

CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY ON THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK OF YOUNG EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

Today's young generation is a challenge for HR specialists everywhere. The generation that lives life through the Smartphone screen is the subject of debates and studies in numerous areas of the social and economic life. As teachers, we realize that it is increasingly difficult to make students get involved, while companies complain that young people do not want to work. The purpose of this cross-cultural study is to identify to what extent the cultural factor influences the attitude towards work and what and if there are the common characteristics of young employees that cross over cultural boundaries. For this purpose, an intercultural study on work attitude was conducted in six countries: Hungary, India, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, and Sweden. A part of the study was discussed in depth in a previous paper, so, within this paper we will mainly focus on the similarities and differences between the young generations of the six countries. We found that, although the cultural factor accounts for the differences in perception of the studied generations, there are also some similarities one might consider universal in today's young generation. Research findings and limitations are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *young generation, employees, work attitude, national culture.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M50, J24.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The post-millennials or the Facebook generation or Generation Z are all names for today's young generation. The generation that lives life through the Smartphone screen is the subject of debates and studies in numerous areas of the social and economic life. Known to be less focused, better multi-taskers, more entrepreneurial, and with higher expectations (Beall, 2016), today's young generation is a challenge for HR specialists everywhere. As teachers, we realize that it is increasingly difficult to make students get involved, while companies complain that young people do not want to work.

2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this cross-cultural study is to identify to what extent the cultural factor influences the attitude towards work and what and if there are the common characteristics of young employees that cross over cultural boundaries. For this purpose, an intercultural study on work attitude was conducted in six countries: Hungary, India, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, and Sweden. A part of the study regarding data about India, Romania, and Sweden was discussed in depth in a previous paper (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016). In order to achieve the research objectives, two quantitative research studies were carried out:

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- *Analysis of secondary data from:* World Values Survey abbreviated WVS (WVS online) and European Values Survey abbreviated EVS (EVS, 2010). Because WVS and EVS provides data that covers social, gender and age groups within each country, the data from the WVS and the EVS was taken into account and referred to as national average. WVS was used to obtain data for India, while EVS provided information on Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, and Sweden.

- *Students' survey research* – study on master students with work experience. The research was carried out in universities. The research instrument is a self-administered questionnaire. Three of the questions in the questionnaire will be analyzed for the purpose of this research. All in all, the questionnaire was filled out by 429 respondents, of which 330 questionnaires were considered valid and were retained for interpretation. Out of the 330 valid questionnaires, 171 were completed by women, while 159 by men. Most of the respondents are aged between 22 and 25 years old, a part of them are between 26 and 29 years old, while 2 respondents (from Italy) are between 30 and 33 years old.

Research limitations

Only students from one university in each country were included in our study, thus research findings cannot be extrapolated unequivocally to a national level.

The six countries in the study

From an economic standpoint, based on the GDP/inhabitant, the status of the six countries included in the study is as follows (International Monetary Fund, 2016):

- The Netherlands with 51,049 \$ GDP/ capita;
- Sweden with 49,836 \$ GDP/capita;
- Italy with 36,833 \$ GDP/ capita;
- Hungary with 27,482 \$ GDP/ capita;
- Romania with 22,348 \$ GDP/ capita;
- India with 6,616 \$ GDP/ capita.

From a cultural standpoint, the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede for the six countries considered are illustrated in Figure no.1.

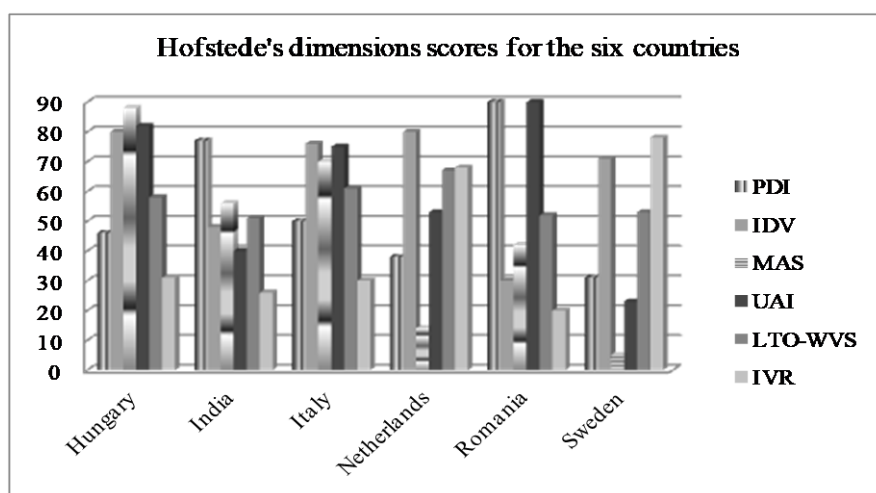


Figure 1. Hofstede's dimension scores for the six countries.

