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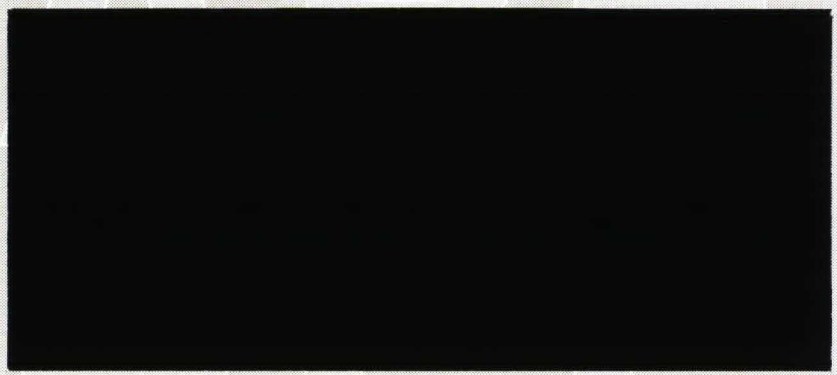
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Work Meanings in International Perspective

Bernhard Wilpert and Hans Maimer

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Work Meanings in International Perspective

Bernhard Wilpert and Hans Maimer

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1. Conceptual Issues

1.1 The ontological significance of work

The meaning of 'work' is intimately linked to the understanding of human nature. This understanding differs at different points in time within cultures, as well as it differs in different cultures at a given point in time. Thus, the notion of work is intrinsically a value laden concept, in positive or negative terms. Any perusal of relevant reflections on work, as short as it may be, will underscore the veracity of this thesis.

In the Graeco-Roman tradition work was mainly seen as an aspect of life's deficiency (Drenth, 1991). In consequence, value was placed on 'otium' (leisure), not on 'negotium' (the opposite of leisure) and Vergil's dictum 'labor omnia vincit' must be understood in terms of work as the only way to overcome life's hardship (Veit, 1994). The ambivalent character of work in the Judaeo-Christian tradition has also been observed many times. On the one hand work in the old testament was seen as punishment for the original sin (Gen. 3, 17-19), but also as a form of cooperation in God's creation (Gen. 2,15). Christ's preference of meditative Mary over busy Martha in the new testament as opposed to Paul's message 'He who does not work should not eat either' (2. Thess. 3,10) may be interpreted as the continuation of this ambivalence, only to be overcome by St. Benedict's 'ora et labora' which put work and prayer on the same footing. Luther then almost reverses the ranking again by saying 'laborare est orare' (Veit, 1994).

The Western philosophical discourse continues this reflection of the relationship of work to human nature. Thus, Hannah Arendt (1958), in her book on the human condition, distinguishes labor as the often painful bodily effort of serving the immediate daily needs from work as the activity which creates 'the sheer unending variety of things' and lasting human

culture. Work is for Marx man's metabolism with nature, producing material conditions of life, creating new needs and, at the same time, societal relations. It may be of particular interest in our context to quote his passage on work verbatim:

Man moves the natural forces belonging to his body, arms and legs, head and hand, in order to appropriate natural matter in a form usable for his own life. Through this movement he impacts upon and changes nature external to him and changes his own nature at the same time. (Kapital, vol.3).

The passage is so interesting, because it encompasses intrinsic ontological, material and individual psychological dimensions of working.

Cross-cultural comparisons reveal significant differences from Western notions of work, but all are again intimately linked to the understanding or destination of human nature in the context of the world, of creation. The emphasis of some non- western religions and cultures in their view of man and work seems somewhat different from our Western understanding:

- less concerned with subjugating nature
- less individual centered
- more concerned with social justice and equality
- and work as a fulfilment of social obligations.

Some of the Sayings of Muhamed illustrate this, e.g.:

'He who neither worketh for himself, nor for others, will not receive the reward of God'.

'Those who earn an honest living are the beloved of God'.

Work then, 'whether it is manual or intellectual, is considered in the new islamic perspective, as a way to render homage to God, as an 'ibada', a true act of devotion' (Fitouri, 1983:88).

For the Buddhist Dogen (1200-1253) it was the proper execution even of the most simple activities (drinking tea, carry water) which led to Nirwana, a notion which was extended by the Zen priest Suzuki Shosan (17th century) to work life and the conduct of professions:

'When one carries out arduous and difficult tasks and when one suffers from it, one is not constrained by passions. One then practices a Buddhist activity'.

Hence, hard and diligent professional work leads to Nirwana.

'For Suzuki, every profession has a social significance in that it is a manifestation of the absolute', of Buddha himself (Saito,1983). Saito underlines that diligence, group orientation, obedience toward superiors and lack of individualism (or 'self-detachment') are central characteristics of Buddhist work ethics.

This intimate unity of everyday life and activities with the religious and spiritual seems similarly strongly developed in Hinduism. 'The 'Santi-parva' in Mahabharata, defines it as that 'culture' through which the individual realizes him/herself and progresses towards enlightenment, which refines and fortifies each being, irrespective of his caste, his colour, his belief or sex, and which ultimately leads him to the Divine' (Patnaik, 1983:27). It has thus a social and moral significance of cosmic dimensions (D'Sa, 1994).

In summary, important roots then of work ethics are the orientational systems of religious tradition, spiritual world views and social theoretical concepts of man and his place in nature and supranature. It is this very imbeddedness of the notion of work in views and concepts of the world and of human nature which provides the basis for the societal values attached to working. In speaking of values we refer to constructs which explicitly or implicitly orientate people of a given society with regard to *the set of sentiments and evaluations of people concerning the right, correct and morally justified or required work behavior.*

1.2 Work related values in Western society

The central problem in Max Weber's seminal study 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' (originally in German: 1904/5) was to explain why people pursued individual wealth and material gains for their own sake beyond existential necessity. His answer was that protestantism in its Calvinist variety induced a high degree of asceticism in a person and

to devote his/her efforts as much as possible to fulfil his/her duties in this world. If the person was successful in his/her calling, i.e. individual work, which could be shown by material wellbeing and becoming rich, this was the surest sign for him/her to be graced and selected by God. Thus work for material wellbeing was considered good, hard work was better. Accumulation of individual riches became an obligation before God and society. And in consequence, protestantism paved the way for capitalism by changing the idiosyncratic acquisitive motives into a social order: the Protestant Ethic of Work (PEW). In a way, Weber's thesis may be understood as an anti-marxist approach which claimed the overriding importance of materialist, economic determinism. In Weber's perspective, economic development is propelled by the primacy of religious thought of man and his salvation by God, proven by his material success in this world.

We refrain from outlining the many supporting and contradicting comments Weber's thoughts have met from various social critics. It is however worth underlining the distinct *individualism* underlying his interpretation of the spiritual dimension in economic development. At the same time, Weber was well aware that religious factors interacted with what we could call societal factors in bringing about modern capitalism. Such factors are considered f.i. 'urbanization; the development of cooperatives and guilds; a codified and developed legal system, a bureaucratic nation state; book keeping systems, etc.' (Furnham, 1990:2).

But religious views of the world and of human nature are only part of the story. In the 17th century begins a new trend in Europe to gain momentum: the trend to explain nature and natural phenomena on a rational, secular, non-religious basis. The laws of mathematics and of mechanics in physics appear to be universally valid. New sources of energy (steam and electricity) offer new opportunities to subjugate nature, even exploit it. New forms of work emerge and begin to impact on work habits and work attitudes. The machine age begins, based on and linked to new developments in the *history of ideas*.

The machine has little tolerance. It must be handled in specific and precise ways, else it will fail you. It must receive regular maintenance and spare parts must fit with utmost accuracy. The machine will be able only to accept raw materials of a certain quality, otherwise it will stop. And the machine demands human interaction at specific points in time. The precision

of a clock's pendulum swing and the clock itself become the metaphors of the *machine age*.

