Similarities and Differences in Perceived Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture:

Snapshots of Australia and India

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WORK MOTIVATION, PERSONALITY, AND CULTURE

Abstract

Increasing use of international resources and alliances aimed at better economic management are evident in many global companies, but more needs to be known about how cultural issues relate to individual motivation and personality in order to enhance work performance. While several Western motivation theories exist, such as the motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1959), the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), and the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the transferability of these theories to different cultures has been questioned (Hodgetts, Luthans, & Doh, 2006; Hofstede, 1980). Furthermore, a need to expand the cross-cultural database beyond America, Japan, Hong Kong, and China comparisons has been highlighted (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Yi Ou, 2007). The present thesis studied similarities and differences in perceived work motivation and personality across two diverse cultures: Australian and Indian. The three main research questions were: 1) Are there any differences in the personality profiles of Australian and Indian students and employees? 2) Are there any differences in sources of motivation of Australian and Indian students and employees? 3) What are the similarities and differences between Australians and Indians in terms of cultural dimensions?

Australia and India were chosen because the two countries are similar in several respects (for example, both countries are the two biggest democracies in the Asia-Pacific region), but both countries are also very different on several aspects (for example, Australia’s population is approximately 22.62 million whereas India’s population is 1.241 billion). Hence a comparative study of Australia and India should reveal interesting information. Furthermore, a study of Australia and India could illuminate a broader understanding of the two cultures as trade relations between Australia and India have been increasing dramatically over the past decade. The recent Australian government decision to overturn the ban on uranium sales to
India and the Australian Prime Minister’s visit to India is expected to further boost and strengthen trade relations between the two countries.

The self-determination theory of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) was considered the most appropriate theory for the present thesis based on an extensive literature review of the major theories of motivation and by asking the study participants in both countries what motivated them. Specifically, four studies were conducted to investigate similarities and differences in work motivation and personality between students and employees in Australia and India. A mixed-methods approach was used in the present thesis because qualitative methods provide a rich view of the domains of interest whereas quantitative methods allow more precise interpretation of relationships within those domains. Semi-structured interviews were utilised in studies one and two, while group differences were tested in studies three and four. In studies three and four, correlational analyses were utilised to investigate relationships among variables.

Studies one and two were qualitative in nature where 62 students (25 Australian and 37 Indian) and 59 employees (17 Australian and 42 Indian) were interviewed to investigate what motivated them to study/work and what were desirable and undesirable personality characteristics of students/workers according to them. A thematic analysis of interview responses revealed that Australian and Indian students and employees had similar motivators such as an intrinsic interest in study/their work and need for achievement. However, there were also some culture-specific motivators such as work as a means to enhance social status among male Indian employees. This theme was interpreted in light of the hierarchical nature of Indian society. Some gender differences were noted as well. For example, Indian female students were motivated to study because education was a tool for them to obtain independence and respect. This need for respect from others and family members was interpreted as a reflection of the male-centric Indian society. However, it must be noted that
there were significantly more females than males in the studies, hence the results may be gender biased.

With regard to personality characteristics, Australian and Indian students and employees considered being conscientious and open to new experiences desirable personality characteristics. Some culture specific themes emerged such as the theme of ‘being political’ as an undesirable personality trait prevalent among the Indian male employees. This theme was interpreted as an aspect of paternalism which characterises most Indian superior-subordinate relationships.

Studies three and four were quantitative in nature where 138 students (61 Australian and 77 Indian) and 128 employees (59 Australian and 69 Indian) were administered measures of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation, the Big Five personality traits, work ethic and, cultural dimensions (horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism). In addition, the employee sample was administered measures of basic need satisfaction at work and work locus of control. The results comparing Australian and Indian students showed Indian students scoring higher on self-reliance (a work ethic sub-scale that measures striving for independence) and acceptance of hierarchical relationships (vertical collectivism). Differences in self-reliance were interpreted in terms of cultural differences in the learning atmosphere. Australian students scored higher on conscientiousness and lower on neuroticism than Indian students; which was interpreted in terms of cultural differences in standards of behaviours. Australian and Indian students had similar scores on measures of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

The results comparing Australian and Indian employees showed Indian employees scoring significantly higher on pro-leisure attitudes and attitudes towards the productive use of time (work ethic sub-scales). It was proposed that perhaps possessing pro-leisure attitudes were not considered undesirable and hence not part of ‘good work ethic’ in the Indian society.
Indian employees also scored higher on horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism and vertical collectivism. Higher scores on all dimensions of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism were interpreted in terms of culture specific values of coexistence of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies in the Indian society. Australian and Indian employees had similar scores on measures of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the Big Five, basic need satisfaction at work, and work locus of control.

