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Cultural Identity Integration

Ting Liu[†] Tomoki Sekiguchi[‡] Wirawan Dony Dahana[§]

Abstract

In this study, we explore the role of functional and linguistic bridging in multinational corporations (MNCs) using a sample of 200 Japanese employees working in Japanese overseas subsidiaries. We draw on the social network theory and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to advocate the idea that bridging roles (functional and linguistic bridging) influence team-member exchange (TMX) and emotional exhaustion positively via the mediating role of occupational social capital and role conflict. We found that employees who possess low cultural identity integration were more versatile in moderating between a bridging role, team member relationships, and emotional outcomes. Our findings make a theoretical contribution in exploring bridging roles from both the positive and negative sides of international business. We suggest that although bridge individuals can lead to positive team member relationships, they can also signal emotional burnout stemming from role conflict. We also offer suggestions on how to recognize cultural identity integration as a resource in elaborating on bridging roles and mitigating negative emotional outcomes.

JEL Classification: M10, M14, M16

Keywords: functional bridging; linguistic bridging; cultural identity integration; team-member exchange (TMX); emotional exhaustion

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Today, multinational corporations (MNCs) are increasingly recognizing the resilience of individuals who have internalized and identified with more than one culture and language (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Fitzsimmons, Liao, & Thomas, 2017). These individuals are called *bridge individuals*, defined as individuals who have specific language skills acting as bridging roles between different language groups in MNCs (Harzing, Köster, & Magner, 2011).

Because of their multidimensional activities, bridge individuals have been seen as knowledge-transferring nodes, gatekeepers, conduits for acquiring resources, and influence agents (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Bridge individuals can take a variety of roles such as reducing the distance between individuals in a network and spreading information rapidly throughout a network (Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

In MNCs, bridge individuals in host country subsidiaries face cultural and language problems that employees in headquarters cannot address. Bridge individuals need to act in bridging roles not only among different teams and team members, but also among different languages and cultures. Language skills and cultural skills are resources for bridge individuals' roles (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014). Nevertheless, the way bridge individuals interact with others when serving their bridging role is still not well explored (Sekiguchi, 2016).

Functional Bridging and Linguistic Bridging in MNCs

Bridge individuals are likely to overcoming language barriers. Bridge individuals include expatriates, inpatriates, and nonnative locals and act as linking pins in MNCs (Harzing et al., 2011). There are various terms with similar meanings in the prior literature, such as *cultural mediators*, *linking pins*, *go-betweens*, *bridge builders*, *cultural brokers*, and *boundary spanners*. Bridge individuals can be understood as having the same function as boundary spanners in the multilingual and multicultural context. The scope of boundary

spanners is broader than that of bridge individuals (Sekiguchi, 2016) because they can be used in all constructs such as intergroup and intragroup organizations and to describe individuals facilitating interactions between two groups (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Callister & Wall, 2001; Richter & West, 2006). Bridge individuals focus more on MNCs with multilingual and multicultural environments. Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014) synthesized four boundary-spanning functions: information exchanging, linking, facilitating, and intervening.

Similar to other organizations, MNCs are made up of clusters such as departments or teams, and even clusters divided by age, nationality, or language. In the current research, we define clusters in the multinational companies into *rigid clusters* and *malleable clusters*. Rigid clusters cannot be changed subjectively such as in different departments in the companies. Malleable clusters are defined as fluid clusters that can be changed by subjective factors, such as language and culture clusters. To amplify the role of multilingual bridge individuals in MNCs without confusing them with the traditional bridges, we will differentiate the terms *functional bridging* and *linguistic bridging* in this study to describe the different roles of bridge individuals.

We define the bridging role that straddles rigid clusters as functional bridging and the bridge among malleable language clusters as linguistic bridging. Specifically, we use the term *functional bridging* to describe those employees who have a functional exchanging, linking, facilitating, and intervening role in the intergroup relations and between different divisions in MNCs. For example, the role of bridge individuals bridging different functional departments (e.g., marketing departments or human resources departments) is functional bridging. We utilize the term *linguistic bridging* to describe bridge individuals from the linguistic perspective, such as in the exchanging of information, linking, facilitating, and intervening among different language groups.

Highlighting the Positive and Negative Sides of Bridging Roles

In-group and out-group biases foster tightly knit cliques, and bridge individuals connect different clusters, making it a small world. We examine the role of bridge individuals working in MNCs from the positive and negative perspective. Bridge individuals straddle the border in MNCs (Fitzsimmons et al., 2017), and they act as *ties* and *bridges* in the network of organizations. We discuss how bridge individuals can shape intergroup relationships (i.e., team-member exchange) as the positive outcomes and emotional exhaustion as the negative outcome. We discuss cultural identity (i.e., cultural identity integration), serving as an activator and a tranquilizer on occupational social capital in social networks and role conflict as the job demands.

We aim to explore the interactive relationship between bridge individuals and others when bridge individuals act as a bridge between in-groups and out-groups. The purpose of this study is to establish the association between bridging roles and positive social exchange relationships (i.e., team-member exchange) and negative emotional outcomes. We aim to highlight both the positive and negative sides of bridging roles by referencing cultural identity integration as a resource. The way in which bridging roles interact with social exchange relationships and emotional outcomes within MNCs can aid both practitioners and researchers. We draw attention to the bridging role among different language groups and explore culture and language as resources for bridging roles.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Theoretical Background and Development of Hypotheses

We utilize social network theory, social capital framework, and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory to delineate the role of functional bridging and linguistic bridging in interorganizational relationships and the moderating effect of cultural identity integration.

Integrating the Positive Effect of Bridging Roles with Social Network Theory

Social network theory explains that bridge individuals act as a connection between clusters within the organization (Sekiguchi, 2016). Social network theory provides individual actors such as people, teams, or organizations with channels through which social interactions and exchanges occur. It also establishes opportunities and constraints not only for actors occupying specific positions in the network, but also for the whole network and different regions within the network. According to social network theory, there are many types of clusters, which can be different departments or ethnic groups in an organization (Cross, Parker, & Sasson, 2003). In MNCs, clusters include not only the departments, divisions, and teams, but also different cultural and language groups. Yip, Ernst and Campbell (2009) define five dimensions of boundaries in organizations: vertical, horizontal, stakeholder, demographic, and geographic. These types of boundaries can also be seen as a way of distinguishing clusters in the organizations.