Abbreviations used: PDI – power distance small/large, IDV – individualism/collectivism, MAS – masculinity/femininity, UAI – uncertainty avoidance low/high, LTO-WVS – long/short term orientation, IVR - indulgence/restraint.

Source: made by authors based on the scores indicated by Hofstede in his research (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the subjects studied by WVS and EVS, two were found to be suitable for the purposes of this research: Perception of life (important aspects in life) and work (important aspects within a job). Based on the data collected from the two databases, hierarchies have been developed; these hierarchies have then been used to identify how the perceptions of the young generation differ from the national average.

3.1. Important aspects in life

3.1.1. Analysis of World Values Survey and European Values Survey data

WVS and EVS contain data on the importance of six aspects in life: family, friends, leisure time, politics, religion and work. In the hierarchy of aspects considered important in life, family is ranked first in five out of the six countries considered for the study (Table 1), while work is ranked second in four out of six analysed cultures: India, Italy, Romania, and Hungary. Contrary to expectations, Sweden is the only country which places work first. The Netherlands places work at the bottom, on the fourth place out of six; but ranks friends as the most important aspect in life (Table 1). The hierarchy of the Netherlands reveals the pronounced femininity and indulgence that characterises its culture. In contrast, Romania places friends the bottom of the hierarchy of important aspects in life, on the fifth place out of six. Only politics is considered less important in Romania. In fact, politics is the least important issue in all the countries analyzed, except for Sweden where politics is considered more important than religion (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

3.1.2. Perceptions of young generation

When comparing the results of the students' survey with the data from EVS and WVS, we will find there are significant differences in all studied countries. At the same time, it can be noticed that there are common features between the young generations of the six countries. Table 1 presents the hierarchies of important aspects in life based on both EVS/WVS and students' survey data. The main findings are discussed further.

In the case of India, the largest difference between EVS and the students' survey is about the importance of religion; it seems that the young generation of India pays less importance to religion. On the other hand, work, leisure time and friends are aspects with greater importance for the young generation. As for the perception on the importance of family and politics, there are not significant differences between WVS data and the research on students (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

For Italy, the most significant difference between EVS and the students' survey is about the importance of leisure time, 55 percent of the representatives of young generation attribute a great importance to leisure time in comparison to 27 percent of the EVS respondents (Table 1). Friends are also more important for the young generation from Italy, while family, work and politics are less important aspects. Yet, differences are not very large for these aspects.

Leisure time and friends represent two significantly more important aspects for the young generation in Netherlands, 87 percent, respectively 77 percent of respondents consider these aspects very important (Table 1). In contrast, religion is considered the least important aspect in life, considering that no respondent considered religion more than a „less important” aspect in life. For politics, there was no „very important” answer recorded, but approximately 45 percent of respondents think that politics is an “important enough” aspect. Just like in many of the other countries included in the study, work is less important for the young generation from the Netherlands; for this aspect there is a difference of 14 percent between EVS data and the research on students. Religion and politics represent other two less important issues for the young generation; no Dutch respondent considers these two issues as “very important” in life.

