

Universal Endorsement of Values & Impact on Employee Engagement

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This paper examines the impact of cultural values on employee engagement and the interaction effects of the former on the latter. The study is based on a statistical analysis of survey data from India, USA, UK, Germany, Ecuador, Denmark, France, Switzerland, and China collected online via the web survey system. The findings reveal that power distance has a negative impact on employee engagement. On the contrary, values like collective individualism, in-group collectivism and assertiveness have a positive impact on employee engagement. The remaining five cultural dimensions showed an insignificant relationship towards employee engagement.

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Introduction

Turning people's energy and ambition into engagement and ultimately into significant performance improvement demands attention, focus and some very different behaviours from senior leaders. Thus, employee engagement has gained prominence in an environment of a competitive global market and stiff competition, and dwindling value of currency. Additionally, it is seen that organizational performance is supposedly achieved through positive emotions and positive behavioral concepts (Cameron et al., 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) unlike what used to be in earlier years where job satisfaction, alienation, burnout and intention to quit were the main focus. This includes words like optimism, trust, and engagement. Further, authors like Markus and Kitayama (1991) have stated that different cultural values have an influence on an individual's cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioral systems.

Towers and Perrin (2006) have made a worldwide comprehensive study which revealed that owing to the geographical differences engagement differs. Addi-

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tionally, researchers have argued that employees' work attitudes and organizational behaviors are significantly affected by national culture because different countries encourage different cultural values (e.g. Bae & Chung, 1997; Glazer, Daniel & Short, 2004; Yao & Wang, 2006). However, there are studies of Katz and Darbishire (2000) which argued that values of the employees have been found to be similar across countries despite cultural differences in values within countries with respect to certain industries. Hence, industries have developed their own cultures, which have higher influence than the culture of the individual countries in which each branch of an organization is situated (Power et al., 2011).

Therefore, this study aims at investigating the relationship between cross-cultural dimensions on employee engagement and the former's predictive value towards the latter. Secondly, it aims to find out the interaction effect among cross-cultural dimensions and its effect on employee engagement.

Literature Review

Extant literature has shown employee engagement construct to be involving a multi-dimensional state (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Kahn, 1990; Rothbard, 2001). However, the multidimensional nature of the employee engagement con-

struct suffered from methodical lacunae as in certain cases factors comprising the construct were scalable in single bipolar dimensions as proposed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) and Rothbard (2001) and in other cases like that proposed by Kahn (1990), the elements determining it can be interchangeably used. Although it has been commonly referred to as a psychological state constituting cognitive, emotional and physical involvement exhibited by an individual, the state preceding its behaviors was modeled as uni-dimensional (Thomas, 2007). The single factor employee engagement scale in the cross-cultural context has shown better fitness of the model as compared to the multidimensional one (Thomas, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Therefore, with such valid statistical reason this study adopts second order one-dimensional employee engagement construct which has even been validated by Kumar and Gupta (2013) as well as Thomas (2007).

Employee Engagement as a Dependent Variable

There are evidences in the literature stating that construct of employee engagement is considered to be one of the positive employee attitudes (e.g. Harter et al., 2002; Towers Perrin, 2007). It is only this perspective which places employee engagement within the context of existing constructs used within organizational psychology (e.g. job satisfaction and commitment). The linkages between cultural values like collectivism and individualism have been clearly established with work attitudes like organizational commitment and employee behavior

(Woo, 2009). It is also argued that one's national culture has a significant impact on one's attitudes and behavior at the workplace (e.g., Bae & Chung, 1997; Glazer, Daniel & Short, 2004; Hofstede, 1980; Yao & Wang, 2006). However, there is a scarcity of research studies in the cross-cultural context which has examined the association between cultural values and employee engagement.

An extensive study has been conducted by GLOBE Consulting Company (House et al., 2004) to overcome criticism raised towards Hofstede's (1980) work specially pertaining to methodology. The findings of the GLOBE study has evolved with nine cultural dimensions which are Performance Orientation, Future Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Assertiveness, Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Power Distance, Humane Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance. The present study has applied the construct of cross-culture described by House et al. (2004) as the quartet's nature of multidimensional cross culture captured effectively the variance in dimensions due to cross country mobilization of workforce.