A bridging tie is seen as a potential source of novel information, because bridge individuals are not assigned bridging activities as the majority of their job, nor do they devote the majority of working time in bridging roles, they always perform their bridging activities as part of their normal job (Harzing et al., 2011). Thus, bridge individuals can be seen as ties, connecting clusters in MNCs. They facilitate information spreading and diffuse norms and values.

Extant empirical research provides support for the association between social capital and social networks. For example, Lin (1999) defined social capital as access to and use of

resources embedded in social networks. Investment in social networks can facilitate the flow of information and provide useful information regarding opportunities. Bridge individuals as social ties can also carry more valued resources and even exercise greater power. According to social network theory, bridge individuals can be seen as connectivity in a network, carrying information, resources, etc. through the network (Moody & Paxton, 2009). Individuals' social tie resources and their acknowledged relationships can be conceived as certifications of the individuals' social credentials by the organization or its members. Therefore, bridge individuals have more accessibility to resources through social networks reflecting their social capital (Lin, 1999). We thus hypothesize,

H1a: Functional bridging is positively related to occupational social capital.

H1b: Linguistic bridging is positively related to occupational social capital.

Team-member exchange (TMX) represents an individual's perception of the exchange quality of his or her role in relationship interactions with other team members (Seers, 1989). Seers (1989) discussed the construct of TMX to represent the reciprocal exchange among peers within a team. TMX has been used as a team member's perception of "the reciprocity between a member and his or her team with respect to the member's contribution of ideas, feedback, and assistance to other members and, in turn, the member's receipt of information, help, and recognition from other team members" (Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995). Therefore, TMX describes exchange activities with team members in their shared role as team members rather than as unique individuals (Banks et al., 2014). TMX represents how individuals interact with other team members as they maintain team identity roles and focus more on the dyadic relationships among team members but not on individuals.

In organizations, individuals who make more of a commitment and facilitate more in social attachment contribute more in effective working relationships, can establish high-quality reciprocal exchange with other team members, and make on-the-job experiences more

enjoyable (Banks et al., 2014). Individuals who invest more effort into valuing high-quality relationships within the team will receive respect from team members (Banks et al., 2014). This will encourage some individuals to forge strong and harmonious relationships for TMX (Banks et al., 2014). Because bridge individuals are ties and bridges in organizations, they facilitate social attachment and contribute more in working relationships. They establish high-quality interactions within intergroup relations with team members via the resources they are embedded in, which can be seen as social capital. Thus, we hypothesize,

H2a: Functional bridging is positively related to TMX, mediated by occupational social capital.

H2b: Linguistic bridging is positively related to TMX, mediated by occupational social capital.

Exploring the Dark Side of Bridging Roles with the JD-R Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004) states that stressors in the workplace are produced by the relationship between two categories: *job demands* and *job resources*. Job demands represent characteristics of the job that require effort or skills associated with physical and physiological costs. Job resources refers to all aspects of the job that can facilitate the completion of tasks and reduce job demands. To interpret job demands and resources in the current research context, the JD-R model assimilates predictors of burnout (emotional exhaustion). Job demands include work overload, role conflict, and emotional demands that require effort and skills from bridge individuals. Job resources, on the other hand, represent all aspects of organizational characteristics that can facilitate the completion of the job and reduce emotional demands.

When bridge individuals act as bridges among clusters in the organization, not only do positive effects—as discussed above—occur, but negative influence also occurs. Because

bridge individuals perform their bridging role as part of their normal job (Harzing et al., 2011), when their capacity cannot meet the requirements from both their main job and their bridging job, the bridging role will cause job stressors and role conflict will happen.

H3a: Functional bridging is positively associated with role conflict.

H3b: Linguistic bridging is positively associated with role conflict.

Burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that frequently occurs among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). In other words, it is “. . . a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one’s occupation and doubtful of one’s capacity to perform” (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 20). Burnout is composed of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the current study, we focus on the emotional exhaustion dimension. When an inadequate dyadic relationship happens between the bridging role and the resources they have, role conflicts occur, as job demands can further intensify emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Thus, we hypothesize,

H4a: Role conflict mediates the relationship between functional bridging and emotional exhaustion.

H4b: Role conflict mediates the relationship between linguistic bridging and emotional exhaustion.

The Moderating Role of Cultural Identity Integration

Networks are increasingly seen as a structure of clusters of diverse individuals, groups, and organizations working collaboratively. The network approach targets the associations and interactions of members rather than individual attributes or behaviors. Key underpinnings of networks are composed of nodes and ties. Nodes represent the actors in the network who hold positions within the structure. Ties represent the relationships among actors who form the structure. Bridge individuals occupy key structural positions in networks,

affording opportunities and constraints on their actions. The social network approach advocates for individuals to be identified and provides information and materials on processing communication and interventions to amplify networking functions (Long, Cunningham, & Braithwaite, 2013).

Mok and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that bicultural identity integration influences who bicultural people interact with. Their research indicates that bicultural people with more integrated cultural identity interact with more host culture members to verify their embracing of the host country culture. Regarding the bridging role in MNCs, a highly integrated cultural identity will diminish the bridging role because bridging roles only focus on the mixing and blending of interactions rather than the dyadic bridging of both home and host clusters. In this situation, both the home country employees and host country employees will view bridge individuals as outsiders.

Adaptability and linguistic bridging are highest for individuals with the most inconsistent cultural identity integration (Fitzsimmons et al., 2017). This means employees who have a low cultural identity integration can straddle two cultures and switch the role being played as needed; therefore, low cultural identity integration helps amplify the effect of occupational social capital on TMX.

Emotional exhaustion is generally observed due to higher job demands and insufficient job resources available to employees (Hu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2011). Cultural and language skills also serve as key factors and resources in reducing emotional exhaustion. Low cultural identity as a cultural skill can diminish the influence role conflicts have on emotional exhaustion. Thus, we hypothesize the moderating role of cultural identity integration as,

H5a: The indirect effect of functional bridging on TMX, via occupational social capital, is moderated by cultural identity integration such that the indirect effect

is stronger when cultural identity integration is low, but weakens when cultural identity integration is high.

H5b: The indirect effect of linguistic bridging on TMX, via occupational social capital, is moderated by cultural identity integration such that the indirect effect is stronger when cultural identity integration is low, but weakens when cultural identity integration is high.

