



# The relationship between job satisfaction and national culture

Job satisfaction  
and national  
culture

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to focus on the relationship between job satisfaction and national culture. Many studies have reported differences in job satisfaction between countries but none has included national culture as a mediating variable. The paper seeks to attempt to do exactly that by relating data from the European Employee Index™ to Hofstede's national scores on five dimensions of national culture.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The analysis covers 22 nations with a job satisfaction sample size of more than 25,000 respondents. The satisfaction data are subsequently related to Hofstede's national scores on five dimensions of national culture.

**Findings** – The analysis demonstrates that national culture does influence the result of job satisfaction studies.

**Research limitations/implications** – It is important to note that the managerial implications of these findings are limited to some extent. A multinational company conducting job satisfaction studies in different national settings cannot influence the scores on the cultural dimensions. There are no managerial actions that can be taken to eliminate the influence that national culture has on a job satisfaction study.

**Practical implications** – The managerial consequences are that it is virtually meaningless to compare the results from a cross-national job satisfaction study without considering the impact that national culture has on the results. It would be much better to follow Deming's advice on performance appraisal. According to this organizational units from different cultures should be evaluated in relation to their ability to improve job satisfaction instead of being compared without taking national culture into account.

**Originality/value** – The paper gives a theoretical explanation for the influence that national culture has on national job satisfaction levels as well as on other evaluations of job-related aspects and confirms the theoretical considerations through empirical analyses.

**Keywords** Job satisfaction, National cultures

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

The world market is becoming an increasingly complex place in which to operate for today's businesses putting up new demands for corporate information systems. Most information systems are based solely on accounting data and thus insufficient with respect to describing the company's general situation and future financial health (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

The information systems of the future will include measures of intangibles such as customer and job satisfaction. These future information systems will require standardized methods for measuring intangibles (Kristensen and Westlund, 2001) and



this is already well underway in the field of customer satisfaction through national indices such as ACSI in the USA and EPSI Rating in Europe.

Less has happened in the field of job satisfaction with respect to developing standardized measuring methods (Kristensen and Westlund, 2001) and most of the studies done on job satisfaction are limited to specific countries or even specific organizations. These studies report different and sometimes contradictory findings with respect to the effect that employee characteristics such as gender, age and educational level have on intrinsic work motivation and job satisfaction (Clark *et al.*, 1996; Finlay *et al.*, 1995; Gaertner, 1999; Ganzach, 1998; Groot and Maasen van den Brink, 1999; Miles *et al.*, 1996; Robie *et al.*, 1998; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000).

Furthermore, these studies often report large differences in the level of job satisfaction between nations (Eskildsen *et al.*, 2004b; Kristensen *et al.*, 2002; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000) and most of the time these differences are interpreted without taking into account that data are coming from very different cultural settings. The impact of national culture is mostly ignored in international job satisfaction studies.

The aim of this paper is therefore to develop and test assumptions regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and national culture.

The data for this analysis come from two different sources. First of all we draw upon data from The European Employee Index™, which is a recent attempt to develop a standardized way to measure job satisfaction (Eskildsen *et al.*, 2004a, b). The second source of data is Hofstede's scores on five dimensions of national culture (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

The analysis will reveal whether or not national cultural characteristics play a role in determining differences in job satisfaction between countries.

## 2. Job satisfaction and national culture

A classical definition of job satisfaction states that it is "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience" (Locke, 1976). In recent studies within the field of job satisfaction a lot of different constructs have been included as predictors of job satisfaction but overall these constructs can be divided among five main groups of characteristics of the job and work environment (Anderson and Martin, 1995; Boswell and Boudreau, 2000; Clark, 2001; de Jonge *et al.*, 2001; Ducharme and Martin, 2000; Eskildsen and Kristensen, 2006; Eskildsen *et al.*, 2004a, b; Gaertner, 1999; Howard and Frink, 1996; Kristensen *et al.*, 2002; Law and Wong, 1999; Oshagbemi, 1999, 2000; Pollock *et al.*, 2000; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000; Susskind *et al.*, 2000; Testa, 1999) as follows:

- (1) *Organisational image*. This area focuses on the perception of the organization in general and thus the effectiveness of the organization's employees branding initiatives.
- (2) *Organizational vision*. This area focuses on the cultural/ethical aspects of the organization, the ability of corporate management to make sound decisions as well as to inform the employees about the state and direction of the organization.
- (3) *Superiors*. This area focuses on the relationship that the employee has to the immediate manager i.e. the perceived professional and leadership skills of the manager.

