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RELATIONAL JOB DESIGN ACROSS CULTURES:

AN EXPLORATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The effect of culture on various management and job functions has been somewhat of an elusive concept to grasp for various experts on the matter. The first problem – how do you control for something as broad and multi-definitional as a culture? There is no clear consensus on how to apply and control for cultural factors when dealing with modern and past management theory. Michael Morris, Joel Podolny, and Billian Sullivan took a practical approach in "Cultural and Coworker Relations: Interpersonal Patterns in American, Chinese, German and Spanish Divisions of a Global Bank" (2008), focusing on the external social structures and coworker relationships to explain cross-cultural values. Morris et al write, "we propose that culture is carried out by the relationship patterns in which people are embedded…we rely on egocentric network survey methodology to survey employees about their concrete relationships to particular coworkers" (517-518). Accordingly, there have been several other scholars, such as Ng, Sorensen and Kim (2009), and Hofstede (1983) that have written in accordance with this principle. There is some agreement that culture can usually be defined by examining cultural practices, social norms and relationship patterns.

In the field of relational job design, there is a budding field of work, spearheaded by Adam Grant, which focuses on an analysis of the effect of social characteristics of jobs on work outcomes. Studies by Grant (2007) and Morgenson/Humphrey (2007) have supported the theory that work outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment are augmented by social support. There is a blank space left for theorizing on the effect of social characteristics across cultures on job outcomes. For the purposes of this paper, a narrow focus on three outcomes of work – job satisfaction, job performance and organizational commitment – will be employed using a cross cultural lens. The relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is also explored. A theoretical look into the matter will explore several hypotheses that individuals in certain cultures, such as those with a larger focus on social support, should experience higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Four countries (the same four used by Morris and colleagues in their 2008 study) will be used for the hypotheses – America, China, Germany and Spain.

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CHAPTER 1

CULTURE

Geert Hofstede (1983) defined culture as "collective mental programming" (76). This does not mean that all individuals are programmed with certain behaviors and social patterns – it merely implies an average pattern of norms across individuals in a given culture. Certainly, culture is not the only defining factor in an individual, but rather a pervasive influence on many individuals that is difficult to quantify. The influence of culture on social patterns is considerable in most nations. Morris and colleagues (2009) reflect on culture in several nations, writing that culture patterns "reflected an 'economic bias in American Society'; dedication to superordinates, a form of 'familism in Chinese society', emphasis on formal classifications, a 'political accent' in German social behavior" (519).

Take something as simple as conversation as a social pattern. In America, it is appropriate (and often encouraged) to be direct in conversations and business dealings and to avoid skirting around issues. In many Asian cultures, the norm is to approach the issue tentatively, as to not offend the other party. A simple difference in conversation patterns can be the root of a serious business disagreement, so it is important to take into account cultural differences in the modern global context of business.

Ng and colleagues (2009) write that culture is "a phenomenon at the group, institutional, or societal level, even though it has strong relevance for predicting individuals' behaviors" (764). They explain the four models of national culture most frequently cited in scholarly work and later use Hoftstede's model to support their hypotheses. These four models seek to better define culture in a manner that can be studied and supported by concrete data –

1) Hofstede's Framework: Geert Hofstede has had enormous importance in the field of management theories across cultures. In 1980, he broke culture into four dimensions – power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity. Looking at individualism-collectivism as an example – this is a measure of whether individuals in that society are more focused on self or group goals.

2) Schwartz's Framework: In 1994, Schwartz examined individuals from 67 nations based on three dimensions – hierarchy vs. egalitarianism, mastery vs. harmony, and embeddedness vs. autonomy.

3) Inglehart's Framework: Inglehart published their main work in 1997 that defined culture based on two dimensions – survival vs. self-expression and tradition vs. secular rational. The first dimension is concerned on whether or not the culture values material things (survival), while the second dimension examines the extent to which a culture values authority and traditional values.

4) GLOBE Model: Headed by Robert House in 2004, the GLOBE project identified nine dimensions of culture in a study on the effect of cultural differences on leadership. Since this paper focuses on Hofstede's definition most heavily of the 4 models, the GLOBE model will not be discussed in any detail.

*All four models taken from Ng, Sorensen and Kim, 2009 (765-766)

Even from a summary look at cultural theories, the complexity of dealing with culture becomes obvious. None of the theories have an effective method to deal with variance in a given culture among individuals. And even if one were to accept one of these models as an effective way to quantify culture, it is still unclear how to accurately collect results to define a given culture based on the provided dimensions.