Implications of results for theories relating to personality and work motivation are discussed; also discussed are the implications for practice such as personnel management, incentive systems, and training and development. Strengths and limitations of the present thesis are outlined. The present study’s findings suggest important similarities and differences between Australians and Indians which provide a snapshot of underlying cultural values.

*Keywords:* work motivation, personality, culture, Australia, India
Declaration

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Trishita Chaudhuri Mathew

Date:
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: Overview of Research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Study India and Australia?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Aims of the Present Thesis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Research Questions and Hypotheses</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Trajectory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Contents of the Subsequent Chapters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: Work Motivation Theories: The Quest for a Culturally Appropriate Theory</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Theories of Motivation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland’s Achievement Theory</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: Cultural Underpinnings of Work Behaviour and Personality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Socio-Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Dimensions: The Work of Hofstede and Trompenaars</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompenaars’ Cultural Dimensions</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality versus Cultural Specificity of Personality</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: Biologically based or Culturally Specific?</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table of Contents (Contd.)

**CHAPTER FOUR: Personality and Individual Differences at Work**
- The Big Five and Work Behaviour ........................................... 44
- Work Locus of Control .......................................................... 46
- Work Ethic ............................................................................ 48
- What is the Utility of Personality Measures in the Workplace? ...... 50
- Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture: The Picture Thus Far .... 51

**CHAPTER FIVE: Methodology and Methods**
- Paradigms of Research Methods ............................................. 53
- Cross-Cultural Research: Strengths and Limitations .................. 55
  - Equivalence ......................................................................... 55
  - Sampling ............................................................................ 57
  - Response Styles ................................................................... 59
    - Socially Desirable Responding ........................................ 59
    - Response Bias .................................................................. 61
  - Levels of Analyses ............................................................. 62

**CHAPTER SIX: A Qualitative Analysis of Motivation and Personality: Looking at Australia and India**
- Brief Overview of the Indian Culture ...................................... 65
  - India, a Lens for Diversity ................................................. 66
  - Family Structure ............................................................... 66
- What are the Core Indian Values? .......................................... 68
  - Duality in Thinking ........................................................... 68
  - Coexistence of Collectivistic and Individualistic Tendencies ...... 69
  - Familism and Personalised Relationships ............................. 71
Table of Contents (Contd.)

CHAPTER SIX (contd.)

Hierarchical Relationships...........................................72

Brief Overview of the Australian Culture................................74

Australia Fair.................................................................74

A Brief History of Australia...........................................75

Mateship............................................................................77

Tall Poppy Syndrome.......................................................77

Families in Australia..........................................................78

Summary Conclusions.......................................................79

Study One: Semi-Structured Interviews of Indian and Australian Students........79

Overview of Higher Education in India................................79

Indian Women in Higher Education.................................81

Academic Motivation in India...........................................82

Overview of Higher Education in Australia...........................84

Australian Women in Higher Education............................87

Academic Motivation in Australia.......................................88

Study One Hypotheses......................................................89

Method.............................................................................89

Participants.....................................................................89

Materials.........................................................................91

Design.............................................................................92

Procedure.......................................................................92

Results...........................................................................94

Discussion.....................................................................117
CHAPTER SIX (contd.)

Study Two: Semi-Structured Interviews of Indian and Australian Employees……122

- Attitudes towards Work in India and Australia........................................122
  - Spirit of India......................................................................................122
  - Women and Work in India.................................................................125
  - Juxtaposition of Attitudes.................................................................127
  - Changing Nature of Work in Australia..............................................127

- Study Two Hypotheses.................................................................131

- Method.........................................................................................132
  - Participants....................................................................................132
  - Materials and Design......................................................................134
  - Procedure.....................................................................................135

- Results.........................................................................................137

- Discussion....................................................................................158

- General Discussion.......................................................................163

CHAPTER SEVEN: A Survey of Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture: India and Australia.........................................................166

- Work Motivation...........................................................................166
  - The Big Five................................................................................168

- Work Ethic...................................................................................170

- Work Locus of Control.................................................................172

- Individualism and Collectivism......................................................173

- Study Three: Similarities and Differences in Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture between Australian and Indian Students.................................174
CHAPTER SEVEN (contd.)