- (4) *Co-workers*. This area focuses on the social climate among the co-workers, the degree of professional cooperation as well as the sense of social belonging.
- (5) *Conditions of work*. This area focuses on the job content, the physical work environment, job security, the pay and benefit package, in other words all of the aspects of the job itself when perceived as isolated from the social and cultural context.

Most international companies are measuring job satisfaction in order to improve the organizations HR and leadership capabilities.

In most instances the organization ends up with results that shows that job satisfaction varies across the countries in which the organization is operating. But does this really mean that the organizational units are performing differently or does the national culture in which the unit is operating influence job satisfaction?

Several international studies have reported national differences with respect to the level of job satisfaction (Eskildsen *et al.*, 2004b; Kristensen *et al.*, 2002; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000). The national differences reported are comparable across studies so it does seem that there is an exogenous national factor influencing the level of job satisfaction in an individual country.

One attempt at describing the differences between nations is Hofstede's theory on national culture. According to Hofstede differences between nations can be attributed to differences along the following five dimensions of national culture (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005):

- (1) power distance (PDI);
- (2) individualism (IDV);
- (3) masculinity (MAS);
- (4) uncertainty avoidance (UAI); and
- (5) long-term orientation (LTO).

The first dimension, power distance, describes the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect power to be distributed unequally.

The second dimension, individualism, describes the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.

The third dimension, masculinity, describes the distribution of roles between the genders. Predominantly masculine societies are assertive and competitive whereas predominantly feminine societies are modest and caring.

The fourth dimension, uncertainty avoidance, describes the degree to which a society possesses tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.

The fifth and final dimension, long-term orientation, describes the degree to which a society can be said have a Confucian heritage. Societies with long-term orientation possess thrift and perseverance whereas societies with short-term orientation are oriented towards steadiness, stability and tradition.

Differences along these five dimensions may be some of the exogenous factors causing national job satisfaction levels to be different. The first assumption, *A1*, to be tested in the following is therefore:

A1. National job satisfaction levels are influenced by Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The five cultural dimensions may also influence the evaluations of other job related aspects from the reputation of the employer to the willingness of the respondents to stay employed by the organization. The second assumptions, A2, to be tested in the following is therefore:

A2. All evaluations of job related aspects are influenced by Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The following sections will introduce the empirical data material and report the findings of the analyses.

### 3. Empirical data

The assumptions listed previously are tested on the basis of data from the European Employee Index™, which is an index that was launched in August 2001 and is conducted by the independent market research company Ennova.

The questionnaire contains generic questions that could be answered by any employee irrespective of industry, education, trade, etc. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to evaluate all aspects of their job from the reputation of the employer to their willingness to stay employed by the organization.

The survey also contained a number of questions regarding personal and other characteristics such as age, education, size of the company, and whether or not the respondent was holding a managerial position. In order to fill in the questionnaire the respondent had to meet the following criteria:

- be employed, but not self-employed;
- work at least 25 hours a week for the same employer; and
- be at least 18 years old.

If several members of the household fulfilled the criteria, the person whose birthday passed most recently was asked to complete the questionnaire.

The model behind the European Employee Index™ is shown in Figure 1.

