the UK and Thai cultures, as measured by Hofstede's cultural dimensions. These scores are used to illustrate the relevance of our comparison of Thailand and the UK. In addition to these broad cultural differences, there are important differences in the institutional environments facing workers in the UK and Thailand which will be referenced in setting out hypotheses. The focus is on differences in recent macroeconomic performance and the approaches to labour regulation and social security support mechanisms in the two countries.

Table 1: A comparison of cultural values in Thailand and in the UK

	United Kingdom	Thailand
Individualism/Collectivism	89	20
Power Distance	35	64
Masculinity/Femininity	66	34
Uncertainty Avoidance	35	64

Table 1 illustrates the relatively high level of uncertainty avoidance in Thailand compared with the UK. Hofstede (1994: 113) defines uncertainty avoidance as, 'the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations'. Uncertainty avoidance captures a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Additionally, it is noted that the labour markets in the UK and Thailand differ in their structures and in their recent dynamics. At the time of data collection, the UK economy had not experienced an economic recession since March 1992, and the financial services sector had grown faster than the overall average of the economy throughout this expansion. By contrast, Thailand experienced several dramatic economic reversals. Most notable is the Asian financial crisis of the mid-1990s, where the bursting of a financial bubble led to cost-cutting and restructuring (Siengthai and Bechter, 2005), and the unemployment rate doubled between February 1997 and February 1998 (National Statistics Office of Thailand). Labour regulation in the UK and Thailand are governed by quite different philosophies, as illustrated by the work of Botero *et al.* (2004). They conceptualise labour regulation as encompassing the set of safeguards in place for workers as well as the nature and generosity of the support available for the unemployed, and they undertake a systematic review of the employment laws, collective bargaining laws, and social security laws in 85 countries, including the UK and Thailand. According to this work, Thailand offers relatively more in the way of *de jure* safeguards for employees, while the United Kingdom offers more generous and timely support for the unemployed. The social support systems in the UK are considerably more developed than those in Thailand. The first government system of unemployment insurance appeared in the UK in 1911, and the current system permits individuals to begin receiving benefits within eight days of becoming unemployed. These benefits are part of a wider system including redundancy payments and housing

support. By contrast, Thailand introduced its first wide-ranging social insurance scheme in 1990. This scheme was a radical change to the social support structures in Thailand, but the 1990 scheme offered no unemployment benefits: only sickness, maternity, invalidity and death benefits. The Unemployment Mitigation Plan of 1998 introduced unemployment benefits for the first time. Even today, employees must wait a minimum of 35 days to begin receiving unemployment benefits. Compared with the UK, Thailand's approach to labour market regulation places greater restrictions on the use of alternative employment contracts (e.g., things other than full time permanent employment), provides stronger regulatory guidance on employment conditions, and provides more regulations aimed at job security. Thailand also offers protections in its national constitution for unionisation and collective bargaining (Botero *et al.*, 2004). There are several barriers to the exercise of these safeguards in practice, including a lack of protection from employer reprisals for union organisation activities prior to union registration. This has led to examples of firms firing union leaders prior to union certification (Datamonitor, 2009: 2). Despite these challenges to enforcement, the balance of unemployment protections available in Thailand is skewed towards regulation rather than benefits. These factors, coupled with the cultural differences identified by Hofstede, leads to the hypothesis:

H2: Satisfaction with job security is more salient to the commitment of Thai workers than UK workers.

Another key difference evident in Table 1 relates to power distance. Power distance refers to the extent to which individuals accept that power is distributed unequally, and generally reflects a view that status differences are important and accepted in society. Hughes (1971) argued that in a rigidly structured or high power distance society, jobs furnish both objective meaning and crucial connections between individuals and institutions and between institutions and broader society. This suggests that workers in rigidly structured societies are likely to have a stronger sense of pride and higher self-esteem when performing reputable jobs as part of a well-regarded organisation. Workers in large, nationally-known organisations will be held in higher esteem in these environments and this could provide a foundation for organisational attachment (Carmeli and Freund, 2002). Hofstede's cultural dimensions suggest that power distance is more salient to workers in Thailand than in the UK. Coupling this with the relatively high status associated with jobs in banks in Thailand relative to the UK leads to the hypothesis:

H3: Satisfaction with the work itself is more salient to the commitment of Thai workers than UK workers.