Morris and colleagues took an interesting approach to the problem of measuring variance in cultural norms. In 2008, they asserted that cultures vary in relational norms with regards to interpersonal interaction among coworkers in an organization. They examined coworker social relations in America, China, Germany and Spain and hypothesized that existing models of culture (the models explained above) would emerge in workplace relationships. Their basic contention is that culture is embedded in people's relationship patterns, and by asking a series of questions about an employee's relationship with his coworkers and superiors, certain culture differences would manifest themselves.

For each country, Morris and colleagues surveyed a sample population of employees from Citicorp Bank and formed a basic hypothesis about how workplace behavior in each country was influenced by cultural and societal norms. Here are the essentials from their testable theories, based on previous cross-cultural research:

1) *America* – American norms in business are centered around practical ends and are less expressive than other countries. In America, individualism is king. Therefore, workplace

relationships should be able to be formed more quickly in America because they are purely intended to reach a practical, not an interpersonal, goal.

2) *China* – Chinese cultural norms are rooted in concepts such as filial responsibility and deference to authority. Intuitively, Chinese workplace interaction should reflect this deference to authority and less-direct approach to forming business relationships.

3) *Germany* – The Germans are known for their formal legal system and procedural culture, and Morris expected that this would carry over to the workplace. Coworker interaction should reflect the formal structure of the legal and political procedure (norm) in Germany.

4) *Spain* – Spanish norms revolve around honor and high levels of sociability. Morris hypothesized that coworker relationships (specifically, conversations with coworkers) would focus more on non-work related topics than in other cultures.

From the survey results and analysis of employee answers, Morris and colleagues found some support for all of their hypotheses, with some of the support conclusive. They found strong support for the American hypothesis – Americans are less likely to have double tie (both in/out of work) relationships and they have shorter instrumental (work related) ties than in other cultures. Regarding China, the data did not support their prediction of high levels of deference to superiors, though it did point to a high level of direct social exchange between coworker peers and with their superiors. Germans had high levels of job-related interaction, but their relationships were not as heavily defined by formal categories and procedure as predicted. Morris and colleagues did find strong support for their Spanish cultural predictions, finding that Spanish coworkers both remained in a social relationship longer and enjoyed more non-work focus in their relationships than in other cultures.

The work of Morris and his colleagues points to a strong link between the social norms of a culture and workplace behavior. Simply by making inferences about the relationship of some well-known social norms of four major nations to the workplace, they were able to predict how employees in a major global bank would view their relationship with coworkers. Culture is a strong predictor of the nature of workplace relationships. Likewise, social relationships and interactions in the workplace can further illuminate understanding of a given culture. A strong understanding of social interaction and support in the office is critical to gaining insight into both culture and the nature of how work is performed.

CHAPTER 2

 SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RELATIONAL JOB DESIGN

Different cultures have different social patterns, and, as Morris proved, these social patterns carry over into the workplace, affecting how employees feel about their coworkers, bosses, and the job itself. In 2009, Adam Grant published "Redesigning Work Design Theories: The Rise of Relational and Proactive Perspectives" with Sharon Parker. Since the late 70's and 80's, relational job design research had been on the decline because researchers were more focused on task than social characteristics. Relational job design focuses "on how jobs, roles and tasks are more socially embedded than ever before, based on increases in interdependence and interactions with coworkers and service recipients" (317).

With more social interaction in jobs, workers can reap the benefits. Employees who have more social contact with those they work with feel a stronger sense of commitment to their coworkers. The more social interaction that occurs, the greater the bond becomes between individuals. Grant (2007) contends that this "affective commitment to beneficiaries increases the positive effect of perceived impact on the motivation to make a prosocial difference" (404). As the global economy becomes increasingly more service oriented, social interaction in the workplace is becoming more important for researchers to study. Certain social characteristics of work can affect the way employees perceive their jobs, as well as how well they perform in their roles (Grant, Fried and Juillerat, 2009).

To measure different social characteristics of a job, and relate them to work outcomes, Morgeson and Humphrey (2008) identified four social characteristics that are important to understand the relational design of work:

1) Social Support – factored in things like opportunities for assistance from coworkers and perceived friendship. Social support had a strong correlation will two important "well being" work outcomes:
   - Organizational Commitment (correlation = .82)
   - Job Satisfaction (correlation = .56)
2) Interaction outside the organization – the level of activity with people outside of the organization, in a business sense. This also has a small correlation with job satisfaction.

