

Analysing the ‘Migrant Work Ethic’

Benjamin Hopkins

Lecturer in Human Resource Management
Aberystwyth University
United Kingdom

Email: beh@aber.ac.uk
July 2012

© 2012 Benjamin Hopkins
No written or electronic reproduction without permission

Please note – work in progress, please do not cite

Analysing the ‘Migrant Work Ethic’

Benjamin Hopkins

Introduction

On 1 May 2004 the European Union was expanded to include the A8 nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Since their entry into the UK labour market, workers from these nations have been lauded by employers, and much of the popular press, as having a stronger work ethic than similar workers from the UK. It is the purpose of this paper to examine why these workers are seen as having a stronger work ethic, and to use labour process concepts to explain how it is the weaker labour market power of these workers that leads them to exhibit more malleable and co-operative characteristics.

Initial research into the A8 expansion has found that many people from these countries have downgraded their jobs significantly upon arrival in the UK (Green et al 2005, Gilpin et al 2006, Datta et al 2007, Curries 2007), a decision that is linked to their English language proficiency (Anderson et al 2006, Green et al 2007). Although employers praise A8 migrants’ ‘work ethic’ (Dench et al 2006), firms cite communication with migrant workers as a key problem (Green et al 2007). This is a particular issue in companies with low skilled jobs, as the removal of the requirement of English language skills to learn the job attracts migrant workers who can only speak their native language.

This paper firstly investigates the nature of jobs in three case study companies, and how these roles attract migrants from the A8 countries. The skill levels required, and the subsequent removal of the need for English language skills to take them, is explored. Secondly the paper investigates managers’ attitudes towards these workers, and how the inclusion of A8 workers in the UK labour force has altered the “virtual hiring queue” (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) of “virtual hierarchies of migrants” (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007:17), where a worker’s ethnicity affects their propensity to be hired and managers’ views of them even before they start work. The attitudes towards workers from the A8 countries are considered, and compared to workers from the UK. The paper then moves on to investigate how the weaker labour market power of these workers, particularly linked to their levels of English language proficiency, weaken their labour market position, and investigates how this is negated by these workers by being malleable and compliant to the demands of employers, which is often termed by these employers as the ‘Polish work ethic’.

Migration in the UK

In Capital Volume 1, Marx (1867:456) identified the trend in manufacturing under the capitalist system that “instead of each man being allowed to perform all the various operations in succession, these operations are changed into disconnected isolated ones, carried on side-by-side”. Harry Braverman (1974) updated this observation to examine how work had been degraded a century on, particularly with regard to the introduction of new technology and manufacturing processes, identifying that “work has become increasingly subdivided into petty operations that fail to sustain the interest or engage the capacities of humans with current levels of skill; that these petty operations demand ever less skill and training” (1974:4). Braverman’s work further examined the implications of the implementation of deskilling on labour markets, stating that this would create a divided labour supply between ‘core’ workers in the industrialized nations, and a reserve army of exploited workers in developing countries. An important development in this paper which investigates low skilled work in food manufacturing firms is to consider whether this ‘reserve army’ is not to be found in developing countries, but amongst migrant workers in the UK.

When considering migrant workers, it is important to consider the wider migration and immigration policies that affect them. Ruhs (2008:403) states that immigration policy has to be based upon three factors:

- (i) how to regulate the number of migrants to be admitted to the country
- (ii) how migrants should be selected
- (iii) what rights should be granted to migrants after admission

To this end, the approach of successive UK administrations from 1945 had been to restrict immigration into the UK, particularly by low skilled workers. Ruhs (2008) outlines a number of reasons why governments of high-income countries should attempt to attract skilled rather than unskilled migrants and immigrants. The first of these is the income effect on low skilled native workers if there is an increase in the number of low skilled workers. An increase in the supply of low skilled workers will lower the wages of low skilled workers (Dustmann et al 2008), although it is important to note that the UK has the floor of the national minimum wage. By contrast, a relative scarcity of higher skilled workers will see wages for these workers rise, thus increasing inequality. Secondly, skilled migrants can be expected to be in higher paid jobs and less likely to claim social security, thus increasing their net fiscal contribution (Rowthorn 2008). Finally, endogenous growth models emphasise the human capital benefits of an increase in skilled migrants as spill over effects help the whole economy. However, there are other costs to consider, particularly overcrowding and strain on public services. Coleman (2008) and Rowthorn (2008) both point to the startling figure that immigration at current levels would lead to a UK population of around 85 million people in under 75 years’ time.