The machine operator, in turn, although often liberated from hard work which the machine has taken over, must have a basic understanding of the functioning of the machine, if he wants to maximize its reliability and output. He is required to display accurate and recurring functions in response to the machine and the state of the production process. Thus the notion of quality acquires a totally new meaning from the previous quality notion of the craftsman, who produced according to specific customer order. The craftsman's quality notion was socially determined. The machine notion of quality is an objectively measurable notion in terms of precise parameters of time, centimetre, weight and energy. Thus, technological developments changed and impregnated work and work life thoroughly with new demands on competence, attitudes and behavior. Since the breakdown of machinery provides instant feedback of some kind of malfunctioning, we may rightly assume that work under machine conditions itself will educate and train the operator to act appropriately. He, in turn, will tend to educate his children in these roles and competencies.

Society reacted, among others, with institutionalizing general schooling and vocational training. In the 18th century formal schooling became obligatory socialization agents for work life, training systematically all those competencies required by the machine age: punctuality, exactitude, precision, technical understanding, personal commitment to a given task. Hence, in summary, we may call these features which began to overlay traditional religiously rooted work ethics *societal factors*. They, too, contributed to the emerging work ethic.

However, religious traditions and societal factors only provide the framework for how people perceive work and what motivates them to work, because it does not follow that such an 'objective' significance of work carries over to all people. Working means different things to different people subjectively. Of similar importance for values which people hold vis-à-vis work is influenced by their own socialization and specific circumstances of their life: For many housewives cooking may smack of work. For some of us who are devoted hobby cooks, it is bliss and meditative relaxation after a hard day's work. For the ancient Greeks only manual labor was considered work, and it was reserved for slaves; the Greek citizen did not consider his privilege of intellectual activity as work while to be intellectually

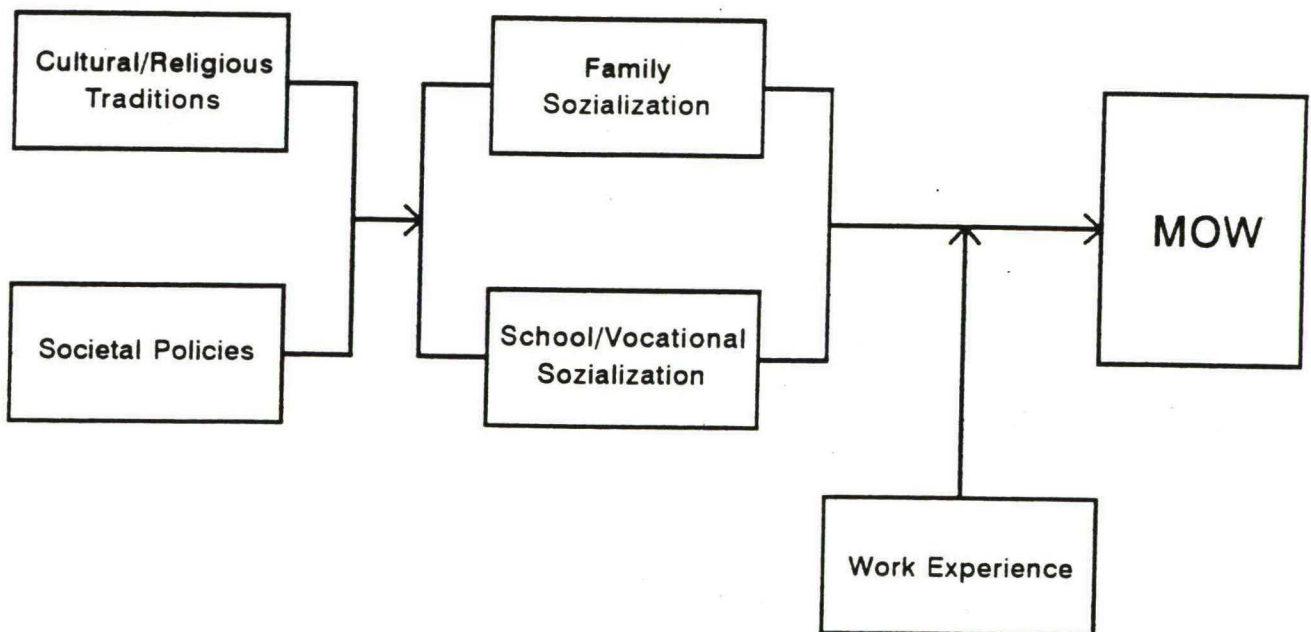
busy is the bulk of our own work as academics.

A great deal of an adult person's wake life is spent working. And even a great deal of the life of the young is spent preparing for work through education in families, schools, universities. Already this important proportion of work in the time budget of people tells us that work assumes a special place in human life-long activities.

'The significance that work will almost inevitably acquire for most people in modern society can ... be demonstrated strikingly by various examples and diverse research evidence: Working defines the time structure for days, weeks and years. It marks the division between productive and reproductive, and often between auto- and hetero-determined activities. It lends itself to legitimize socially biographic phases: training, work life, retirement' (Ruiz Quintanilla & Wilpert, 1988:3).

Thus we may say: work related values come from intricate interactions among cultural/religious traditions, societal measures, and socialization in family, socialization through formal schooling and socialization from work experience (see fig. 1)

Figure 1 Influences on Work Meanings



In the context of a market economy the most important defining characteristic of work is an activity for which a person is paid. So, when speaking of *work related values (the Meaning of Working)* in the context of this paper we refer to *the set of sentiments and evaluations of people concerning the right, correct and morally justified or required behavior for which they are paid*. This understanding does not imply that people only work in the interest of income generation, in fact, as the MOW study (MOW, 1987) has shown, intrinsic and extrinsic work motives go hand in hand with paid work.

1.3 Rationale for international comparisons

Paid work, in our Western societies, is becoming ever more problematic. We may even speak of a crisis of work. The main characteristics of this crisis are:

- A steady reduction of the need for 'living work' (Marx), i.e. human work exemplified by an apparently unavoidable increase of long term unemployed persons and an epochal trend (only intermittently stopped or slightly reversed) in the reduction of average work time. Average weekly work hours in Germany were reduced during the last hundred years from 72 hours (1881) to 37.7 (1990).
- The paradoxical situation where a minority of overworked people faces an increasing mass of un- or underemployed persons.
- The paradoxical situation where a lot still remains to be done and a lot of problems to be solved in our countries (in education, environmental protection, social work etc.), but cannot be done due to the fiscal crisis and the failure of the market system.
- Paid work still serves for most people its central function of providing the means to meet existential needs, giving meaning to life and social status, of offering opportunities for the formation of personal identity.
- In objective terms, work remains in our societies the main mechanism to distribute goods, privileges and benefits.

In short, work in our societies is characterized by contradictions which hold the potential of serious social disruptions. Here lies the social and practical reason to find out in different countries what the subjective work meanings are in order to provide a safer social-scientific basis for the design of social political programs with the intention to find an answer to the crisis.

A practical reason for the conduct of comparative research into work related values can be found in the assumption that work values are not only the consequence of the factors described above, but they may be considered also as causal influences on the nature and direction of change in social and economic institutions. Therefore, it seems of considerable practical interest to know the incidence and spread of major meaning patterns which individuals and significant social groups attach to working.

In addition to these social policy and practical motives there exists a scientific one to conduct international comparative studies on the meaning of working: the validity of any scientific model can be considered ever so much more robust if it has proven its validity in different societal contexts.

2. The Meaning of Working Study (MOW)

2.1 Beginnings and growth of MOW

The central questions which MOW pursues are: What is the subjective meaning of working for people in modern society, its antecedents and consequences? (England & Wilpert, 1978). The research team of the original study (MOW, 1981, 1987) was composed of colleagues from eight countries: Belgium, Germany (FRG), Israel, Japan, Netherlands, United Kingdom, USA, Yugoslavia (Slovenia)¹. The countries covered represent a wide spectrum of national industrialized contexts with considerable differences in socio-cultural background,

¹ Members of the original research team were: Belgium: P. Coetsier, R. Spoelders-Claes, M. Holvast; Germany: A. Ruiz Quintanilla, B. Wilpert; Israel: I. Harpaz; Japan: J. Misumi; Netherlands: P.J.D. Drenth, E. Andriessen, R. van der Kooij; UK: F.A. Heller; USA: G.W. England, W.T. Whitely; Yugoslavia: V. Antoncic.

religious traditions and political systems. Attempts of the international team to involve also colleagues from the East and Middle European countries failed under the then existing international political barriers.