Table 1. Hierarchy of issues considered important in life in the six analyzed countries

Hungary		India		Italy	
EVS	Student research	WVS	Student research	EVS	Student research
family	family	family	family	family	family
work	work	work	work	work	work
friends	leisure time	religion	Leisure time	friends	friends
leisure time	friends	leisure time	friends	religion	leisure time
religion	religion	friends	religion	leisure time	religion
politics	politics	politics	politics	politics	politics
Netherlands		Romania		Sweden	
EVS	Student research	EVS	Student research	EVS	Student research
family	leisure time	family	family	work	leisure time
friends	family	work	leisure time	family	family
leisure time	friends	religion	work	friends	friends
work	work	leisure time	friends	politics	work
religion	religion	friends	religion	religion	religion
politics	politics	politics	politics	leisure time	politics

Source: authors' compilation

In the case of Romania, leisure time, family and friends are more important aspects for the young generation (see Table 1). On the other hand, religion, work and politics are not very important for the Romanian youth. Only 21 percent of Romanian respondents think that religion is a very important aspect in life, 36 percent less than the EVS data; while work is very important for only 42 percent of the respondents (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

For Sweden, the importance of leisure time is significantly higher for the young generation, as there is a 75 percent difference compared to EVS. On the other hand, the importance of work is significantly lower for Swedish respondents; only 23 percent of them think that work is a "very important" aspect in life. Politics is an unimportant aspect in the eyes of Swedish respondents (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

In case of Hungary, the smallest differences were recorded between EVS and the research on students (Table 1). The most significant difference, 14.8 percent, was recorded in case of family; the young generation from Hungary thinks that family is less important. Just like in the other countries included in the study, the leisure time is more important for the young generation; while work is less important compared to EVS data. Religion and politics are issues to which the young generation does not attribute a great importance.

3.2. Important aspects in a job

3.2.1. Analysis of World Values Survey and European Values Survey data

Based on the aspects related to work and work preferences analysed by EVS and WVS, a hierarchy of important job aspects was made (Table 2).

The financial aspect represents the most frequently mentioned aspect in a job in four of the six analysed countries: India, Italy, Romania and Hungary. This aspect could be explained in the light of the masculinity of Italy, Hungary and India, while in case of Romania, Hungary and India the importance of the financial aspect could be explained by the economic development level, the three countries have a GDP/capita significantly smaller than the other three countries included in the study.

Table 2. Important aspects in a job

India	
Important	Less important
<i>Good pay</i>	You can achieve something
Job security	good hours
Respectable job	Opportunity to use initiative
Interesting job	<i>Generous holidays</i>
Responsible job	Not too much pressure
Italy	
Important	Less important
<i>Good pay</i>	Opportunity to use initiative
Job security	Job useful to society
A job that meets one's abilities	Family friendly
You can achieve something	Responsible job
Interesting job	<i>Generous holidays</i>
Romania	
Important	Less important
<i>Good pay</i>	Meeting people
Job security	Job useful to society
Pleasant people	Responsible job
People treated equally	<i>Generous holidays</i>
A job that meets one's abilities	Not too much pressure
Netherlands	
Important	Less important
Pleasant people	Have a say
People treated equally	Responsible job
A job that meets one's abilities	Not too much pressure
Opportunity to use initiative	<i>Generous holidays</i>
<i>Good pay</i>	Job security
Sweden	
Important	Less important
Pleasant people	A job that meets one's abilities
Opportunity to use initiative	Meeting people
You can achieve something	<i>Generous holidays</i>
<i>Good pay</i>	Job useful to society
Interesting job	Family friendly
Hungary	
Important	Less important
<i>Good pay</i>	Learning new skills
Job security	Have a say
Pleasant people	Not too much pressure
People treated equally	Opportunity to use initiative
Good hours	<i>Generous holidays</i>

Source: made by authors based on data from WVS and EVS

Job security is ranked second in the hierarchy of important job aspects in the same four countries, while for the Netherlands job security comes last. The importance of job security can be explained in the light of the intense avoidance of uncertainty characteristic of Romania, Hungary and Italy, but also by the level of economic development (in case of India, for example). In the two feminine countries, the Netherlands and Sweden, the most important aspect of the job is "working with nice people" (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

In all the six countries, the respondents think that having "generous holidays" is not among the most important job aspects. The possibility of taking initiative is not very important for the respondents from India, Italy and Hungary.

3.2.2. Perceptions of young generation

In Hungary, compared to EVS data, the percentage of respondents who think that to be well-paid is an important element of a job increased by 14.5 percent, while the percentage of those who think that a family friendly job is important decreased by 12 percent. This difference can be explained in the light of masculinity-femininity dimension, considering that as people grow older, they tend to focus more on society and less on themselves, which generates a lower masculinity level in case of older generations (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Therefore, we can state that for the young generation in Hungary the masculine values are more pronounced. Another aspect on which there is a significant difference (of 17 percent) between the two studies refers to the number of leave days. Thus, the Hungarian representatives of young generation consider *generous holidays* as an important aspect of a job.