Table 1 illustrates differences between Thailand and the UK related to individualism/collectivism. Indeed, of the 69 countries for which results are reported on Geert Hofstede's personal website, Thailand is joint-fourteenth on the list of most collectivist countries while the UK places 67th on the same list. Hofstede (1994: 51) argues that members of individualistic societies are self-oriented and emphasise individual initiative and achievement while

individuals in extremely collectivist societies are integrated into 'strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty'. The high degree of individualism associated with UK culture and the low level of individualism associated with Thai culture leads to the hypothesis that provision of job conditions associated with individual achievement and rewards should be more salient to the commitment of UK workers than Thai workers. Specifically, the following is hypothesised:

H4: Satisfaction with the sense of achievement on the job is more salient to the commitment of UK workers than Thai workers.

H5: Satisfaction with pay is more salient to the commitment of UK workers than Thai workers.

The opportunity to use one's own initiative on the job and the amount of influence over one's job both capture elements of job design that are thought to improve satisfaction amongst workers. There is evidence that this is true in Western cultures, but these facets of satisfaction also reflect a greater degree of individual autonomy that may not sit well with employees embedded in a collectivist society with a high tolerance for power distance. The observed differences in power distance and individualism/collectivism between the UK and Thailand leads to the hypotheses:

H6: Satisfaction with the scope for using one's own initiative on the job is more salient to UK workers than Thai workers.

H7: Satisfaction with the amount of influence over one's own job is more salient to UK workers than Thai workers.

Method

The determinants of affective commitment are examined using data collected in surveys of financial services counter clerks in the UK and Thailand. This focus on respondents performing the same job means that intrinsic job satisfaction will be the same. Comparability of the results is further enhanced by the inclusion of workplace-level effects in the analysis, as there may be some variety in the way these jobs are realised at the workplace level. These workplace-level effects control for the impact of omitted variables affecting the commitment levels of all workers in the same workplace, including group-based incentive schemes, corporate HR policies and workplace locations. The focus on within-workplace variation of the attitudes of workers performing the same tasks allows a focus on the link between HR practices and commitment and enables comparison of these results to examine the way national cultural environments influence these links. The high degree of regulatory control over bank products restricts the range of products banks can provide, thus generating an environment in which employee discretion is the key differentiating force in the services of these organisations. Employee motivation to engage in discretionary effort at the customer interface can affect the level of customer loyalty which in turn has an impact on business performance (Gelade and Young, 2005). Hence, finding a set of employment practices that enhance the positive exercise of employee discretion in this environment

could secure and expand the organisation's customer base and associated income.

UK Sample: WERS 2004

The UK data come from employees working as counter clerks in financial services workplaces who participated in the Workplace Employment Relations Survey of 2004 (WERS, 2004). This survey was focused at workplace level, including an eight-page self-completion questionnaire distributed to up to 25 random employees per workplace. Respondents can be classified by occupation and by industry, thus concentrating the analyses on 305 counter clerks (SOC 4123) from 53 workplaces who list their 'main activity' as part of the financial services industry. This narrow focus facilitates direct comparison with data from analogous Thai employees.

Thai sample: Thai bank survey

Thai data was collected using a survey of clerks in the retail branch network of one of the largest Thai banks in 2006. The sampling approach follows the recommendation of Vijver and Leung (1997) to make samples as similar as possible on relevant background characteristics. The survey instrument was designed with the intention of drawing comparisons with WERS 2004. Access restrictions meant that the authors could only survey employees from one Thai bank. This restricts the cross-workplace variation in HR policies in Thailand, but it provides ample opportunity to observe variation in the way these policies are implemented and received. Given the unit of analysis (the employee), it is at this level that variation is required for investigation of the hypotheses. Furthermore, any range restriction introduced by the nature of the Thai sample is likely to make it harder rather than easier to identify support for the hypotheses. Difficulties associated with cross-cultural implementation of survey methods are well known (Harkness *et al.*, 2003). As such, the Thai survey relied on measures used in WERS 2004 which had been forward and back translated to ensure accuracy. The resulting survey was distributed to all retail branch employees in the Thai bank resulting in 1,378 gross returns: a gross response rate of 72%. These returns yielded 519 cases reporting all requisite data.