Meanwhile MOW has grown in comprising additional studies in Brazil, South Africa, Peoples Republic of China, in the former German Democratic Republic (Wilpert & Maimer, 1993), and in Russia. Replication studies have been conducted seven to nine years after the original study in Belgium, Germany, Japan, and USA². Harpaz carried out a panel research in Israel where he interviewed the same persons in a second research several years later. Ruiz Quintanilla used basic instruments of MOW in a comparative research in the former CSSR, in Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

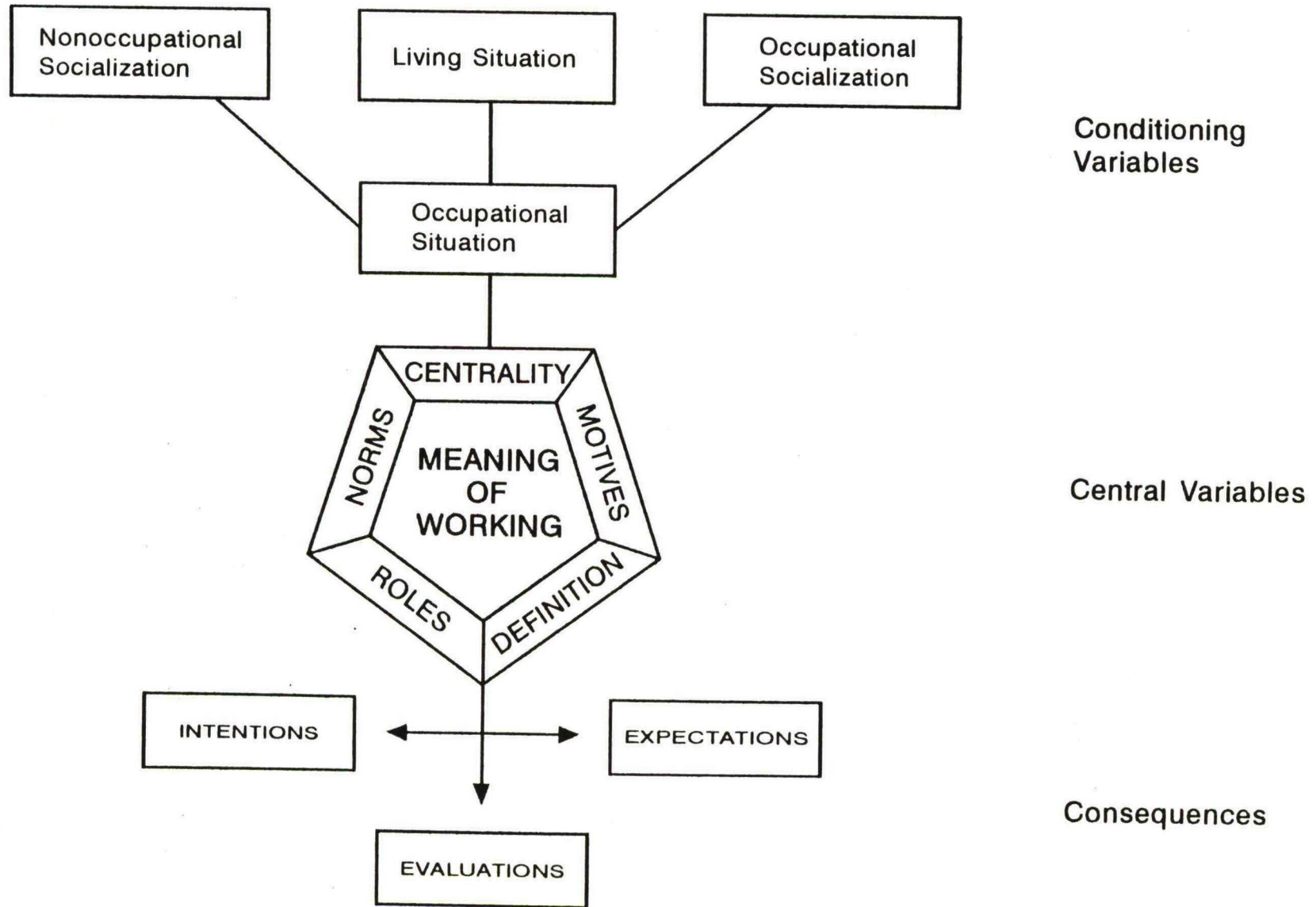
2.2 Theoretical core concepts

Team members of the original MOW study cooperated closely in the collective development of a heuristic theoretical model, the construction and extensive pre-testing of appropriate instruments, pilot studies, subsequent item analyses, scale and index construction. Similarly, data analyses and report writing were accomplished in close collaboration of all team members leading to collective authorship of the major publications.

The guiding heuristic model comprises three categories of variables (see figure 2).

² Members of the international team which conducted the replication research were: Belgium: R. Claes, P. Coetsier; Germany: H. Maimer, A. Ruiz Quintanilla, B. Wilpert; Japan: J. Misumi; USA: G.W. England, W.T. Whitely.

Figure 2 Heuristic Model for the Subjective Meaning of Work



(1) Conditioning Variables

Conditioning variables are considered to be the antecedents of work meanings. They cover *personal circumstances* (age, education, religious orientation, urban-rural upbringing, family status etc.), *job situation and career history* (digression on the job, job sequences etc.), and *environmental variables* (labor law, industrial relations system, unemployment levels etc.).

(2) Central Variables

These are the focal variables reflecting and measuring work meanings:

- *Centrality of working* as a life role in absolute terms as well as in relation to other life roles;
- *Societal norms* about working as accepted by respondents in terms of one's rights and expectations concerning work (entitlement orientation) and internalized social demands concerning working (obligation orientation).
- *Work motives* in terms of expected results from working and importance of certain work facets (variety, autonomy, skill utilization, pay etc.).
- *Work role identification*, i.e. identification with roles in task, work organization, profession.
- *Work definitions*, i.e. features of an activity which defines it as 'work'.

(3) Consequences

This third major set of variables reflects presumed outcomes of working such as expectations regarding one's future work, aspirations and intentions concerning work and working, job and occupational satisfaction.

2.3 Design and methodological approach

The original MOW study (MOW, 1987) combined two different kinds of samples, a national

representative sample of the participating country's work force and a target group sample³. The target group sample consisted of ten different social or professional groups in each country. The target groups were chosen on the basis of their centrality or marginality to the labor market (e.g. unemployed, retired, white collar employees, temporary workers, tool and die makers) and on the basis of their degree of professionalism (e.g. teachers, chemical engineers).

The field work of the original study were conducted in 1980-83 on the basis of standardized questionnaires, the replication studies mentioned above in 1989-91. Including the various spin-off studies from the original research, altogether more than 25,000 respondents participated so far in MOW.

3. Major MOW-Findings

Only few and illustrative examples of the MOW findings can be presented within the framework of this paper. Some refer to the original eight country study (MOW, 1987) and some are based on the four country replication research and offer selected insights into the change of work meanings over time.

3.1. Work Centrality

Work centrality is defined as the degree of general importance that working has in the life of an individual at any given point in time (see Dubin, 1956; Dubin et al., 1975; Dubin et al., 1976). There are two major theoretical components of the work centrality construct. The first component involves a value orientation toward working as a life role. This component includes identification with work (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Maurer, 1968; Lawler & Hall, 1970) and involvement or commitment to working (Kanungo, 1979, 1982). The second component of work centrality parallels Dubin's (1956) central life interests, Barker's (1968) theory of behavioural settings, and Heider's (1958) theory of interpersonal relationship. This decision orientation takes into consideration that a person's experiences are segmented into

³ Exceptions were only Britain and Yugoslavia: British data are confined to a national sample, Yugoslav data to a sample of the target groups.

different life spheres. The work segment can occupy a central position among life spheres, share a position with other life spheres, or occupy a peripheral position in one's life.

