

Navigating cultural dissonance: the mediating role of emotional intelligence in collectivist adaptation to individualistic societies

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore individual workers' interactions with culture dimensions of the society that surrounds them as they perform daily work. In many contexts, there are significant differences between the larger society and individual subcultures. For example, collectivist subcultures living within the otherwise individualistic society found in the USA create a dynamic environment ripe for emotion. The question becomes: how can workers navigate this interaction between subculture and the dominant cultural traits to ultimately find positive organizational outcomes?

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a quantitative survey among 189 US-based workers claiming to be part of a collectivist subculture. A mediated model connecting collectivism, emotional intelligence (EI) and positive workplace outcomes (i.e. grit, resilience, affective commitment, sense of place commitment) is tested via the Hayes PROCESS methodology, allowing for direct and indirect effects results.

Findings – The results confirmed the mediated relationship between collectivism, EI and each of the positive outcomes hypothesized within the research model. The findings suggest that collectivists living within an individualistic society leverage EI as an important tool to translate their collectivist ideals into grit, resilience, organizational commitment and sense of place. Collectivist individuals can apply affective strategies for success in individualistic workplaces.

Originality/value – This study contributes new insights to the ongoing research on cultural identity, EI and workplace outcomes by demonstrating how collectivist subgroups within a predominantly individualistic society leverage EI to foster grit, resilience, affective organizational commitment and sense of place commitment. This research enters an unexplored line of investigation by positing that emotional abilities translate collectivist ideals into positive workplace outcomes, which has no existing theoretical underpinning to date.

Keywords Emotional intelligence, Affective commitment, Resilience, Grit

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Individual workers interact with a range of cultural artifacts as they perform their work duties and interact with colleagues. Cultural values shape how individuals interpret social expectations, manage relationships and respond to workplace challenges. While many



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studies see nations and cultures as single units of analysis, the concept of national cultures as homogeneous has been replaced by a more nuanced understanding that cultural variation exists within larger, dominant societies (House & Javidan, 2004; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012; Tung, 2008). These subcultural differences can influence workplace behavior in meaningful ways, particularly when individuals maintain cultural orientations differing from the dominant society. The question becomes: how can workers navigate this interaction between subculture and the dominant cultural traits to ultimately find positive organizational outcomes?

Although the USA is characterized as highly individualistic based on Hofstede's theory on cultural dimensions and more recent studies (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022), collectivist value systems persist within various subcultures often found in religions such as Judaism or Christianity. These religions are grounded in collectivist ideals such as prioritizing community welfare, mutual support, shared resources and communal life found in a common religious texts. In a setting like the USA, these religions can be thought of as cultures in and of themselves (Cohen & Varnum, 2016). These collectivist subcultures can be influenced by the larger culture (Cohen et al., 2005) and influence the development of the national cultures that surround them (Cohen & Hill, 2007). These ideas have important implications in the workplace.

Emotional intelligence (EI) may hold promise as a mechanism for navigating cultural workplace dynamics. For workers who hold collectivist ideals in the largely individualistic USA, they must find a way to navigate their cultural orientations within organizational contexts, which may occur through the deployment of affective abilities. The EI of workers has been shown as a powerful tool in a myriad of organizational contexts and as pathway to many positive outcomes (Miao et al., 2017; Winton, 2023), such as understanding, processing and directing emotions and the emotions of those around them (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). These abilities provide a foundation to decode and explain the heightened emotions of the environments they live and work in, allowing individuals to regulate emotions in way that support relational goals central to a collectivist identity when such identity is enacted in organizational contexts.

