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What are Some Cultural Variances that Explain Differences in Employee Engagement, and What are the Implications of those Differences?

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Abstract

As the companies extend their activities at an international level, the human resources management tools, including the employee engagement, need to be developed and diversified to manage differences in culture, economics, and political values. Understanding cultural dimensions and drivers of engagement helps to adapt to the variances in the employee engagement. In this summary, we narrow our focus to the Hofstede's cultural dimension theory to apply cultural variances to the employee engagement model.

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Required Publisher Statement

Question: What are some cultural variances that explain differences in employee engagement, and what are the implications of those differences?

Introduction

As the companies extend their activities at an international level, the human resources management tools, including the employee engagement, need to be developed and diversified to manage differences in culture, economics, and political values. Understanding cultural dimensions and drivers of engagement helps to adapt to the variances in the employee engagement. In this summary, we narrow our focus to the Hofstede's cultural dimension theory to apply cultural variances to the employee engagement model.

Drivers of Engagement

Employee engagement can be viewed as the status of employee satisfaction to their work, work situation, the people around them, and the result of their association with the organization. This status is depicted in four stages - satisfied, motivated, committed, and advocate. [i] When it comes to the drivers leading to higher stages, employee surveys have shown that cultural values influence how each individual perceives and interprets a situation. Therefore, the driver of employee engagement differs depending on its culture.[ii] Mercer's What's Working studies have found that top motivators differ country to country (**Appendix 1**). Whereas U.K. and China value confidence in senior leadership, for example, U.S. culture does not value it as an important driver. As the nature of work is changing and the global economy is emerging, it is hard for an employer to anticipate nation-specific drivers to interpret employee engagement.

Although there are differences in the drivers of engagement by nations, there is a consistent set of drivers, which are globally emerging:

• The work itself, including opportunities to develop
• Recognition and rewards
• Confidence and trust in leadership
• Organizational communication

Therefore, understanding the cultural differences can account for the variances in engagement drivers.

Cultural Variances in Engagement

Hofstede's study focuses on 5 dimensions of culture that are nation specific, which include interpersonal relations, uncertainty avoidance, importance of gender, power distance, and time orientation[iii]. Using those dimensions we examine 4 that are most applicable to the company's engagement drivers. However, the cultural dimension that we did not apply to an engagement driver, time orientation, is still applicable to employee engagement. For example, countries with short-term time orientation will want feedback right away, while long-term orientation countries will value more aggregated evaluations based on a longer duration.

Interpersonal Relations and Professional Opportunities
On one end of the spectrum, cultures can be considered a collectivist culture. In these environments, team loyalty and interdependence are valued characteristics. Goal attainment is aligned with a broader group, not the individual, in these cultures. On the other end of the spectrum are individualistic cultures. In these cultures, people are expected to be self-reliant and independent. It is important that workers in these cultures have autonomy and that rewards are based on individual performance. [iv]

Employees with high engagement in regard to professional opportunities feel respected, feel their work is valued for its overall contribution, and that the work place provides development opportunities.[v] Employees in the collectivist cultures expect the professional opportunity to be provided by the

organization, whereas employees in individualistic cultures are motivated to develop based on personal challenges, gaining autonomy, and securing more freedom in the role.[vi] Therefore, support from the physical conditions and dependence on the organization is more valued in the collectivist cultures in terms of motivating employees for professional opportunities.

Uncertainty Avoidance and Trust in Leadership

If a country or culture tries to avoid ambiguity and values security, they are strong in uncertainty avoidance. On the other hand, a culture can be weak in this category. In these cases, the culture values freedom and innovation, and thus avoids being too formal.

Acts of leadership show employees the orientation of the organization, how resources are allocated, and involvement with the customers-employee relationship.[vii] In cultures that are strong in uncertainty avoidance, security motivates employee esteem. However, employees in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are motivated by fulfillment of more innovative objectives rather than security.[viii] This implies different drivers to confidence and trust in leadership by cultures, and what kind of aspects should be emphasized when managers communicate with employees regarding the vision of company.

Importance of Gender and Recognition and Reward

If a country falls on the more masculine side of this spectrum, they tend to value more male dominated behaviors such as assertiveness and the needs for achievement in the workplace. On the other hand, a feminine culture in the work place means more emphasis is placed on relationships and cooperation with co-workers and superiors.

Recognition and reward in the highly engaged organization is perceived as fair and competitive. However, the way to practice varies by culture. In the masculine culture, employees prefer to receive money, titles, tangible or status-oriented rewards, whereas employees in feminine cultures value meaningful rewards, such as time off, improved benefits, or symbolic rewards. [ix]

Power Distance and Organizational Communication

Power Distance refers to a culture reaction to authority and its distribution of decision-making. Therefore, in low power distance culture, hierarchies with clear chains of command and regulations are articulated and valued. People in this kind of environment respond better to a clear boss with a centralization of power. On the other hand, countries that score high in power distance prefer "flatter" organizations where decision-making is shared and/or democratic. Open discussion and disagreement is often encouraged in these circumstances.