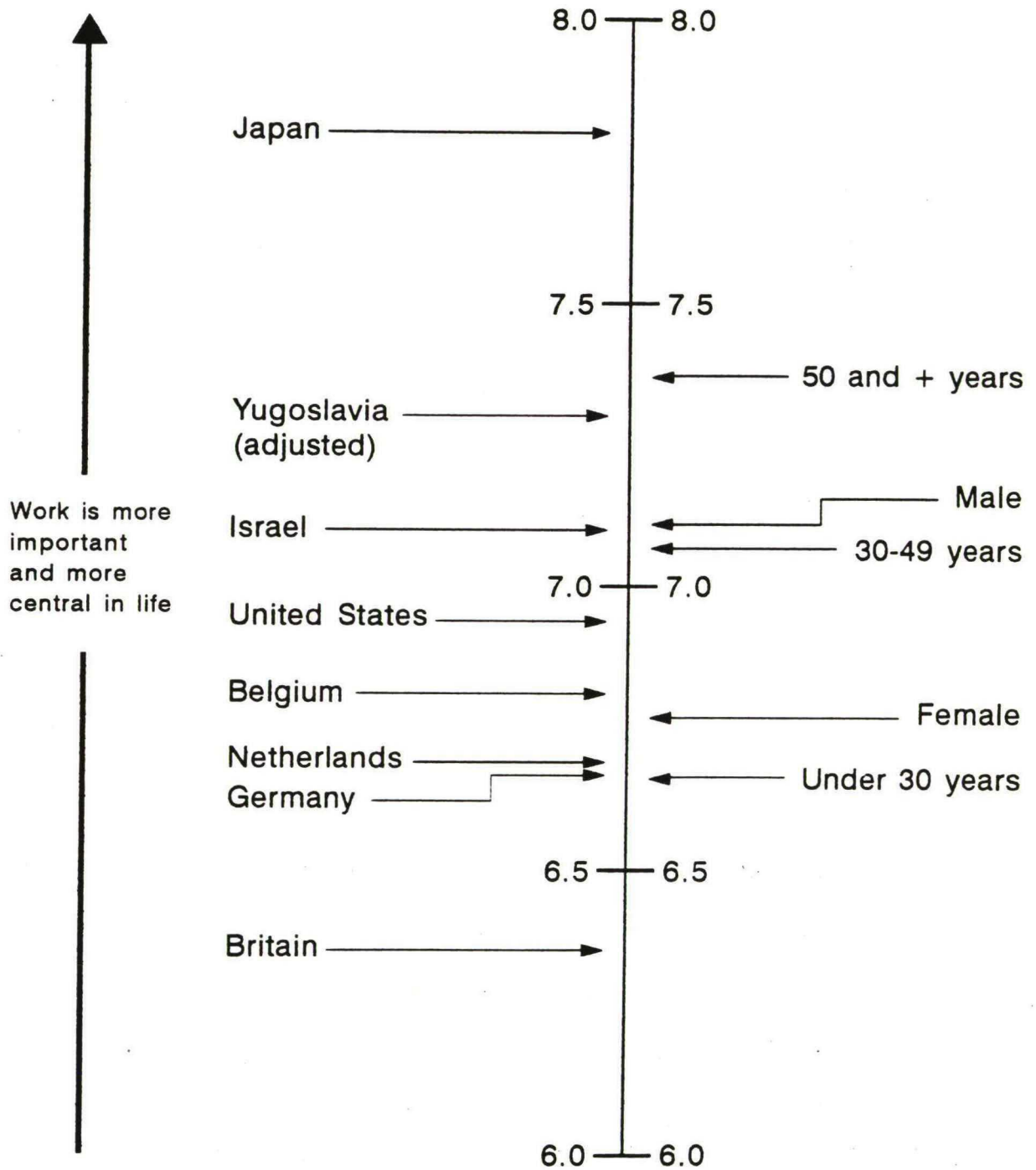
The latter component of work centrality is realized in the MOW instrument as assignment of 100 points in total to five life areas (leisure, community, work, religion and family).

The value component of work centrality is indicated as a seven-point scaled response to the question: 'How important and significant is working in your total life?' The anchor statements at the low and the high end of the scale are: 'one of the least important things in my life' respectively 'one of the most important things in my life'.

The centrality of work is thus assessed by an Index⁴ combining absolute and relative importance of work. Results are reported in Figure 3. The figure shows the level of over-all work centrality of the work force (national samples with the exception of Britain and Yugoslavia, see footnote 3) in our eight countries (t1) and highlights differences among age and gender groups.

⁴ For detailed construction of Index CW2to10 see MOW (1987:81-82,91).

Figure 3 Country, Age and Sex Group Comparisons of Work Centrality (t1)



If we consider the distribution of responses only to the seven step scale of absolute work importance, the percentages of the three highest categories fall between 58.0% (UK) and 81.2% (USA). This is strong indication that respondents in all of the eight countries attribute more than medium importance to work.

Four observations may be noteworthy:

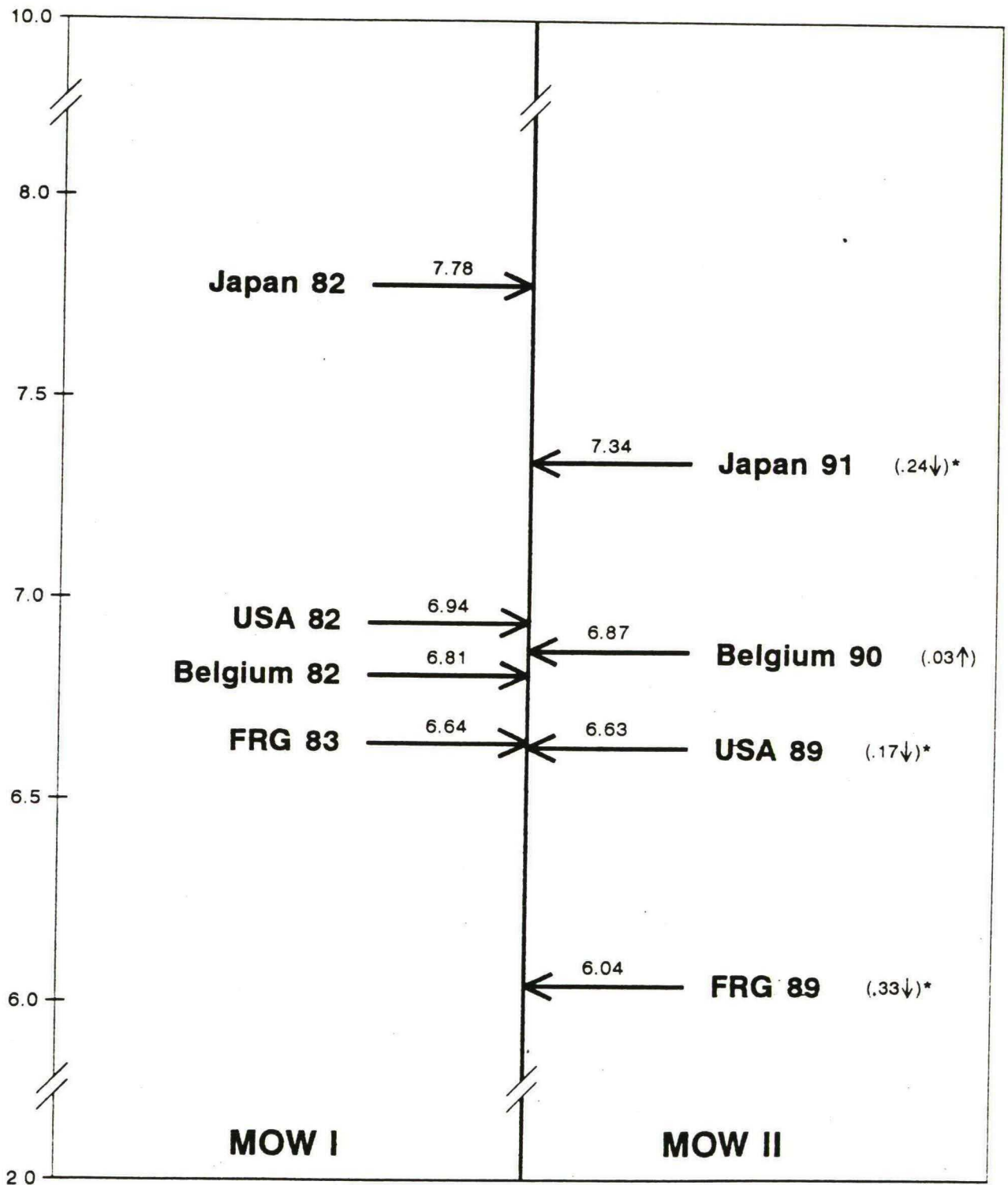
- (1) Variance among countries is considerably higher than variance among age and gender groups.
- (2) Higher biographic age is linked to higher work centrality scores. However, it remains a moot question whether this is due to cohort or to life cyclical effects.
- (3) Men show higher work centrality scores than women.
- (4) Irrespective of the considerable variability in work centrality associated with the three groups (country, age, gender) for the large majority of the work force working (at t1) had a large absolute importance in their life.