3) Interdependence – the extent to which workers are connected to one another in an organization. In Morgeson and Humphrey's study, interdependence had a significant correlation with our two key outcomes:

- Organizational Commitment (correlation = .39)
- Job Satisfaction (correlation = .33)

4) Feedback from others – information from other workers about how an individual is performing in their job. We see a significant correlation between feedback from others and job satisfaction in Morgeson/Humphrey's meta analysis (correlation = .32). There was no analysis of the correlation between feedback from others and organizational commitment by Morgeson and Humphrey.

Clearly, there is a proven link between social characteristics of a job and two outcomes; job satisfaction and organizational commitment. To gain a better understanding of why these correlations exist, it is necessary to examine both outcomes in greater detail. Before the outcomes are discussed, the concept of culture as a moderator and predictor of social behavior must be addressed. After this framework is in place, it should be possible to make hypotheses about cultures with higher tendencies towards social interaction at work and the two outcomes in question.

CHAPTER 3

EFFECT OF CULTURE ON SOCIAL PATTERNS

It is hardly a bold statement to say that national culture has a large effect on the social patterns of the individuals living there. When visiting European countries, Americans might be surprised to see coworkers out for a lunchtime alcoholic beverage even though this is a common practice among businesspeople. Likewise, a German individual might not expect to see such a plethora of fast food restaurants when he or she visits the United States. Because the relationship between social interaction and work has been covered, it is time to bring a third factor into play – culture.

Geert Hofstede, in "The Cultural Relativity of Organizational Practices and Theories" (1983) makes the claim that nationality impacts three main areas of culture:

1) Political – differences between formal and informal institutions
2) Sociological – a peoples' "identity"
3) Psychological – the actual mindset of the inhabitants of a given culture has been programmed from a young age to reflect the nation's cultural values

Hofstede makes the distinction that all individuals in a culture do not reflect the national culture in a uniform manner, but rather the national culture is more of general guideline for the behavior and patterns among individuals. National culture has a strong influence over the behavior, including the social patterns, of the individuals in that setting.

Wasti and Can (2008) tested their hypothesis that high levels of vertical collectivism in a culture have a moderating effect on the relationship between local commitments and global outcomes. They used Turkish employees as an example of individuals in a culture with high vertical collectivism (high collectivism and power distance) to test their cultural hypothesis. Later in this study, in Part 2 of Chapter 4, their findings on organizational commitment are discussed. Wasti and Can found that in societies with high vertical collectivism, employees have a higher level of affective commitment to the organization and that social interaction in countries like China and Turkey overlaps work interaction to a greater extent than in the West. Also, Wasti and Can found that there were low levels of variance in vertical collectivism in Turkey, illustrating the link between Turkish culture and a shared sense of collectivist values. Turkish culture has pervaded work and society to the extent that individuals hold similar sets of values…and they bring these values with them to the office.

Wasti and Can's findings support the theory that certain cultures encourage and promote certain kinds of values (and therefore affect the social structure) more than other cultures. Turkey also scored very low on the Individualism Index (Hofstede 80), more confirmation of the pervasive nature of collectivist values in their society. Collectivist cultures have more social interaction at work than individualistic cultures, which means that the continuance of research in the field of relational job design, and the comparison of multiple cultures, is of critical importance moving forward.

CHAPTER 4

JOB SATISFACTION, JOB PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT ACROSS CULTURES

Several researches have examined both organizational commitment and job satisfaction in the context of cross cultural research. Although findings haven't been entirely conclusive, the link between certain aspects of a culture and these outcomes is undeniable. The main reason for the ambiguity of findings in this area is the difficulty that researches face when attempting to moderate for national culture. Quantifying culture seems an impossible task. Ng and colleagues (2009) creatively measured culture by applying Hofstede's framework to survey results from employees of different nations. These employees were asked questions that would indicate their level of job satisfaction. The goal – to find a link between culture and the job satisfaction job performance relationship. Wasti and Can (2008) examined organizational commitment in Turkey, a collectivist culture, and hypothesized that this outcome would be related to levels of vertical collectivism. In this study, Wasti and Can used several published methods of measurement to quantify different facets of work in the Turkish context, all relating to commitment. The survey of Turkish employees was meant to determine levels of organizational commitment among the Turkish culture and, more broadly, collectivist cultures.

