

The Impact of Culture on Women's Attitudes Regarding Career Options and Advancement in the Workplace

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Proposal Summary (work in progress):

Many researchers have found distinct differences between males and females, particularly in their attitudes regarding advancement in the workplace (Hofstede, 1980). In developing his four dimensions of culture related values, Hofstede found that females were much more likely to respond that having a good working relationship with their manager and cooperating with their co-workers was very important. Males responded that opportunity to gain higher earnings and to get recognition for doing a job well was very important.

The current research project attempts to determine the impact of culture on both women's perceptions of career options and their aspirations to advance on the corporate ladder, and whether or not gender is an additional factor in the expression of those aspirations (leading to an interaction effect). For example, some studies have found that American students value personal achievement (found to be more pronounced for males in other studies) more than students from other countries (Church & Katigbak, 1992). Positive value placed on assertiveness and self-confidence is greater in cultures that are comprised of members with more individualistic traits, such as the United States (Takata, 1987).

Perhaps, even more important than actual gender differences, is the issue of gender stereotyping and the self-fulfilling prophecy effect. Do women of different cultures see themselves as stereotyped in unique ways which would then impact their personal assessment of chances for advancement? Would these women make any

attempts to pursue advancement if they held a negative view of their chances for success? And, furthermore, do women and men hold different views?

This issue is important in our current, globalized work environment. It also addresses the need for understanding of today's considerably diverse work population. The ethnocentric view of one's own culture as the center of everything, and all other cultures are scaled and rated in reference to it, suggests the ability to be bias free in worker choices and assignments is an unrealistic expectation. Bond (1988b) calls this problem "cultural inwardness," holding values of cultural superiority and respect for tradition. He further states that some hold values of "social integration," meaning they have higher tolerance of others and feel in harmony with others. It is unlikely, however, that any one individual can be totally, socially integrated and not affected by cultural bias to some degree.

Method:

Participants will be undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a business or Industrial/Organizational psychology program and business professionals from three countries: United States, Brazil, and Poland.

A research tool is currently being developed to obtain information from the participants related to: participant demographics, cultural beliefs (particularly related to "appropriate" gender career choices), career aspirations, degree of international knowledge, gender stereotype, level of education, etc. It is important that attitudes be addressed in as circumspect of a manner as possible to avoid a high degree of social desirability responding.

Data will be collected in face-to-face sessions with participants. The researchers, who are based in the United States, have an opportunity to travel to Brazil and Poland for this purpose.

Conclusion:

The findings from this research project can be used to enhance the skills of Human Resource Managers regarding the impact of cultural context on career aspirations of workers from countries other than the United States. This knowledge will be useful in designing motivational incentives and career tracks, particularly for women.

It is hoped that the IAMB conference will present an opportunity to interact with other professionals in the field who may share a common interest or who may have special experience in this area of research. Particularly, comments regarding developing the research protocol in a way that will encourage cooperation from participants of other countries will be welcomed.