Turning now to the replication study which investigated work meanings in four countries and allowed for a comparison of intermittent changes of work meanings between two measurement points (figure 4), we note that the highest amount of decrease in work centrality was found in Germany (Tilton coefficient⁵ = .33), followed by Japan (Tilton coefficient = .24) and the United States (Tilton coefficient = .17). No significant change in work centrality can be made out in Belgium (minimal increase, Tilton coefficient = .03).

A more detailed way of looking at the work centrality and its components will follow in part 4 of this paper.

⁵ The Tilton coefficient is defined as the absolute difference between the two means divided by the average of the two standard deviations (Tilton, 1937).

Figure 4 Centrality of Work Index (2 to 10 Scale)



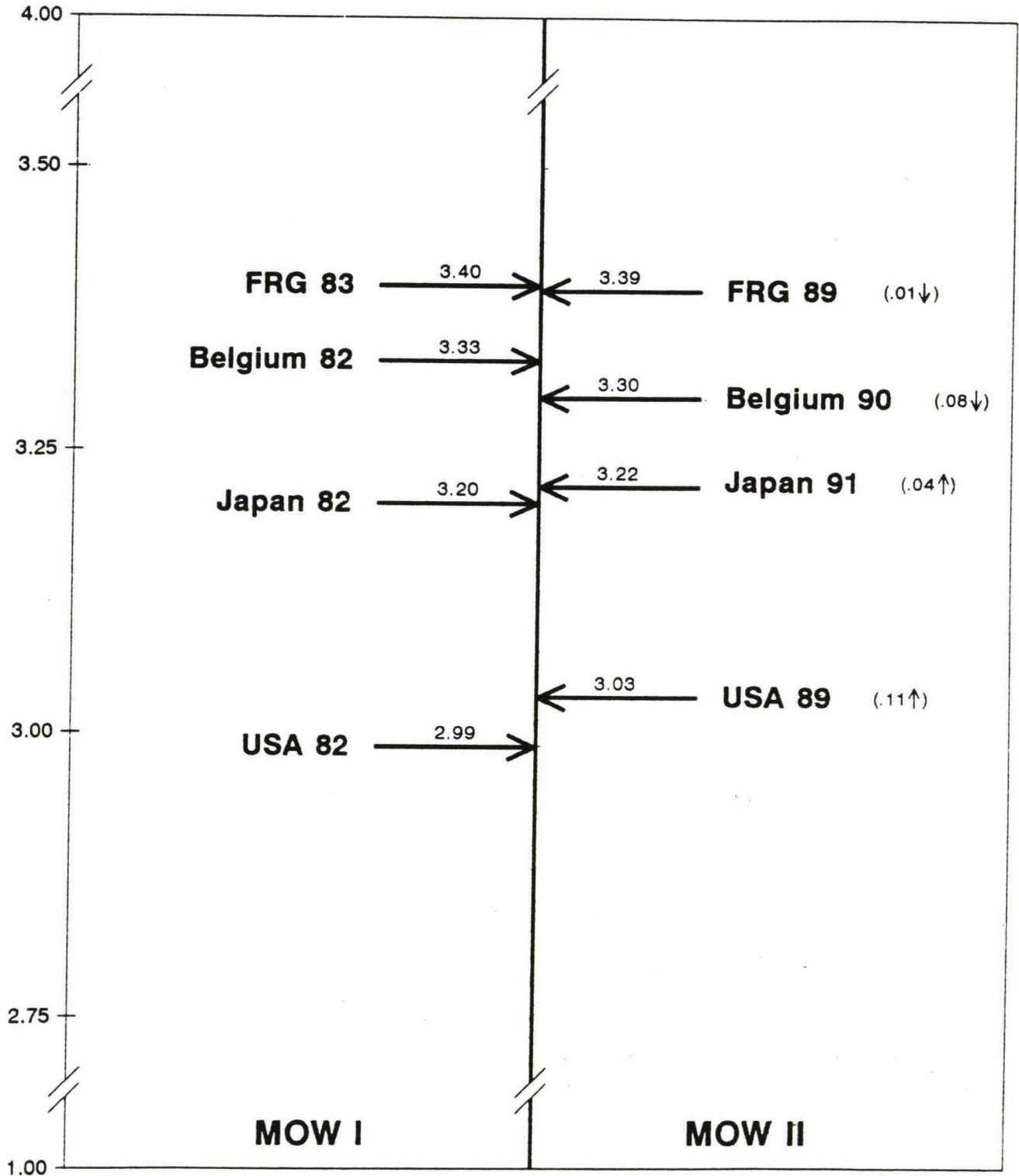
In brackets the Tilton Coefficient = absolute difference between means / average of standard deviations (↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease)

* Significant change on .01 T-test level

3.2. *Work Norms*

The respondents had to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with normative statements about working. Four entitlement items are combined in the Index ENT1to4. Examples of these entitlement items are: 'A job should be provided to every individual who desires to work' or 'Every person in our society should be entitled to interesting and meaningful work'. Figure 5 informs about the sample mean scores. No significant changes were found on .01 T-test level.

