

**A theory of organisational attachment for skill discounted migrants
that recognises different work motivations**

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ABSTRACT

This paper revises Treuren, Stothard, Hutchinson and Manoharan's (2017) theory of skill discounted migrant workplace attachment to recognise different migrant work motivations. Treuren et al. (2017) proposed that skill discounted migrants would immediately adopt strategies to enable them to acquire a less discounted job elsewhere, leading to a specific type of organisational attachment. Based on a series of interviews with migrants living in Canada, Bauder (2005) identified four distinct and different motivations towards work, of which one corresponds to the motivation assumed in Treuren et al. (2017). We proposed two more, making for six migrant motivations. This paper sketches how differently motivated skill discounted migrants are likely to be attached to their employer.

Keywords: migrants, skill discounting, retention, embeddedness

Skill discounting is a feature of migrant settlement (Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton, Gabarrot, 2015; Rajendran, Ng, Sears & Ayub, early view; Reitz, 2001; Shirmohammadi, Beigi & Stewart, 2019). Skill discounting occurs when the accumulated qualifications, knowledge, experience, skill and overall capability of a job seeker is under-valued because of membership of a class of people differentiated by, for example, gender, age, ethnicity, migrant status, sexual preference, religious affiliation, disability, neurotypicality, compared to people who possess the characteristics of the dominant community (Esses, Bennett-AbuAyyash & Lapshina, 2014; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Bauder, 2003). The extent of skill discounting among migrants is not clear. We have estimated that approximately 10% of migrants in the first four rounds of the Continuous Survey of Australian Migration (Department of Home Affairs, 2018) experienced forms of skill discounting that oblige them to find employment in a new occupation (Authors, under review). The migrant adjustment literature has demonstrated that skill discounting can lead to people taking lower-quality and paying jobs within their existing occupation, taking jobs in other occupations (Creese & Wiebe, 2010), taking part-time work (Grant & Nadin, 2007), retraining (Chiswick, Lee & Miller, 2005; Fuller & Martin, 2012), or returning to their country of origin (Winterheller & Hirt, 2017).

Migrant skill discounting has adverse social and economic implications for individuals, employers and the community. First, skill discounting adds to the difficulty of migrant settlement. Migrants experiencing skill discounting are less able to find suitable employment and income, creating additional challenges to the problems of acclimatising to the host nation (La Barbera, 2015). Second, skill discounting means that the full array of skills available to employers and the community is not available, exacerbating existing labour, skill and talent shortage.

This paper is concerned with one aspect of the current understanding of skill discounting: how does skill discounting affect the attachment of migrant employees to their employers? Are these employees more likely to want to leave their employer when they have greater on-the-job link, fit or sacrifice embeddedness when compared to non-migrant employees? Does skill discounting have the same effect across the skill discounted migrant cohort? Employee attachment – as demonstrated in the job embeddedness literature – directly affects employee performance and turnover (Lee, Burch & Mitchell, 2014). Treuren, Stothard, Hutchinson and Manoharan (2017) have proposed a model to

explain the likely characteristics of migrant attachment. This paper proposes a substantial revision of that theory that recognises alternative migrant work motivations, as highlighted by Bauder (2005, 2006).

The Treuren et al. (2017) paper assumed, first, that migrants might have a different form of attachment to the organisation than non-migrant ('local') employees. Second, that migrants may experience skill discounting. Third, and the starting point for this paper, that paper also assumed that the behaviour of migrants could best be explained in terms of optimising, utility maximising behaviour, where skill discounting triggers job search and career development activity designed to obtain the best possible job given the employee's expertise. This assumption is consistent with the skill discounting (Rajendran, Ng, Sears & Ayub, Early view; Shirmohammadi, Beigi & Stewart, 2019) and over-qualification (Johnston, Khattab & Manley, 2015) literatures which hold the typical migrant to want the best application of their capabilities, will actively seek opportunities for the use of those capabilities, and will make decisions about their workplace engagement accordingly (Dietz et al, 2015). Driven by that motivation, the skill discounted employee would form a specific type of attachment to their current employer.

This paper recognises that this argument is applicable but only for *some* migrants. Bauder (2005, 2006) demonstrated that a migrant may have one of a number of different work motivations, and the strength of these motivations can vary substantially between migrants from different countries of origin and between the genders. Bauder identified four types of migrant motivation: employment as economic survival, employment as moral obligation and cultural expectation, employment as a means of social and economic advancement, and employment as a method of social integration.