PART 1 – JOB SATISFACTION JOB PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP

Ng and colleagues explored job satisfaction on a global level in their 2009 work "Does the Job Satisfaction Job Performance Relationship Vary Across Cultures?" To moderate for culture, Ng et al used Hofstede's four-piece framework of culture to build their hypotheses. Here are the four hypotheses that they came up with based on Hofstede's four dimensions:

1) Job satisfaction is more linked to job performance in individualistic than collectivist cultures because in an individualistic culture, "one acts to according to one's own discretion and preferences" (766). In collectivist cultures, group goals are a more important predictor of behavior on the job.

2) In low power-distance cultures, as defined by Hofstede, the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is higher than in cultures with high-power-distance cultures. This logic makes sense because individuals in highly socially stratified cultures should be more likely to perform on the job based on expectations from superiors and formalized roles, rather than worry about how satisfied they are with their job. For examples, individuals in China, a high-power-distance society, should be more likely to accept their role in an organization and

perform their tasks regardless of their perceived happiness, or satisfaction, with the job. In America, on the other hand, there is more social equality and more room for job satisfaction to play a role in the performance.

3) Similar to their previous two hypotheses, Ng and colleagues predicted that there would be a stronger link in low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures between job performance and job satisfaction because there is less focus on tradition and defined roles. Cultures that allow more room for change let individuals be more open with their personal attitudes and differences. Logically, someone's attitude about their work should have a greater effect on their performance in such cultures.

4) The job satisfaction job performance link is stronger in masculine (material) cultures than in feminine (non-material, relationship-based) cultures. In material cultures, it should follow that employees will associate working hard with monetary or material gain – there should be clear, tangible, performance augmentation from a happy worker in these cultures. In more socially bound cultures, such as Spain, the link shouldn't be as strong because workers tend to focus their efforts more on relationships and social groups.

Ng and colleagues found the most significant support for the third hypothesis, finding that cultures high in uncertainty-avoidance had a weaker relationship between job satisfaction and job performance(specifically, task performance) among employees than in cultures that are more open to change. Sorensen's findings illuminate cultural differences in the way work is approached. In cultures such as China or Turkey, where norms are heavily integrated into social settings and the workplace, individuals perform their tasks more as a function of set roles and expectations of superiors than personal attitudes about their jobs. In America, a culture known for its openness to change and creativity (low-uncertainty-avoidance), individual attitudes about work, such as job satisfaction, play a larger role in how the work is performed.

Of course, these findings are broad generalizations, not a rule that applies to every individual in each culture. Although Hofstede's dimensions are an accepted method of quantifying a culture, any analysis of a culture as a whole is inherently imperfect – there are just too many factors to take into account. Nevertheless, managers working in today's global setting could benefit from this information by applying theory to practice. There is an undeniable link between culture and they way work is viewed and performed by individuals.

PART 2 –ORGANIZATINAL COMMITMENT ACROSS CULTURES

Commitment to an organization can take many forms because employees are tied to their workplace in multiple ways. Wasti and Can examined these concepts in 2008 with their work "Affective and Normative Commitment to Organization, Supervisor and Coworkers: Do Collectivist Values Matter?" Affective commitment deals with the personal connection a worker has with their employer and normative commitment stems from the concrete sense of obligation an individual feels towards their company. Wasti and Can chose Turkish employees as their testing subjects because Turkey is a society high in vertical collectivism, meaning there is high collectivism and power distance. Their second study is of particular relevance to this paper because it "tested the 'cultural hypothesis' which argues for the moderating influence of collectivist values on the relationship between person (local) commitments and organizational-level (global) outcomes" (404).

Their hypothesis that commitment to superiors would be higher in collectivist society did not merit any real results. Wasti and Can did find that high levels of affective commitment in societies characterized by high vertical collectivism led to reduced turnover intentions in workers (mean=1.78). In low collectivism cultures, even those with high affective commitment had noticeably higher turnover intentions (mean=1.99). But why wasn't there any significant difference in normative commitment to an organization between collectivist and non-collectivist cultures? Wasti and Can hypothesize, "It is possible that normative commitment, particularly in terms of person commitments, is construed differently in collectivist contexts than in the West" and "in diffuse cultures, like China and Turkey, personal and professional life domains overlap to a larger extent than in North America" (411). Taking into account these profound, ingrained cultural differences between collectivist and non-collectivist cultures, it is easy to see where different definitions and perceptions of organizational commitment would make collecting testable data on the topic a difficult task.