Relatively little research has examined how collectivists operate within individualistic societies or how EI may facilitate this interaction. Existing literature examines collectivism in cultures where those values dominate, leaving little understanding of how collectivism functions as a subculture. This gap is particularly relevant in the USA where collectivist identities persist within subcultural communities despite the broader societal emphasis on individualism. The present study addresses this gap to understand how collectivist subcultures deploy EI to mediate the workplace outcomes of grit, resilience, affective commitment and sense of place (SOP) commitment. To explain these relationships, this study applies the theoretical lenses of Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework, EI theory and cross-cultural adaptation theory. By examining collectivist identity within a highly individualistic societal context, this research contributes to the literature by highlighting how cultural orientations embedded within subcultures may shape workplace behavior.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Theoretical background

Few frameworks account for the cultural differences found between countries, geographies and among workers in organizations. Hofstede's (1980) model allows for a quantifiable understanding of cultural differences, providing a dimensional model useful for cross-cultural comparative studies (de Mooij, 2015; Oumlil & Balloun, 2017). Hofstede (2001)

defines culture in this model as a way of distinguishing the members of one group of people from others by focusing on the “collective programming of the mind.” This programming is related to the dimensions on a spectrum that measure masculinity versus femininity, small versus large power distance, weak versus strong uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism. Among these dimensions, the individualism-collectivism continuum has received attention because of its influence on social behavior, interpersonal dynamics and workplace attitudes (Liñán et al., 2016; Saad et al., 2015).

Individualism focuses on the self, independence and freedom with the goals for individualistic workers of personal achievement and initiative. Whereas collectivism focuses on group harmony, loyalty and consensus amongst group members. To date, the literature has focused on individualism, which is likely due to western cultures dominating the list of individualistic focused groups and individualism seeing a consistent increase across the cultures throughout the world (Santos et al., 2017). The difference between each end of the individualistic-collectivistic continuum can be found in the differing values or norms (Hofstede, 2001), the products generated from the culture (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008) and the socialization processes (Greenfield, 2009).

Subculture interaction. Researchers have defined a subculture as a collection of understandings, behaviors and cultural artifacts used by a particular group of people and dispersed through a larger interlocking cultural network (Fine & Kleinman, 1979). This process of unraveling the heterogeneity of cultures has seen limited investigation from organizational researchers (da Motta & Gomes, 2022) despite calls for culture-conscious management and the identified usefulness of Hofstede’s cultural model in the context of professional, organizational and religious subcultures within the borders of a larger society (Al-Khalifa et al., 2015; Hofstede, 1998). Based on the tenets of Hofstede’s model (1980, 2001), collectivist ideals may allow employees to connect with fellow workers on a deeper level, an emotional level that may not be possible without this collectivist subculture identity. When collectivists operate within individualistic organizations, workers interpret and respond to expectations that may differ from their own cultural orientation. This study posits that collectivists deploy EI as one mechanism through which they manage workplace dynamics.

Connecting with emotional intelligence

The emotional level of connection can be seen in the emotional abilities of workers. Cross-cultural research finds that culture plays an important role in the building and shaping of individual and group attitudes, values and behaviors (Yetim, 2003). Particularly, a collectivist orientation has been associated with distinct psychological and emotional processes (Bhullar et al., 2012). EI may function as a regulatory tool that collectivist workers deploy to navigate the societal norms, meanings of emotions and affective communication that differs between the larger society and collectivist subculture (Gunkel et al., 2014). EI is an affective ability that allows individuals to monitor their own and others’ feelings, to express emotion, to reason and make decisions based on emotion, to regulate swings in emotion and to productively use, maintain and improve one’s own emotional state while also managing the emotions of others (Winton, 2023). However, collectivism does not imply greater EI, rather it may increase the situational need to engage emotional perception, regulation and management to sustain harmony and achieve workplace success.

Cross-cultural adaptation

To understand the cultural aspect of collectivism discussed earlier, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory provides a foundational framework within which collectivist workers see themselves as

fully integrated and identified with a group (Hofstede, 1980, 2011). Within these groups and relationships, collectivist workers must lean on EI and the tenets of Mayer and Salovey's theory of EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). A final theoretical addition allows for these emotional abilities to be maximized in the cross-cultural context of collectivism and individualism.

Cross-cultural adaption theory (Kim, 1988) provides a pathway for collectivist workers to establish and maintain a stable working life via productive reciprocal relationships with the larger individualistic society (i.e. the host culture). Cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process that attempts to find an equilibrium in the naturally adversarial interaction between the subculture and host culture (Kim, 2001). The key to finding this equilibrium is an ability to see, understand and communicate in accordance with the norms and practices of the host culture, actively engaging in social processes.