As for Indian respondents, the most significant differences between WVS data and the research we conducted on students are related to the opportunity to take initiative and the possibility of having a job that meets one's abilities. It seems these two job aspects are not as important for the young generation. On the other hand, *working hours, generous holidays, a respectable job and the lack of pressure in a job are more important aspects for the young generation* (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

In case of Italy, there are three aspects for which the difference between the two research studies is higher than ± 10 percent: working hours, generous holidays and the financial aspect. The financial aspect was mentioned by 90 percent of the students' survey respondents, this percentage being by 13.5 percent higher than that of EVS. Similar to the case of Hungary (also a masculine culture), this difference can be explained in the light of masculinity-femininity dimension: masculinity tends to be more pronounced among the young generations than among the older generations³. The convenient working hours and more leave days are other two important aspects for the young generation in Italy, 70 percent of respondents (by 16.5 percent more than EVS), respectively, 45 percent (by 23 percent more than EVS) mentioned these aspects as important issues in a job.

Regarding Netherlands, there are four aspects for which the difference between the two research studies is higher than ± 10 percent. Two of them are aspects which can be associated with intrinsic work motivation: *a) opportunity to learn new skills and b) interesting job*. 94 percent of respondents consider these issues important aspects of a job. Compared to EVS this percentage is by 23 to 24 percent higher, so we can say that the *young generation of Netherlands shows a preference for an intrinsically motivating job*. A *well-paid job* is important for 48 percent of the respondents, a percentage lower by 25 percent compared to EVS data. A *job useful to society* is an important workplace aspect for 71 percent of students' survey respondents, percentage by 11 percent higher than the national average. Therefore, we can say that for the *young generation it is more important to do a job useful to society than to have a well-paid job*.

In case of Romania, a well-paid job (mentioned by 92 percent of respondents) is the most important job related aspect, while working hours and more leave days are aspects mentioned by 83 percent, respectively 71 percent of respondents. Therefore, it is safe to say that Romanian youth is in search of jobs with flexible working hours and more leisure time. Other important job aspects for the young generation of Romania are the opportunity to learn new skills and to *achieve something*. (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

In the case of Sweden, *an interesting job is the most frequently mentioned aspect* by students, with a weight of 94 percent of respondents. Therefore, we can state that *the young generation of Sweden shows a preference for an intrinsically motivating job*, similarly to the young generation of Netherlands (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016). Job security and good working hours are also two important job aspects for Swedish youth. The importance of job security for the young generation

could be explained by the fact that Sweden registers *the highest percentage of unemployed young people* compared to total number of unemployed in OECD (UNRIC, 2012).

3.2.3. Analysis of open-ended question responses

To identify which are the aspects the young generation see as the most important job aspects, we included one open question in the questionnaire. The answers were grouped into 5 categories in the case of India, 8 categories in case of Italy, 9 categories in case of Hungary, 6 categories for the Netherlands, 14 categories for Romania, and into 10 categories for Sweden. The first three most frequently mentioned important issues of a job for each of the six countries are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The three most important aspects in a job

	Hungary	India	Italy
1	good pay	good pay	good pay
2	promotion opportunities	job security	promotion opportunities flexible working hours/ more leisure time
3	good working conditions job security	respect from superiors and peers	job security
	Netherlands	Romania	Sweden
1	<i>intrinsic motivation</i>	good relations with peers	<i>intrinsic motivation</i>
2	opportunity to make a difference	good pay	good pay
3	job satisfaction	<i>intrinsic motivation</i>	more leisure time

Source: made by authors based on responses recorded for the open-ended question

In Hungary, all respondents mentioned good pay as the most important aspect of a job (Table 3). As stated, the importance of the financial aspect can be explained in the light of masculinity-femininity dimension, Hungary being the most masculine country included in the study. Promotion opportunities and good working conditions are important as well for the Hungarian respondents.

As for India, good pay and job security are aspects mentioned by more than 90 percent of respondents (Table 3). An explanation for the importance of these aspects could be the level of economic development in India.