The field requires a more culturally-sensitive research approach. Even though Wasti and Can did not come up with conclusive results from their survey and analysis of a select group of Turkish employees, their ideas on organizational commitment in collectivist cultures hold a great deal of merit. Individuals in a collectivist culture have been brought up in a society that values shared goals and strong norms. It is only logical that employees of an organization in a collectivist country should be more committed to the organization, the "group" in which they develop their career. In countries like China and Turkey, the general focus is on the common good and contributing to the team, not a pursuit of individual goals.

More research on organizational commitment in different cultures may unearth facts that support this innate logic.

CHAPTER 5

TWO OUTCOMES IN FOUR CULTURES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONAL JOB DESIGN

It is about time that modern management research answers the question, "in what culture are workers most satisfied with their work?" Another similar question – "in what culture are workers most committed to their organization?" is also important to modern research in the field of cross-cultural management research. These are difficult questions because it is impossible to account for all the workers in a given culture and use an effective method to measure job satisfaction/organizational commitment among the individuals in each society. In theory, individuals in certain cultures should experience higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Morgenson and Humphrey's research in 2008 quantified the link between the social characteristics of work and two outcomes – job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Previously in this study, the strong tie between culture and the social patterns of individuals living in that culture was explored. It should follow that individuals in cultures such as Spain should experience higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than other cultures. Because Spanish culture is known for its high level of sociability and strong focus on interpersonal relationships in the workplace, I hypothesize that workers in Spain are more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to their company than in other cultures.

Based on Morris and colleagues (2008) study of social patterns in the workplace in America, China, Germany and Spain, I will now theorize as to the levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction in each of those cultures. In each of these theoretical frameworks, I have not considered most aspects of the hypothetical organizations in each culture such as the differences between tasks, work environments, political influences, etc. I seek to make broad generalizations about the effect of each culture on two outcomes based on existing research about the four countries in question.

1) *America:* Social support and other social characteristics play a smaller role in the American workplace than in other cultures because workers are focused on their work. American culture has been well documented as individualistic. Morris and colleagues (2008) found, through a series of questions asked to American workers, that social interaction in America was more likely to be with people out of the office than in other cultures. Inter-workplace social relationships do not last as long in America compared to other cultures. In line with current research on relational job design, I hypothesize that with further research, American workers

would report the lowest job satisfaction levels of the four countries examined in this study. And, because America is a very individualistic culture, organizational commitment among American workers would also be the lowest out of the four countries. Hofstede's Individualism Index (80)shows America as very high on the scale and places collectivist countries like Turkey on the opposite end of the spectrum. Americans are generally less committed to an organization and more committed to personal development and individual goals.

2) *China* – By population, China is the world's largest country with over a billion people. China is a collectivist culture in which norms such as filial responsibility and deference to authority are an integral part of society. Although Morris and colleagues (2008) research did not establish a firm link between Chinese employees and deference to their superiors, they did find evidence of a great deal of social exchange between all levels in organizations. Research in the field of relational job design would suggest that this increased social interaction would augment certain outcomes. Therefore, I hypothesize that Chinese employees would report high levels of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment if asked the right questions.

3) *Germany* – The Germans are known, according to Morris and colleagues' research, for their formalized political institutions and structured norms –these national features carry over into individuals in the workplace. Although Morris did not find strong support for his hypothesis that formal rules would carry over into the workplace, he did find evidence of high levels of social interaction among coworkers. Again, I would predict high levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction among German workers.

4) *Spain* – Spain is the most socially oriented of the four countries, with high levels of social interaction among coworkers and a tendency for in-work relationships to also carry outside the office, unlike in America. I hypothesize that Spanish workers would report the highest levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment out of the four countries. Social characteristics of work have been shown to lead to an increase in both these outcomes, so Spain should have the highest results.

These four hypotheses are purely theoretical, and I will leave it to future researches to test them. In testing each prediction, it is important to account for cultural differences when administering surveys or other tests to employees.

DISCUSSION

 A better understanding of how employees from different cultures respond to various survey questions needs to be reached to come up with real answers about job design across cultures. One of the main difficulties researchers have faced in this field is the inability to moderate for cultural differences and achieve a standardized method of measuring various testable hypotheses. A possible approach would be to review the literature from each country on management theory, for who understands the nuances and complexities of a culture better than the people who live their lives immersed in it? With a better understanding of cultural differences, it will become easier to tailor an effective set of questions for workers in different countries and glean good data from the survey results. It is also important to remember that individual differences will always skew survey results, making it impossible to draw exact conclusions about workers in a given culture.

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