On 1 May 2004 the A8 countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) acceded to the EU, together with Cyprus and Malta. As a result of concerns about the effects on labour markets, and also the potential for 'welfare tourism' in the EU15 countries, many countries placed transitional restriction periods on migrant workers from the A8 countries. These arrangements were put in place for up to seven years, based on a 2+3+2 formula, where review took place after two and five years. Perhaps surprisingly given previous policy towards unskilled migrant and immigrant workers, the UK fully opened its' labour markets to workers from the A8 countries, predicting that there would be an inflow of between eight and thirteen thousand workers (Dustmann et al 2003, Home Office 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). Only the UK, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden imposed no restrictions, although Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain lifted these restrictions during 2006 to 2008, and Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and Germany reduced restrictions.

Over six hundred thousand people from the A8 countries had registered on the Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS) in the UK by the time research for this project started in July 2007 (Cooley and Sriskandarajah 2008). Over one million were registered when the scheme closed in April 2011, seven years after accession. Clark and Drinkwater (2008:505) show that these changes saw the proportion of migrants and immigrants from the A8 countries rise from 4.1% of the total in 2000-2003 to 36.5% of the total in 2004-2007, whilst in the same period the proportion of Africans fell from 21.5% to 12.9%. The largest group of workers on the WRS are Poles, who make up 58% of all registrations (Gilpin et al 2006), with the second largest being Lithuanians (14%) and Slovaks (11%). Poland is the largest accession country, with a population of 40 million, meaning that around 0.44% of the Polish population are registered on WRS. 1.16% of all Lithuanians registered on WRS (Gilpin et al 2006), meaning that the largest proportion of workers registered on WRS are to be found from Lithuania. The main reason cited for moving to the UK by CEE workers is high levels of unemployment in their home countries, for example almost 20% in Poland at the time of accession (Drinkwater et al 2006), a finding echoed in Grzymala-Kazlowska's (2005) account of Polish workers in Belgium. Home Office figures show that the majority of these workers are young and single, with 44% being aged between eighteen and twenty-four, and a further 39% being aged between twenty-five and thirty-four (Home Office Accession Monitoring Report 2006).

The majority of recent migrants workers have taken low skill jobs (Green et al 2005, Gilpin et al 2006, Datta et al 2007, Curries 2007), with early CEE migrants receiving an average wage of £5.94 an hour (Anderson et al 2006), despite their relatively high levels of education (Drinkwater et al 2006, MacKenzie and Forde 2007). However, wages in Poland were also low at the time of accession, with a study by Sinn in 2002 finding that the average hourly wage in engineering in Poland was 4.80 Deutsch Marks in West Poland and 2.70 Deutsch

Marks in East Poland, as compared to 28.50 Deutsch Marks in Munich. Green et al (2007) find that nearly two-thirds of A8 migrants cite financial reasons as a factor in moving to the UK. Although Home Office figures suggested a healthy 39 per cent of CEE migrant workers were to be found in the 'Administration, Business and Management' sector, this group contains all agency workers irrespective of the job that the agency gives them. Meardi (2008) finds that instead less than 1% of CEE migrants are to be found in managerial jobs. Dustmann et al (2008) find that many migrant and immigrant workers, despite having higher levels of education than the native UK workforce, downgrade considerably upon arrival in the UK. Although there is an over-representation of migrant and immigrant workers in top management jobs (Deutsch et al 2006, Epstein and Mealem 2010), Dustmann et al (2008) find that 47% are in the lowest three occupational groups, as compared with 27% of UK workers. Manacorda et al (2006) and Card (2009) argue that this is as a result of the incomplete substitutability between these workers and those from the UK. Dustmann et al (2008) argue that if these workers were completely substitutable then they would be found towards the higher skilled end of the labour market, but instead their observed location is towards the bottom end of the labour market. Only 5% of highly-skilled workers from the UK are found in the lowest two occupational categories – a figure which rises to 26% when considering recent migrants and immigrants.

Clark and Drinkwater (2008) found that recent migrants from the A8 countries had the lowest returns to their skills and earnings, and relate this to the issue of English language skills, although they note that the temporary nature of this migration may make it uneconomical for these workers to improve their English language skills to raise their earnings potential in the UK if they are only in the country for a short while. This rate of return was lower even than for those immigrants from Asian and the Middle East, whilst migrants from Australasia and the rest of the EU found returns to their education to be roughly similar to those from the UK. Friedberg (2000) argues that another reason for this poor return is a lack of portability of skills and qualifications between countries, with managers in the UK unaware of the value of these if they are earned outside the UK (see also Clark and Drinkwater 2008).