H6a: The indirect effect of functional bridging on emotional exhaustion, via role conflict, is moderated by cultural identity integration such that the indirect effect is stronger when cultural identity integration is high, but weakens when cultural identity integration is low.

H6b: The indirect effect of linguistic bridging on emotional exhaustion, via role conflict, is moderated by cultural identity integration such that the indirect effect is stronger when cultural identity integration is high, but weakens when cultural identity integration is low.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

We conducted a survey study with 200 Japanese employees (mean age = 46.41, mean tenure = 4.08; 69.5% were male) working in overseas Japanese subsidiaries through a third-party online survey administration company in Japan (China 27.5%; Korea 2.5%; other East Asian countries 10%; Southeast Asia 24%; South Asian 3%; Europe 4.5%; North America 13.5%; Central and South America 2%; Oceania 4%; others 9%). All of the participants were of Japanese nationality. They were expatriates from Japanese headquarters (48.5%) or expatriates from other countries (7.5%) and Japanese employees recruited from the host countries (44%).

Measures

All measures except for control variables, language interpreting times, languages spoken, and foreign language proficiency were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The wording of the items was slightly revised to fit the current research context and translation from Japanese.

Functional bridging. We measured functional bridging with a 10-item scale adapted from Ancona and Caldwell (1992). A sample item is, “I keep other teams/divisions in the company informed of my team/division’s activities.” We reworded the items slightly to the team and division context to fit the study. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.94.

Linguistic bridging. We measured linguistic bridging with a two-item scale developed by Fitzsimmons, Liao, and Thomas (2017) and a four-item scale modified from the data coding of Barner-Rasmussen and colleges (2014). The two-item scale included *languages spoken* and *language interpreting* items, which were, “How many languages do they know well enough to interpret for a college at which that language was spoken (including Japanese)?” and “How many times were participants asked to interpret in the past week?” The four-item scale was composed of the boundary spanner functions described in Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014): exchanging, linking, facilitating, and intervening. A sample of the original item is, “I intervene between different language groups to help them resolve language misunderstandings, manage conflicts, and build trust between each other.” Cronbach’s alpha for linguistic bridging was 0.75.

Occupational social capital. We measured occupational social capital with a six-item scale developed by (Ng & Feldman, 2010). The wording of the items was then slightly modified from questions to statements. An example of the item is, “I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.90.

Role conflict. Participants indicated their role conflict on a role-stressor measure developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). We selected a five-item role conflict subscale relevant to our study. The wording of the selected items was then slightly modified to fit the study context. One item sample is, “I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.85.

Cultural identity integration. We measured identity integration with a nine-item blendedness subscale from the revised bicultural identification inventory validated by Huynh (2009) and one original item that we developed (see Appendix for details). One item sample is, “I do not blend my Japanese and XXX cultures.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.68 (albeit marginally).

TMX. We measured TMX with a 10-item scale developed by Seers, Petty, and Cashman (1995). The wording of the items was then slightly modified to a declarative sentence from an interrogative sentence. A sample of the item is, “I am flexible about switching job responsibilities to make things easier for other team members.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.96.

Emotional exhaustion. We measured emotional exhaustion with a nine-item subscale from the measurement of experienced burnout developed and validated by Maslach and Jackson (1981). The wording of the items was then slightly modified. A sample of the item is, “I feel emotionally drained from my work.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.94.

Control variables. We controlled for age, gender, industry, and tenure years in the companies (including tenure working both in the headquarters and subsidiaries) because these factors can affect the dynamics of social capital and network in the organizations. We also controlled for foreign language proficiency. Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014) discussed language skills as resources for boundary-spanning activities. Because employees with high language skills tend to be language nodes (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999), they

can access more information from formal or informal interactions; thus, when employees have high foreign language proficiency, they can act more between host clusters and home clusters, within groups or without groups. They can bring more novel information from outside groups, which can enhance the relationships between team members and leaders. Hence, controlling foreign language proficiency is necessary. We measured foreign language proficiency (for both the local language and English) using a 10-item scale generated by Liu and Jackson (2008). A sample of the item is, “I rate my reading ability, listening ability, writing ability, speaking ability, and overall local language proficiency and English language proficiency as . . .” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.95.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to hypothesis testing, we first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012) to ensure that the seven variables (functional bridging, linguistic bridging, occupational social capital, role conflict, cultural identity integration, TMX, and emotional exhaustion) in the model had adequate validity. Because the original measures in this model consisted of many indicators, we reduced the number of indicators following the item-parceling approach used by Mathieu and Farr (1991). We reduced the number of items for functional bridging, occupational social capital, cultural identity integration, TMX, and emotional exhaustion to three factors. The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that the hypothesized seven-factor model would have a good fit to the data, ($\chi^2 [254] = 596.87, p < .01$; TLI = 0.90; CFI = 0.91; SRMR = 0.08; RMSEA = 0.08). These results provide support for the validity of the measures used in this study. Descriptive statistics and correlations of the individual- and team-level variables are provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

We used ordinary least squares regression to test Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 3a, and 3b. Functional bridging was positively associated with occupational social capital (adjusted $R^2 = 0.23$, $\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$; see Table 2), which supported Hypothesis 1a. As shown in Table 3, linguistic bridging was positively associated with occupational social capital (adjusted $R^2 = 0.16$, $\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$), and Hypothesis 1b was also supported. Similarly, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported because functional bridging was positively associated with role conflict (adjusted $R^2 = 0.15$, $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$; see Table 4), and linguistic bridging was positively related to role conflict (adjusted $R^2 = 0.10$, $\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$; see Table 5). To test Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 4a, and 4b, we conducted bootstrapping-based mediation tests using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). As Preacher and Hayes (2008) recommended, we estimated the indirect effect of functional and linguistic bridging on TMX and emotional exhaustion via occupational social capital and role conflict using unstandardized coefficients and a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to produce a 95% confidence interval around the estimated indirect effects. The bootstrapped indirect effect was significant if the 95% confidence interval excluded zero.

Insert Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 about here

Results revealed that functional bridging activity was associated with TMX, mediated by occupational social capital (*indirect effect* = 0.17, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.25]; *direct effect* = 0.28, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.41]; *total effect* = 0.45, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.57]). Additionally, linguistic bridging activity was associated with TMX, mediated by

occupational social capital (*indirect effect* = 0.16, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [0.06, 0.28]; *direct effect* = 0.25, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [0.10, 0.40]; *total effect* = 0.41, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [0.25, 0.56]).

Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported. In terms of Hypotheses 4a and 4b, functional bridging activity was associated with emotional exhaustion, mediated by role conflict (*indirect effect* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [0.04, 0.24]; *direct effect* = 0.12, *SE* = 0.09, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.30]; *total effect* = 0.25, *SE* = 0.09, 95% CI [0.06, 0.44]), and linguistic bridging activity was associated with emotional exhaustion, mediated by role conflict (*indirect effect* = 0.15, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [0.06, 0.25]; *direct effect* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.12, 0.20]; *total effect* = 0.19, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [0.03, 0.36]). Hypotheses 4a and 4b were supported. Together, these results provide support for Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 4a, and 4b.

Insert Table 6 about here

To test Hypotheses 5a and 5b, we began by examining the interactive effect of occupational social capital and cultural identity integration on TMX. We conducted an ordinary least square regression to examine this interactive effect. We entered occupational social capital, cultural identity integration, and control variables in Step 1 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$; Model 4 in Tables 2 and 3). In Step 2, we entered the interaction term ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$; Model 5 in Table 2) to the indirect relationship from functional bridging to TMX via occupational social capital, which explained significantly more variance than Step 1 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$; Model 5 in Table 2). In terms of Hypothesis 5b, we again entered the interaction term ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.10$; Model 5 in Table 3) to the indirect relationship from linguistic bridging to TMX via occupational social capital, which also explained significantly (albeit marginally) more variance than Step 1 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.34$,

$\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.01$; Model 5 in Table 3). These results provide initial support for Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

Insert Figure 2 and Figure 3 about here

To aid in interpretation, we plotted Figures 2 and 3, which had the expected directions as we hypothesized. We then utilized the method introduced by Hayes (2013) to test the simple slope at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator terms. As hypothesized, when cultural identity integration was high, the effect of functional bridging on TMX mediated by occupational social capital was significant and weaker (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [0.01, 0.24]). When cultural identity integration was low, the mediated model was significantly stronger (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.22, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [0.10, 0.38]). Regarding the mediated model of linguistic bridging on TMX via occupational social capital, similarly, when cultural identity integration was high, the mediated model was significantly weaker (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [0.03, 0.27]), and when cultural identity integration was low, the mediated model was significantly stronger (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.20, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [0.07, 0.37]). Thus, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported.

We followed the same procedure in testing Hypotheses 6a and 6b. In Step 1, role conflict, cultural identity integration, and control variables were entered (adjusted $R^2 = 0.22, p < 0.01$; Tables 4 and 5). In Step 2, results suggested after the inclusion of the interaction term, the mediated model (Functional bridging → Role conflict → Emotional exhaustion) explained more variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.23, \Delta R^2 = 0.01, p < 0.01$; Table 4) but was not significant. The mediated model (Linguistic bridging → Role conflict → Emotional exhaustion) explained more

variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.23$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$; Table 5), and the interaction term was significant ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.10$; Model 5 in Table 5), albeit marginally.

Insert Figure 4 about here

We examined graphs of the significant two-way interactions shown in Figure 4, which were in the expected direction. We then utilized the method introduced by Hayes (2013) to test the simple slope at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator terms. As hypothesized, when cultural identity integration was high, the mediated model of linguistic bridging on TMX via occupational social capital was significant and stronger (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.18, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.31]). When cultural identity integration was low, the mediated model was significantly weaker (*conditional indirect effect* = 0.09, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.21]). Therefore, Hypothesis 6b was supported but Hypothesis 6a was not supported. In summary, all the hypotheses except Hypothesis 6a were supported by the current data analysis.

Discussion

Across the empirical study in Japanese overseas subsidiaries, we found support for our hypotheses that bridging roles have mixed effects on emotional outcomes and team member relationships in MNCs. On one hand, both functional bridging and linguistic bridging signify occupational social capital in the organizations, which in turn is positively associated with TMX. On the other hand, they increase role conflict, which in turn is positively related to emotional exhaustion. We further demonstrated that these mediated effects were moderated by cultural identity integration. Especially, employees working overseas with low cultural identity integration were likely to promote occupational social capital and reduce role conflict. Below, we discuss the theoretical contributions and practical implications.

Theoretical Contributions

This study focused on bridge individuals and their bridging role. Bridge individuals were mentioned by Harzing and colleagues (2011), but the bridging role has not been explored deeply, especially not through quantitative methods. As we know, this study first utilized a quantitative research method to demonstrate the role of bridging in intergroup relations and on personal perception. We also categorized bridging roles from functional and linguistic perspectives, highlighting the bicultural and foreign language context. We probed this association utilizing social network theory and JD-R theory. The findings suggest that bridging roles have both a positive and negative effect. In terms of the positive impact, bridging roles can amplify intergroup relations such as TMX. On the other hand, bridging roles can also foster negative emotional outcomes such as emotional exhaustion. Our findings shed light on the question of whether there are any negative outcomes of bridging roles.

Furthermore, we delineated the moderating role of cultural identity. These findings highlight the significance of cultural identity, giving support to the idea that cultural identity can also be a resource of fostering the association between bridging roles and outcomes. We found that lower cultural identity integration can exacerbate the effect of bridging roles on emotional outcomes and team member relationships. This finding can be seen as the result of treating cultural skills as resources (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2017) argued that individuals who have a separate cultural identity are more likely to associate with different cultures and bridge networks. We provided further evidence on the argument that the straddling of cultures plays a determinant role in bridging interorganizational clusters.

Finally, language research is becoming incrementally prominent in international business. We conceptualized the linguistic bridging role as a new perspective to exploring bridging roles in MNCs. As one element of the potential research of multiculturalism and

multilingualism, we advocate the relationships between language-based bridging and cultural identity moderation.

Practical Implications

Our findings also provide practical implications for both the employees and companies. Based on our findings, we contend that bridging roles have a profound impact on intergroup relationships, and they may also have a negative impact on emotional outcomes. Employees who are bicultural or bilingual, or who are working in a multicultural or multilingual environment, can use our framework to help them recognize their attributions and functions in the clusters they belong to. We suggest that although bridge individuals can lead to positive team member relationships, they can also lead to emotional burnout stemming from role conflict.

Second, because emotional exhaustion can be fostered when individuals behave as bridge individuals and exert bridging roles among different clusters, especially when they have separate cultural identity, MNCs should also care about their employees' emotional and attitudinal outcomes in addition to their behavioral outcomes.

