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**HOW DO YOU CLIMB THE CORPORATE LADDER?
A MULTI-REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICAL PREFERENCES
FOR INFLUENCING SUPERIORS**

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INTRODUCTION

In this 35 society study of cross-cultural perspectives on the use of varying degrees of ethical upward influence behaviors in organizations, we extend previous empirical research in two significant ways. First, cross-cultural values research has identified socio-cultural and geographically similar clusters

of societies (Inglehart, 1997; Schwartz, 1994; Ronen & Shenkar, 1985). In this study, we tested the appropriateness of these cultural region typologies in respect to managerial perceptions of the ethicality of influence behaviors. The overarching goal of this research is to explore the possibility of a global model of upward influence ethics. This study's comparison of managers and professionals in 35 societies from seven global cultural regions should provide a significant step forward in the development of a global model of upward influence ethics, which will be of interest to both researchers and international managers.

Cultural values encapsulate the shared and socially desired principles, beliefs, norms, and goals that inform individual perceptions, decisions, and behaviors (Smith & Schwartz, 1997). Consistent with previous cross-cultural research on ethical decision-making and business corruption (Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Cherry, Lee & Chien, 2003; Husted, 1999; Thorne & Saunders, 2002; Vitell et al., 1993; Volkema, 2004), we used the cultural values dimensions identified by Hofstede (2001) and by Smith, Dugans and Trompenaars (1996) to develop hypotheses regarding cross-cultural differences in influence ethics.

Although based on surveys conducted in 1968-1972, Hofstede's (2001) cultural values model remains one of the most cited in the cross-cultural values literature. This cultural values model is based on five cultural values: power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and long-term orientation.

Power distance denotes societal norms regarding the distribution of power. Power distance is positively related to the use of assertive and coercive influence strategies but negatively related to the use of rational and soft (ingratiation, impression management) influence strategies (Egri et al., 2000; Morris & Pavett, 1992; Ralston, et al., 1994, 1995, 2001; Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991). Power distance has been found to be positively related to unethical decision making (Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993; Getz & Volkema, 2001) and perceived corruption (Cohen, Pant & Sharp, 1996; Husted, 1999). Power distance is expected to be negatively related to the acceptability of organizationally beneficial influence behavior, and to be positively related to the acceptability of self-indulgent and destructive influence behavior.

Individualism/Collectivism is concerned with individual-group obligations and relationships. Research has shown that soft, relationship-oriented upward influence strategies are more acceptable in individualistic cultures (Ralston et al., 2001). The rated effectiveness of relationship-oriented upward influence tactics by managers has been found to be higher in collectivistic (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Fu et al., 2001) as well as in individualistic (Kennedy et al., 2003) cultures. Self-serving influence strategies have been found to be more acceptable in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998; Lu, Rose, & Blodgett, 1999). However, other studies have found that managers in collectivistic cultures view hard and assertive upward influence strategies as being more acceptable and more effective than managers in individualistic cultures (Fu et al., 2001; Ralston et al., 2001). In sum, the acceptability of organizationally beneficial behavior should be relatively more acceptable in collectivistic cultures, self-indulgent behavior should be relatively more acceptable in individualistic cultures, and destructive influence behavior should be relatively more acceptable in collectivistic cultures.

High uncertainty avoidance cultures have lower tolerance of ambiguity and emphasize compliance with codified rules and procedures and the avoidance of individual competition. Research regarding the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and the acceptability of ethical behaviors has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, individuals in high uncertainty avoidance cultures have attributed higher importance to ethical problems (Armstrong, 1996), and viewed unethical and deviant behaviors more negatively (Vitell et al., 1993; Cohen et al., 1996) than individuals in low uncertainty avoidance cultures. In contrast, larger multi-country studies have found that perceived business corruption is positively related to uncertainty avoidance (Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Getz & Volkema, 2001; Husted, 1999) with the explanation that corrupt practices (such as bribery) serve to reduce uncertainty by securing more certain results. Therefore, uncertainty avoidance is expected to be positively related to the acceptability of self-indulgent and destructive influence behavior.

Masculinity/Femininity relates to achievement motivation versus quality of life. Masculine cultures emphasize the need for assertiveness and competition to achieve personal and material success. In contrast, feminine cultures emphasize the enhancement of quality of life through service, care and harmony in personal relationships. The honesty and concern for others required for organizationally beneficial behavior

suggest that these cooperative behaviors would be more acceptable in feminine cultures. Self-serving and coercive behaviors as well as perceived corruption are more prevalent in masculine cultures than in feminine cultures (Blodgett et al., 2001; Davis & Ruhe, 2003; Doney et al., 1998; Husted, 1999). Thus, it is expected that self-indulgent and destructive behavior would be more acceptable in masculine cultures.

Long-term orientation relates to a culture's time orientation and concern with others' perceptions (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Long-term orientation is highly correlated with individualism (Yeh & Lawrence, 1995) For this reason, long-term orientation was not included in the development of hypotheses.