Arranging these three theoretical footings provides a framework for understanding how collectivists' identity precedes and motivates the deployment of emotional abilities. Enculturation in a collectivist subculture provides a basis for positive outcomes such as resilience and commitment. As individuals sit within a larger individualistic host culture, collectivist workers may encounter cultural incongruence that necessitates active emotional regulation and adaptation (Kim, 2008). In this process, EI functions as a mechanism through which collectivist identity is translated into an adaptation. Throughout this adaptation process, collectivist workers must proactively limit any detrimental effects of the cross-cultural adaptation process to productively adapt into the larger society. This does not mean that a worker loses their collectivist ideals. Instead, by using EI, these workers can associate their collectivism with productive workplace and community outcomes. If EI functions as the mechanism through which collectivist identity translates into workplace behavior, it should also influence important organizational outcomes, such as grit, resilience, affective commitment and SOP commitment.

Associating positive outcomes

Grit. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) define grit as a passion and perseverance toward long term goals. An understanding of grit can be seen in the outcomes associated with grit in the literature. These outcomes include increased performance of students (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Jachimowicz et al., 2018), worker engagement and employee retention (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014) and worker performance and job satisfaction (Dugan et al., 2019). Together, these outcomes and the literature suggest that grit is not resilience following a failure, but a pathway to completing professional goals that have been committed to (Perkins-Gough, 2013). For collectivists in a larger society of individualists ripe for conflict, grit stands as a worthy outcome because of its protective qualities that support the individual in difficult times within an organization.

EI appears to function as the regulatory mechanism through which collectivist orientation relates to grit. The literature has exposed a positive relationship between EI and grit (Ain et al., 2021; Kwapisz et al., 2022). However, the nuance of this relationship taking the interplay of conflicting cultural into consideration remains elusive despite calls for greater understanding (Datu et al., 2018; Kim & Lee, 2022). An understanding of EI, supplemented by a cross-cultural adaptation framework, provides a pathway to understanding this nuance. When collectivist workers experience conflict, they may be motivated to engage EI as a regulatory resource to manage emotions. Said another way, workers can engage their EI abilities to render collectivist ideals into a consistent passion and perseverance inherent in grit:

H1. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between collectivism and grit.

Resilience. Resilience is a state of psychological capacity to rebound from adversity and failure (Luthans, 2002). Resilient workers not only recover from conflict or other hardships that generate stress (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), they emerge from these stressful situations with added confidence in working through future challenges (Bal, 2020). Collectivist orientation may motivate workers to prioritize this positive outcome of resilience because of their underlying ideals of loyalty and commitment to organizations (Rego & Cunha, 2009). Collectivists are willing to adopt organizational goals and citizenship roles (Murphy et al., 2006) and feel more secure in uncertainty (Love, 2007), leading to a resilient state.

Still, there is likely a mapping mechanism from these collectivist ideals to resilience. The literature shows a positive relationship between EI and resilience (Bande et al., 2015). The basis for this relationship is intuitive, as emotionally intelligent workers leverage their ability to limit emotional swings and stress to build resilient qualities (i.e. stress alleviation, reduced turnover, intention to leave) (Bande et al., 2015). However, the connection between collectivist tendencies and resilience is less obvious. These emotional abilities may allow collectivists to unlock positive outcomes seen in the bivariate relationship (e.g. commitment, organizational citizenship behavior) while also empowering them to refrain from deviant behaviors as they endeavor to appear prosocial, care for intimate social ties and commit to their group identity (Miao et al., 2020). As collectivist workers focus on building relationships and harmony amongst coworkers, they may be more likely to engage emotional competencies to manage interpersonal dynamics effectively. The activation of EI allows these workers to engage in productive emotions, limit detrimental emotional displays and cope with the demands of the workplace (Bar-On, 1997):

H2. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between collectivism and resilience.

Affective commitment. The literature constructs organizational commitment with three dimensions based on attitudinal and behavioral theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Yet, continued investigations of organizational commitment have focused on the attitudinal component, affective commitment (Mercurio, 2015). Continuing this conversation, this research concentrates on this dimension of organizational commitment shown to strongly and positively relate to a range of other positive workplace outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002) and defines affective commitment as an emotional attachment to the organization as workers identify and involve themselves in organizational goals and strategies (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mercurio, 2015).