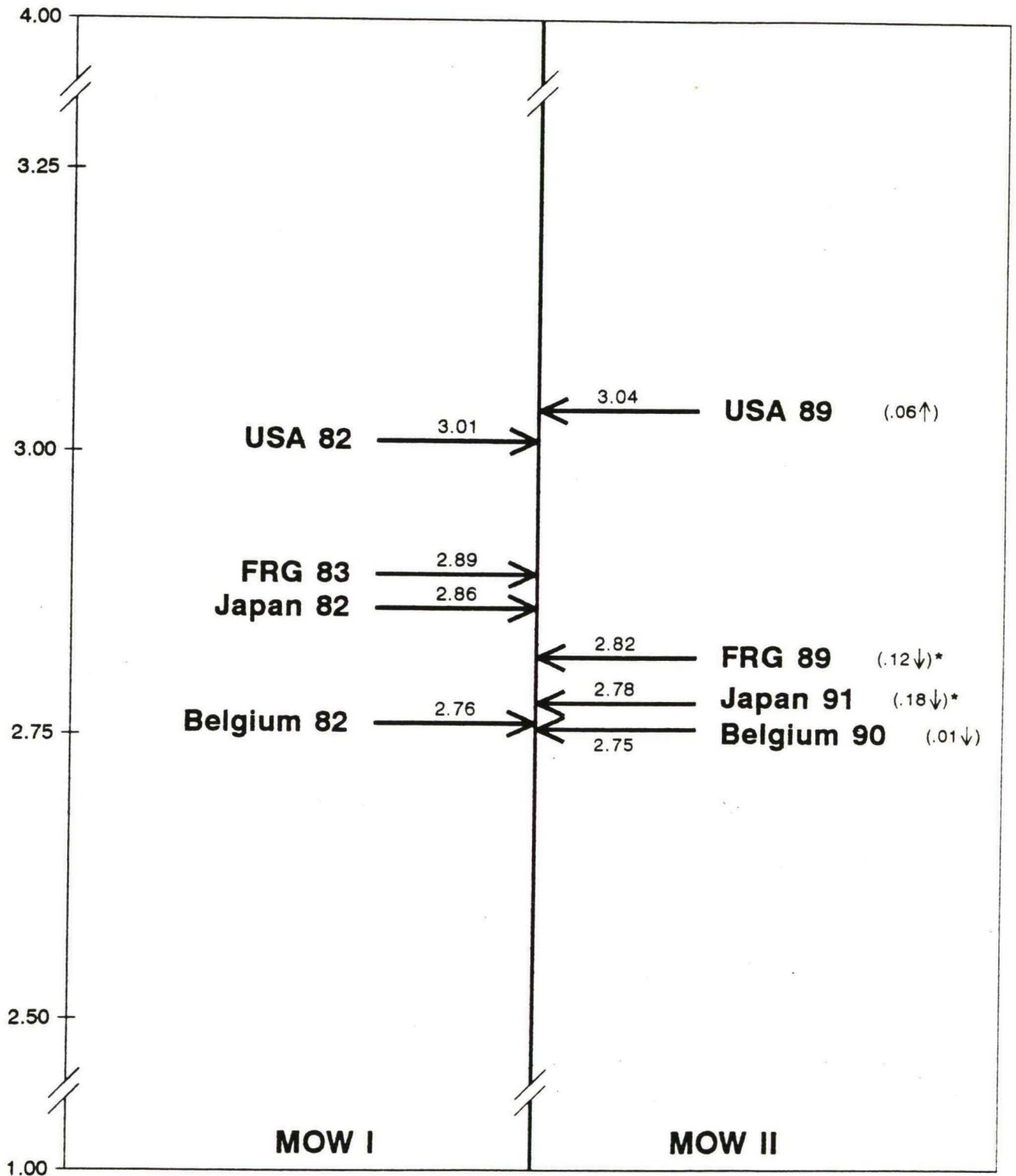
Figure 5 Entitlement Index (1 to 4 Scale)



In brackets the Tilton Coefficient = absolute difference between means / average of standard deviations (↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease)

On the other hand, four normative obligation items build an Index OBL1to4. Examples of these obligation statements are: 'It is the duty of every able-bodied citizen to contribute to society by working' or 'A worker should value the work he or she does even if it is boring, dirty or unskilled'. As Figure 6 pictures, in Japan and Germany there is a significant decline of this normative orientation (Tilton coefficients: .18 for Japan and .12 for Germany).

Figure 6 Obligation Index (1 to 4 Scale)



In brackets the Tilton Coefficient = absolute difference between means / average of standard deviations (↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease)

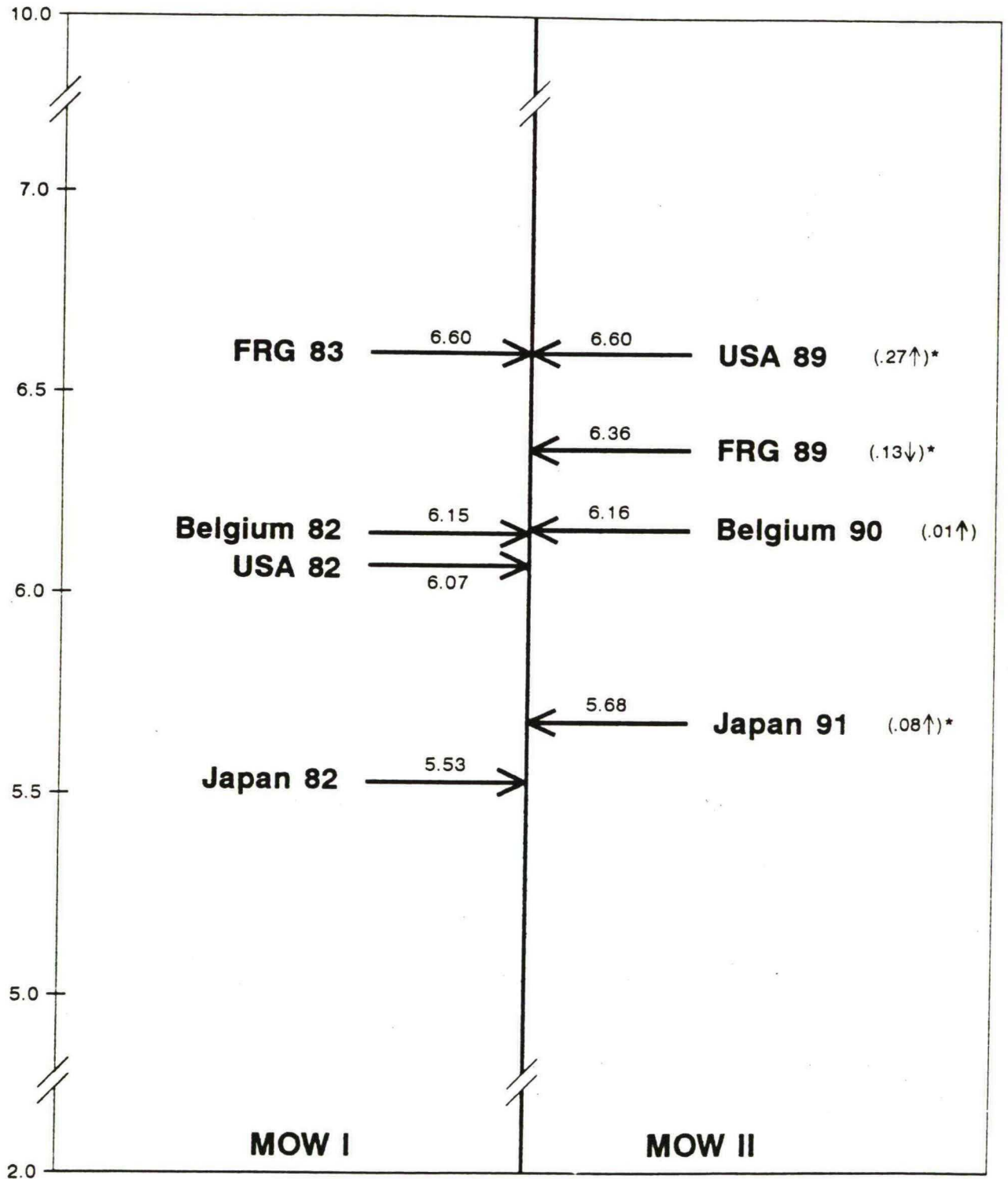
* Significant change on .01 T-test level

3.3. *Work Motives*

The economic Index EC2to10 combines the importance of the work goals 'promotion', 'job security' and 'pay'. The expressive or intrinsic Index IR2to10 is the combination of three work aspects 'interesting work', 'variety' and 'autonomy'.

As figure 7 illustrates, the degree of economic orientation and the direction of change over time are different for the four countries: Germany drops off significantly from the first rank in the year 1983 (Tilton coefficient = .13) and makes way for the United States, which rise from the third to the first place (Tilton coefficient = .27). Also Japan rises significantly (Tilton coefficient = .08) but remains at the least rank.