This paper will, first, introduce Treuren et al.'s (2017) theory. We will then look at Bauder's framework and extend it to include two further motivations: first, employment as a means to obtain a satisfactory and comfortable standard of living; and, second, employment as a means to obtain permanent residency. We will then review and repudiate the Treuren et al. (2017) argument and then remediate and revise that theory, by sketching a model that identifies six different migrant work attachments drawing on the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001) to describe how migrants may be connected to the organisation.

This paper makes several contributions to the literature. First, it remedies the errors of the Treuren et al. (2017) paper. Second, and more important, it provides a corrective perspective to the skill discounting and over-qualification literature that assumes the existence of a single motivational type – the desire of an employee to obtain the best job, that uses all their skills – and proposes that employees may have one of several motivations to work. Such an argument enables a more nuanced discussion about the impact of employer skill discounting on migrant job choices and resettlement, and their subsequent employment attitudes and behaviour.

TREUREN ET AL. (2017). A THEORY OF MIGRANT ATTACHMENT

The 2017 paper assumes that migrants may experience skill discounting, which may lead to the employee being obliged to seek a job that does not fully engage the employee's pre-migration capabilities. Skill discounting occurs when recruiters and managers evaluate the skills of migrants as 'worse than those of locals, even if they are factually of the same quality' (Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton & Gabarrot, 2015, p. 1319). Authors (under review) has estimated that 10.7% of employed male migrants and 7.9% of employed female migrants have experienced skill discounting sufficiently severely to prevent obtaining employment in their pre-migration occupation. This figure is a conservative estimate: it reflects the experience of migrants who were obliged to obtain employment in a new occupation because of skill discounting. A substantially greater number of migrants will have experienced forms of skill discounting that enables them to continue in their pre-migration occupation but work at lower levels, not using the same level of expertise or recognition as a result (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010; Guo, 2009, 2013).

Unable to find a job that uses the skill discounted migrant's full capabilities, the Treuren et al. (2017) model then assumes the migrant employee will seek out ways to reduce the skill discount and a job that better uses the migrant employee's self-perceived pre-migration expertise and status. But the migrant is quickly confronted by two realities. First, the need to obtain an income to pay bills and to minimise the depletion of their savings (Creese & Wiebe, 2010). Second, that the migrant will need to undertake some form of development to improve the labour market valuation of their skills (Fuller, 2015; Anisef, Sweet & Frempong, 2003). The migrant takes a job to ensure their economic survival while seeking development opportunities.

Here the migrant seeks to acquiring experiences that would bring the skill discounted migrant's cultural capital into better alignment with the prevailing norms within the job seeker's occupational market. In Bourdieuan terms, the challenge for the employee is to deploy their economic and social capital to bring the job seeker's cultural capital into better alignment with the prevailing habitus of the job seeker's preferred occupational field. Here the migrant would seek to find ways of developing their set of knowledge, skill and attributes to better fit with the prevailing expectations.

For a migrant who is currently skill discounted, the current job is an interim stop on the journey towards a job with negligible skill discounting. Such a job would – first – satisfy the migrant's need for an income, and in so doing, provide the employee with economic stability from which to seek additional employment. A job also offers the possibilities to acquire social and cultural capital needed to reduce further skill discount. Treuren et al. (2017) hypothesised that for skill discounted migrants, a job has no inherent value beyond the (i) need for economic stability and (ii) the potential to acquire additional capital with which to bring the employee into alignment with the habitus of his or her target occupation.

It is this set of priorities that leads to the skill discounted migrant job seeker to a different organisational attachment, compared to the non-discounted migrant and the typical local employee. Local employees who are happy with their jobs are likely to report a negative relationship between on-the-job linkage embeddedness (OEL), on-the-job fit embeddedness (OEF) and on-the-job sacrifice embeddedness (OES) and intention to leave (ITL), for the reasons outlined in the job embeddedness literature (Lee et al., 2014).

Treuren et al. (2017) argued that skill discounted migrants will have a similar but different set of relationships to their current employer. First, the relationship between on-the-job linkage embeddedness (OEL) and intention to leave (ITL) will be stronger and more negative for skill discounted migrant employees than for non-migrant employees. This is because skill discounted migrants will see increased connections to people as opportunities to develop their social and cultural capital. This follows the argument presented in Kiazad, Seibert and Kraimer (2014) and Treuren (2017) that increased linkage embeddedness may increase the social network and capital of the employee. In those papers, the implication of that increased capital is the ability to neutralise adverse

work circumstances. In this paper, we speculate that the resource of increased social networks increases the capacity of the migrant to obtain better opportunities to develop their cultural capital, their on-the-job skillset as well as their language skills, improving their long-run capital. capacity of the employee to access organisational resources to improve the quality of their work-life – in this case, the on-the-job fit (OEF) and ITL relationship will be weaker (and possibly even positive) for skill discounted migrant employees than for non-migrant employees; on-the-job sacrifice (OES) and ITL relationship will be weaker (that is, more positive) for skill discounted migrant employees than for non-migrant employees (Figure 1).