There are further insights from studies like James (1993) who has contended that power distance influences perceptions of fairness and tolerance to unfairness. Hence, varying dimensions of power distance might affect employee engagement at different levels. Yet, another study has argued that the changes in consideration, performance orientation, and employee development are more strongly related to changes in em-

ployee engagement than to satisfaction and intent (Atwater & Brett, 2006). Sanam and Yawson (2012) have posited that collectivistic values, as one of the main cultural constructs, affect significantly the perception of organizational fairness and in turn have an impact on organizational outcomes like employee engagement, absenteeism and so on (Fang & Lim, 2002). One of the earlier studies has already revealed that employee commitment in 15 European countries and Canadian affiliates of US multinationals is significantly negatively affected by individualism, whereas positively affected by dominant values like assertiveness (Palich et al., 1995). Cultural values like performance-orientation have shown greater acceptability to workplace bullying and other dimensions like future-orientation and humane-orientation showed less acceptability to the latter one (Power et al., 2011). However, in other studies the impending effects of bullying practices on organizational outcomes like employee engagement have been negatively related (Loh et al., 2010; Yeung & Griffin, 2008). In the study by Kaiser (2007) it is argued that the gender job satisfaction paradox does not exist anymore in the European context due to institutional labor market interventions and equality of opportunities available to both men and women. However, these studies if replicated in other continents the results might not be similar. Among all those cross-cultural dimensions mentioned by House et al. (2004,) individualism and collectivism values are found to share close proximity with work attitudes and organizational behaviors of employees (e.g. Lee &

Gao, 2005; Murphy et al, 2006; Pines et al, 2002). Yet, the present study has even considered the impact of other cultural dimensions as espoused by power et al. (2011) on employee engagement.

In the backdrop of the aforementioned discussion, the following hypotheses can be drawn:

- H1: High power distance significantly and negatively influences employee engagement.
- H2: Increase in uncertainty avoidance decreases employee engagement significantly.
- H3: Performance orientation value will decrease employee engagement significantly.
- H4: Individual collectivism has a significant and positive impact on employee engagement.
- H5: In-group orientation value significantly and positively influences employee engagement.
- H6: Gender egalitarianism has a significant and positive impact on employee engagement.
- H7: Future orientation value will have a positive and significant influence on employee engagement.
- H8: Assertiveness approach will have a significant and positive impact on employee engagement.
- H9: Human orientation value has a significant and positive impact on employee engagement.

H10: Interactions are not statistically significant and they are weak.

Data

The study is based on data (n= 295) collected from India, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, China, the US, UK, France, and the United Arab Emirates. Country responses were collected from various sectors like research firms, consulting firms, manufacturing, telecommunication, IT, FMCG, and others. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. The majority of the respondents were younger (53per cent), males (81.36 per cent), holding middle managerial position (47% per cent), had job tenure less than 5 years (43 per cent), and worked for the present organization between one to three (61% per cent). Data was restricted to professionals with educational degrees less than bachelors. The response rate was calculated for each industry. It varied from 2.04% to 22.45%. When considering the respondent's employment settings, the IT sector accounted for 22.45%, whereas closer to that were contributed by research firms and the manufacturing sector (20.41%). The highest responses' share was obtained from countries like Switzerland and Germany accounting for thirty per cent. Responses from other countries ranged between 2% and 20%.

Procedure

Questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 400 professionals and managers using a list sent by friends and contacts. Respondents completed the

questionnaires anonymously and returned them to the author. The questionnaires were primarily delivered to the respondents in electronic form. An electronic survey was used to facilitate responding activity and to minimize errors related to the manual input of data. A total of 295

questionnaires were received; carrying the final response rate to be (73%) per cent. Incomplete questionnaires were eliminated. The questionnaires were translated from English to Mandarin using the back-translation method while circulating among Chinese working professionals.

Table I Demographic Statistics

	N	Percentage		N	Percentage
Age			Experience at current employment		
30 or less	150	50%	1-3	181	61%
31-40	84	43%	4-6	73	24%
40 Above	51	17%	7-9	13	4%
			10-12	7	2%
			12 onwards	19	6%
Gender					
Male	55	81.36%			
Female	240	18.37%			
Total work experience			Organizational level		
1-5	127	43%	Non-Management	Nil	
6-10	91	30%	Lower Management	121	41%
11-15	19	6%	Middle Management	139	47%
16-20	25	8%	Senior Management	37	12%
21 onwards	37	12%			

Measures

A variety of single item and multiple item measures was used.

Employee engagement: It was measured by a nine-item scale ($\alpha=0.77$) developed by Thomas (2007). Respondents indicated their levels of engagement on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Strongly agree). One item was "I am enthusiastic about providing high quality products or service" ($M=38.9$, $SD=2.67$, $\alpha=.85$). Employee engagement, as measured by this scale, is modeled as a one-dimensional construct.

Cross culture: Each dimension of the GLOBE study conducted by House et al. (2002) was described by items designed in "quartets" having isomorphic structures across two levels of analysis that is organization and society and across the two cultural forms (as is and should be). Here the author has made a slight modification by considering only two cultural forms (as is and should be). For instance, Table 2 shows the culture construct definition and sample questionnaire items. Each dimension comprised six items. During analysis "should be" statements were considered as they showed less variance.

Table 2 Culture Construct Definitions & Sample Item Questionnaires with Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach's Alpha

Culture Construct Definitions	Sample Item Questionnaire	Mean	SD	á
<i>Power Distance</i> : Degree to which members of collective expect power to be distributed equally	Followers are (should be) expected to obey the leaders without question	22.73	1.70	.85
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i> : The extent to which a society, organization and a group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.	Most people lead (should lead) highly structured lives with few unexpected events.	22.49	1.53	.67
<i>Human Orientation</i> : Degree to which members of a collective encourage and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others.	People are (should be) generally tolerant of mistakes.	22.69	1.70	.62
<i>Collective Individualism</i> : Degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage collective distribution of resources and collective actions.	Leaders encourage (should encourage) group loyalty even if individual goals suffer	22.93	1.39	.86
<i>Collectivism II</i> : Degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organization and family.	Employee feels (should feel) great loyalty towards this organization	21.61	1.74	.81
<i>Assertive</i> : Degree to which individuals are confrontational, assertive and aggressive in their relations with others.	People are (should be) generally dominant in their relationship with each other	24.90	1.51	.89
<i>Gender Egalitarianism</i> : Degree to which a collective minimizes inequality.	Men are (should be) encouraged more than women to attain a higher position in the organization.	20.78	1.93	.69
<i>Future Orientation</i> : The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in future.	More people (should)leave for the present than for the future	20.78	1.93	.62
<i>Performance Orientation</i> : The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.	Employees are (should be) encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance.	14.78	1.77	.72

The initial six dimensions measures of cross-cultures were originally taken from the Hofstede (1980) study. The scales of power distance, and uncertainty avoidance were quite similar to the Hofstede (1980) study. Collectivistic individualism dimension measures societal emphasis on collectivism with low score reflecting individualistic emphasis and vice versa. In-group collectivism scale measures pride and loyalty to the family or organization. Masculinity dimensions of Hofstede (1980) were replaced by two dimensions labeled as gender egalitarianism and assertiveness as developed by House et al. (2004). Future orientation and human orientation dimensions are drawn from the study by Kluckhohn and

Strodtbeck (1961) which emphasizes on the temporal mode of society. The study of McClelland's (1985) conceptualization of affiliative motive has provided a clue to the dimension of performance orientation. Sample items are represented in Table 2.

Results

Hierarchical regression analyses for work engagement are given in Table 3. The regression models consist of four steps. First, the respondent's personal characteristics like age and gender were added to the model. In the second phase employment-related factors (levels of management, experience at current em-

Table 3 Hierarchical Regression Analysis on Work Engagement

	Variables	MO1	MO2	MO3	MO4
Step 1	Age	.12*	.35*	.64***	.34**
	Gender	-.03	.02	.07	.01
	ΔR^2	.008			
Step2	Level of Management		.15*	-.29***	-.16*
	Country of Employment		.03*	.04	.03
	Total Work Experience		-.15	-.51**	-.41
	ΔR^2		.018		
Step 3	Power distance			-.37***	-.29***
	Uncertainty Avoidance			.05	.03
	Humane Orientation			.11	.11
	Societal Collectivism			.21*	.23**
	In-Group Collectivism			.15**	.20**
	Performance Orientation			-.06	.03
	Assertiveness			.48***	.43*
	Gender Egalitarianism			.03	.03
	Future Orientation			-.07	-.02
ΔR^2			.35		
Step 4	Power Distance ^x Societal Collectivism			.52***	
	Power Distance ^x In-group orientation			.29***	
	Power Distance ^x Assertiveness				.09
	In-group Orientation ^x Assertiveness				.31**
	ΔR^2				.69

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p<.001

ployment and total experience) were regressed on employee engagement. In the third step, the predictors called cross-cultural dimensions mentioned by GLOBE Consulting Company were added to the model. Further a step was taken during the analysis through regression that is the fourth step included interaction effects of predictor values and regressed on employee engagement.

Hypotheses 1-9.