Third, because cultural identity integration can mitigate the negative effect of the linguistic bridging role and amplify the positive effect of both bridging roles, MNCs should offer insights for their employees to help them recognize their cultural identity. MNCs should not only offer language training for employees who work in multicultural environments, but also should emphasize the significance of promoting cultural philosophy and providing identity training to their employees. For firms based in their home countries that are trying to recruit international employees, integrating cultural training is also pivotal.

In the current research, we also controlled the host country language rather than only considering English as Lingua Franca because local language interacts more with local identity. Also, because there are many countries or regions where people cannot speak

English at a high level, local language domination is relatively high. For Japanese firms that have already established businesses overseas, learning local languages becomes significant. In those overseas locations, Japanese firms should adopt a corporate language based on local languages and cultural factors, but it should not be limited to Japanese or English.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

In the current research, our sample was Japanese employees working in overseas-based subsidiaries. Bridge individuals can also be foreign employees from host countries or other countries working in subsidiaries, or foreign employees working in the headquarters. Future research can extend the research range from host country nationalities to other nationalities.

In addition, we included cultural identity but did not include organizational identification and group identification. Because organizational identification and group identification also influence effective intergroup relations (Richter et al., 2006), future research can take further steps to explore the impact of group identification, organizational identification, and cultural identity on bridging roles.

Finally, the survey items of bridging roles were based on boundary spanning. Although the bridging role of bridge individuals is similar to boundary spanning activities, the focal point of bridging roles is different from spanning functions, especially when bridge individuals are in a multicultural context and when culture and language are seen as resources of bridging roles. Thus, future research might examine how to build a new, rigorous measure for both functional and linguistic bridging roles.

Conclusion

In this research, we looked at the pros and cons of functional and linguistic bridging roles in MNCs, utilizing social network theory and the JD-R model. Our findings examined the interplay of functional and linguistic bridging roles, emotional outcomes, and TMX via

mediations of occupational social capital and role conflict. We also looked at the positive role of low cultural identity integration, which can also be seen as a resource in fostering bridging roles and mitigating negative emotional outcomes. We aimed to build research highlighting bridge individuals in MNCs and to connect national culture to the language context in international business. Cultural identity and language should be included in the strategy loop of a company, and intergroup relations can be bolstered through bridge individuals. Companies should also beware of the negative emotional outcomes via bridging activities.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Functional bridging | 4.10 | 1.02 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Linguistic bridging | 3.44 | 0.92 | 0.71** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Role conflict | 4.47 | 1.13 | 0.36** | 0.28** | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Occupational social capital | 4.11 | 0.98 | 0.44** | 0.38** | 0.41** | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Cultural identity integration | 3.87 | 0.72 | 0.04 | 0.15* | 0.05 | 0.16* | | | | | | | |
| 6. Emotional exhaustion | 3.86 | 1.21 | 0.20** | 0.22** | 0.35** | 0.17* | -0.11 | | | | | | |
| 7. TMX | 4.48 | 1.04 | 0.45** | 0.37** | 0.35** | 0.52** | 0.10 | 0.01 | | | | | |
| 8. Age | 46.41 | 10.82 | -0.09 | -0.20** | 0.13† | -0.11 | -0.13† | -0.18 * | 0.08 | | | | |
| 9. Gender | 1.30 | 0.46 | -0.08 | 0.07 | -0.11 | 0.10 | 0.21** | -0.06 | 0.05 | -0.36** | | | |
| 10. Industry | 10.57 | 4.92 | -0.16* | -0.12† | -0.13† | -0.04 | 0.01 | -0.00 | -0.16* | -0.02 | 0.25** | | |
| 11. Tenure | 4.08 | 2.01 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.10 | 0.00 | 0.15* | 0.09 | 0.28** | -0.19** | -0.15* | |
| 12. Foreign language proficiency | 5.38 | 2.23 | 0.17* | 0.32** | 0.11 | 0.28** | 0.30** | 0.07 | 0.20** | -0.23** | 0.27** | 0.04 | 0.05 |

Table 2
Regression Analyses for the Positive Path of Functional Bridging

| Variables | DV = Occupational social capital | | | DV = TMX | |
|---|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
| Functional bridging | 0.40**(0.06) | 0.45**(0.07) | 0.28**(0.07) | | 0.29**(0.07) |
| Occupational social capital | | | 0.41**(0.07) | 0.56**(0.07) | 0.43**(0.07) |
| Cultural identity integration | | | | 0.03 (0.09) | 0.05 (0.09) |
| Occupational social capital × cultural identity integration | | | | -0.14† (0.07) | -0.16* (0.07) |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Age | -0.00 (0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) |
| Gender | 0.20 (0.15) | 0.36* (0.16) | 0.27†(0.15) | 0.18 (0.15) | 0.28† (0.15) |
| Industry | 0.00 (0.01) | -0.03† (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) | -0.02† (0.01) |
| Tenure | 0.05 (0.03) | 0.01 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.03) | -0.00 (0.03) |
| Foreign language proficiency | 0.08* (0.03) | 0.06† (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.01 (0.03) |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.35 | 0.30 | 0.36 |
| R^2 | 0.26 | 0.27 | 0.38 | 0.33 | 0.39 |
| F | 11.10** | 11.61** | 16.61** | 11.89** | 13.68** |

Table 3
Regression Analyses for the Positive Path of Linguistic Bridging

| Variables | DV = Occupational social capital | | | DV = TMX | |
|---|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
| Linguistic bridging | 0.34**(0.07) | 0.41**(0.08) | 0.25**(0.07) | | 0.25**(0.07) |
| Occupational social capital | | | 0.47**(0.07) | 0.56**(0.07) | 0.49**(0.07) |
| Cultural identity integration | | | | 0.03 (0.09) | 0.02 (0.09) |
| Occupational social capital × cultural identity integration | | | | -0.14† (0.07) | -0.14† (0.07) |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Age | -0.00 (0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) | 0.02**(0.01) |
| Gender | 0.10 (0.16) | 0.25 (0.17) | 0.20 (0.15) | 0.18 (0.15) | 0.21 (0.15) |
| Industry | -0.00 (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) | -0.03* (0.01) |
| Tenure | 0.05 (0.03) | 0.00 (0.04) | -0.02 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.03) |
| Foreign language proficiency | 0.07* (0.03) | 0.05 (0.03) | 0.02 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.00 (0.03) |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.33 | 0.30 | 0.34 |
| R^2 | 0.18 | 0.20 | 0.36 | 0.33 | 0.37 |
| F | 7.17** | 7.99** | 15.22** | 11.89** | 12.38** |