With this definition in hand, it is important to link affective commitment to collectivist ideals. Collectivism focuses on cooperation with a selfless consideration of social support and motivating others. In line with this focus, meta-analysis highlights experiences such as leadership behaviors, procedural justice and organizational support, among other social experience variables, represent primary antecedents of affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). Socialization processes and interpersonal relationships can positively impact a worker's commitment to their organization (Bauer et al., 2007; Morrow, 2011). However, there may be more to this process than a simple bivariate relationship. The evidence hints at collectivist tendencies requiring conversion into affective commitment, as workers must first perceive their organization and the people they work with as supportive to "buy-in" and commit (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Whitener, 2001). These collective-focused workers may rely more heavily on emotional regulation when navigating individualistic organizational environments. The worker can regulate the rollercoaster effect associated with affective workplace events through flexibility and an ability to recover, shaping their attitudes based on their "we" identity and the limiting of negative emotions in response to the natural

stressors of the workplace (Winton, 2023). With EI fully deployed, the result is association of collectivism with affective engagement and commitment:

H3. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between collectivism and affective commitment.

SOP commitment. Commitment to an organization often goes beyond this specific organizational aspect to include the place within which a worker lives and works. This general relationship between a person and the environment surrounding them refers to a worker's SOP. SOP encompasses several concepts of environmental psychology, including dependence, attachment and identity (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). These psychological factors shape the worker's attitudes toward the setting via conative, cognitive and affective similar to those found in organizational commitment. This study proposes a similar association of collectivism to this commitment to the place a person lives and works.

Taking an attitudinal approach to SOP, where attitudes of commitment are shaped by a worker's place identity, place attachment and place dependence, provides an emphasis on place as a center of emotional meaning. The place becomes focused on human emotion and relationships (Tuan, 1979). Ryden (1993) expands this idea to emphasize that people respond to a particular landscape because of the people living and working in this landscape. This response is a convergence of cognition, action and emotion (Canter, 1997) that necessitates emotional abilities to convert one's personal identity into a place identity. A collectivist identity based on a complex interaction of ideas, beliefs, skills, values and feelings, which are often in conflict with the larger host culture, adds complication to developing a commitment to place. The development of place attachment and place dependence requires socialization and a support of a worker's well-being (Tian & Wise, 2025). Collectivists would inherently support these types of actions, whereas individualists surrounding them in the place they live and work would not be naturally predisposed to this supportive and sacrificial mentality. Therefore, a nuanced association between collectivism and SOP based on identity, social conscience and workplace characteristics must be formed (Liu, 2015). Workers can use their ability to productively process emotions and positively influence the emotions of others to make this connection, adapting to the affective events surrounding them to generate the close and high-quality interactions they naturally seek and that produces a commitment to a place (Cropanzano et al., 2017):

H4. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between collectivism and sense of place commitment.

Methodology

Sample

The collection of data for this study was performed via an online panel (Winton & Sabol, 2022). The population targeted in this data collection included workers over the age of 18 who live and are actively working within the USA. Additionally, the population focused on those workers claiming a collectivist affiliation via their religious background. Specifically, respondents were drawn from those workers affiliated with the Christian faith tradition. The USA represents a country with a high concentration of citizens taking part in religions based on collectivist ideals, particularly the Christian faith tradition (Pew Research Center, 2024). The Pew Research Center (2024) finds that 62% of the US population claim a Christian religious background, with 86% reporting that their religion is very or somewhat important in their lives. These characteristics of this study population make it an effective target for

collecting a sample of workers who share a collectivist background while also living and working within a larger individualistic culture in the USA. Upon completion of data collection within this population, a total of 189 respondents made up the final sample.

The sample represents a typically aged worker with 57.7% being aged between 25 and 44 years old. Responses were distributed fairly evenly between male (46.0%) and female (54.0%), with the majority of the respondents representing the Caucasian or White race category (70.4%). Further, the largest category of education level was represented by those respondents with at least a bachelor's degree (78.8%).