Figure 1 here

Once the migrant is no longer skill discounted, Treuren et al. (2017) hypothesised that the migrant's attachment behaviour will follow that of the non-migrant workforce (Figure 2).

Figure 2 here

WHY TREUREN ET AL. (2017) IS (PARTLY) WRONG

Treuren et al.'s (2017) model represents a small leap out of the darkness, but it assumes that all migrants have the same work motivation, and thus, the experience of skill discounting is likely to lead to the same response. But studies such as Fuller and Martin (2015) and Winterheller and Hirt (2017) suggest that migrants respond to skill discounting in different ways. We propose that the migrant response to the skill discounting effect depends on their work motivation. Bauder's (2005, 2006) studies of the adjustment process of recent migrants to Canada identified four motivational types. Some are directly affected by skill discounting and some not. Of Bauder's four, one accords with the work motivation implicit in Treuren et al. (2017) and the broader skill discounting and over-qualification literatures. In the first motivation, some migrants were primarily motivated by *economic survival*. This type of migrant is driven by economic necessity and is likely to take the first suitable job that is available, as employment provides the income needed to provide for the costs of living,

even if that job does not use their skills or provide much satisfaction. Second, the migrant is prompted to work through *moral obligation*. In this motivation, the migrant is obligated to work to provide financial support for their family or to minimise their dependence on the host country's welfare system. Third, the migrant is determined to obtain the best job possible, and to quickly re-establish themselves into a social position equivalent to that experienced prior to migration. Bauder called this the *self-advancement* motive. Finally, work can be seen as a means to obtain social and economic *integration* into their adopted country. Work conveys both economic and social benefits. These migrants are concerned to develop their skills, as part of their strategy of fully acclimating to the host country.

Our fieldwork (currently unreported) suggests that two other potential motivations. First, we propose that migrants may be motivated to seek employment that enables the migrant to meet their expectations for a certain standard of living and personal comfort. Once that standard of living is met, the migrant does not feel obliged to find employment that better meets their skill-use needs or status ambitions.

We also propose a motivation where the primary motivation is to obtain the necessary conditions needed to convert a temporary visa into permanent residency. This requires either employer nomination (under visa class 186, 187) or the completion of at least a year of full-time employment. For these migrants, skill use, job satisfaction and income are relatively unimportant beyond the requirements of economic survival, as the employee compromises their personal wishes to maintain a job that will hopefully lead to permanent residency.

These six motivations sketch the motivation prompting migrants to obtain employment. Each reflects a different set of drivers and personal imperatives. Viewed from the perspective of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), each has a slightly different position in the continuum between external regulation and intrinsic motivation.

THE DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONAL ATTACHMENTS

If skill discounted migrants are motivated to find employment for different reasons we can also expect attachment to the employer of each of these migrants will also vary. In the case of local employees, the primary motivation is for local employees to find the best job that is available; skill discounting

does not occur and as a result, these employees are relatively able to find the best jobs enabled by their knowledge, skills and abilities (Treuren et al., 2017). For these employees, a better job is characterised by higher levels of on-the-job fit, links and sacrifice.¹ The higher the level of each of these, the greater the perceived value of the job, the organisation and the opportunity cost of leaving the job, and thus has a negative association with intention to leave. This can be seen in Figure 1. The justification and evidence for this argument can be found in the several hundred job embeddedness papers published since Mitchell et al.'s (2001) seminal paper.

We propose that each of the migrant motivational types will lead to a different logic of organisational attachment, and that those skill discounted migrants who possess different motivations will also report different configurations of on-the-job fit, links and sacrifice when compared to local employees. To keep the analysis process manageable, we will compare each of the motivational types against the hypothesised typical local employee. Table 1 summaries the organisational attachment of each type of migrant motivation.

Table 1 here

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated by economic survival

For these employees, the criterion is finding and keeping a suitable job, until a better job becomes available. Avoiding job loss is the central concern; issues of satisfaction are relatively unimportant.

We propose that an employee with this motivation is likely to have a steeper, more negative relationship between OEL than others: the more connection, the greater productive resources available to the employee (Treuren, 2017). OEF is likely to have a stronger, negative relationship than for local employees: greater fit represents greater connection to the organisation, less chance of losing the position through under-performance. We propose that OES has a stronger relationship with ITL in two ways. That is, compared to a local employee, the skill discounted migrant is less likely to want to leave at all levels of OES; while also being more sensitive to OES. This can be seen in Figure 3.

¹ Here we are following the literature and assuming that local job seekers and employees can be characterized by having a single dominant motivation.

Figure 3 here

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated by their moral obligation to work

These migrants are motivated by a perceived sense of duty that holds employment itself, and the consequences of employment such as an income, as an achievement in itself. The conditions of work, the utilisation of skill or the maximisation of status are not as important compared to obtaining and maintaining employment and contributing back to the family and community. Bauder's description of this motivational type indicates no necessity to obtain a job that uses skills (OEF) or achieves any outcomes such as social integration (OEL) or income. Thus, it is hypothesised that these migrants are likely to be primarily concerned to a need to remain employed, creating a higher level of sensitive relationship between OES and ITL. OEL and OEF are relatively unimportant for this motivational type, compared to local employees. This can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4 here

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated by self-advancement

Treuren et al. (2017) have described this position as having three characteristics relative to local employees. Link embeddedness (OEL) is hypothesised as having a stronger, more negative relationship with ITL. Here increased connection represents greater opportunities to develop new and better social and cultural capital, better enabling the future movement to a less discounted job once the employee has learned all the lessons that organisation may provide. Fit embeddedness also has a particular meaning for these employees: the greater the fit, the greater the over-competence in the job, prompting the employee to look for employment that better uses the employee's capability. Thus OEF is likely to have a relatively positive relationship between OEF and ITL, potentially with a positive correlation. Finally, and most significantly, OES is hypothesised to have negligible meaning for skill discounted migrants seeking a better job – and we assume that the relationship between OES and ITL

for this migrant type is closer to zero (if not indistinguishable from zero), than that for a local employee. This can be seen in Figure 1.

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated to increase their social integration

These migrants desire better connection to others, at work and in the community. Thus we propose that the key feature of this migrant motivational type is the relative importance of link embeddedness, reflected in the relative steepness of the relationship between OEL and ITL. A job with few linkage opportunities is less appealing compared to a job with high linkage opportunities. OEF and OES are relatively unimportant for this motivational type, compared to local employees (Figure 5).

Figure 5 here

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated to obtain a comfortable living standard

For migrants who hold this motivational type the key issue is obtaining and maintaining the job. Once the right job is found, the primary concern is to not lose the job. Thus, these employees have a high level of sensitivity of OES to ITL. And the worse the fit of the employee to the job, the less comfortable the job, and thus, the greater sensitivity of the employee to OEF. However, compared to the self-development motivational type or the local employee, the use of skills is not very important. Nor is the expansion of connections to people at work, beyond that needed to ensure conviviality, convenience and comfort (Figure 6).

Figure 6 about here

The attachment of skill discounted migrants motivated to obtain permanent residency

We propose that this motivational type is primarily concerned with finding and keeping a job where an employer will sponsor their permanent residency (PR) application. Thus for these people, maintaining the found job is very important: loss of the job may prevent tenure-based application for permanent residency or citizenship status. Here the opportunity cost of losing their job is greater than that of other employees – losing the job means either starting the arduous process of restarting their

campaign for eligibility for PR, or worse, having to returning to their home country. These employees are not especially concerned if a job uses their skills; or whether they are developing their capabilities, but they will be concerned to increase their fit and linkage if that will increase their chances of obtaining employer support for residency. Thus, sacrifice embeddedness is likely to be steeper, and the slope of OEL and OEF is secondary and less important than it would be for a local employee (Figure 7).

Figure 7 about here

Moderators of migrant work motivations

This paper has specified several new work motivations and sketched some likely employee attachments resulting from those motivations. In this section we sketch some thoughts on the factors influencing the work motivation adopted by the skill discounted migrant. Subsequent research will need to test and develop these.

Bauder (2005, 2006) found that that migrant adoption of the four motivations varies by nation-of-origin and gender. For example, Indian respondents were more likely to rate economic survival motivation items more highly, than Chinese and East European migrants and Canadian non-migrants, who all rated those items similarly. At the same time, women also rated the same economic survival items more highly than their male counterparts. Bauder's analysis, however, was incomplete, and was accompanied by a call to undertake more extensive data analysis that controlled for current wealth, stage of life, occupation, education and employment status. We need to investigate these boundary conditions.

We also propose that migrant work motivations are likely to evolve over time. Several motivations are more likely to exist soon after arrival, and some motivations are likely to arise once the migrant is more settled. Using the language of self-determination theory, as the pressure for external regulation eases, the migrants may move to more intrinsic and self-regulated motivations. The survival motivation is likely to exist for many migrants in the early months and years after

arrival. Over time, many will have found better jobs and circumstances and will then adopt other motivations. Once some degree of economic security has been established, the employees is then likely to be motivated by self-enhancement or the desire to attain permanent residency. In the third level, the employee will be motivated by more relatively internal and intrinsic motivations such as satisficing, moral obligation and social integration.

Discussion, limitations and conclusion

The early years of migration for non-sponsored migrants is dominated by the struggle to find stability. Finding suitable employment is central to this, with the migrant first needing to establish economic survival, and then to meet their broader family and personal goals, including the full recognition of these their pre-migration skills. A person with valued skills in their home country may find that these skills may have been enough to win a visa and the ensuing permission to restart their career in a new country, only to discover that these very same skills may not be recognised by employers.

A substantial literature has highlighted this phenomenon, and identified the consequences, and measures the hardship that sometimes follows. But, as noted earlier, this literature does not entirely explain how migrants deal with this situation. Researchers have identified a variety of responses to the existence of skill discounting. This paper, along with Treuren et al. (2017) examines one aspect of this: how the skill discounted migrant employee is connected to their employer.

Treuren et al. (2017) assumed that the skill discounted migrant would have a simple, consistent response: the migrant, full of energy and vitality, driven by ambition and frustration, would seek to find a suitable job that better utilise their skills and matches their perceived social standing. Until the skill discount was no longer applied to them, these employees would see each job as merely a stepping stone to a better, less discounted job, and an opportunity to cultivate the social and cultural capital needed to remove the skill discount. Thus, the desire to remove the skill discounting will prompt a pragmatic strategy aimed at removing the skill discount, and a particular form of attachment with their various employers.

Informed by Bauder (2005, 2006), this paper suggests that this approach may be applicable to some migrants, but not all. We have proposed that a migrant may have distinct and different

motivations guiding their response to skill discounting, and as a consequence, may have a different relationship to their employing organisation. In this paper we briefly sketch six different approaches. Four of these are based on Bauder's findings, and two are based on our own unpublished research.

This paper makes a very preliminary set of comments about what these motivations may be, and how these motivations might moderate the relationship between the experience of skill discounting and the employee's relationship with their current employer. We do not know how many migrants may be classified by the various motivations, nor do we know how these motivations evolve over time, and whether there are specific individual differences or situational factors that prompt or lead to the demise of specific motivational types. These are all questions for subsequent research.