Organizations with high engagement have an open and planned communication culture, in which the supervisor is trained to actively participate in cascading information. In the culture that has high power distance, information cascaded by hierarchies is considered more credible than in the culture with low power distance. Therefore, this difference plays an important role with drivers that are relevant with organizational communication.

Conclusion

A company operating in many different countries should approach employee engagement plans and ratings based on the cultural dimensions of that country. Different values based on the different cultural dimensions can account for a lot of the variance in employee engagement if there is a misalignment between the two. However, it should also be noted that while an organization can operate in a country, the organizational culture may not be the same, so a cultural evaluation should be done before implementing engagement strategies to align based on cultural dimensions.

Appendix

Differences in national drivers of employee engagement (Rank)

	Rank		
Driver	*U.S.*	*U.K.*	*China*
Confidence in **achieving career objectives**	1	—	—
A sense of **personal accomplishment**	2	1	1
Confidence that the **organization will be successful**	3	—	—
Quality as a high priority in the organization	4	—	—
Opportunity for **growth and development**	5	—	—
Information and assistance in **managing careers**	6	—	—
Flexibility to **provide good customer service**	7	—	—
Confidence in **senior management**	—	2	4
Opportunities for **training**	—	3	6
Paid fairly, given one's contribution	—	4	2
A good **reputation for customer service**	—	5	—
Receiving regular **feedback on performance**	—	6	7
Comparable **benefits** to industry	—	7	3
IT systems support business trends	—	—	5

Table 1. Levels of culture, values and value types included in the model SH Schwartz

Level of culture	Value types	Value
Openness to changes	Self-management	independence, openness, wolność
	Stimulation	curiosity, creativity, openness
Conservatism	Safety	safety, respect
	Adaptation	respect, equality
	Tradition	membership, loyalty, obedience
Individual growth	Achievements	respect, equality
	Hedonism	pleasure
	Authority	subordination, authority / power of social
Transcendence	Universalism	honesty, wisdom, peace
	Protectiveness	friendship, responsibility

Source: own study based on: Schwartz (1999)

Stankiewicz, J., & Moczulska, M. (2012). Cultural conditioning of employees' engagement. *Management, 16*(2), 72. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/v10286-012-0057-x

Table 2. Dimensions of culture defined in the model by to G. Hofstede and the type of values included in the model S.H. Schwartz

Dimensions of culture		Type of values
Power Distance	Low	Achievements
	Large	Authority
	Individualism	Self-management
	Collectivism	Adaptation Tradittion
Uncertainty Avoidance	Week	Stimulation
	Strong	Safety

Source: own study based on: Hofsteade, Hofstede i Minkov 2011,Szwartz (1992)

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Table 3. Dimensions of culture and determinants of employee engagement

	Determinants of employee engagement	Power distance		interpersonal relations		Uncertainty Avoidance		Importance of gender		Time orientation	
		large	low	indi-vidu-alism	collec-tivism	week	strong	ma-sculi-nity	femi-ninity	short--term	long--term
Work	Task: • content (challenge) • diversity (autonomy) • well-defined		X X	X X			X				X X	
	Condition: • time/place • benefits, • employment	X	X		X X		X X X				
Inter-personal relations	Superiors: • partners • „competetitors" • decision-makers • co-workers	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
	Employees • team (cooperation) • competition • distrust („alien")				X X			X	X	X	X
	Organizational climate/ atmosphere in the team			X	X				X		X
	Conflicts: • power • rules • together (compromise)	X		X			X	X	X		
Organi-zation	Goals: • enterprises • employees	X	X	X		X		X			X X
	Quality of life (balance: home- work)		X			X			X		
	Rewarding: • by position • according to merit • according to needs • by affiliation to the group • according to rules • by recognition	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
	Promotion			X				X			
	Tranings		X	X	X				X		

Source: own study based on Sikorski (2006), Hofsteade, Hofstede i Minkov (2011), www.geert-hofstede.com (16.09.12)

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Table 4. Dimensions of culture defined in the model by to G. Hofstede taking into account the country

Dimensions of culture		Country
Power Distance	Low	Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, China, France
	Large	England, USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, the Scandinavian countries,
interpersonal relations	Individualism	Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, France, Spain, English-speaking countries, Netherlands,
	Collectivism	Thailand, Korea, China, Japan, Russia, Bulgaria
Uncertainty Avoidance	Week	scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, England, USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, China,
	Strong	Germany, Hungary, China, India, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, France
Importance of gender	Masculinity	Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, English-speaking countries, China, Japan, Italy
	Femininity	Thailand, Korea, Russia, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, France, Spain
Time orientation	Short-term	England, USA, Spain, Czech Republic
	Long-term	China, Japan, East Asia, India

Source: own study based on: Sikorski (2006), Hofsteade, Hofstede i Minkov (2011) , www.geert-hofstede.com (16.09.12)

Stankiewicz, J., & Moczulska, M. (2012). Cultural conditioning of employees' engagement. *Management, 16*(2), 72. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/v10286-012-0057-x

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Further Reading

2016 Trends in Global Employee Engagement Employee engagement is on the rise, but volatility abounds http://www.aon.com/ecuador/attachments/Engagement2016.pdf

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