The study supports hypothesis H1, H4, H5 and H8. The explanatory power of power distance towards employee engagement accounted higher and significant but with increase in power distance there is a decrease in employee engagement ($r = -.37, p < .000$). On the contrary, the impact of assertive on employee engagement is strongly significant but positive ($r = .48, p < .000$). A similar case is accounted for by collective individualism and in-group collectivism but the degree of predictability power is less than the former ($r = .21, p < .03, r = .15, p < .01$) respectively.

The industry operating cross-culturally or constituting workforce representing various countries does not accept the cultural values like the uncertainty dimension, future orientation dimension, performance orientation, humane orientation, and gender egalitarianism.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9 were not supported by the regression analysis. It is quite apparent that the industry oper-

ating cross-culturally or constituting workforce representing various countries does not accept the cultural values like the uncertainty dimension, future orientation dimension, performance orientation, humane orientation, and gender egalitarianism. Therefore they are insignificant in predicting employee engagement.

Hypothesis 10.

Interaction effects, according to Table 3, are found to be strong. When the power distance interacts with individual collectivism and in-group orientation, the predicting value towards employee engagement are strong and significantly positive ($r = .52, p < .01, r = .28, p < .01$). Whereas, the interaction effects of Assertive and Power distance reveals statistically insignificant. The change in R^2 is noticeable when in the fourth phase of the regression model the impact of interaction effects on employee engagement were examined. It signals the predictability power of independent variables towards employee engagement to be double compared to the third phase of the hierarchical regression model. Therefore, the amount of variance explained in employee engagement increases with the interaction effects.

Discussion

This research examines the potential relationship between cultural dimensions and employee engagement across the globe. The analysis is primarily based on the findings of Katz and Darbishire (2000) and Power et al. (2011) presum-

ing that industries located across the globe have established their own culture and has a magnifying effect on the employees compared to that of national culture. In addition to that, there are traces in studies showing noticeable changes in a country's value system (Noordin et al., 2002; Takemura & Yuki, 2007).

The hierarchical regression analysis has assessed the impact of the actual predictors, i.e. cross-cultural dimensions on employee engagement. Out of nine cultural dimensions as proposed by House et al. (2004), four cultural dimensions (assertiveness, power distance, in-group collectivism and collective individualism) have been universally endorsed and perceived to influence employee engagement irrespective of different cultural backgrounds.

The influence of power distance is perceived to be more pronounced in explaining variance in employee engagement.

Interestingly, it is noted that among all cultural dimensions the influence of power distance is perceived to be more pronounced in explaining variance in employee engagement and the relationship between them is reported to be inverse in nature. Hence, the result confirms past literature (James, 1993). Further, collective individualism and in-group collectivism show a positive influence on employee engagement which is consistent with past literature (Fang & Lim, 2002). Additionally, the interaction effects between power distance and col-

lective individualism and power distance and in-group collectivism are highly effective in reducing the perceived unfairness due to higher power distance. These findings can be explained on the basis of three insights.

Culturally, in-group collectivism believes in maintaining equality among in-group members (Earley & Gibson, 1998) which becomes a first insight for the aforementioned finding. This implies that when tasks are inherently to be conducted in a team it should be free from hierarchical influence so that it increases the engagement level of employees due to perceived fairness and justice (James, 2003; Gupta & Kumar, 2013). The authority driven culture is less valued by employees as it stifles the spirit of the employees to be physically, cognitively and emotionally involved. Additionally, the interaction effect has a significant impact on leadership attributes (House et al., 2004).

The second insight can be developed through the social exchange theory. It is argued that there is an inverse association between powers and inter-dependence that characterize the relationship in the team as per the social exchange theory. Therefore non-reciprocity among team members may generate the problem of inequality or asymmetry in power (Emerson, 1962). Further, it even indicates that the performance of the team declines as a result of such asymmetry in power. On the other hand, if the belongingness to the team strengthens, assumed intangible investments and reciprocal behavior like cooperation among

team members increases then inequality arising due to power distance diminishes (Blau, 1964; Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

The third insight leads to the possible emergence of transformational leadership. Tasks executed through team effort carry a high level of interdependence. The interaction effects of high power distance and high in-group collectivistic cultural values lead to high employee engagement and transformational approach of leadership may evolve in the process which is endorsed universally and by organization too (Jung et al., 1995).