Figure 7 Economic Index (2 to 10 Scale)

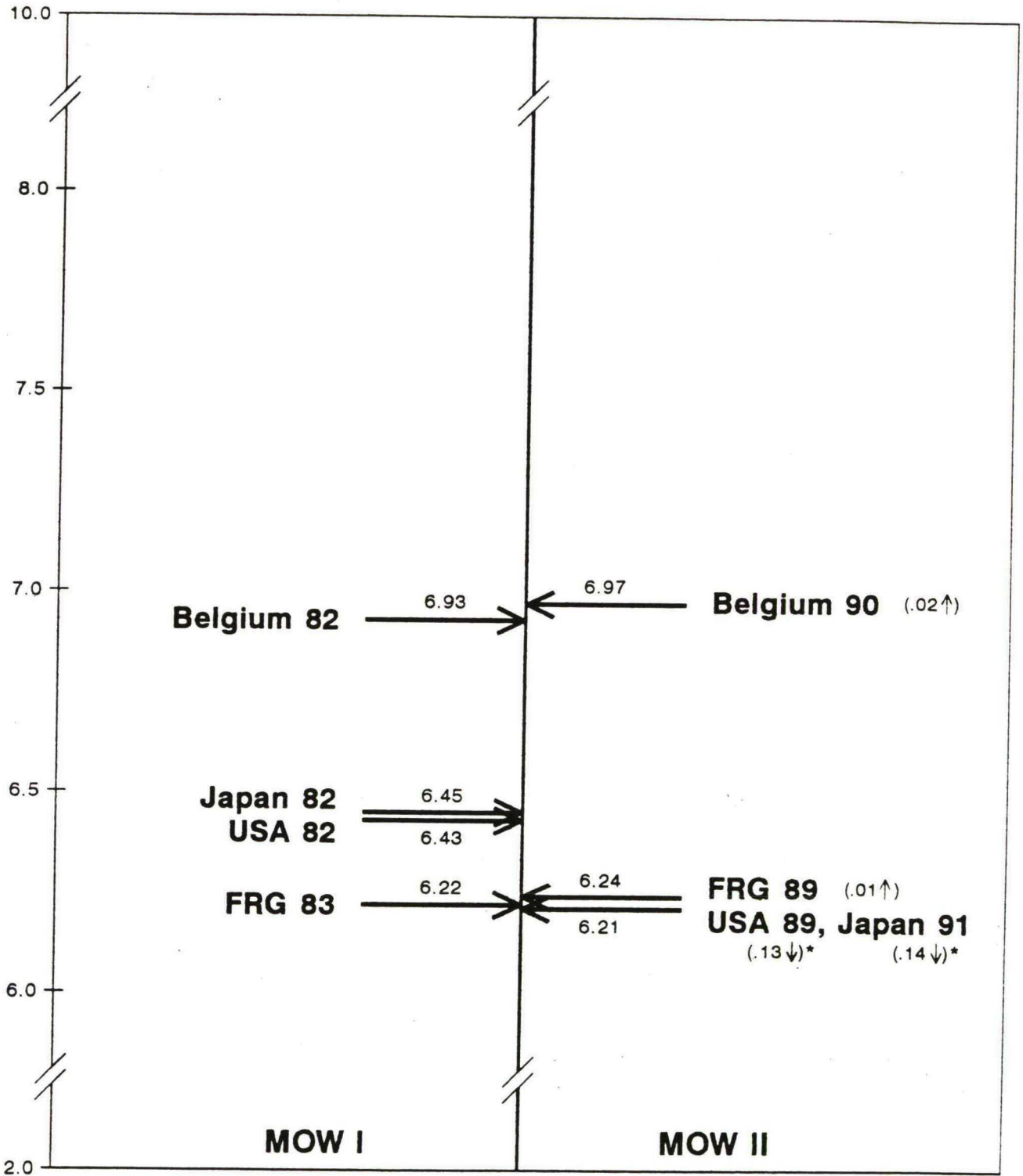


In brackets the Tilton Coefficient = absolute difference between means / average of standard deviations (↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease)

* Significant change on .01 T-test level

As to the expressive orientation (figure 8) we see that it declines significantly in the United States (Tilton coefficient = .13) and in Japan (Tilton coefficient = .14) over the two points in time. At the moment of replication (MOW II) the three countries Germany, Japan and the United States show very similar Index values. Belgium takes a special position with the absolutely highest score of expressive orientation.

Figure 8 Expressive Index (2 to 10 Scale)



In brackets the Tilton Coefficient = absolute difference between means / average of standard deviations (↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease)

* Significant change on .01 T-test level

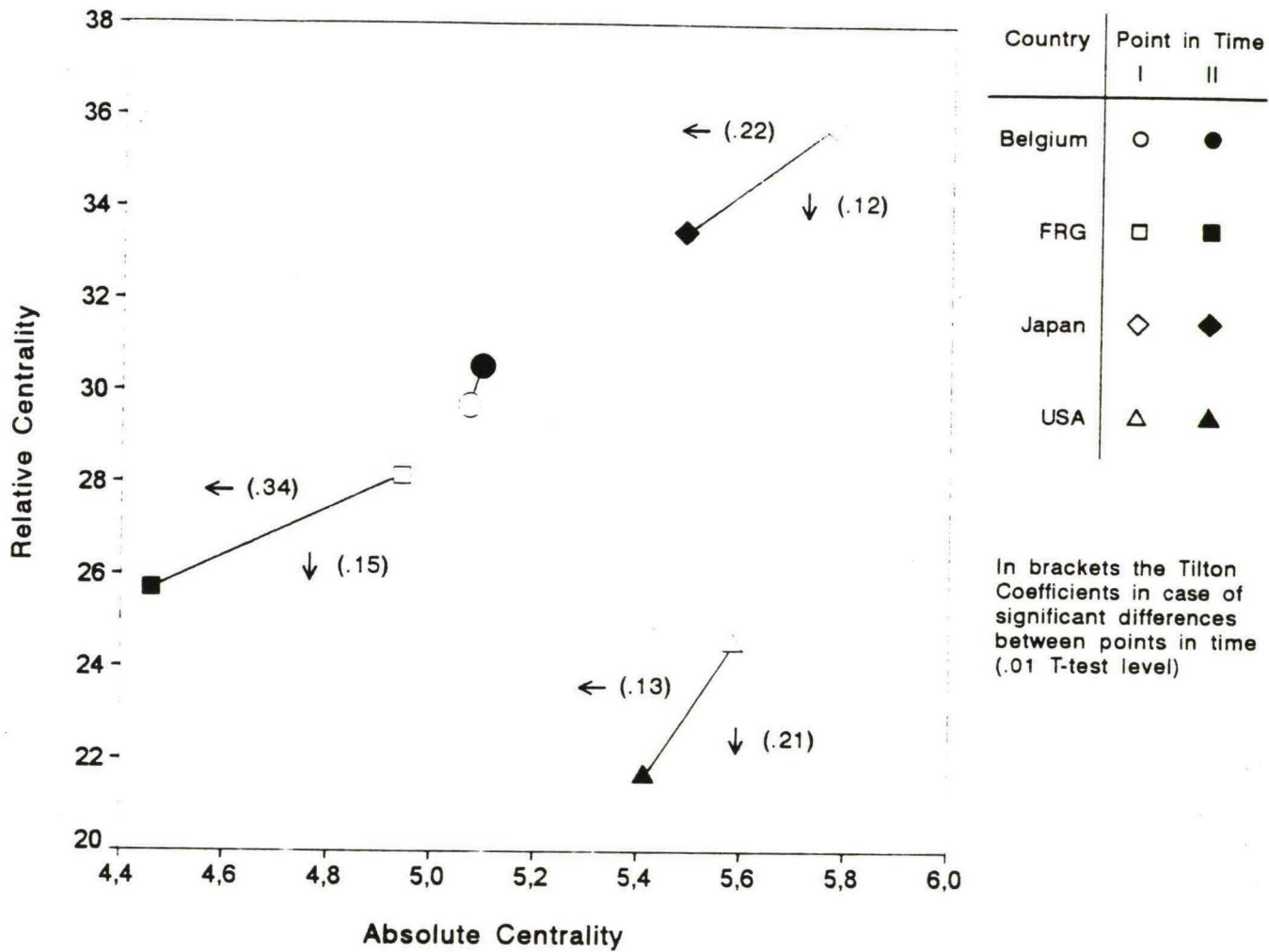
4. Changes in Centrality of Work

The general decrease of work centrality as illustrated in figure 4 (with exception of Belgian results) and the moderate correlation between the two centrality indicators ($r=.28$ in the combined national samples) pose some intriguing questions:

- * Does only one of the two measurements of centrality - absolute or relative component - reflect the shift or is there an overall tendency of decline?
- * Are there any systematic differences in change between the four countries with regard to the two measurements?
- * Are there any systematic differences in change between different groups of people, e.g. between different job categories?