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Figure 2. The skill-gap

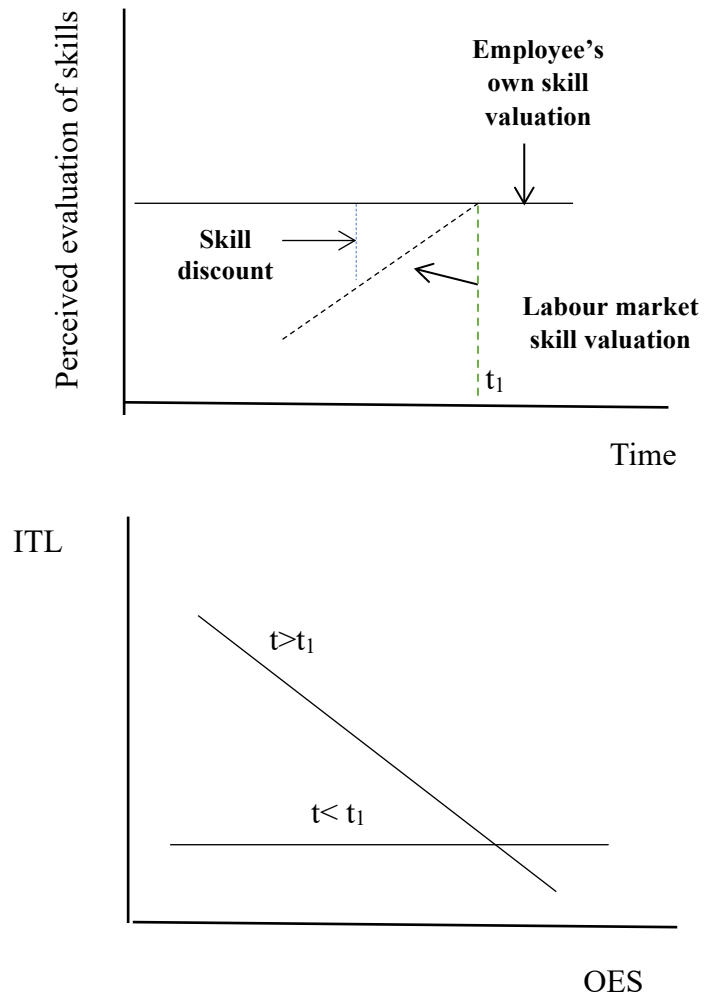
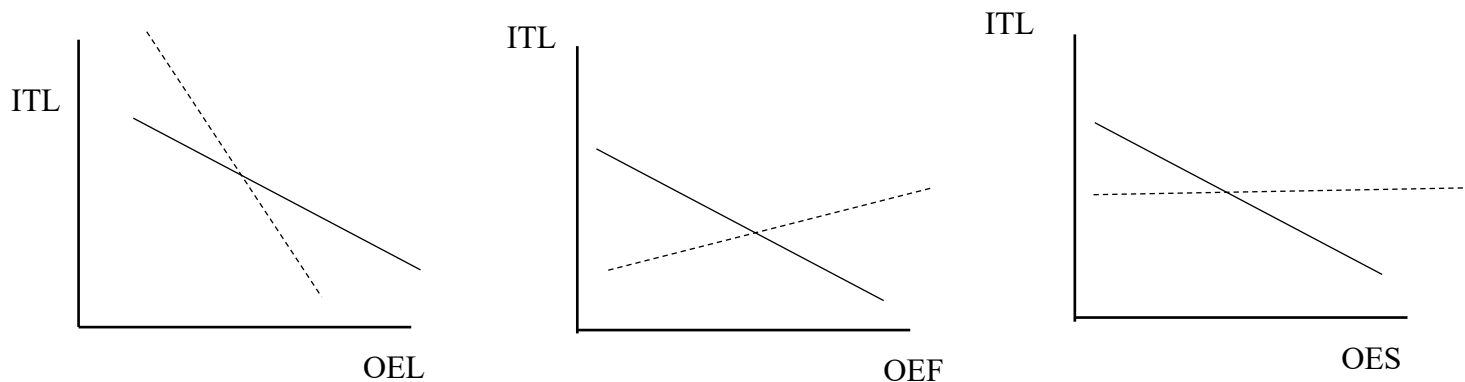


Table 1. Relationship between on-the-job embeddedness component and intention to leave by motivation

Figure	Work motivation	OEL	OEF	OES
1	Local employee	(-)	(-)	(-)
3	Economic survival	Stronger than local	Stronger than local	Stronger than local
4	Moral obligation	Weaker than local	Weaker than local	Stronger than local
1	Self-advancement	Stronger than local	Weaker than local	Weaker than local
5	Social integration	Stronger than local	Stronger than local	Weaker than local
6	Comfortable living standard	Weaker than local	Stronger than local	Stronger than local
7	Acquisition of permanent residency	Weaker than local	Weaker than local	Stronger than local

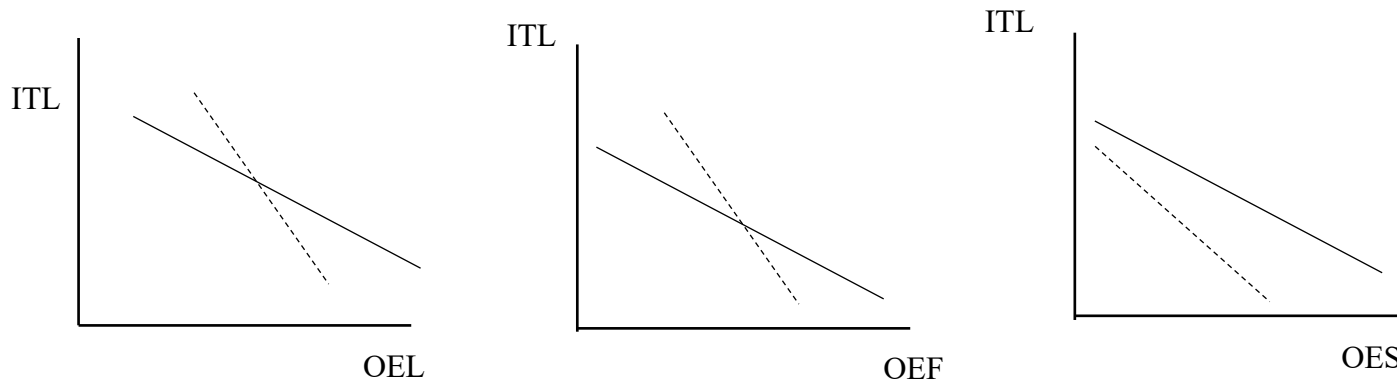
Notes: 1. OEL: On-the-job embeddedness Linkage; OEF: On-the-job embeddedness Fit; OES: On-the-job embeddedness Sacrifice;
 2. Stronger than local: denotes a more negative relationship between embeddedness and ITL; Weaker than local: denotes a less negative relationship between embeddedness and ITL