On the other hand, the hierarchical regression even reveals that the cultural dimension called assertiveness significantly predicts the employee engagement. However, the degree of significance is less compared to the other three cultural dimensions. Assertiveness is synonymous to masculinity (Hofstede, 1993). In-group collectivism and assertiveness cultural dimensions can run concurrently which implicitly means that the feeling of belongingness and loyalty towards an organization is contingent on the success of the group and the organization over out-groups. In other words, the organization should encourage the feeling of competition, and direct communication towards out-groups and consequently the group reward should be accorded when success is achieved. The finding is indicative towards fostering a culture of harmony among in-group members but feeling of confrontation towards out-group members. According to the latest finding it is asserted that the feeling of in-group collectivism breeds organizational citizenship behavior

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(Hongyu et al. 2012). Subsequently, it can be presumed that increase in organizational citizenship behavior exhibits a higher level of employee engagement (Fang & Lim, 2002; Choi's, 2002). Conclusively, it can be argued from the present study that the interaction effects of assertiveness and in-group collectivism leads to higher employee engagement with a moderate level of assertiveness and high in-group collectivism. Further the team-oriented leadership approach may evolve with such interaction effects (Dorfman et al., 1997) and high employee engagement. This is commensurate with the affirmation that leaders with a moderate level of assertiveness but high level of inclusiveness will be accepted by in-group members, which in turn can engage them more with the organizational goal and vision.

Implications for Research

The present study is significant as it endeavors to make meaningful theoretical contributions towards cultural values and employee engagement literature. One of the theoretical contributions, which can be examined in future research, is the following propositions based on the preceding discussion:

P1: Interaction effect of in-group collectivism and power distance cultural values has got positive and significant effect on employee engagement in

the context of the etic approach promoting transformational leadership style.

P2: Interaction effect of in-group collectivism and assertive cultural values has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in the con-

text of the etic approach promoting team leadership style.

Secondly, based on the past studies the following models are established and can be examined in future research in the context of the etic and emic approaches to leadership styles.

Fig1 Leadership Style Based on Interaction Effects of In-group Collectivism and Power Distance

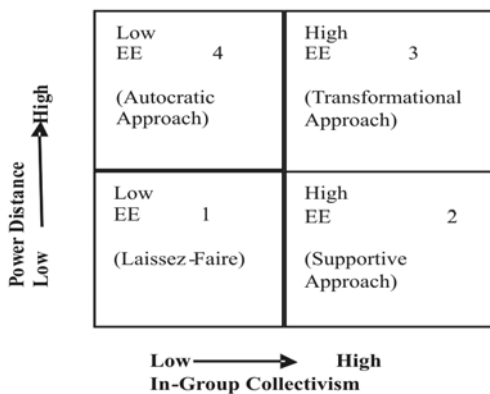
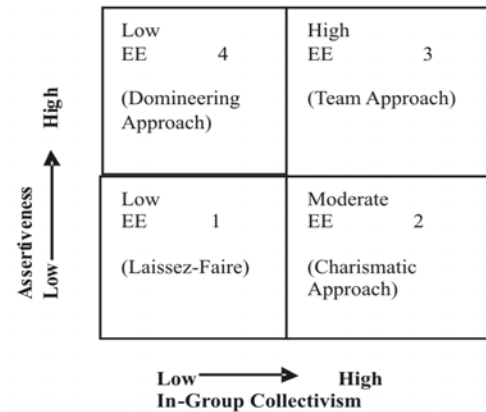


Fig2 Leadership Style Based on Interaction Effects of In-group Collectivism and Assertiveness



Contribution to Practice

A number of implications can be drawn from the present study. High engaging culture can be strived in any organization by following the third quadrant of fig1 and third quadrant of fig 2 irrespective of the country’s culture as the four dimensions (assertiveness, power distance, in-group collectivism and collective individualism)are universally endorsed and perceived in the same sense as well as possible consequences.

Various intervention strategies can be designed on the basis of current findings in order to increase employee engagement. The following practices can cer-

tainly be incorporated in organizations based on the preceding discussion.

- Empowerment practices should be inherent in the system.
- Team work should be the backbone underlying any activities.
- Performance linked group reward system should be encouraged.
- Transformational and team-oriented leadership style should be endorsed to cultivate the feeling of inclusion.

Limitations & Future Research

The study has contributed to the theoretical body of cross-culture and

employee engagement substantially. However, it leaves space to limitations due to the cross-sectional nature of research. The cross-sectional design of the study does not allow us to determine causality among variables. The longitudinal study can affirm the generalization on the cause and effect relationship among variables mentioned in this study. The sample size here was the greatest constraint to arrive at inferences. Therefore, the future study can avoid these limitations and endeavor to create generalizations by examining the cause and effect relationships through structural equation modeling across the countries and industries.

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