A number of factors explain this labour market performance. Matthews and Ruhs (2007) state that under a basic labour economics framework employers pay the same reservation wage to an homogenous group of workers, with these workers' reservation wage being determined by their skill set. However, Matthews and Ruhs state that this situation is rarely found when migrant workers are added to the labour supply, as their 'frame of reference' (Piore 1979) is usually the labour market in their home countries, meaning that their wage expectations are significantly lower than those of native workers. It is also important to note, however, that these 'frames of reference' will be different for different groups of migrant and immigrant workers – the labour market in Poland is very different to the labour market in Iraq, for example. Clark and Drinkwater (2008) state that this means that returns to human capital are lower for migrant and immigrant workers, particularly if these workers face discrimination in the workplace (Clark and Lindley 2008), or if skills and qualifications were earned overseas (Clark and Drinkwater 2008). Matthews and Ruhs (2007) argue that one way that employers can react to their lack of understanding of foreign skills and

qualifications is to introduce deskilled working practices, and they cite the example of scripted interaction or tightly controlled food production lines in the hospitality sector. Matthews and Ruhs (2007) argue that the other main tactic used by employers is to recruit workers with what they term 'a good attitude', and which is often referred to by managers interviewed for this paper as 'a good work ethic'. This is a reflection of these workers' lower power in the labour market; as they do not have easily transferable qualifications or skills such as English language skills, they make up for this with a 'good work ethic' (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). A key finding in this paper is to investigate how this 'work ethic' changes over time, and how, as workers increase their labour market power in other ways, their reliance on the stereotypical 'Polish work ethic' diminishes. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) argue that this 'work ethic' creates a variable 'hiring queue', what Matthews and Ruhs (2007:17) refer to as "virtual hierarchies of migrants", where employers order their job candidates based upon their ethnicity, a finding replicated in this study. Matthews and Ruhs (2007) suggest that this hierarchy also extends to comparing migrant and immigrant workers with those from the UK, and that in lower skilled roles employers will actually prefer a 'good work ethic' over more recognisable qualifications or skills. This creates complex hierarchies amongst potential recruits, where "workers are often – and in some cases primarily - distinguished and recruited on the basis of their nationality. While most of the employers in our study [of low skilled hospitality jobs] have developed a clear preference for migrant workers over British workers, they also differentiate between migrant workers from different countries" (Matthews and Ruhs 2007:29).

Perhaps the most important factor in explaining labour market power and these labour market outcomes is English language skills. Green et al (2007a:11) found that "On coming to the UK they [A8 migrants] had taken the first job they could find, had found that opportunities were restricted by their limited English or had found it difficult to find similar work to that done previously". Green et al (2007b) found that migrants felt that they had to develop their English language skills in order to advance their careers from the jobs that they had taken, or even to get back to the kinds of jobs that they had been employed in while in their home country. As this paper investigates migrant workers in low skill manufacturing jobs, nearly all had low levels of English proficiency. Language skills are closely related to labour market performance, and therefore will affect an individual's labour market power and where they will be found in the formal hierarchy. Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) find that language proficiency is lowest among those groups that have the largest disadvantages in the labour market. Eckstein and Weiss (2004) and Dustmann et al (2008) state that language is a complementary skill to job-related skills, and that both are necessary in order to get a job at the individual's work-related skills level. For the UK, Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) state that English-language fluency increases employment probabilities by around 20 percentage points and earnings by up to 20 per cent.

In addition to labour market power, English language proficiency leads to differing life outcomes. When investigating the US, Bleakly and Chin (2009) found that better English language skills led to an increased probability of marrying a native (as also found by Stevens and Swicegood 1987, Davila and Mora 2001, Meng and Gregory 2005, Duncan and Trejo

2007), which Furtado and Theodoropoulos (2009) find in turn leads to a higher probability of being in employment. Those with better English language skills are also found to have fewer children (Sorenson 1988, Swicegood et al 1988, Akbululet-Yuksel et al 2010), have a spouse with a higher position in the labour market (Bleakley and Chin 2009) and be more likely to live outside of 'ethnic enclaves' (Bleakley and Chin 2009, Akbululet-Yuksel et al 2010). Chiswick et al (2004) find that younger workers are also more likely to develop language skills of the country to which they move, leading to the differing life outcomes as noted above. Schaafsma and Sweetman (2001) find a strong negative relationship between an individual's age at immigration and their subsequent earnings, and argue that this is because older immigrants are less likely to invest in language skills of their new nation. The aim of this paper is to investigate how English language skills affect labour market outcome for Central and Eastern European migrants in the UK, and how migrants attempt to overcome disadvantages in their labour market outcomes by displaying what is considered by managers to be a superior 'work ethic'.