As illustrated in Figure 9, the decrease in centrality of work is significant for three of the four countries participating in MOW replication study. Germany, Japan and the United States decline significantly (.01 T-test level) in both centrality indicators. In Germany and Japan the change in Standard Deviation units regarding the absolute indicator is greater than the change regarding the relative indicator (Tilton coefficients: $.34 > .15$ in FRG; $.22 > .12$ in Japan). In the United States the change of relative importance is greater than the change of absolute importance (Tilton coefficients: $.13 < .21$). This shows the general decline of the importance of work in three countries. No uniform relation between the two dimensions of change was found.

Figure 9 Countries and Changes in Absolute and Relative Centrality

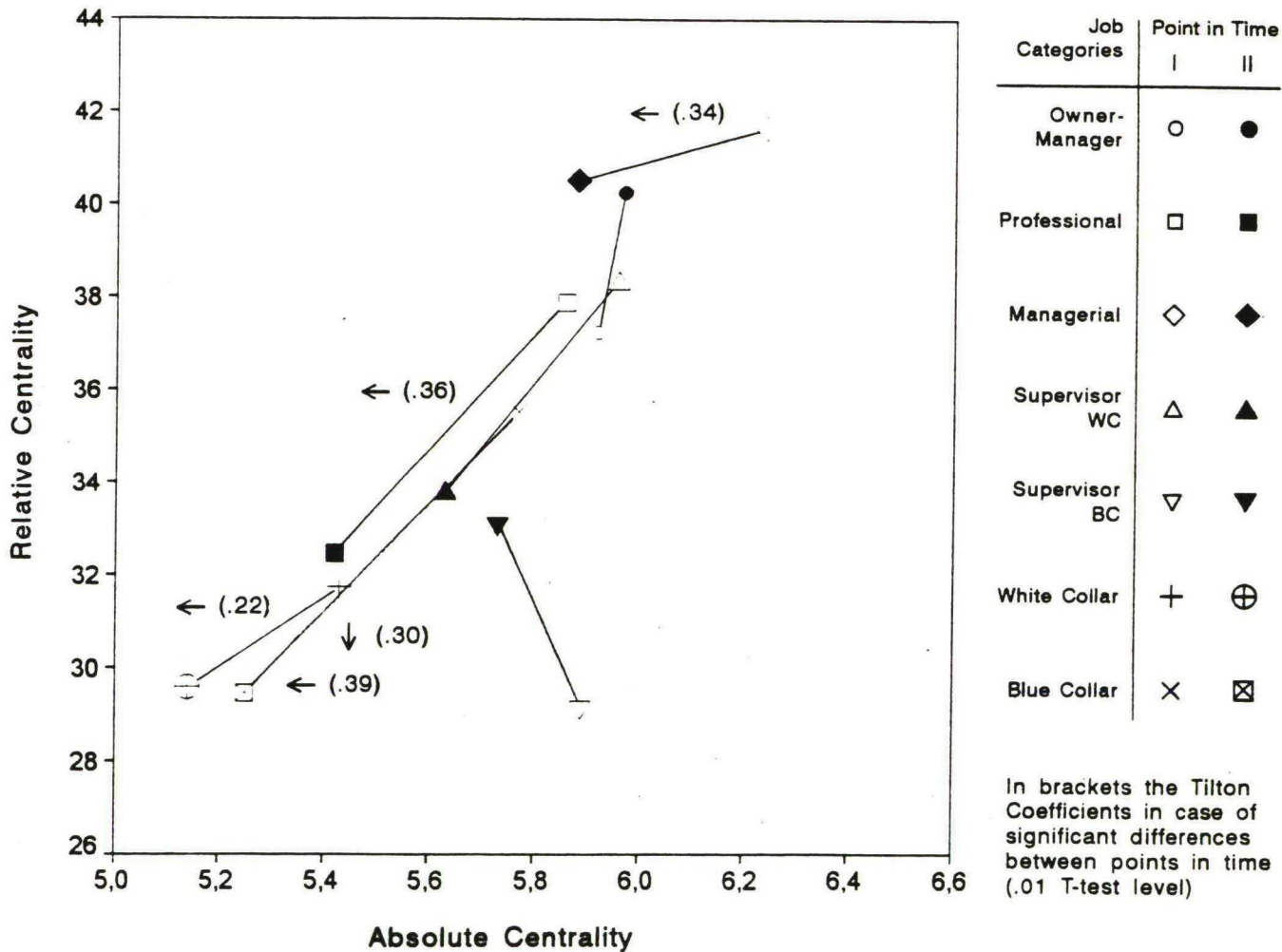


In a similar type of analysis focusing on different job characteristics the respondents of the MOW study were divided into seven job categories:

- * Owner-Manager
- * Professional
- * Managerial
- * Supervisor White Collar
- * Supervisor Blue Collar
- * White Collar
- * Blue Collar

The several job categories can now be compared by country and their changes in relative and absolute importance of work. As illustrative findings of this analysis may be reported the changes that took place in work centrality scores between t1 and t2 in Japan. Figure 10 shows a general trend which was already noted in the overall country trends (figure 9): by and large most job groups are also marked by both, a marked decline in absolute and a smaller decline in relative work centrality: Professional (Tilton coefficient = .36), Managerial (Tilton coefficient = .34), White Collar (Tilton coefficient = .22) and Blue Collar (Tilton coefficient = .39). Additional significant changes (.01 T-test level) in the relative dimension only concern the Blue Collar worker (Tilton coefficient = .30).

Figure 10 Japan: Changes in Absolute and Relative Centrality



Significant changes in Germany occurred mainly as a decline of absolute centrality at the job categories Owner-Manager (Tilton coefficient = .57), Supervisor Blue Collar (Tilton coefficient = .51), White Collar (Tilton coefficient = .38) and Blue Collar (Tilton coefficient = .35). The relative proportion of change can only be considered as significant within the group Blue Collar worker (Tilton coefficient = .20).

The American sample divided in job categories show only one significant change in the relative dimension within the White Collar group (Tilton coefficient = .20). The least changes, i.e. no significant ones, between the two measurement points took place in Belgium.

5. Conclusion

Three general conclusions may be drawn from the findings reported here, one relating to the nature and usefulness of the theoretical model of Meaning of Work, the second relating to its methodological implications, and the third suggesting practical consequences.

The fact that we find significant differences between countries, between different social and professional groups, as well as at different points in time for these groups, reflects the complexity of factors determining work related values. Given these complexities, sweeping (culturalist) statements about the overall character of work meanings in a specific culture or country must, therefore, be considered very critically. Thus, the study of subjective meanings of work must be carried out with correspondingly differentiated and complex models which allow to take into account the complex interactions of religious-cultural traditions, social conditions as well as work socialization and work experience of respondents as co-determinants of work meanings. The MOW- model having proven its usefulness in a great variety of national settings seems to have succeeded fairly well in integrating these complexities on the conceptual level.

Methodologically, MOW falls short of systematically measuring the influence of macro-factors such as culture or tradition or changing *Zeitgeist*. MOW shares here the notorious shortcomings of most comparative studies in the social sciences. This shortcoming

points at serious gaps in methodologies between religious-historical and social science studies of the kind reported here. Apart from this general methodological point there remain open issues within the operationalizations of important MOW variables themselves. As a case in point may be mentioned the demonstrated lack of linear relationship between the two components (relative and absolute) of our measure of Work Centrality which puts challenges to further scrutinize the validity aspects of the concept.

The important practical implication of the MOW study relates to the finding that in spite of the noted decrease in significant work meaning measures, working still remains an important domain within the life context of people. This is so even in countries which have tightly knit social security nets. Whether this continued importance of working is due to existential needs or socialized habitus is irrelevant in view of the unemployment crisis in industrialized countries. We identify here the challenge for practical social politics.

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