Measures

The CVSCALE (Yoo et al., 2011) and its six items were used to collect measures of collectivism. The items are measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Workers were asked to report on their collectivist predispositions by evaluating statements such as, "Group welfare is more important than individual rewards."

The perceptions of respondents regarding their emotional abilities (i.e. EI) was evaluated with WLEIS (Wong & Law, 2002). Perceptions were based on 16 items such as "I am a good observer of others' emotions" and "I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally" that allow for the measurement of four dimensions of EI. These perceptions were measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*.

The Grit-S Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) measured two dimensions of grit with eight items. Both perseverance and consistency of interest items were included with statements such as "I finish whatever I begin" and "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one," respectively. Respondents used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *not at all like me* to 5 *very much like me* for this scale.

An understanding of the workers ability to bounce back, or otherwise, to recover from stress was measured with the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008). The scale uses a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Items included in the scale included "It does not take me long to recover from stressful events" and "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble."

The Affective Commitment Scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990) was used to measure workers' affective commitment to their organization. Responses recorded on a seven-point Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 7 indicating *strongly agree*, measured items such as "I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization" and "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own." Both normally and reverse-scored items were included in the scale.

Finally, workers' SOP was measured with an object-modified scale by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001). Using 12 items on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*, the scale evaluates three dimensions of SOP. These dimensions include place identity, place attachment and place dependence. Items such as "My community is the best place for doing the things that I enjoy most" and "Everything about my community is a reflection of me" are included in the scale. Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations and Cronbach's alpha for each of the study variables outlined herein are found in Table 1.

Before performing hypothesis testing, an examination for potential common method bias was performed. The goal of this assessment was to eliminate suggestions that common method variance significantly influences the results due to the self-report and single-source limitations inherent in the data. The results of a Harman's single-factor test showed that the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's α coefficients of all variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1. COL	0.896						3.442	0.914
2. EI	0.252**	0.939					5.765	0.786
3. GRIT	0.080	0.570**	0.874				3.729	0.820
4. RES	0.119	0.556**	0.509**	0.830			3.602	0.821
5. AFCM	0.180*	0.369**	0.294**	0.367**	0.850		4.908	1.167
6. SOPC	0.255**	0.398**	0.358**	0.218**	0.444**	0.874	3.489	0.750

Note(s): $n = 189$. **Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$, *Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$. Diagonal values correspond to the Cronbach's alphas of the constructs; COL = collectivism; EI = emotional intelligence; RES = resilience; AFCM = affective commitment; SOPC = sense of place commitment; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

single factor explained 27% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold that would indicate common method bias (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019).

Hypothesis testing in this study was done via the Hayes (2018) PROCESS tool. This OLS regression based statistical analysis uses a bootstrap method, allowing for both direct and indirect effects of a mediated relationship to be tested simultaneously. Mediation models using PROCESS Model 4 allowed for the testing of multiple mediation in line with hypotheses. To qualify the data for regression analysis, the data was assessed for linearity, independence of observations, outliers, homoscedasticity of residuals, multicollinearity and normality. Independence of residuals was confirmed by a Durbin–Watson statistic of 2.126. No evidence of multicollinearity was found with tolerance values greater than 0.1. A lack of collinearity issues was found with VIF less than 10 between variables. The assumption of normality was met by assessing a Q-Q Plot. Further, the use of the bootstrapping approach to assess mediation allows for the avoidance of normality assumptions in the sampling distribution through use of bootstrapping confidence intervals (Hayes, 2018). Table 2 provides the results of this testing, with unstandardized direct and indirect effects reported.

Results

An overview of results is provided in Figure 1, with details available in Table 2. These results provide both the direct and indirect effects of each study variable. Regarding direct effects, individuals reporting higher levels of collectivism demonstrated a significant relationship between this collectivism and both EI ($\beta = 0.579$, $t = 3.565$, $p < 0.001$) and SOP ($\beta = 0.272$, $t = 2.418$, $p < 0.05$). The relationships between EI and the study variables were also analyzed and the direct effects in these relationships were significant for all four outcome variables, including grit ($\beta = 0.306$, $t = 9.469$, $p < 0.001$), resilience ($\beta = 0.220$, $t = 8.915$, $p < 0.001$), affective commitment ($\beta = 0.256$, $t = 4.923$, $p < 0.001$) and SOP ($\beta = 0.255$, $t = 5.212$, $p < 0.001$).