Methodology

This study presents findings from three case study companies. The case study companies are all food manufacturers, and this sector was chosen as the companies are affected by variations in both the supply of their ingredients and also in the demand for their products. This means that they have to use a variety of techniques to cover fluctuations, including temporary work, where there is a higher incidence of migrant workers. The three companies used for this study were ReadyCo, a ready meals manufacturer operating in the East of England; ChocCo, a chocolate manufacturer operating in the Midlands of England; and SpiceCo, a spice company operating in the West of England. Despite producing different goods, the manufacturing techniques in the factories are broadly similar, with workers placing food products into pots, boxes or jars on a moving belt. Although these jobs had once required higher levels of skill, for example with ChocCo handmaking its assortment chocolates, advances in technology meant that jobs at the companies tended to be low-skill, repetitive and monotonous. These jobs required no previous experience and had short training times. No trade union was recognised at any of the companies, although ChocCo had a Joint Consultative Committee. Research at ReadyCo took place over two weeks in December 2007, research at ChocCo took place over three weeks in July 2007, and research at SpiceCo took place over two weeks in January 2008. Methods consisted of seventeen semi-structured interviews at ReadyCo, twenty at ChocCo, and thirteen at SpiceCo. These semi-structured interviews were conducted through an interpreter where the interviewee did not speak English. Those interviews that were conducted in English are reflected in this paper verbatim, in order to demonstrate the English proficiency of respondents. These interviews were enriched with informal interviews, and time was also spent on each company's induction programmes for new starters. There was also lengthy observation, for two to three weeks at each site, in both work and social settings. This observational data was used to compare people's perceptions given in interviews, which often included discussions about sensitive issues such as ethnicity, with the reality of the shop floor.

ChocCo is based on the outskirts of a small town, equidistant between two larger cities, and has been trading for around one hundred years. It employs around a thousand permanent manufacturing staff, supplemented by up to four hundred directly employed temporary workers, and one hundred agency workers. Directly employed workers were paid £5.50 an hour at the time of visiting, with agency workers being paid the minimum wage at the time of £5.35. Short term staff are employed in the run up to the company's peak market of Christmas, when the company takes around a third of its annual takings, with some workers being kept on for the company's second spike in demand at Easter. Products have a shelf life of around nine months, meaning that production for Christmas starts to increase in the summer, whilst the company has reduced fluctuations in its supplies of ingredients by purchasing chocolate ready-made.

ReadyCo is based on the outskirts of a small town and has been trading for around ten years. It employs 350 permanent staff, supplemented by up to 60 agency staff. The hourly rates at the time of research were £6.30 for permanent staff, and £6.02 for agency staff, higher than the minimum wage of £5.52 per hour at the time. Higher wages were paid in order to attract people into the uncomfortable chilled environment. The factory runs twenty four hours a day, and shifts run from six o'clock each morning and evening for twelve hours, with people working for four shifts and then having four shifts off. Peak demand tends to be in the winter months as this is when people eat more ready-prepared hot meals, with demand increasing three-fold at times of peak demand, or even higher during supermarket promotions. The factory has to alter its output levels rapidly as a result of changing orders from supermarkets, and also because of the short shelf life of their fresh products. The company has attempted to reduce fluctuations in supply of ingredients by sourcing from different countries throughout Europe, and by using frozen vegetables in all but the most expensive ranges.

SpiceCo is based in a large city and has been trading for around forty years. It currently has around eighty permanent production staff, supplemented by up to fifteen extra staff sourced from an agency. The hourly rate at the time of research was £5.70 for permanent staff and £5.60 an hour for agency staff, again above the minimum wage. The factory's day shift for permanent staff runs from 6am until 6pm, and is split into four three-hour blocks. This means that the company has several workers on short shifts, for example older workers who wish to work for three hours in the morning, or parents who wish to work while their children are at school. The company also uses a significant amount of overtime to cover fluctuations, as the thirty hour standard working weeks mean that workers can be paid at single time when they work overtime. Agency staff are employed on a longer shift from noon until 8pm, and are used to cover permanent staff who create a night shift when demand is high. Peak demand tends to be in the winter months as this is when customers are more likely to cook at home. The company is limited in its ability to use price promotion to flatten out demand as the main reason for the purchase of herbs and spices is to replenish stock at home, and thus

promotions such as buy-one-get-one-free are only likely to reduce future sales. Shelf life for the products is long, at around three years, with most supermarkets requiring at least six months of this when the product reaches them. This allows the company to hold higher levels of stock, as there is little risk of the product spoiling. This has allowed the company to remove most problems of seasonality of supply, although they also use crops from different areas of the world, for example sourcing pepper from Brazil, India and Vietnam, as these harvests occur at differing times during the year. At all three companies there remained some fluctuations in demand and supply, and they used agency workers as one response to these variations.

Findings

Managers' Views towards UK workers

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the low skilled and alienating nature of many of the jobs at the case study companies, managers had negative views towards many of the workers from the UK, particularly where the company was in a tight labour market and had used JobCentres as a means of recruitment. Recruiters viewed JobCentres as the places where they were more likely to get potential problem workers. Both ChocCo and SpiceCo had placed adverts with JobCentres, but both reported the same problems with people turning up for interview only to keep their Job Seekers' Allowance rather than with any real intention of taking the job:

You get a lot of people if you advertise with the local JobCentre, and we probably won't do any more, you get a lot people who just want to fill in their dole regulations. They come and they mess you about and say they want a job when they don't really want a job. A lot of people interviewed badly so that we don't give them a job, it is all deliberate... I have found if you go to the local JobCentre, without being rude, you tend to get a lot of people who literally don't want to bother to work, they just want to mess you about, and fulfil that they have been for an interview, and they don't want to get the job.

HR/Finance Director - SpiceCo

They will sit there and tell you that. I have had it in an interview: “Can you tell me why you have applied for this job?” “Yeah, Jobseekers have sent me but I don’t want it. I don’t want you to give me the job.” “So why have you come to the interview?” “Well I get a bonus if I turn up to the interview” ... We have had them walk on the line and they have refused. “No, I do not want this job, but I want you to finish me. If you finish me I would get the dole, if I walk out I’m not entitled to the dole”.

Process Manager - ChocCo

However, managers also reported problems with UK workers sourced from agencies, frequently citing issues with absence and time keeping as key problems, as well as a reluctance to work overtime. These workers were unlikely to be offered permanent or directly employed temporary roles with the case study organisations as a result of this perceived poor ‘work ethic’.

Managers’ views towards CEE workers

In keeping with the findings of writers such as Green et al (2007) and Dench et al (2006), managers’ views towards CEE (Central and Eastern European) workers were, by comparison to their views towards UK workers doing similar jobs, overwhelmingly positive. This was based on a perceived high work ethic amongst CEE workers, a willingness to work overtime, and a low absence level, all problems identified with workers from the UK. They had found that even with a whole line of CEE workers they had worked well:

Having an all Polish team everyone said “How are you going to do?” but they are brilliant, because I have got people who understood me well and they can translate for me. I said “We are the lazy ones, they are such a bright lot”. It has just been good, they are a really good team.

Operations Manager - ReadyCo

Managers understood that the motivation to work when being out of their home country would often lead to lower absence levels as workers needed to make enough money to cover their living expenses, which compared favourably to their opinion of some UK workers:

What I notice is the Poles, their absence tends to be very good because they are very financially motivated because they have travelled two thousand miles to live in a country where they have got no family to support them. They have got to get £1,000 a month or they can't live in their house, so they are always here. Sometimes some of the English people who come through agencies, usually you have got to be pretty bad not to get a permanent job in England, so sometimes you wonder why the English people are working through agencies. Sometimes it is because their timekeeping is really poor, and you will find some English people just don't turn up, they do a couple of days and then they can't be bothered.

Operations Manager - SpiceCo

The new workers from CEE countries had further hardened managers' views towards workers from the UK:

Four and five years ago people from the agency were drug addicts who didn't want to work, but now you get someone from the agency and they will be really good. All the Poles have made quite a lot of difference, they are really highly motivated, because they have come here to earn money. I think they have moved the benchmark up of what agencies can offer, because all the indigenous English people have had to step up a bit as well. So in the past the people you got coming in were just pathetic, but now whoever you get in from an agency are generally quite good.

British Manager – SpiceCo

These views show how managers at the case study companies had created a virtual hiring queue of potential workers, with migrant workers seen as being preferable to those from the UK.

Labour Market Power

For most migrant workers the challenge was to find work quickly and so they didn't specify a particular job or company to the agency. Indeed, it did not matter to migrant workers which agency they used to find a job:

A guy who called me gave me the name of some agencies in [town] and when I went to the first agency it was too busy so I just went over the road.

Polish Line Leader - ReadyCo

Perhaps the key problem, however, for CEE migrants was that their labour market power was reduced by the level of their English language skills. This was an issue cited by UK managers with CEE workers in each of the case study companies that employed them (see also, for example, quantitative work by Green et al 2007, and case studies by Mackenzie and Forde, 2009). It is important to note, however, that language was not just an issue for those who came from outside of the UK:

It is the same with Scotland, turnips and swedes and parsnips are all the same thing there, they call them neeps or something. Here we have a turnip, a swede and a parsnip. Once they understand that they are three different components that do different things we are fine.