Summary of Hypotheses.................................................................174
Method..........................................................................................174
Participants...................................................................................174
Materials.......................................................................................176
Design............................................................................................186
Procedure......................................................................................186
Results..........................................................................................188
Discussion.....................................................................................199

Study Four: Similarities and Differences in Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture between Australian and Indian Employees.........................................................206

Summary of Study Four Hypotheses.................................................206
Method..........................................................................................207
Participants...................................................................................207
Materials.......................................................................................210
Design............................................................................................215
Procedure......................................................................................216
Results..........................................................................................217
Discussion.....................................................................................231

CHAPTER EIGHT: Similarities and Differences in Work Motivation, Personality, and Culture: Same, Same, but Different?.................................................................241

References....................................................................................251

Appendices....................................................................................310
List of Tables

Tables

Table 1: Consequences of allocentrism and idiocentrism as outlined by Triandis (2001) .................................................................39

Table 2: Participants’ information on age [range, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)], mean number of years in the current institute (SD) and mean number of residency years in current country.................................................................91

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes prevalent in Indian and Australian student samples.....115

Table 4: Participant characteristics information on mean age (SD), level of management [Mgt. Level: Upper (U), Middle (M), and Lower (L), frequency], mean tenure in occupation and organisation (SD), and mean number of years in the country of residence (SD)........................................................................................................134

Table 5: Themes and sub-themes prevalent in Indian and Australian employee samples....156

Table 6: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Openness to new experiences (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Neuroticism (N), and Acquiescence Bias (AB) Scores for Australian and Indian Samples as found by Schmitt et al. (2007) ........................................................................................................169

Table 7: Participant characteristics information on age [range, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)], mean number of years in the current institute (SD) and mean number of years in the country of residence (SD)......................................................................................176

Table 8: Descriptions, Number of Items, and Example Items of Sub-Scales Centrality of Work, Self-Reliance, Hard Work, Leisure, Morality / Ethics, Delay of Gratification, and Wasted Time...........................................................................................................178
List of Tables (contd.)

Table 9: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the Sub-Scales of Centrality of Work (CW), Self-Reliance (SR), Hard Work (HW), Leisure (L), Morality / Ethics (M/E), Delay of Gratification (DG), and Wasted Time (WT) for Indian and Australian Students ................................................................. 179

Table 10: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha of Sub-Scales Horizontal Individualism (HI), Vertical Individualism (VI), Horizontal Collectivism (HC), and Vertical Collectivism (VC) for Australian and Indian Student Samples ........................................ 181

Table 11: Internal Consistency as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the Sub-Scales of Intrinsic Enjoyment, Intrinsic Challenge, Extrinsic Compensation, and Extrinsic Outward for Australian and Indian Students ................................................................. 184

Table 12: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N) for Australian and Indian Students ................................................................. 186

Table 13: Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of extrinsic outward, extrinsic compensation, intrinsic enjoyment, and intrinsic challenge for the Australian and Indian student samples ................................................................. 190

Table 14: Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeable, and neuroticism for the Australian and Indian student samples ................................................................. 191

Table 15: Means (M) and Standard deviations (SD) of self-reliance, morality / ethics, leisure, hard work, centrality of work, wasted time, and delay of gratification for the Australian and Indian student samples ................................................................. 194
List of Tables (contd.)