Measures

The authors use established survey measures of organisational commitment and satisfaction with HR practices from WERS 2004. This section begins with a description of the organisational commitment, and then describes the measurement of HR practices.

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment is defined as the degree to which an employee feels loyalty to the organisation. This approach captures a form of affective commitment to the entire organisation rather than commitment to a particular organisational unit (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The measure uses questions

from the WERS 2004 employee survey, where each respondent indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. A sample item asks for agreement with the statement, 'I am proud to tell people who I work for'. The properties of this scale in the full WERS data have been examined, in the subset of the WERS data used in this paper, and in the Thai data, and the scale is always one-dimensional with a coefficient alpha in excess of 0.83.

Satisfaction with HR practices

Satisfaction with a portfolio of employment practices can be used in combination to assess overall satisfaction with the employment relationship, or can be used as individual facets reflecting job conditions (Spector, 1997: 2). This study adopts the eight-facet measure of job satisfaction employed in the WERS 2004 employee survey, which is initially employed as an overall construct before examining facets separately. Survey items assess the degree of employee satisfaction with eight different job aspects. Respondents used a five-point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied' to respond to the question:

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?

- The sense of achievement you get from your work.
- The scope for using your own initiative.
- The amount of influence you have over your job.
- The training you receive.
- The amount of pay you receive.
- Your job security.
- The work itself.

This measure exhibits appropriate levels of internal reliability: the minimum alpha in our samples is 0.75.

Controls

The relationship between commitment and satisfaction with HR practices was estimated within an ordinary least squares (OLS) model including HR practices and a set of control variables identified in previous literature. These control variables include gender, age, workplace tenure, pay level and workplace fixed effects. Meta-analyses by Cohen (1992), Mathieu and Zajac (1990) and Meyer *et al.* (2002) suggest that gender, age and tenure are important to understanding organisational commitment. These demographics may be proxies for unobserved characteristics or circumstances tying individuals to organisations. They may also shape the ways individuals assess costs associated with making exchange investments and influence their willingness to make themselves vulnerable by trusting their organisations (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson and Wayne, 2008: 1087). Respondents were asked to indicate within pay bands how much they were paid as relatively high pay may increase feelings of self-esteem and induce higher commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990: 179). Other controls could have been justified, but the authors were constrained by the practicalities of designing a survey to facilitate both

organisational access and employee response. Workplace-level fixed effects were employed to control for any omitted variables affecting commitment levels of employees in the same workplace.

Data analysis and results

Descriptive statistics obtained from the UK and Thai datasets are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. All correlations with the dependent variable, affective commitment, are significant, ranging between 0.29 and 0.54. The correlations between the independent variables suggest examination of the extent of multicollinearity in subsequent regression analyses. The variance inflation factors associated with the regression models never exceed 3.45, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem. The mean levels of the regression variables in Thailand are generally higher than in the UK, though the mean level of pay satisfaction is higher in the UK (3.37) than in Thailand (2.97). Females comprise 72% of Thai counter clerks and 81% of UK counter clerks. The median counter clerk in our UK sample is 22–29 years of age, while in Thailand the median is 30–39 years of age. Median tenure in the UK is five to ten years, while in Thailand it is over ten years. Pay in Thailand is much lower than in the UK, with virtually all counter clerks in Thailand being paid less than the lowest paid clerk in the UK.

Hypothesis testing

This section considers the results of the regression analyses, as well as considering the extent to which they support the hypotheses developed earlier in the paper. Separate regressions are run for each country. These results are presented in Table 4. There are three regression models, each of which builds from the last. All of the models have adjusted R-squared figures above 0.366, and F-tests of model significance all show appropriate significance levels. Multicollinearity diagnostics are all acceptable. Table 4 reports standardised regression coefficients (betas) in order to facilitate comparison.