Operations Manager - ReadyCo

This had also been the case when SpiceCo had run a facility in North Wales, with many of the managers and workers there speaking Welsh as their first language. At each of the case study companies UK workers and managers tended not to be bilingual. ReadyCo had a very high proportion of CEE and in particular Polish workers, but where none of the managers interviewed could speak beyond a very basic level of Polish. However, the basic jobs in the case study companies did not need high levels of English language skills as these easier jobs could be visually explained, and thus the managers could employ people who hardly spoke any English:

Most of them they don't speak English, but they are very, very good workers. I think people should give them more of a chance. They could be very, very useful because some of them are really, really good. Some of them just don't get anywhere because they can't speak the language, and I don't think that is fair really. Because of their language a lot of people won't take them on, but they do good work, so people should just give them a chance because they can do the job not speaking the language, it is working by hand, you don't need to actually speak.

Line Leader - SpiceCo

The majority [of agency workers], I would say up to eighty percent have below-average understanding of English. They will understand what you're telling them, but they are not quite sure, so in some cases you have to get someone who is better in Polish to say what you want. In cooking I have got a few Polish speaking employees, when I do get agency I try to buddy them up with them, it makes it easier for communication.

Operations Manager - ReadyCo

In this way language served as a factor in keeping migrant workers in the lowest skilled and lowest paid jobs until they had developed their English skills, regardless of the levels of their work-specific skills. This was a particular problem for those short term workers who would be trained by permanent workers. As well as being reliant upon permanent workers to train them, agency workers also tended to have lower levels of English skills, and thus were reliant on workers who had been in the UK for a longer time to translate for them. This provided more opportunity for permanent English-speaking workers to take the better jobs in the factories such as on the Cauliflower Cheese line at ReadyCo. On the ready meals line, cauliflower cheese is one of the key product lines, and is produced on a traditional assembly line. Around ten workers have plastic trays and scales in front of them. They weigh out a pre-arranged amount of cauliflower and then place their tray onto a moving line. One worker then presses the cauliflower down with a metal device like an iron to achieve a flat level. This then passes through the 'turbo', a depositor which puts a set amount of cheese sauce into the tray. These plastic trays are then loaded onto metal trays, with around 20 on each tray, and these metal trays are then placed into movable racks. The traying and racking jobs at the end are acknowledged as the hardest in the factory. During time spent observing the cauliflower cheese line at ReadyCo it was very noticeable that the permanent white-hatted workers were clustered around the easier weighing jobs, whilst the yellow-hatted agency workers were clustered around the heavier racking jobs. In this way the agency workers were victims of both the formal hierarchy, where they were made to wear different clothes, and the informal hierarchy, where permanent workers ensured that they were given more difficult jobs. Migrant workers who were employed through an agency experienced double exclusion based on both contractual status and nationality. Migrants understood that in order to further progress they needed a higher standard of English, as also noted by Green (2007):

Only problem is with English. I have master of economy my degree, and I work still go up, up, up, up, but I am lazy because I'm too tired to go to college and learn English. My wife is learning in college. Me, I would like but I am too lazy, but I know I must because for me is better.

Polish Line Leader - ReadyCo

However, a key problem for some of these workers was that they would get placed on a line with only other agency workers, such as the hand filling line at SpiceCo, and thus did not get a chance to improve their language skills. Interestingly, the only real criticisms of CEE migrants' work ethic came from other CEE migrants who had been in the country for a longer time and had been promoted to managerial levels. This provides a key new finding for this paper, as it is only recently that CEE migrants have been promoted into managerial positions, allowing for these formal hierarchies between CEE workers to develop. These managers felt that new CEE migrants did not have the same commitment to work that they did, even though these managers felt that later migrants had an easier move to the UK than they had done because of the increase in services, such as Polish shops, or banks providing leaflets in Polish, and because many had friends or family with whom they could stay, as described by

two different Polish line leaders. Their labour market power had increased with better knowledge of agencies and firms.

There come more lazy people, people who don't care about the future, and people who come from the agency now have an easy start to get the work, because before when people came here they were not looking for any help, they have to find everything themselves and make for themselves. Now there are people coming who did not work in Poland so they do not know what is the true life. They come here straightaway after school, they think that work here is heavy but they did not work in Poland, in the situation there. They come here and they have got family, they have all their friends, so when they come they have a place to live in and they find them a job.

Polish Line Leader - ReadyCo

Now we have a lot of Polish people here, and three years ago they came here very energetic, the Polish people want to work because they know they get a chance and they have to do everything the best that they can. Now they come very lazy people because they are coming because of their family, or they are coming because of somebody else and they know that if they lose this job they can find another job, and they don't care about the job now.