Similar to Hungary and India, (Table 3), most of the Italian respondents mentioned good pay as an important aspect of a job. All in all, 90 percent of respondents attributed a great importance to the financial aspect. Promotion opportunities and leisure time are also important for Italians.

In case of the Netherlands (Table 3), each of the 62 respondents mentioned at least an issue which could be included in the category *intrinsic motivation*. Diversity, challenge, independence, novelty, a pleasant activity seem to be important elements of a job for the Dutch. Thus, the aspects related to intrinsic motivation come first on the list of preferences of Dutch respondents.

The job aspect most frequently mentioned by Romanian respondents is the financial aspect: sufficient amount of wages, financial rewards, bonuses (see Table 3). On the one hand, the importance of money can be attributed to the intense uncertainty avoidance specific to Romania; wages contribute to the reduction of anxiety related to "the safety of tomorrow", and on the other hand, the importance of this aspect can be explained by to the level of economic development of the country (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016).

In Sweden, just like the Netherlands, the aspects related to intrinsic motivation of work are ranked first in the hierarchy of important aspects of a job, while diversity, a pleasant activity, the opportunity to improve one's skills are also considered essential elements of a job.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As stated at the beginning of the paper, the purpose of this cross-cultural study was to identify to what extent the cultural factor influences the attitude towards work and what and if there are the

common characteristics of young employees that cross over cultural boundaries. For this purpose, an intercultural study on work attitude was conducted in six countries: Hungary, India, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, and Sweden. While the findings related to India, Romania and Sweden were discussed in depth in a previous paper (Abrudan, Matei and Roman, 2016), this paper focused on the differences and similarities between the young generation of six countries.

There is an obvious relationship between the cultural factor and the attitude towards work. The cultural dimensions of masculinity-femininity and uncertainty avoidance are the dimensions with the greatest influence on the attitude towards work.

There are also some common characteristics of young employees that cross over cultural boundaries; leisure time and friends are life aspects of particular importance for the young generation of all six countries. Flexible hours are preferred. The importance of work is inferior for the young generation, although work remains an important part of one's life (see Figure 2).

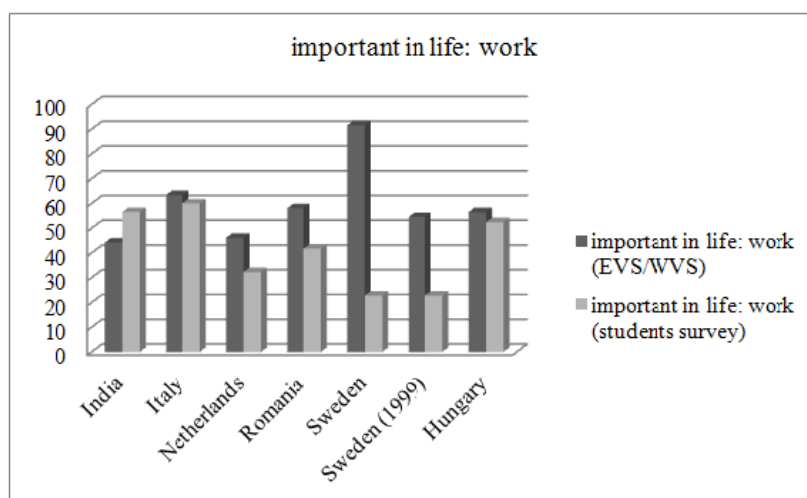


Figure 2. Importance attributed to work in the six countries included in the study

Source: authors' compilation

According to the Italian online press (Filippi, 2014), young people are not willing to do just any job, they prefer office jobs; they acquire bachelor's degree and master's degree only to find a comfortable job. They prefer work in the public sector because of the policy regarding free days and leaves, and also because of salary security, and many young people prefer to live with their parents without getting a job (Leone, 2014). Sweden is confronting with a critical youth unemployment problem (UNRIC, 2012), and Romanian young people have difficulty in finding a job in accordance with their studies (România, Te iubesc, 2014).

Motivating the „new generation of employees” is a challenge that companies either willingly accept or will bear the consequences as work motivation and innovation seem to be more important than ever. Companies must focus on “ordinary” employees, who can be “exceptional innovators” (Hamel and Breen, 2010) if the right environment is made available.

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