Model 1 investigates the relationship between overall satisfaction with employment practices and affective commitment. The model includes demographic controls (age, tenure and gender), as well as workplace fixed effects. The results strongly support Hypothesis 1, as the betas for Thailand and the UK are both significantly different from zero at conventional levels. It is also noted that the overall link between commitment and HR practices is of similar magnitude in the two countries, as evidenced by betas of 0.586 in Thailand and 0.543 in the UK. Relative to Model 1, Model 2 replaces the summated satisfaction with HR practices with the individual facets of the scale. Unsurprisingly, this results in a higher adjusted R-squared in both the UK and Thailand. Model 2 also reveals that the commitment of counter clerks in both Thailand and the UK is connected to satisfaction with the sense of achievement, but here the similarities between significant regression coefficients end. The beta for the UK (0.379) is 75% higher than the analogous beta for Thailand (0.216). In Thailand, there are additional significant relationships between commitment and satisfaction with job security and satisfaction with

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations for key variables from the United Kingdom (N = 294)

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Affective commitment	2.55	0.85	(α 0.86)								
2 Overall job satisfaction	2.73	0.66	0.60**	(α 0.83)							
3 Sense of achievement	2.51	0.94	0.54**	0.71**							
4 Scope of using own initiative	2.49	0.93	0.38**	0.76**	0.64**						
5 Amount of influence over own job	2.77	0.92	0.40**	0.77**	0.54**	0.73**					
6 Training received	2.82	1.10	0.36**	0.68**	0.29**	0.39**	0.42**				
7 Amount of pay received	3.37	1.15	0.37**	0.61**	0.28**	0.28**	0.32**	0.37**			
8 Job security	2.54	0.97	0.33**	0.53**	0.19**	0.21**	0.24**	0.36**	0.29**		
9 The work itself	2.53	0.95	0.50**	0.73**	0.66**	0.49**	0.47**	0.38**	0.35**	0.29**	
10 Involvement in decision-making	2.85	0.82	0.38**	0.66**	0.34**	0.47**	0.53**	0.44**	0.30**	0.30**	0.33**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations for key variables from Thailand (N = 519)

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Affective commitment	4.04	0.62	(α 0.75)								
2 Overall job satisfaction	3.73	0.56	0.57**	(α 0.84)							
3 Sense of achievement	3.91	0.76	0.49**	0.75**							
4 Scope of using own initiative	3.93	0.69	0.38**	0.69**	0.57**						
5 Amount of influence over own job	3.91	0.74	0.32**	0.66**	0.50**	0.64**					
6 Training received	3.78	0.84	0.34**	0.66**	0.45**	0.42**	0.38**				
7 Amount of pay received	2.97	1.08	0.29**	0.64**	0.32**	0.20**	0.20**	0.33**			
8 Job security	3.75	0.80	0.45**	0.72**	0.44**	0.32**	0.33**	0.40**	0.47**		
9 The work itself	3.83	0.79	0.53**	0.72**	0.50**	0.37**	0.32**	0.36**	0.41**	0.52**	
10 Involvement in decision-making	3.82	0.71	0.42**	0.74**	0.46**	0.48**	0.46**	0.33**	0.38**	0.54**	0.53**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Ordinary least squares regression analysis of affective organisational commitment on facets of job satisfaction and fixed effects capturing demographic factors in Thailand and the United Kingdom. The authors report standardised regression coefficients to facilitate comparison.