Polish Line Leader - ReadyCo

The change in work ethic cited by CEE managers had also been noticed by the UK managers, with the views of one manager at ReadyCo showing both the perceived change in work ethic amongst CEE workers as their increased knowledge of the labour market had increased their labour market power:

The major thing that I have noticed from the Polish is that a lot of the time they tend to be very, very hard-working. They are willing to please, and they will do pretty much anything that you ask of them, in comparison to the Asian or Pakistani community which would probably put up more of a debate with you about what they should be doing. Thinking about it, I have noticed that even in my team recently there are people who I know who used to be very hard-working and would do anything but now, maybe it is because they have got more confidence or maybe because they know what they are capable of, and that they can speak the language more they say "Why do I have to do that?" They more talk back to you and become slightly lazy. Although they can do it and you know that they can do it, you know that they are very, very capable of it, but they don't show it as much as they used to. That is one thing I have noticed recently in my team...I could rely on certain people and I knew that they would do it, they would do what I asked them to, and maybe now that they have been here longer they are getting a bit more confidence, maybe a bit more arrogance, and now they will talk back to you. I don't think it is down to them as a culture, I think it is the same as anyone

who spends more time in a country, you adapt more to the environment around you, you become more comfortable and more confident. You deal with the situation differently, a positive way, maybe more in a bit of a negative way, but that has certainly happened in my team, which I am not so happy about.

Operations Manager - ReadyCo

This shows how the labour market power of different groups can alter over time. With an increased amount of labour market power, for example through better knowledge of the labour market provided by friends and family, CEE workers were finding it easier to get jobs in the UK. Also, as there were more CEE workers in companies who could train these workers and as signage and documentation was provided in languages other than English, English language skills were becoming less of a factor in reducing labour market power. With this increased labour market power had come a perceived lessening of the 'work ethic' of CEE workers in the case study companies.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the specific case of low skilled production roles in three food manufacturing plants. Perhaps as a result of the alienating job design, managers at the case study companies were often critical of the 'work ethic' of those workers that came from the UK. By comparison, they praised the 'work ethic' of migrants from the CEE countries, as demonstrated, for example, by lower levels of absence and a willingness to work overtime. However, this work ethic is very strongly linked to the labour market power of these workers, which is influenced by knowledge of the labour market and, in particular, by English language skills. However, as their labour market knowledge had increased, and the importance of the ability to speak English has decreased, managers at the case study firms reported that these migrants were becoming less reliant on a good work ethic.

References

Akbululet-Yuksel, M., Bleakley, H. and Chin, A. (2010) "The Effects of English Proficiency among Childhood Immigrants: Are Hispanics Different?" University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 07/10

Anderson, B., Ruhs, M., Rogaly, B. and Spencer, S. (2006), "Fair enough? Central and Eastern European migrants in low-wage employment in the UK", COMPAS Research Report, University of Oxford, Oxford

Braverman, H. (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degredation of Work in the Twentieth Century* New York: Monthly Review Press

Card, D. "Immigration and Inequality" University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 07/09

Chiswick, B. R., Lee, Y. L. and Miller, P. W. (2004) "Parents and Children Talk: The Family Dynamics of English Language Proficiency" University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 03/04

Clark, K. and Drinkwater, S. (2008) "The Labour-Market Performance of Recent Migrants" *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 24 (3) p495-516

Clark, K. and Lindley, J. (2009) "Immigrant Assimilation Pre and Post Labour Market Entry: Evidence from the UK Labour Force Survey" *Journal of Population Economic* 22 (1) pp175-198

Coleman, D. (2008) "The Demographic Effects of International Migration in Europe" *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 24 (3) p452-476

Cooley, L. and Sriskandarajah, D. (2008) "Facts and Figures: A Context for Understanding the Issues" in Flynn, D. and Williams, Z. (ed) *Towards a Progressive Immigration Policy* London: Compass

Curries, S. (2007), 'De-skilled and devalued: the labour market experience of Polish migrants in the UK following EU enlargement', *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 83-116

Datta, K., McIlwaine, C., Evans, Y. Herbert, J. May, J. and Wills, J. (2007), "From coping strategies to tactics: London's low-pay economy and migrant labour", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 404-432

Davila, A. and Mora, M. T. (2001) "The Marital Status of Recent Immigrants in the United States in 1980 and 1990" *International Migration Review* 35 (2) pp506-524.