Figure 1. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components for local employees and self-advancement motivated migrants



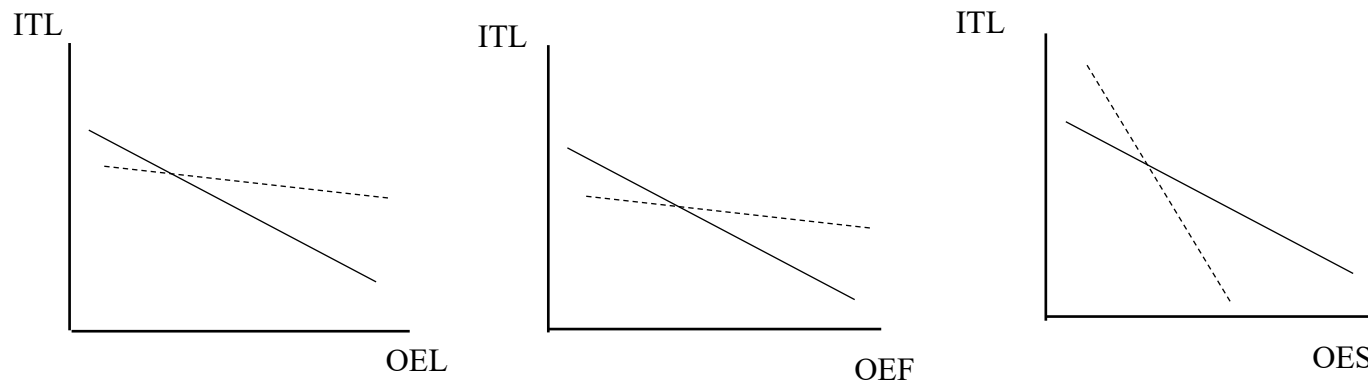
Notes: Migrant (self-advancement): broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness

Figure 3. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components for economic survival motivated migrants and non-migrants



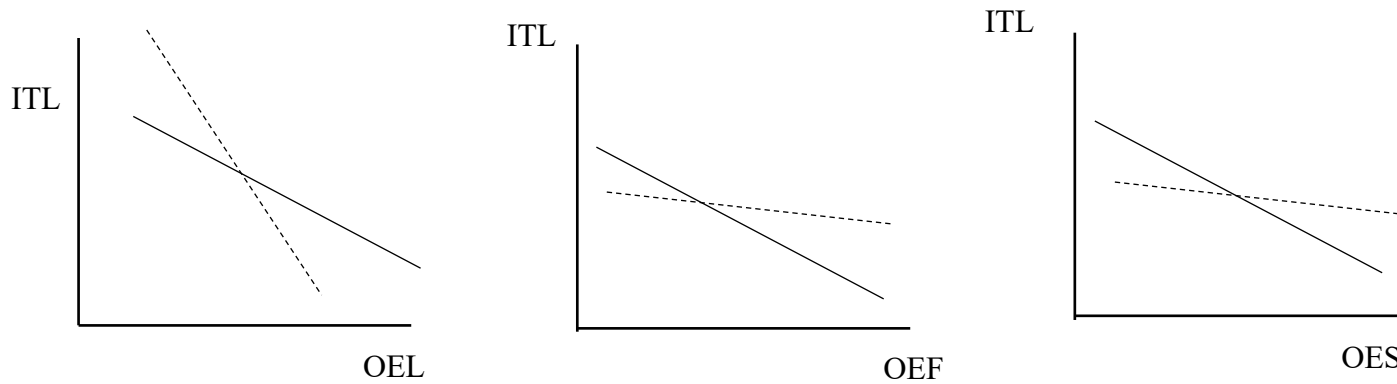
Notes: Migrant: broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness;