Table 16: Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of horizontal collectivism, horizontal individualism, vertical collectivism, and vertical individualism for the Australian and Indian student samples………………………………………………………………………………………………………196

Table 17: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients for work ethic sub-scales (self-reliance [SR], hard work [HW], morality / ethics [M/E], centrality of work [CW], wasted time [WT], leisure [L], delay of gratification [DG]) and conscientiousness (C)…………………………………198

Table 18: Participant characteristics information on age [mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)], level of management [Mgmt. Level: Upper (U), Middle (M), and Lower (L), frequency], mean tenure in occupation and organisation (SD), and mean number of years in the country of residence (SD)…………………………………………………………………………………209

Table 19: Internal Consistency as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the Sub-Scales Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence for Australian and Indian Employee Samples…212

Table 20: Internal Consistency as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the Sub-Scales of Intrinsic Enjoyment, Intrinsic Challenge, Extrinsic Compensation, and Extrinsic Outward for Australian and Indian Employees……………………………………………………………………………………………………213

Table 21: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N) for Australian and Indian Employees……………………………………………………………………………………………………214

Table 22: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the Sub-Scales of Centrality of Work (CW), Self-Reliance (SR), Hard Work (HW), Leisure (L), Morality / Ethics (M/E), Delay of Gratification (DG), and Wasted Time (WT) for Indian and Australian Employees……………………………………………………………………………………………………214
List of Tables (contd.)

Table 23: Internal Consistencies as Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha of Sub-Scales Horizontal Individualism (HI), Vertical Individualism (VI), Horizontal Collectivism (HC), and Vertical Collectivism (VC) for Australian and Indian Employees ................................................. 215

Table 24: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) Of Work Preference Inventory Sub-Scales Extrinsic Outward, Extrinsic Compensation, Intrinsic Enjoyment, and Intrinsic Challenge for the Australian and Indian Samples ........................................................................ 220

Table 25: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SDs) of Autonomy and Relatedness for the Australian and Indian Employee Samples ........................................................................................................ 221

Table 26: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeable, and Neuroticism for the Australian and Indian Employee Samples ........................................................................................................ 223

Table 27: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Self-Reliance, Morality / Ethics, Leisure, Hard Work, Centrality of Work, Wasted Time, and Delay of Gratification for the Australian and Indian Employee Samples ........................................................................................................ 224

Table 28: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Horizontal Collectivism, Horizontal Individualism, Vertical Collectivism, and Vertical Individualism for the Australian and Indian Employee Samples ........................................................................................................ 227

Table 29: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient for Intrinsic Motivation Sub-Scales: Intrinsic Enjoyment (IE), And Intrinsic Challenge (IC), and Basic Need Satisfaction Sub-Scales: Autonomy (A), Relatedness (R), And Competence (C) ........................................................................................................ 229
List of Tables (contd.)

Table 30: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients for Work Ethic Sub-Scales: Self-Reliance (SR), Hard Work (HW), Morality / Ethics (M/E), Centrality of Work (CW), Wasted Time (WT), Delay of Gratification (DG,) and Work Locus Of Control (WLoC)…………………………….230

Table 31: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients for Work Ethic Sub-Scales (Self-Reliance, Hard Work, Morality / Ethics, Centrality of Work, Wasted Time, Leisure, and Delay of Gratification) and Conscientiousness…………………………………………………………….231
List of Figures

Figure 1: Aims, samples, methodologies, and methods used in each study of the present thesis……………………………………………………………………………………………………………10

Figure 2: Summary of the self-determination theory: Influences of the social environment and individual differences in motivational orientation on motivation which ranges from amotivation, extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation. Fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy enhance intrinsic motivation……………………………………………………………………………………………………..23

Figure 3: Theoretical and empirical literature review thus far revealed that culture affects personality and work motivation. Culture was operationalized by horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism; personality by the Big Five, work locus of control, and work ethic; and work motivation by the theory of self-determination……………………………………52
### List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Process Theories of Motivation</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Letter to the Head of Educational Institute, Mumbai, India for Phase of the Thesis</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Explanatory Letter for Australian Students – Phase I</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Letter to Australian Organisations Requesting Participation in the Research Project</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Statistical Output from SPSS for Studies One and Two</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Example Transcript</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: Letter to the Head of Educational Institutes, India for Phase II of the Project</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Explanatory Letter for Students – Phase II</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J: The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix K: Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Scale</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix L: Work Preference Inventory</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix M: International Personality Item Pool</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix N: Basic Need Satisfaction at Work Scale</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix O: Work Locus of Control</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix P: Statistical Output for Studies Three and Four</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>