Based on Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) work, Smith et al. (1996) identified two values continua: egalitarian commitment—conservatism and loyal involvement—utilitarian involvement.

Egalitarian commitment—Conservatism relates to an achievement—ascription orientation towards organizational status and rewards. Whereas egalitarian commitment relates to universalistic and impersonal decision criteria, conservatism relates to particularistic criteria that favor in-groups. The procedural fairness principle of egalitarian commitment suggests a positive association with organizationally beneficial influence behavior. In contrast, cultural conservatism is expected to be positively related to self-indulgent and destructive behavior.

Loyal involvement—Utilitarian involvement relates to the basis for an individual's involvement with a group or organization. Loyal involvement is "based on a long-lasting identification with the organization's goals as one's own" whereas utilitarian involvement "is contingent on meeting one's individual goals" (Smith, Peterson, & Schwartz, 2002: 194). Loyal involvement and organizationally beneficial behavior both emphasize an alignment between individual and organizational objectives. Alternatively, the self-interested nature of utilitarian involvement is more consistent with the motivations of self-indulgent and destructive behavior.

CULTURAL REGION HYPOTHESES

We relied on previous values research that has identified socio-cultural and geographically similar clusters of societies (Inglehart, 1997; Schwartz, 1994; Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Smith et al., 1996). In this study, there were 32 societies representing seven cultural regions (Anglo, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, East Asia, and South Asia) and three independent cultures (Egypt, Israel, South Africa). To develop hypotheses for each upward influence behavior, we use the cultural values profile presented in the previous section of this paper.

Hypothesis 1: Organizationally Beneficial Influence Behavior

Previous upward influence research suggests that organizationally beneficial influence behavior would be relatively more acceptable in small power distance, collectivistic, feminine, high egalitarian commitment, and high loyal involvement cultures. The cultural regions closest to this values profile are the Anglo, Germanic Europe, and Latin Europe regions. Next closest are the East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America regions. Finally, the Eastern Europe region has the least in common with this profile.

Hypothesis 2: Self-indulgent Influence Behavior

Self-indulgent influence behavior are expected to be relatively more acceptable in large power distance, individualistic, high uncertainty avoidance, high masculinity, low egalitarian commitment, and low loyal involvement cultures. The cultural region that is closest to this values profile is Eastern Europe followed by the Latin America, East Asia, South Asia, and Latin Europe regions, and lastly, the Anglo and Germanic Europe regions.

Hypothesis 3: Destructive Influence Behavior

Destructive influence behavior are expected to be relatively more acceptable in large power distance, collectivistic, high uncertainty avoidance, high masculinity, low egalitarian commitment, and low loyal involvement cultures. The cultural region that closely matches this

values profile is Eastern Europe. Next most similar are the East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America regions, followed by the Latin Europe region. The least similar are the Germanic Europe and Anglo cultural regions.

Three societies, Egypt, Israel, and South Africa are not included within these regions, and thus they are not included in these hypotheses. While it is proper to view these three countries as “independents,” is relevant to include them in an analysis due to their economic and political importance.

METHOD

Sample

A total of 8,154 managers and professionals from 35 societies were surveyed for this study. The participants in the seven cultural regions were: Anglo region (n=928): Australia, Canada-Anglophone, United Kingdom, United States; Germanic Europe region (n = 363): Germany, the Netherlands; Latin Europe region (n=1,268): France, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland-French; Eastern Europe region (n=1,530): Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia; Latin America region (n=540): Argentina, Brazil, Mexico; East Asia region (n=1,184): China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan; and South Asia region (n=1,849): India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam. The study also includes data from Egypt (n=125), Israel (n=133), and South Africa (n=140).

Instrument and Procedures

The Strategies of Upward Influence [SUI] instrument was used to measure participants' views on the acceptability of influence behavior. To test hypotheses regarding cultural region differences in the relative acceptability of influence behavior, a MANCOVA was conducted in which the dependent variables were the three upward influence dimensions, the independent variable was cultural region, and the covariates were age, gender, position level, organization size, and industry. If the cultural region variable was significant, then post hoc group comparisons were conducted to test hypotheses.

RESULTS

As found in other upward influence studies (Egri et al., 2000; Fu & Yukl, 2000; Ralston et al., 1994, 2001, Schmidt & Yeh, 1992), there was cross-cultural agreement in the relative acceptability of organizationally beneficial behavior (positive) over self-indulgent (negative) behavior with destructive behavior being the least acceptable type of upward influence. The results of the MANCOVA indicated significant cultural region differences for all three SUI dimensions (Wilks' $\lambda=.97$, $F=11.04$, $p<.001$): organizationally beneficial behavior ($F=5.41$, $p<.001$), self-indulgent behavior ($F=13.45$, $p<.001$), and destructive behavior ($F=7.38$, $p<.001$). There were also significant interaction effects for cultural region with age (Wilks' $\lambda=.99$, $F=1.91$, $p<.01$), gender (Wilks' $\lambda=.99$, $F=2.30$, $p<.001$), position (Wilks' $\lambda=.99$, $F=1.68$, $p<.05$), company size (Wilks' $\lambda=.99$, $F=1.84$, $p<.01$), and industry (Wilks' $\lambda=.97$, $F=1.73$, $p<.01$).