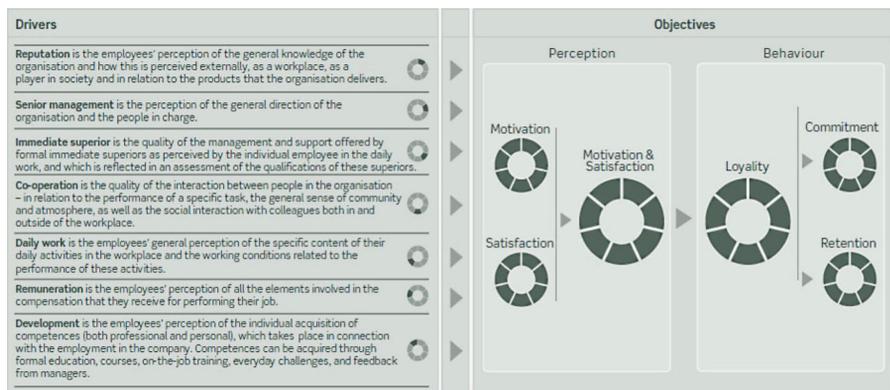


Figure 1.  
The European Employee  
Index™

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All the constructs in Figure 1 are seen as latent constructs and are conceptualized through at least two manifest variables. The model is estimated through the use of partial least squares (PLS). PLS is a preferable technique when conducting structural equation modeling on the basis of questionnaire data (Kristensen and Eskildsen, 2005, 2009).

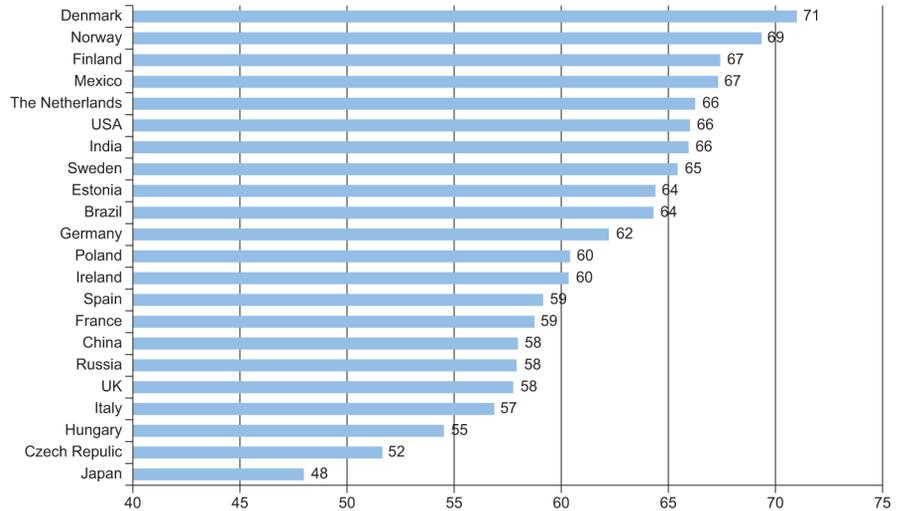
The data used in this study were collected in 2008 and 2009. A total of 25,411 respondents from the following 22 countries participated (the sample size in the individual country is shown in parentheses):

- (1) Denmark (4,814);
- (2) India (531);
- (3) Norway (5,119);
- (4) Brazil (580);
- (5) Finland (756);
- (6) The Netherlands (506);
- (7) USA (526);
- (8) Sweden (4,816);
- (9) Germany (580);
- (10) Russia (516);
- (11) Estonia (516);
- (12) China (555);
- (13) Spain (607);
- (14) Italy (587);
- (15) Japan (584);
- (16) Poland (589);
- (17) Czech Republic (587);
- (18) Great Britain (698);
- (19) France (529);
- (20) Ireland (804);
- (21) Mexico (332); and
- (22) Hungary (279).

Job satisfaction levels for all 22 countries included in the study are reported in Figure 2 on a 0 to 100 scale where 0 indicates the lowest possible score and 100 the highest possible score.

The ranking of the 22 shown in Figure 2 is not unique to this study. A study from 1997, including 21 countries, by Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza (2000) reported very similar findings. It thus appears as if the ranking shown in Figure 1 is not a study specific result but reflects a more universal underlying phenomenon.