However, the focus of this study and hypotheses is on the indirect effects inherent in mediation. Indirect effects highlighted at the bottom of Table 2 provide support for H1, H2, H3 and H4. In support of H1, the indirect effect of collectivism on grit via EI was significant (point estimate = 0.177; CI: 0.070–0.296). Upon inspection of Figure 1 and taking the non-significant direct effect between collectivism and grit into consideration, it is important to note the full mediation between the variables. Supporting H2, the indirect effect of collectivism on resilience through EI was also significant (point estimate = 0.127; CI: 0.052–0.212). As with grit, the mediated relationship between collectivism, EI and resilience appears to be fully mediated, with a non-significant direct effect between collectivism and

Table 2. Direct and indirect effects model coefficients

Antecedent	Coeff	SE	EI (M) <i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	SE	GRIT (Y) <i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Direct effects</i>										
COL (X)	0.579	0.162	<0.001	0.259	0.899	-0.082	0.074	0.273	-0.228	0.065
EI (M)	-	-	-	-	-	0.306	0.032	<0.001	0.242	0.370
			<i>R</i> ² = 0.064					<i>R</i> ² = 0.330		
			<i>F</i> (1, 187) = 12.711, <i>p</i> < 0.001					<i>F</i> (2, 186) = 45.715, <i>p</i> < 0.001		
COL (X)						<i>RES</i> (Y)				
EI (M)						-0.021	0.057	0.714	-0.132	0.091
						0.220	0.025	<0.001	0.171	0.268
								<i>R</i> ² = 0.309		
								<i>F</i> (2, 186) = 41.629, <i>p</i> < 0.001		
COL (X)						<i>AFCM</i> (Y)				
EI (M)						0.159	0.119	0.186	-0.077	0.394
						0.256	0.052	<0.001	0.154	0.359
								<i>R</i> ² = 0.144		
								<i>F</i> (2, 186) = 15.649, <i>p</i> < 0.001		
COL (X)						<i>SOPC</i> (Y)				
EI (M)						0.272	0.112	<0.05	0.050	0.493
						0.255	0.049	<0.001	0.159	0.352
								<i>R</i> ² = 0.184		
								<i>F</i> (2, 186) = 21.020, <i>p</i> < 0.001		
<i>Indirect effects</i>										
COL → EI → GRIT								LLCI		ULCI
COL → EI → RES								0.070		0.296
COL → EI → AFCM								0.052		0.212
COL → EI → SOPC								0.055		0.270
								0.054		0.267

Note(s): COL = collectivism; EI = emotional intelligence; RES = resilience; AFCM = affective commitment; SOPC = sense of place commitment; X = independent; Y = outcome; M = mediator; LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper level of confidence interval

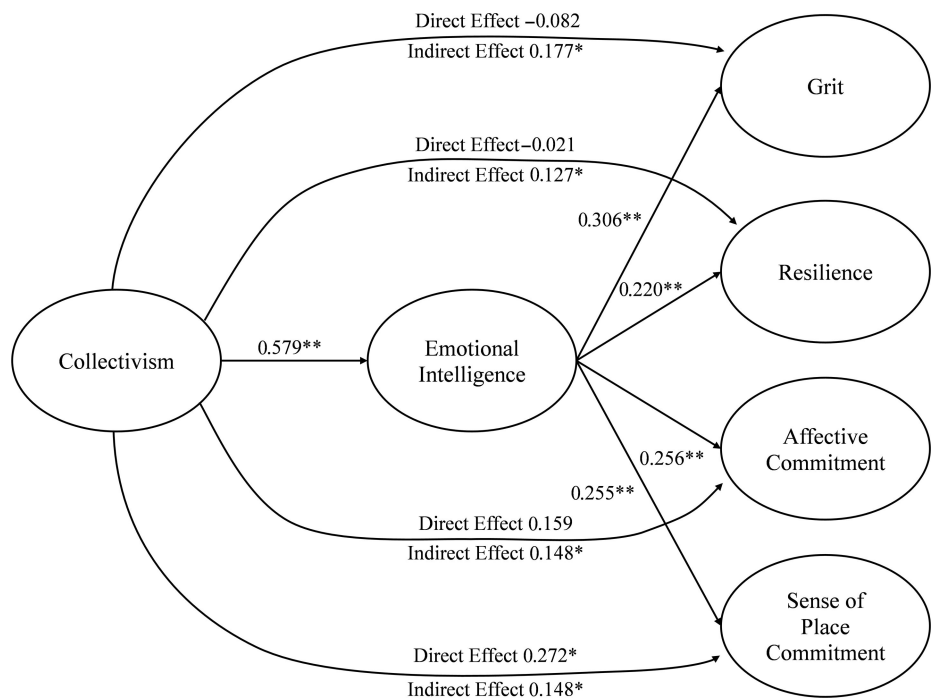


Figure 1. Research model and results

resilience. Supporting the first of the commitment hypotheses (i.e. *H3*), the indirect effect of collectivism on affective commitment through EI was significant (point estimate = 0.148; CI: 0.055–0.270). The pattern of full mediation continues with these relationships. Finally, and in support of *H4*, the indirect effect of collectivism on SOPC commitment (i.e. SOPC) was significant (point estimate = 0.148; CI: 0.054–0.267). Breaking from the pattern of relationships above, the relationship between collectivism and SOPC was significant. Therefore, the mediation between collectivism and SOPC via EI would be described as a partially mediated relationship. In each, these results the bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence interval does not include zero.

Sabol, Winton and Legate (2025) highlight that as mediation models have become of greater importance to organizational and behavioral research, it is essential to interpret the magnitude of indirect effects to allow meaningful comparison and context. In line with indirect effect size distributions reported by Sanchez et al. (2024) and Paterson, Harms, Steel and Credé (2016) in relation to organizational research, the range of indirect effect point estimates results reported here-in (i.e. 0.127–0.177) represent small to moderate effect sizes. While the interpretation of these indirect effect sizes is challenging (Preacher & Kelley, 2011), an attempt is made to provide context for the effect sizes in relation to the larger literature. Via meta-analytic analysis of EI mediators, Schutte, Keng and Cheung (2021) provide statistical guidance for expected effect sizes by reporting an indirect effect of 0.11 (CI: 0.07,0.16). These meta-analytic results provide practical context for the results of this study by indicating that EI plays a part in a model of collectivism, resilience and commitment that is larger than that seen in the existing research. Although the indirect effects reported are

small to moderate, EI may play a proportionally greater role in workers overcoming affective shocks and committing to the places they live and work.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that collectivists living within an individualistic society, such as the USA, use EI as an important tool in adapting their own collectivist ideals into the outcomes of grit, resilience, organizational commitment and SOP. The significance of this adaptation comes from asserting that collectivist individuals have the capacity to apply affective strategies for success in individualistic workplaces.

These workplaces require a certain level of grit, resilience, commitment and SOP. That being true, organizations demand employees to use their emotions to appraise interpersonal dynamics, navigate disagreement, remain engaged in work despite challenges to commitment and recognize opportunities for understanding others. To meet this requirement, workers may need to engage in emotion management and support. In support of these assertions, this study finds that when EI is inserted as a resource to mediate regular workplace realities, collectivists are able to engage their emotional abilities to effectively generate necessary workplace outcomes. Observed in this study, the advantages of collectivism reside in its support for group above self and the desire for harmony, characteristics aligned with one's ability to discern and appraise emotions, and, therefore, creating a more natural bridge between collectivist tendencies and positive workplace outcomes when workers deploy EI. The findings of this study should not be interpreted to suggest that collectivists are inherently more emotionally intelligent than individualists. Rather, collectivist identity orientation appears to heighten relational harmony within the workplace. EI functions as a tool to be deployed in the workplace, not an innate quality of collectivism.