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
Country	Thailand		UK		Thailand		UK		Thailand		UK	
Adjusted R ²	0.366		0.452		0.413		0.489		0.440		0.493	
Signif. F	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
N	519		294		519		294		519		294	
Job satisfaction	0.586	**	0.543	**	–		–		–		–	
<i>Facets of Job Satisfaction</i>												
Sense of achievement	–		–		0.216	**	0.379	**	0.200	**	0.391	**
Scope of using own initiative	–		–		0.082		–0.073		0.128		–0.053	
Amount of influence over own job	–		–		–0.009		0.049		–0.021		0.046	
Training received	–		–		0.032		0.017		0.028		0.035	
Amount of pay received	–		–		0.015		0.175	**	0.064		0.162	**
Job security	–		–		0.182	**	0.079		0.198	**	0.087	
The work itself	–		–		0.250	**	0.119		0.232	**	0.090	
Involvement in decision-making	–		–		0.049		0.065		0.023		0.037	
<i>Control variables</i>												
Male	–0.080		–0.145	**	–0.055		–0.073		–0.058		–0.121	*
Workplace fixed effects	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Age band fixed effects	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Tenure fixed effects	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Pay band fixed effects	No		No		No		No		Yes		Yes	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

the work itself. In the UK, only one additional significant relationship is evident, and this is related to satisfaction with pay. Model 3 extends from Model 2 by adding self-reports of pay levels. These are included because there are reasons to suspect that pay levels might separately influence affective commitment, as the 'winners' in any system may be more positively disposed towards that system (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Also, the difference in the results surrounding pay satisfaction in Model 2 merit a check of the robustness of these results. While the inclusion of pay levels makes a modest increase in adjusted R-squared, the main results of Model 3 are essentially the same as those obtained from Model 2.

Discussion

Before turning to the broader contributions of this study, some limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional nature of our data precludes assessment of the causal direction of the relationships identified. While the authors have adopted the perspective that employee satisfaction drives commitment, this is not unanimously accepted. Currivan (1999) questions the existence of any causal link between satisfaction and commitment, and the literature on the link between HR and performance includes some support for the view that organisational performance drives employee attitudes (Chin-Ju *et al.*, 2010) rather than the other way around. Second, the data from Thailand was collected from many branches of a single bank. Idiosyncrasies of this bank may drive specific findings. That said, there is substantial variation in employee perceptions of HR practices within and across workplaces. Workplace-level controls are included in all these analyses, thus examining employee commitment relative to the average level within the branch, and this helps control for any workplace-specific or organisation-specific factors that might affect commitment. Furthermore, any problems associated with the selection of many employees from a single company would come through restriction of range in the survey responses, thus making it more difficult to identify significant relationships in the data. A third limitation of this study is the use of constructs which are drawn from the same survey instrument. This means that the results may be affected by common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The risk of common method bias is made smaller by the use of different scales for the measurement of satisfaction and commitment questions, as well as the separation of the commitment and satisfaction questions from the other questions in the survey. This forces respondents to consider other themes between the measurements of the other key attitudes in this study. Furthermore, analysis of the data passes Harman's single factor test, and this provides some evidence that common methods variance is not extensive in our data. The coefficients of interest are also being measured relative to each other, and as such the authors would expect any impact of common methods variance to similarly affect the levels of both coefficients rather than the differences between them. Fourth, some authors contend that Hofstede's cultural value dimensions lack methodological rigour (Javidan *et al.*, 2006), but other cross-cultural researchers have provided similar findings using alternative approaches (Triandis, 1994), and as such these results are unlikely

to depend on the specific measure of culture. Lastly, the onset of the global financial crisis (GFC) after the data collection has led to changes in UK labour markets. While this may have led to a transient increase in the salience of job security in the UK, the authors are unaware of any currently available data supporting this view. Previous evidence suggests that culture is very slow to change, even in the face of substantial periods of change (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), and this suggests that any short-term impact of the GFC may dissipate. It is not expected that Thailand is now more individualistic than the UK, nor that uncertainty avoidance is now higher in the UK than in Thailand, and as such the argument stands. That said, the authors speculate that there may have been short-term changes in the salience of job security in the UK post-GFC, and further research on this issue is warranted.