Table 4
Regression Analyses for the Negative Path of Functional Bridging

| Variables | DV = Role conflict | | DV = Emotional exhaustion | | |
|---|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
| Functional bridging | 0.38**(0.08) | 0.19* (0.08) | 0.04 (0.08) | | 0.04 (0.08) |
| Role conflict | | | 0.40**(0.07) | 0.41**(0.07) | 0.40**(0.08) |
| Cultural identity integration | | | | -0.31**(0.12) | -0.31**(0.12) |
| Role conflict × cultural identity integration | | | | 0.16 (0.10) | 0.16 (0.10) |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Age | 0.02* (0.01) | -0.03**(0.08) | -0.04**(0.01) | -0.04**(0.01) | -0.04**(0.01) |
| Gender | -0.09 (0.18) | -0.33 (0.20) | -0.30 (0.19) | -0.24 (0.19) | -0.23 (0.19) |
| Industry | -0.01 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Tenure | -0.01 (0.04) | 0.12**(0.04) | 0.12**(0.04) | 0.13**(0.04) | 0.13**(0.04) |
| Foreign language proficiency | 0.05 (0.04) | -0.00 (0.04) | -0.02 (0.04) | 0.01 (0.04) | 0.01 (0.04) |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.15 | 0.09 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.23 |
| R^2 | 0.17 | 0.12 | 0.23 | 0.26 | 0.26 |
| F | 6.71** | 4.24** | 8.21** | 8.38** | 7.45** |

Table 5
Regression Analyses for the Negative Path of Linguistic Bridging

| Variables | DV = Role conflict | | DV = Emotional exhaustion | | |
|---|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
| Linguistic bridging | 0.35**(0.09) | 0.25**(0.10) | 0.12 (0.09) | | 0.14 (0.09) |
| Role conflict | | | 0.38**(0.07) | 0.41**(0.07) | 0.39**(0.07) |
| Cultural identity integration | | | | -0.31**(0.12) | -0.33**(0.12) |
| Role conflict × cultural identity integration | | | | 0.16 (0.10) | 0.17† (0.10) |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Age | 0.02* (0.01) | -0.03**(0.01) | -0.04**(0.01) | -0.04**(0.01) | -0.04**(0.00) |
| Gender | -0.18 (0.19) | -0.37† (0.20) | -0.30 (0.19) | -0.24 (0.19) | -0.23 (0.19) |
| Industry | -0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.03† (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Tenure | -0.01 (0.04) | 0.12**(0.04) | 0.12**(0.04) | 0.13**(0.04) | 0.12**(0.04) |
| Foreign language proficiency | 0.05 (0.04) | -0.01 (0.04) | -0.03 (0.04) | 0.01 (0.04) | 0.00 (0.04) |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.10 | 0.10 | 0.21 | 0.22 | 0.23 |
| R^2 | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.24 | 0.26 | 0.27 |
| F | 4.82** | 4.51** | 8.46** | 8.38** | 7.75** |

Note (Tables 1–5). $n = 200$. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; industry: 1 = agriculture, 2 = forestry, 3 = fisheries, 4 = mining, 5 = construction, 6 = manufacturing industry, 7 = electricity, gas, and energy, 8 = information communication, 9 = traffic, 10 = retail, 11 = finance or insurance, 12 = real estate, 13 = catering or accommodation, 14 = medical care and welfare, 15 = education, 16 = composite service, 17 = hospitality, 18 = public officials, 19 = other; tenure: 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1–3 years, 3 = 4–6 years, 4 = 7–10 years, 5 = 11–15 years, 6 = 16–20 years, 7 = more than 20 years.

Table 6

Summary of Indirect Effects and Conditional Indirect Effects

| Path and Effects | Estimates (S.E.) | 95% CI |
|---|------------------|-----------------|
| Functional bridging → Occupational social capital → TMX | | |
| Indirect effects | 0.17 (0.04) | [0.077, 0.250] |
| Moderated mediation | | |
| High cultural identity integration | 0.13 (0.06) | [0.006, 0.239] |
| Low cultural identity integration | 0.22 (0.07) | [0.100, 0.376] |
| Indirect difference | -0.09 (0.09) | [-0.293, 0.054] |
| Linguistic bridging → Occupational social capital → TMX | | |
| Indirect effects | 0.16 (0.05) | [0.063, 0.276] |
| Moderated mediation | | |
| High cultural identity integration | 0.13 (0.06) | [0.031, 0.271] |
| Low cultural identity integration | 0.20 (0.08) | [0.074, 0.368] |
| Indirect difference | -0.07 (0.08) | [-0.253, 0.059] |
| Functional bridging → Role conflict → Emotional exhaustion | | |
| Indirect effects | 0.15 (0.05) | [0.060, 0.245] |
| Linguistic bridging → Role conflict → Emotional exhaustion | | |
| Indirect effects | 0.13 (0.05) | [0.043, 0.243] |
| Moderated mediation | | |
| High cultural identity integration | 0.18 (0.07) | [0.050, 0.314] |
| Low cultural identity integration | 0.09 (0.05) | [0.008, 0.212] |
| Indirect difference | 0.08 (0.07) | [-0.046, 0.218] |

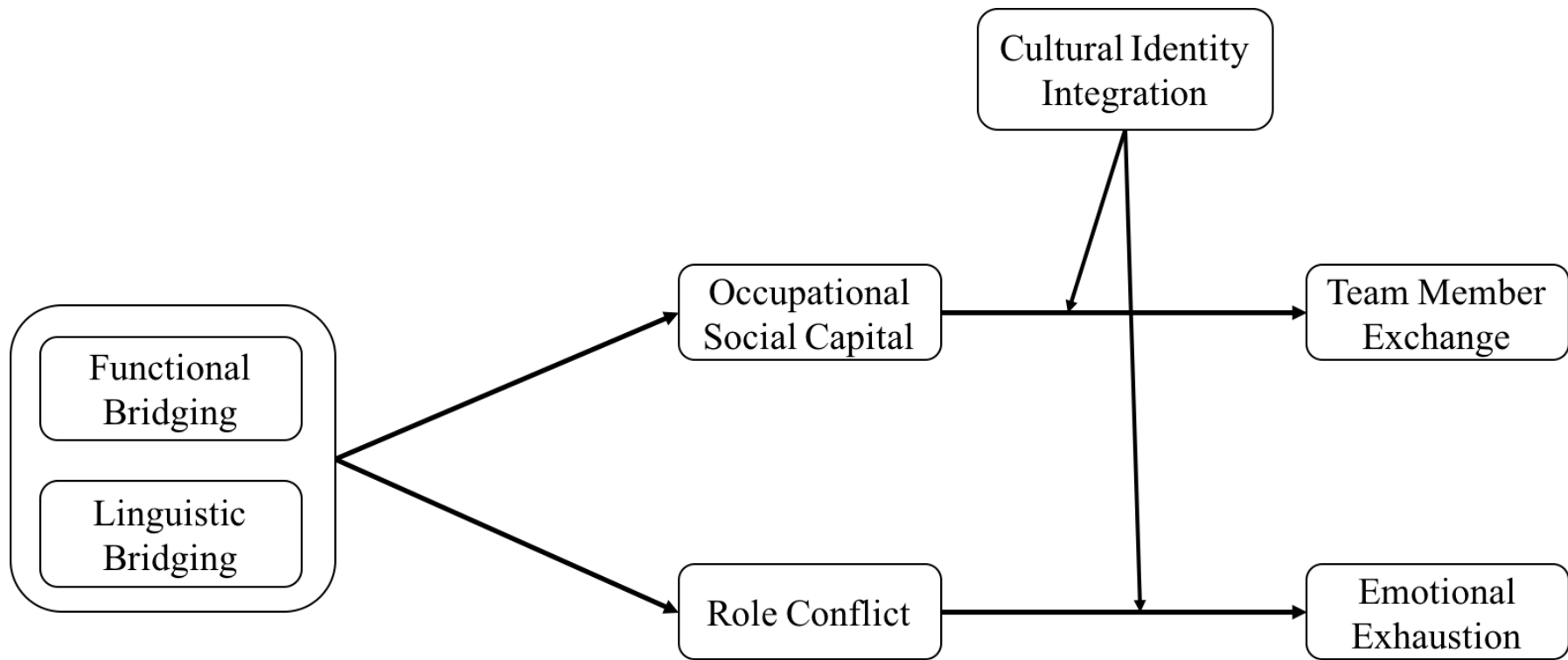


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the current research.

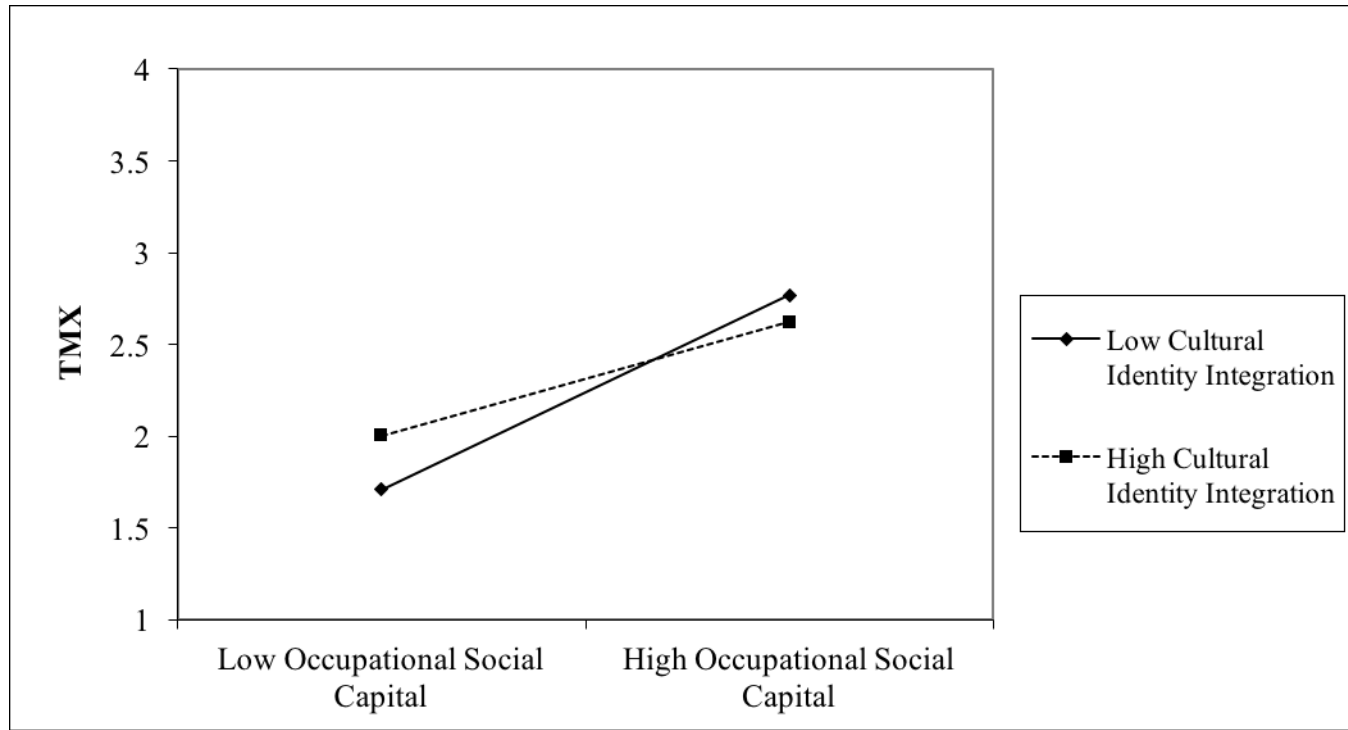


Figure 2. The interactive effect of cultural identity integration and occupational social capital on the indirect relationship between functional bridging and TMX.

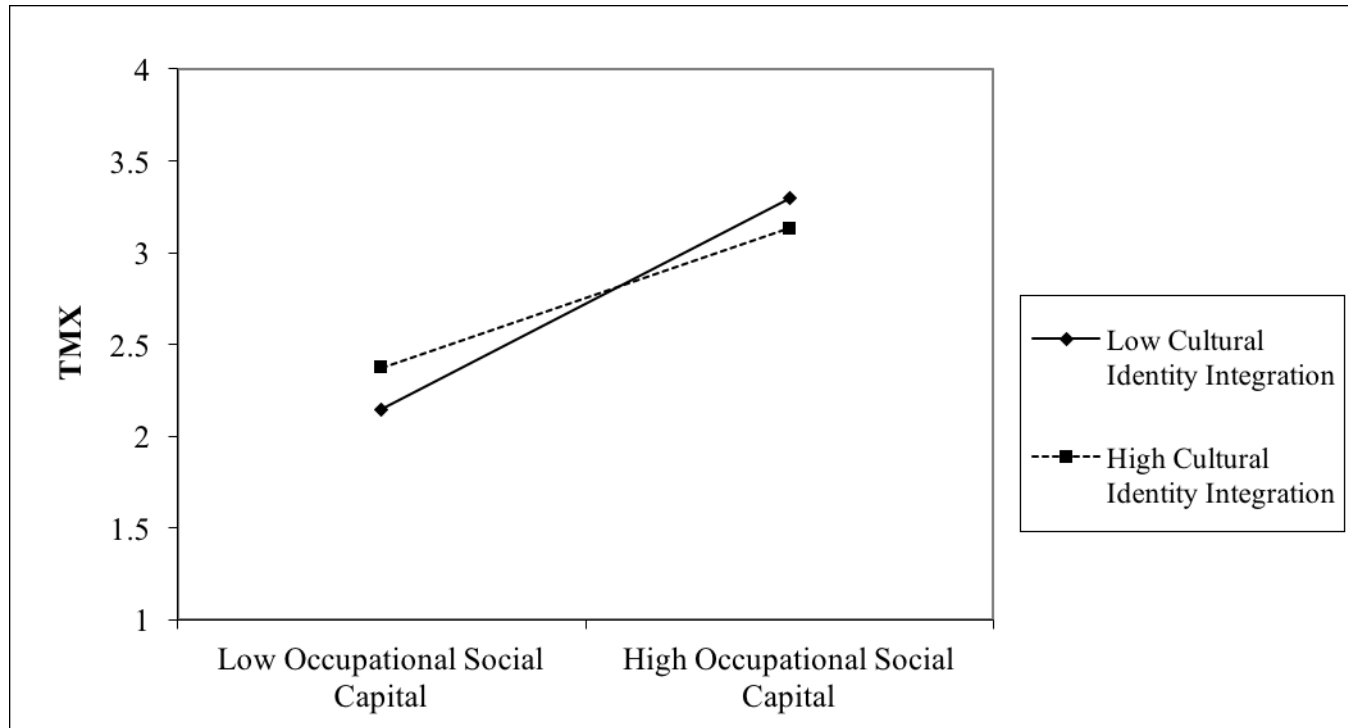


Figure 3. The interactive effect of cultural identity integration and occupational social capital on the indirect relationship between linguistic bridging and TMX.

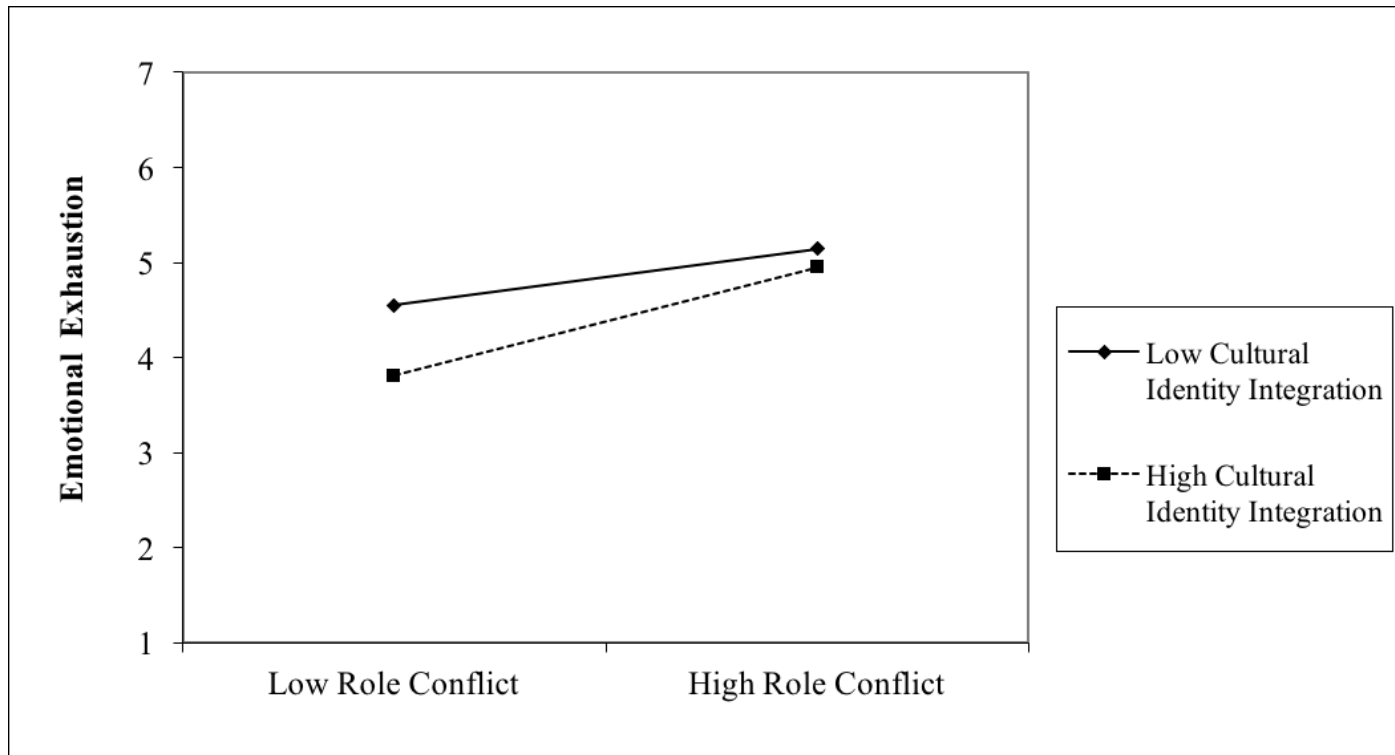


Figure 4. The interactive effect of cultural identity integration and role conflict on the indirect relationship between linguistic bridging and emotional exhaustion.