Returning to the literature on collectivism within individualistic cultures, little prior research exists to support the findings of this study. This makes the study's findings an essential step toward building a meaningful conversation between collectivists living and working within individual cultures and the positive outcomes associated with this relationship. As we turn toward the implications of this study, theory emerges as a place where this study's findings provide promise.

Implications for theory

The constellation of theories applied in this study are expanded by the results here-in. First, [Hofstede's \(1980\)](#) model asserts that individualism and collectivism exist on a continuum. Collectivists living within a larger individualistic culture must be able to adapt; a person with a collectivist identity due to their participation in a cultural subgroup retains the individualistic awareness of their own cultural surroundings. Participation in a collectivist subgroup appears to have a positive effect on workplace outcomes, showing that a person living within a larger individualistic society does rely on the spectrum of understanding inherent in Hofstede's model. Thinking of individualism-collectivism as a sliding scale underscores the dance a collectivist must perform in individualistic workplaces to find success.

The study's findings also expand the utilization of the cross-cultural adaptation theory ([Kim, 1988](#)). Much like the continuum of individualism-collectivism, cross-cultural adaptation theory asserts that despite its challenges of cultural adaptation, subgroups can successfully integrate into the dominate cultural group. Mediation results from this research support that EI is a possible key to this mechanism of adaptation, expanding Mayer and Salovey's theory of EI ([Salovey & Mayer, 1990](#)) into the cultural adaptation literature. At the

same time, this research adds to ability-based EI theory by highlighting the ability of collectivists to use EI to adapt to the larger, dominant, individualistic cultures.

Implications for research

The findings of this research fill a series of gaps in literature surrounding individualism-collectivism by placing a focus on collectivist subgroups within a larger individualistic culture. This focus digs deeper into the individualism-collectivism dynamic by moving beyond comparisons of the two extremes (O'Neill et al., 2016; Parks & Vu, 1994; Van Hoorn, 2015) and investigating the dynamics of subcultures within a national culture. For this study, the implications for research are clear. Previous studies analyzed collectivists living amongst and within collectivist cultures; however, this study's participants are collectivists living as a subgroup within an individualist culture.

This study joins an ongoing attempt at understanding the relationship between collectivism and EI. Research studies disagree about the role EI plays in collectivist cultures and how collectivists deploy EI. It may be that subgroup collectivist are uniquely situated to both understand the dominant culture while simultaneously deploying their collectivist ideals to improve organizational outcomes via emotional abilities. This cultural adaptation warrants further research.

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study support an ongoing need to explore collectivist subgroups within larger individualistic societies. Future research would do well to apply typical study design expansion such as increased sample diversity and extended boundary condition exploration. Specifically, this study is limited by constraints related to cross-sectional design, a restricted sampling frame and the possibility to expand to include additional mediators, moderators and control variables that would allow for further substantiated interpretive claims. Together, this research would help further substantiate the claims made in this study.

Specifically, as it relates to collectivist understanding, future research outside of the US setting would be informative. For western countries where individualism reigns as the dominant cultural value, understanding collectivist subcultures may provide meaningful insights into our communities and workplaces. To effectively lead and manage, employees' abilities to display strong EI may be rooted in a collectivist subculture. Deepening our research practice in this understudied area through continued empirical studies in western cultures is warranted.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the study herein has a particular limitation regarding the exploration of collectivist subgroups. The use of a religiously focused sample (i.e. Christian) may confound the measurement of collectivism and limit generalizability. Future research would do well to specifically frame studies of collectivist workers, generally, versus these samples found among religious subgroups with collectivist tenets. At the same time, the continued investigation of specific collectivist subcultures amongst a range of religiously affiliated populations may add further nuance to the findings of this research by clarifying how collectivist attitudes and behaviors affect workplace commitment.

Further, the inverse should be investigated whereby understanding the individualists living within collectivist cultures could provide much needed understanding to the field. Additionally, deepening our understanding of the personal resources and support mechanism afforded to those who participate in collectivists subgroups within an individualistic society through qualitative research may provide concrete explanations for how and why employees use their EI as a resource to successfully navigate workplace demands.

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