Dench, S., Hurstfield, J., Hill, D. and Akroyd, K. (2006), “Employers’ use of migrant labour”, Home Office Online Report, Home Office, London, April 2006

Deutsch, J., Epstein, G. S. and Lecker, T. (2006) “Multi-Generation Model of Immigrant Earnings: Theory and Application” *Research in Labor Economics*, Vol 24 pp217-234

Duncan, B. and Trejo, S. (2007) “Ethnic Identification, Intermarriage and Unmeasured Progress by Mexican Americans,” in Borjas, G., ed., *Mexican Immigration*, Chicago: National Bureau of Economic Research and the University of Chicago Press

Dustmann, C., Frattini, T. and Preston, I. (2008) “The Effect of Immigration along the Distribution of Wages” University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 03/08

Dustmann, C. and Fabbri, F. (2003) “Language proficiency and labour market performance of immigrants in the UK” *The Economic Journal* 113 (489) pp695–717

Drinkwater, S., Eade, J. and Garapich, M. (2006) “Poles Apart? EU Enlargement and the labour Market Outcomes of Immigrants in the UK” *Institute for the Study of Labor* Discussion Paper No. 2410

Epstein, G. S. and Mealem, Y. (2010) “Interactions between Local and Migrant Workers at the Workplace” University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 16/10

Furtado, D. and Theodoropoulos, N. (2009) “Intermarriage and Immigrant Employment: The Role of Networks” University College London: CReAM Discussion Paper 06/09

Friedberg, R. M. (2000), “You Can’t Take It With You? Immigrant Assimilation and the Portability of Human Capital”, *Journal of Labor Economics* Vol. 18 pp221-52

Gilpin, N., Henty, M., Lemos, S., Portes, J. and Bullen, C. (2006), “The impact of free movement of workers from Central and Eastern Europe on the UK labour market”, Working Paper No. 29, Department for Work and Pensions, London

Green, A. E., Owen, D., and Wilson, R. (2005), “Changing patterns of employment by ethnic group and for migrant workers”, National Report, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Warwick

Green A. E., Owen D. W. and Jones P. with Owen C. and Francis J. (2007), “The economic impact of migrant workers in the West Midlands”, Report, West Midlands Regional Observatory, Birmingham

Grzymala-Kazłowska, A. (2005) “From Ethnic Cooperation to In-Group Competition: Undocumented Polish Workers in Brussels” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (4) p675-697

Home Office (2003a) “Labour Market Performance of Immigrants in the Labour Market”

Home Office (2003b) “The Local Labour Market Effects of Immigration in the UK”

Home Office (2003c) “The Impact of EU Enlargement on Migration Flows”

MacKenzie, R. and Forde, C. (2007) “The Social and Economic Experiences of Asylum Seekers, Migrant Workers, Refugees and Overstayers: Report for the Investing in a Multicultural Barnsley Project” *Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change Research Report Number 1*, University of Leeds

Manacorda, M., A. Manning, and J. Wadsworth (2006) “The Impact of Immigration on the Structure of Male Wages: Theory and Evidence from Britain” CReAM Discussion Paper No. 08/06.

Matthews, G. and Ruhs, M. (2007) “Are you being served? Employer demand for migrant labour in the UK’s hospitality sector”, COMPAS Working Paper WP-07-51, University of Oxford, Oxford

Meardi, G. (2008) “A Suspended Status: the Puzzle of Polish Workers in the West Midlands” in Fassman, H., Haller, M. and Lane, D. *Migration in Europe: Threat or Chance* Cheltenham: Elgar

Meng, X. and Gregory, R. G. (2005) “Intermarriage and the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants” *Journal of Labor Economics* 23 (1) pp135-175

Piore, M. (1979) *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* New York: Cambridge University Press

Rowthorn, R. (2008) “The Fiscal Impact of Immigration on the Advanced Economies” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 24 (3) p560–580

Ruhs, M. (2008) “Economic Research and Labour Immigration Policy” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 24 (3) p403–426

Schaafsma, J., and Sweetman, A. (2001) “Immigrant Earnings: Age at Immigration Matters” *Canadian Journal of Economics* 34 pp1066–99

Sinn, H.-W. (2002), “EU Enlargement and the Future of the Welfare State” *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 49 p104-115

Sorenson, A. (1988) “The Fertility and Language Characteristics of Mexican-American and Non-Hispanic Husbands and Wives,” *Sociological Quarterly* 29 (1) p111-130

Swicegood, G., Bean, F. D., Stephen E. H. and Opitz, W. (1998) “Language Usage and Fertility in the Mexican-Origin Population of the United States,” *Demography* 25 (1) pp1733.

Waldinger, R. and Lichter, M.I. (2003) *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*, University of California Press, Berkeley