This paper presents evidence of differences in the links between satisfaction with employment practices and organisational commitment for counter clerks in financial services workplaces in the UK and Thailand. The focus on counter clerks, while ideal for illustrating the existence of important cultural and institutional differences in the links between commitment and satisfaction, precludes extrapolation of these results to a wider population. Future work should broaden the investigation to include other sectors. The focus on the UK and Thailand could be extended to other countries, thus allowing a more formal test of the consistency of these results with predictions based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Nonetheless, these results conform with predictions based on Hofstede's cultural value dimensions as well as documented differences in the labour market experiences and institutions of the two countries. It was hypothesised that satisfaction with the provision of job security would be more salient to workers in Thailand. There is strong evidence in support of this hypothesis, as the beta for the UK is not significantly different from zero, while the analogous coefficient in Thailand is significantly different from zero. The UK coefficient is also less than half the size of the analogous coefficient in Thailand. It was also posited that satisfaction with the work itself should be more salient to the commitment of Thai workers than UK workers because of the relatively high status of bank employment in Thailand, as well as the greater power distance associated with Thai culture. Again, the significance pattern in Table 4 reveals that satisfaction with the work itself is associated with the commitment of Thai counter clerks but not with UK counter clerks, and again the coefficient magnitude estimated for Thailand is over twice that for the UK.

The authors also argued for differences in the relationship between satisfaction and commitment based on the more individualistic nature of UK culture. Again, there is strong evidence in favour of these predictions. Satisfaction with pay is significantly related to commitment in the UK, but this relationship is not significantly different from zero in Thailand. Furthermore, the beta for UK clerks is more than twice that observed in Thailand. It is also observed that the betas associated with satisfaction with the sense of achievement, while significantly related to commitment in both Thailand and the UK, are meaningfully higher in the UK. Table 4 reports values of 0.391 in the UK compared with 0.200 in Thailand, and it is noted that satisfaction with the sense of achievement is the most important of the job satisfaction facets

connected with commitment of UK counter clerks. The authors see no evidence that satisfaction with the scope for using one's own initiative or satisfaction with the amount of influence over one's own job are salient to the commitment of counter clerks in either country, but collectively these results provide strong support for the idea that cultural differences influence the link between commitment and satisfaction.

Implications for theory, practice and research

These findings suggest a range of important strategic factors which should be considered in the design and delivery of HR policies and practices in different societies. Companies interested in pursuing commitment-based strategies will need to use HRM systems that work in concert with the local environment. One example of a commitment-based strategy is expenditure on training which would be lost with employee turnover. Another might be the devolution of quality control and other workplace monitoring issues to lower levels of the firm hierarchy, both of which require the positive exercise of employee discretion. In these environments positive employee affect is important, and a clear understanding of the drivers of these attitudes is crucial. The results suggest that the uniform application of policies in different cultural contexts may yield different results. Better results might be achieved in the UK with a focus on those elements enhancing the sense of achievement and pay satisfaction, while a focus on job security appears to be of greater value in Thailand. The need for local tailoring of practice has particularly strong implications for multinational organisations. These organisations face a tension between globalisation and local adaptation of policies (Rosenzweig and Nohira, 1994), but the nature of the demand for local adaptations has remained relatively unexplored (cf. Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2009), and certainly not in the context of Thailand. UK data collection was completed before the onset of the GFC, and as such, UK workers may now be more focused on job security than they were before: particularly in the context of the significant changes in ownership and ownership structure that have taken place in the retail banking industry. Further research could usefully investigate any changes in the salience of job security and other facets of job satisfaction to the affective commitment of UK employees, particularly in comparison with other countries.

Advocates of a best practice view might examine these results and ask why there is a focus on the differences rather than the similarities. After all, there are several employment practices to which counter clerks in the UK and Thailand seem to respond to in similar fashion, and the links between satisfaction with overall practices and commitment are of the same magnitude. A response to this view is that a truly best practice policy must be applicable in all environments, and while this article has shown that some of the facets of job conditions might be of similar value to employees the UK and Thailand, there is no guarantee that these same things would be of value in other countries. The authors suspect that a comparison of countries that differ on other margins would reveal other meaningful differences. Thailand and the UK were specifically chosen because of the large differences on the

individualist/collectivist dimension of Hofstede's framework, and also because of important differences in the institutions and history surrounding labour markets in the two countries. In doing so, accurate hypotheses were formed with regard to the dimensions on which there was an expectation of difference.

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