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the Anglo and Latin Europe cultural regions had significantly higher organizationally beneficial scores than East Asia and Latin America, which in turn, scored higher than Eastern Europe. In addition, Latin Europe region had a higher score than Germanic Europe, which in turn had a higher score than East Asia and Eastern Europe. The results provide substantial support for Hypothesis 1. Concerning the independent societies, that were not included in the regions hypotheses, the analysis showed that Egypt and Israel were only significantly lower than Latin Europe, whereas South Africa was similar to Egypt and the Eastern Europe and South Asia countries.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, Eastern Europe scored higher than East Asia, which in turn, scored higher than the Anglo and Germanic Europe regions. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, Latin America and Latin Europe had low (rather than intermediate) scores that were similar to those of the Anglo and Germanic Europe regions. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported. Regarding the independents, Egypt and South Africa both had high scores similar to Eastern Europe and South Asia region countries, while Israel had the lowest score that was similar to Germanic Europe, Latin America, and East Asia.

The post hoc group comparisons revealed that Eastern Europe and Latin America had higher

destructive behavior scores than Latin Europe, which in turn, scored higher than the Germanic Europe, Anglo, and East Asia regions. Hypothesis 3 was supported in that the Eastern Europe region had the highest destructive influence behavior score, Latin Europe had an intermediate score, and the Germanic Europe and Anglo regions were similar in having the lowest scores for this influence behavior. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, Latin America was similar to (rather than lower than) Eastern Europe. Further, East Asia was found to be similar to (rather than higher than) the Germanic and Anglo regions in attributing the lowest acceptability to this influence behavior rather than the hypothesized intermediate acceptability. In total, these results provide moderate support for Hypothesis 3. In respect to the independent societies, we found that Egypt and South Africa had high scores similar to Eastern Europe and South Asia, whereas Israel had the lowest score and was similar to Anglo region countries.

Overall, the strongest support for the predicted relationships among the region is found for the organizationally beneficial behavior, with the weakest support for the Destructive behavior. However, with the exception of East Asia in the Destructive behavior hypothesis, all regions reasonably followed the predicted relationships.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For organizationally beneficial behavior, the egalitarian commitment/conservatism values dimension appears to be the only consistent predictor of cultural region differences in influence behavior. Unlike previous cross-cultural research, power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity values were ineffective predictors of the acceptability of these types of influence behavior (Adler et al., 1987; Egri et al., 2000; Fu et al., 2001). Low egalitarian commitment and low loyal involvement values appear to be associated with a higher acceptability of self-indulgent behavior. Hofstede's values were not predictive of cultural region differences for these behaviors. The lack of consistency of findings across these regions suggests that Hofstede's cultural dimensions have questionable utility for predicting the ethicality of behavior. In respect to the acceptability of destructive influence behavior, a number of cultural values—high power distance, collectivistic, high uncertainty avoidance, and low egalitarian commitment—appear to have predictive potential.

To reiterate, the overarching goal of this study was to explore the potential of a global model of upward influence ethics. This study has facilitated the development of such a comprehensive, global model of upward influence ethics in organizations. Our findings show that across regions, managers and professionals exhibited differing degrees of preference for organizationally beneficial, self-indulgent and destructive influence behavior. However, even though there was not universal agreement on the relative importance of each behavior, we found that participants in all 35 societies were consistent in viewing organizationally beneficial influence behavior more positively than self-indulgent behavior with destructive behavior being viewed as the least acceptable influence behavior. These results suggest a relatively high degree of global convergence on the acceptability of the different types of influence behaviors (Egri et al., 2000; Fu et al., 2001; Kennedy et al., 2003; Ralston et al., 1994, 2001). Thus, while we see that there is a commonly agreed upon ethics hierarchy, we also found varying degrees of regional differentiation indicating global similarity with embedded local differences. Additionally, we found that the Smith et al. (1996) egalitarian commitment—conservatism and loyal involvement—utilitarian involvement values dimensions have predictive value in this model.

In conclusion, this study has provided substantial evidence that there is cross-cultural ethical pluralism (Gonzalez, 2003) in regards to the acceptability of various upward influence behavior. At the same time, our findings suggest that the acceptability of various upward influence behaviors cluster into cultural regions and that these behaviors may even be slowly converging or crossverging (Priem, Love & Shaffer, 2000). However, the most interesting finding may be the indication that there are consistent influence behavior relationships across societies. Thus, there is support for the notion that these relationships might be integrated to form a global model of influence ethics.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS