

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND WORK MOTIVATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: *For decades, the field of work motivation was moulded mainly by the cultural constraints. The present scientific paper is a theoretical research which aims at identifying various motivational patterns which might be used in the EU countries. In order to illustrate these differences, we will use three Hofstede's cultural dimensions: individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Each of these cultural dimensions presents particularities which exert an influence on the way of thinking, on the abilities and behaviours of the individuals in a certain society, but we will refer only at the influence on the attitude towards work. For the identification of the motivational patterns, we will have as starting points, on one side, the particularities of the cultural differences and results of the relevant research performed so far; on the other hand there is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Hence, we can consider that safety and security prevails upon other needs where uncertainty avoidance is strong (Greece, Romania and so on). The need of belongingness will prevail upon the need of esteem in the feminine cultures (such as Sweden, Latvia), but in the masculine cultures esteem need is stronger (such as in the case of Hungary). In masculine countries with an increased collectivism (Greece), the opportunities for improvement, recognition and extra incomes will have an increased importance, while in feminine countries (Holland, Sweden) personal time, freedom and need for belongingness will be more important. Without claiming to be an exhaustive presentation of the motivational patterns, the purpose of the present paper is to underline the necessity that the motivation theories are to be considered valid only in the cultural environment where they were conceived. The transfer and the application of the motivation theories and patterns from one culture to the other, implies the testing of their validity in the new context.*

Keywords: cultural dimensions, Hofstede, work motivation, EU

JEL classification: M12, M16

1. Introduction

The extension of the activities of the companies at International level implies the increase of the complexity of the activities they develop and at the same time, the development and diversification of the human resources management tools used for managing the cultural, economical and political values which influence the activity. For ages the field of the work motivation was mainly modelled by the

occidental theories, each theory being subject to cultural constraints, for which the cultural factor cannot be neglected.

The present scientific paper aims at identifying various motivational patterns which might be used in the EU countries. Because of the tensions of the past years in the EU, the cultural differences between the member states have been perceived significantly. In order to show these differences, we will use three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions: individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Each of these cultural dimensions shows particularities which exert an influence on the way of thinking, the attitudes and the behaviour of the individuals in a certain society, but we will refer only to the influence of the attitude towards work.

In order to identify the motivation patterns, we will have as starting point the particularities of the cultural dimensions and the results of the relevant research performed so far.

2. The concept of culture and the study of cultural dimensions

The concept of culture knows various definitions in the specialized literature. Therefore, Hofstede defines culture as: "mental collective programming which makes us accept something together with the members of the nation or the group that we are part of, but not with the components of other groups or nations (Hofstede, 1996, p.43). Another definition is the one given by House (House et al, 2002, in Alas Ruth, 2006) who considers that culture manifests in the shape of "motives, values, beliefs, identities and events shared which result from the common experience of the members of the groups and which are transmitted from one generation to the other". The analysis of the cultural differences can be realized only on the base of certain criteria, which make the comparison possible. These are called cultural dimensions and in the past few decades several studies have been conducted for the identification of those cultural dimensions which can be used for explaining the differences between the cultures. The most important studies belong to: Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall, Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck, Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, Robert House (coordinator of the GLOBE project), Shalom Schwartz. A few of these studies will be presented briefly.

Schwartz: in an International study on high school students and teachers in 67 countries (1994) identified three cultural bipolar dimensions: conservatism versus autonomy, hierarchization versus equality and artistry / self achievement versus harmony, based on seven basic values (Ng, Sorensen, & Yim, 2009).

Inglehart (World Value Survey): proposes two cultural dimensions: well-being – survival, secular-rational authority – traditional authority (Ng, Sorensen, & Yim, 2009).

House (the coordinator of the GLOBE): The GLOBE study can be considered one of the largest studies on the national cultures. This is a project that involved over 170 researchers from 62 cultures in all the main regions of the world. From the GLOBE study new cultural dimensions resulted: uncertainty avoidance, orientation towards the future, distance towards power, institutional collectivism, orientation towards person, performance orientation, group collectivism, equality, assertion (Alas, 2006).

Hofstede: his approach consists in six cultural dimensions, that is: individualism versus collectivism, distance versus power, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, orientation towards time and permissibility versus austerity.

However, most studies which refer to National culture use Hofstede's cultural dimensions. A search in the Social Science Citation Index indicates the fact that between 1987 and 2004, Hofstede's works *Culture's Consequences* from 1980 and 2001 were quoted 2858 times, almost as frequently as Karl Marx's *Capital* work (2873 quotations) (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006).

Hofstede's model regarding the cultural dimensions has along the time both sustainers and critiques. One of them is McSweeney, which is in the article *Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and their Consequences: A Triumph of Faith - a Failure of Analysis*, published in 2002, critiques both the research tool used by Hofstede and the data analysis pattern (McSweeney, 2002), and Bearden et. All (2006) question the validity of the tool used by Hofstede to capture the complex multidimensional nature of the culture at individual level, considering the tool used by Hofstede unidimensionally (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006).

Due to the spread of use of Hofstede in the cultural studies and the replications and confirmation in multiple following research, in this scientific paper we will use Hofstede's approach.

3. The work motivation and the influence of the cultural factor

The motivation is a force which is said to act in each individual making it choose an action or another one. Cultural values influence how an individual perceives and interprets a situation, and therefore exerts influence on his behavior and motivation (Erez, 2008). As a collective mental programming, the culture plays an important part in motivation. Culture influences not only our behaviours, but also the reasons for which we choose to behave in one way or the other (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 315).

Different assumptions regarding motivation lead to various motivation theories, although classic motivation literates in the management context are American (Maslow, McClelland, Herzberg etc.). Therefore, one will discuss whether the motivational theories can be valid in cultures different from the ones they were realized in.

One of the motivational theories which reflect its American origin is the one of Frederick Herzberg based on the motivation-hygiene dichotomy. From the cultural point of view, Herzberg's theory corresponds to an environment in which the distance from the power is small and the avoidance of uncertainty is low. In the countries in which the distance from the power is big, "surveillance" must not be seen as a hygiene factor, because in this type of culture the dependence on stronger people is a fundamental need which must be a real motivator (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 316).

Another example is the X and Y theory. The suppositions of this theory reflects the values of an individualist and masculine culture such as the one in which McGregor formed and the distinction between X and Y theory is not relevant in certain cultures, such as the ones in Asia (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 318).

Numerous studies on work and attitude towards work in various cultural contexts underlines the importance of the cultural factor. For example, in the cultures in which masculinity is pronounced, there is a high need of accomplishment and the accomplishment is defined through acknowledgement and wealth. The strong masculine cultures appreciate material possessions and extra incomes, while the

feminine culture stress on the work conditions and the employees' participation (Greckhamer, 2011). This suggests the fact that the motivation practices in a feminine culture will be less efficient or completely inefficient in a masculine culture. Other authors (Rinne, Steel, & Fairweather, 2012) explore the connection between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the innovation level expressed by the Global Innovation Index (GII) scores. They identified a strong negative correlation with power and the number of innovations expressed through the scores Global Innovation Index (GII) and a positive link between individualism and the GII scores (Rinne, Steel, & Fairweather, 2012). The connections between Hofstede's cultural dimensions were studied by Shane as well (1992). His research identified a positive correlation between the number of patents for inventions and individualism and a negative correlation between the distance compared to power and number of patents (Ng, Sorensen, & Yim, 2009).

Ng&all (2009) tested and confirmed the hypothesis according to which the relationship between the work satisfaction and work performance is stronger in individualist cultures, where the distance from the power is smaller and which are masculine. Since the employees in the cultures where the distance from the power is bigger expect to be told by the superiors what to do and how to do, it is probable that the work satisfaction exerts a smaller influence than in the cultures which stress on social equality. In the cultures which appreciate material possessions (masculine cultures) a positive attitude towards the work can generate performance, because satisfied employees will dedicate a lot time and energy for the activities with the purpose of obtaining money or climbing the hierarchic ladder. In contrast, in the cultures which appreciate harmony and human relationships (feminine cultures), satisfied employees may prefer to dedicate more time to social activities which do not necessarily exert influence on the performance (Ng, Sorensen, & Yim, 2009).

4. Individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and motivation in the EU

As stated in the official site, although EU is a unique political and economical partnership between 27 European countries (EU official site), as a consequence of the lately tensions inside the EU, the cultural differences between members states have been massively perceived. The purpose of this document is to bring attention on the cultural differences between the EU member states, showing various motivational models with the help of the cultural dimensions which might be used in the EU countries.

As stated before, due to the broad use of Hofstede's dimensions in the cultural studies in this paper we will use Hofstede's approach. More precisely we will use three of the six cultural dimensions: *individualism (IDV)*, *uncertainty avoidance (UAI)*, *masculinity (MAS)*.

Hence, a brief presentation of the three cultural dimensions is required. *Individualism* is characteristic of the societies in which the connections between individuals are weak: it is expected that each of them takes care of itself and the close family. On the other hand, *collectivism* belongs to the societies in which individuals are integrated since birth in strong and unite groups which keep on protecting it during its entire life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 92).

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as the measure in which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous situations or unknown situations. This feeling is expressed, amongst other, through nervous tensions and need of predictability –

the need for written and unwritten rules (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 187).

A society is called *masculine* if the emotional gender roles are set apart clearly: men need to be authoritarian, tough and focused on the material success, while women must be modest, tender and focused on the quality of life. A society is called *feminine* if the gender emotional roles overlap: both men and women must prove modesty, tenderness and preoccupation for the quality of life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 141).

Each of these cultural dimensions has particularities which exert an influence on the way of thinking, the attitudes and the behaviours of individuals in a certain society, but we will refer only to the attitude towards work. For a better image we will take into consideration the cultural dimensions two by two (on one side uncertainty avoidance and masculinity and, on the other hand, individualism and masculinity) and we will represent graphically the way the UE countries are distributed in four quadrants.

The particularities of the cultural dimension together with Maslow's needs pyramid will represent the starting point in the identification of the motivation needs.

Disposed as a pyramid, according to Maslow these needs are (from the base to the top): physiological needs, security needs, social and belongingness needs, esteem and accomplishment needs. Adler (1991) argues that the frame of references of an individual is what determines the importance of his needs, and that the frame of references is partly determined by culture (Geren, 2011). So, these needs require a reordering according to the cultural specific of a country. Hence, we can consider that safety and security prevails on other needs where the avoidance of uncertainty is strong. The need for belongingness (family relations, friends, etc.) will prevail on the need for esteem in feminine cultures, but in the masculine cultures the esteem need will be stronger.

As seen in figure 1, most of the countries are equally distributed in three quadrants (upper left, lower left and upper right). Romania is included in the upper-left quadrant, being feminine (but on the borderline with masculinity) and with a high level of uncertainty avoidance. The extremes are:

- reduced uncertainty avoidance: Denmark;
- intense uncertainty avoidance: Greece;
- masculinity: Slovak Republic;
- femininity: Sweden

Hence, in figure 1, the motivation factors will be (personal or group) satisfaction and esteem in the upper right corner; achievement and belongingness in the lower left corner; security and belongingness in the upper left corner. In some cultures there can be the need of adding new needs, such as: respect, harmony etc. (especially in the case of Asian cultures) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, pg. 210-211).

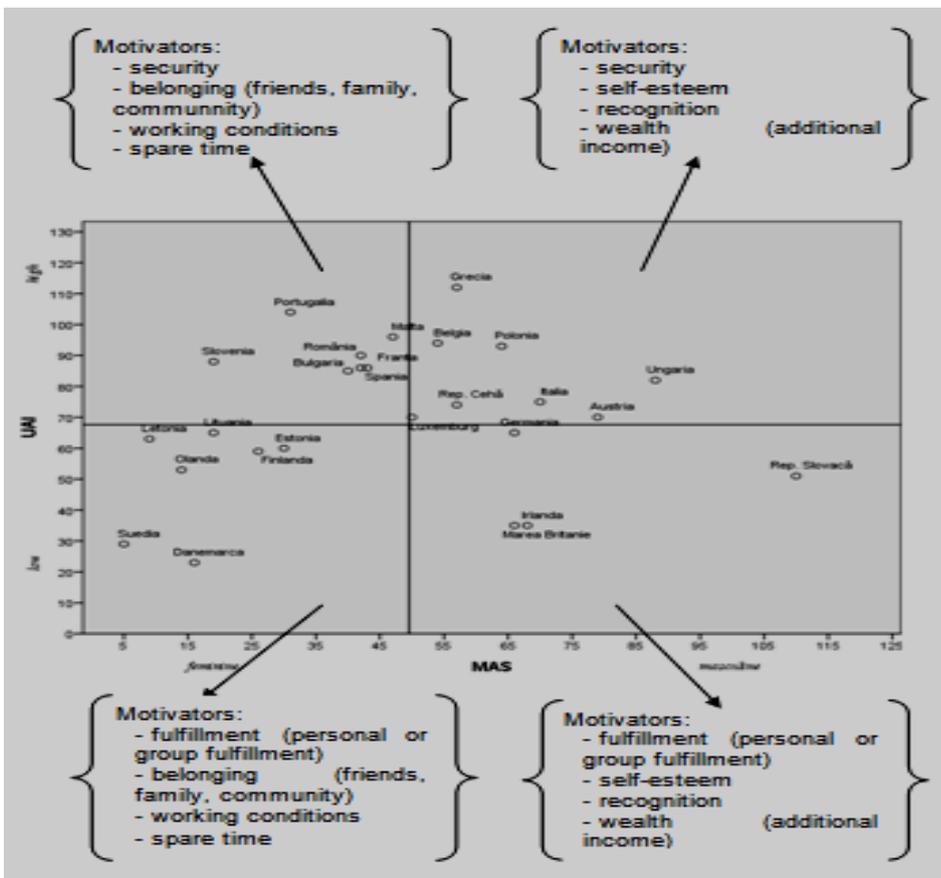


Figure 1. Uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and work motivation in EU
 Source: made by authors based on Hofstede's scores for the two cultural dimensions (available at <http://www.geerthofstede.nl/research--vsm>).

When taking into account individualism and masculinity, the distribution of countries across the four quadrants (figure 2) highlights again the need to adapt the motivational models to the cultural specificity of a country.

As shown in figure 2, most countries are distributed in two of the quadrants (upper left and upper right); Greece is alone in the lower right quadrant. Romania is included in the lower left quadrant, being feminine (but at the borderline with masculinity) and with a pronounced collectivism. The extremes are:

- collectivism: Slovenia and Portugal;
- individualism: Great Britain;
- masculinity: Slovak Republic;
- femininity: Sweden

Hence, in figure 2, personal time, freedom, challenge, belongingness and work conditions will have a special importance in the upper left quadrant; the personal time, freedom, challenge, esteem, recognition and wealth in the upper right corner; perfecting opportunities, belongingness, work conditions and free time in the lower

left quadrant; and the perfecting opportunities, work conditions, esteem, recognition and wealth in the lower right quadrant.