This phenomenon may be national cultural characteristics and the second source of data is thus Hofstede's scores on the five dimensions of national culture. The 22



**Figure 2.**  
National job satisfaction levels

countries from the job satisfaction study mentioned above varies a lot on the five dimensions (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

An indication of this variation is given in Table I where the lowest and highest scoring countries on the five dimensions are reported (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

#### 4. Empirical results

In order to test the two assumptions put forward previously multiple regression has been conducted with the national scores on the five cultural dimensions as explanatory variables. All the results shown in the following are significant at the 10 percent level.

The result from the multiple regression with job satisfaction as dependent variable is shown in Table II.

**Table I.**  
Scores on Hofstede's five cultural dimensions

	PDI		IDV		MAS		UAI		LTO	
Min	Denmark	18	China	20	Sweden	5	Denmark	23	Czech Republic	13
Max	Russia	93	USA	91	Japan	95	Russia	95	China	118

**Table II.**  
Results from multiple regression

	Satisfaction
PDI	*
IDV	*
MAS	-0.103
UAI	-0.092
LTO	*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.414

**Note:** \*denotes insignificant coefficients; the level of significance is 10 percent

As Table II indicates the masculinity and uncertainty avoidance dimensions play a role in determining the level of job satisfaction in an individual country. The more masculine a society is and the more it tends to avoid uncertainty the lower job satisfaction tend to be.

A1 is therefore confirmed which means that Hofstede's cultural dimensions influence national job satisfaction levels.

The next thing to be tested is whether or not Hofstede's cultural dimensions influence the evaluation of the other job related areas shown in Figure 1. The results of the multiple regressions with all of these areas as dependent variables are shown in Table III.

As Table III indicates, individualism is the only cultural dimension that is not related to any of the evaluations of job related aspect.

Furthermore the national level of evaluations with respect to reputation and immediate superior are not related to the five cultural dimensions. A2 is therefore not confirmed.

It is, however, evident that the dimensions of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are the most influential dimensions when it comes to national level of evaluations of job-related aspects, although power distance and long-term orientation play a role in certain situations.

If a society score high on power distance and low on uncertainty avoidance the higher senior management will be evaluated. The same goes for cooperation but here a low score on masculinity would also result in a higher evaluation.

The evaluation of daily work and motivation is only influenced by the masculinity dimension. The less masculine a society is the higher the score on daily work and motivation.

Remuneration and retention, on the other hand, are influenced by masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. The lower the score on these three dimensions that higher the score on remuneration and retention will tend to be.

Development exhibits the same relationship as job satisfaction whereas commitment is influenced only by uncertainty avoidance.

All in all, Hofstede's five cultural dimensions do play a role when interpreting national differences from a job satisfaction study.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	R <sup>2</sup>
Reputation	*	*	*	*	*	*
Senior management	0.094	*	*	-0.152	*	0.367
Immediate superior	*	*	*	*	*	*
Co-operation	0.093	*	-0.116	-0.080	*	0.587
Daily work	*	*	-0.077	*	*	0.162
Remuneration	*	*	-0.110	-0.126	-0.072	0.694
Development	*	*	-0.076	-0.082	*	0.380
Motivation	*	*	-0.133	*	*	0.247
Commitment	*	*	*	-0.085	*	0.145
Retention	*	*	-0.099	-0.110	-0.080	0.583

Note: \*denotes insignificant coefficients; the level of significance is 10 percent

**Table III.**  
Results from multiple  
regressions

### Concluding remarks

This article has investigated the possible influence of national culture on national job satisfaction levels as well as on other evaluations of job related aspects.

For the analysis the article used data from The European Employee Index from 2008 and 2009 as well as scores in Hofstede's five dimensions of national culture.

The analyses revealed that national culture does influence the national level of job satisfaction but not all national level evaluations of job related aspects.

It is important to note that the managerial implications of these findings are limited to some extent. A multinational company conducting job satisfaction studies in different national settings cannot influence the scores on the cultural dimensions. There are no managerial actions that can be taken to eliminate the influence that national culture has on a job satisfaction study.

The important lesson for management is that extreme caution is needed when comparing the results from a cross-national job satisfaction study. Units from different cultural settings cannot necessarily be compared directly without taking national culture into account.

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