Figure 4. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components moral obligation motivated migrants and non-migrants



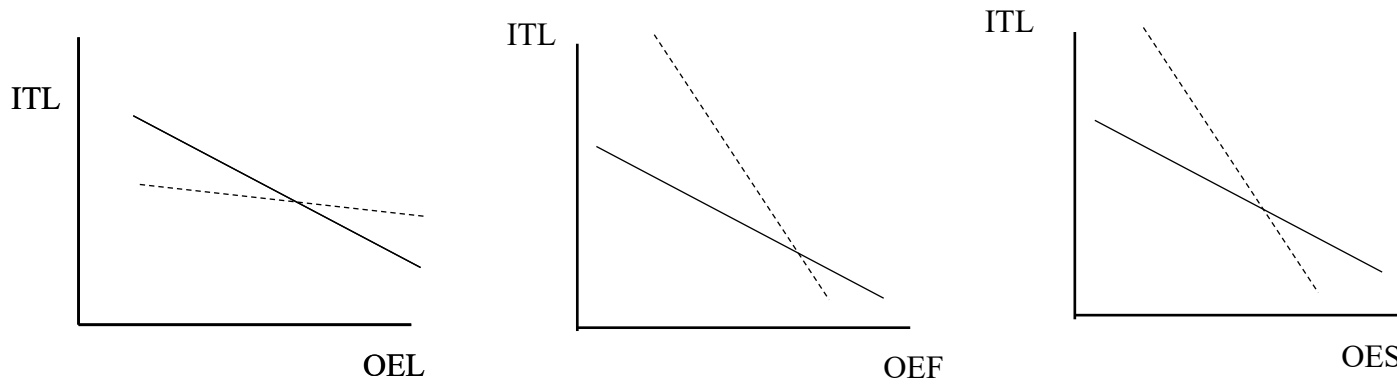
Notes: Migrant: broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness

Figure 5. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components social integration motivated migrants and non-migrants



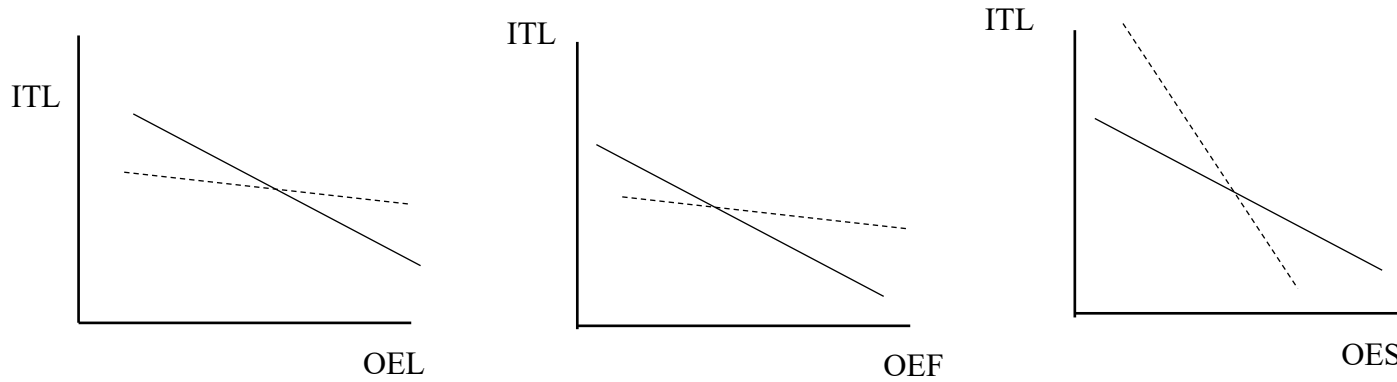
Notes: Migrant: broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness

Figure 6. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components comfortable living standard motivated migrants and non-migrants



Notes: Migrant: broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness

Figure 7. The hypothesised relationships between intention to leave (ITL) and on-the-job embeddedness components permanent residence seeking motivated migrants and non-migrants



Notes: Migrant: broken line; non-migrant; unbroken line; OEL - On-the-job linkage embeddedness; OEF - On-the-job fit embeddedness; OES - On-the-job sacrifice embeddedness;