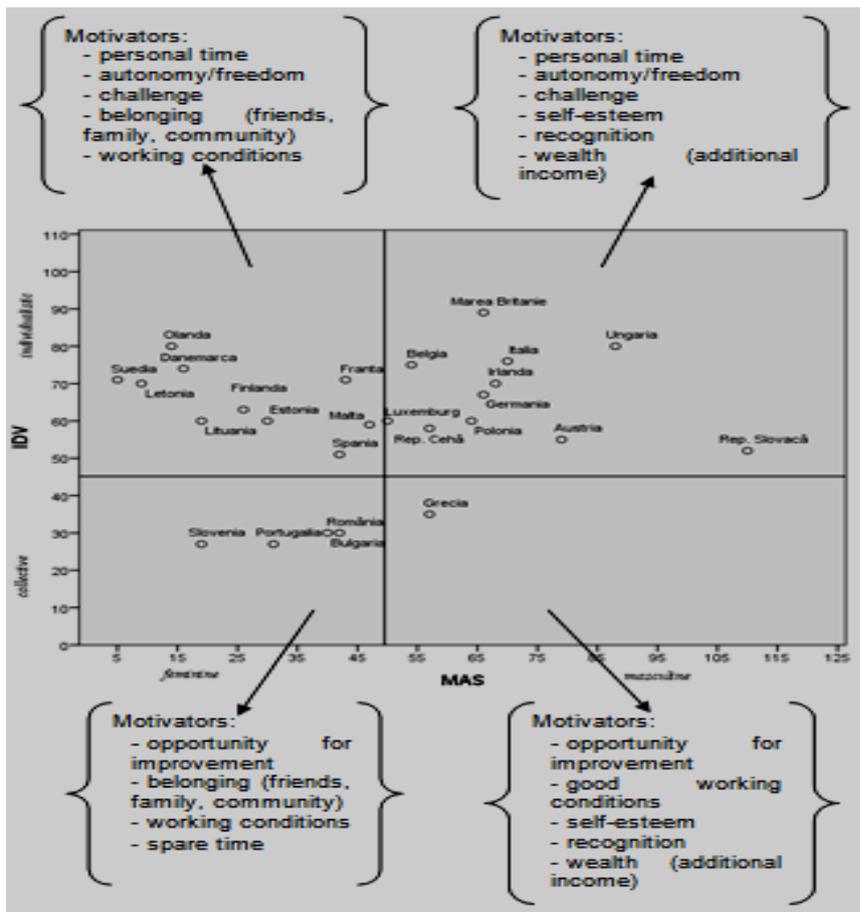


Figure 2. Individualism, masculinity and work motivation in EU
 Source: made by authors based on Hofstede's scores for the two cultural dimensions (available at <http://www.geerthofstede.nl/research--vsm>).

It is not difficult to associate the importance of the personal time, the freedom and the personal challenge with individualism; all these underline the employee's independence from the organization. The work purposes associated with collectivism: perfecting, physical conditions and use of the abilities refer to things that the organization makes for the employee and hence it underlines the dependence of the employee towards the organization (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 93).

5. Conclusions

We stand along side the researchers that support and promote the need to adapt and develop motivational theories that take into account the cultural specificity of a

country. Since the interactions (economical and not only) between the EU member states are unavoidable, the neglect of the cultural factor may lead any such interaction to failure.

Without the claim of an exhaustive presentation of the motivation models, we consider that the present action can represent a starting point for testing the validity of the motivation theory in other cultural context than the ones they were conceived in.

Since the observations in one culture are not mandatory applicable or valid in other cultures as well, we recommend that the motivation theories be implied to be valid only in the cultural environment they were conceived in. They overlap some cultural constraints and they reflect that culture in which the author / authors formed and performed the research (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 317). In order to be applied in a different culture than the one they were conceived in, the motivation theories must be adapted and their validity must be verified. A testing example of the validity is given by Deci&all, who, in 2001 made a study for the verification of the possibility of generalizing the Self-determination theory to the level of other cultures. The analysis perceived offers proof that this theory can be valid also in cultures different than the one it was conceived in, but there are differences related to the intensity between needs and motivation, so that the cultural factor must be taken into consideration (Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001).

The transfer and application of the results of a research from one culture to the other without testing their validity in the new context must be avoided. The organizations that extent to a multinational level must give special attention to cultural differences and to perform analysis before applying policies and procedures (Ng, Sorensen, & Yim, 2009).

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