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We're on a Road to Nowhere... New Forms of Work Organization and National Cultures

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to discuss how far the cultural environment is related to the potential that new forms of work organization, namely autonomy and teamwork, have for success. To accomplish this objective two main approaches will be used: on the one hand, the Socio-Technical Systems (STS) approach, as the main theoretical background for new forms of work organization; and on the other hand, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as the theoretical model to frame the concept of national cultures. The study was developed using data from 23 EU countries. The study showed that the correlation between national cultures and new forms of work organization are significant, yet moderate. Moreover, differences in the impact of cultural dimensions on work design practices were found. The use of autonomy and teamwork can be insufficient to represent the wide variety of work design practices in STS. The same is also valid for cultural dimensions. An understanding of the cultural constraints on work design practices in EU countries can help improve organization models, furthering competitiveness.

Keywords: culture, work organization, autonomy, teamwork, Europe, Hofstede

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Introduction

It is not new to say that market economies are different – more globalized, more competitive and presenting new characteristics that were unknown until half a century ago. In the business world this is a universal truth. Another universal truth that came with the revolution of market economies is change. Change became one of the most used words in business practices and studies because the pace of events is, nowadays, so demanding that it is necessary to be in a state of constant change. This reality poses a difficult task for organizations because they need to adapt constantly without loosing competitiveness. Facing this reality, the management is now under more pressure than ever before.

One of the concerns in management today is the optimization of internal resources. Several tools and techniques can be used to achieve this goal. Among them is work design, which can be defined as a system of procedures, activities and tasks undertaken to develop, produce and deliver a product or service (Sinha and Van der Ven, 2005). The challenges posed by today's economy, namely mass customization, short delivery deadlines, but also new technologies and resources not available until 30 or 40 years ago, have pushed organizations to find new solutions for work design. Thus, new forms of work organization have emerged, new solutions have been tried, but with different results, some successful, some unsuccessful.

The relative success (or failure) of some solutions is well documented in the literature.

Since the famous book by Womack, Jones and Roos (1991), "The Machine that changed the world", several models were questioned and critically evaluated. There was so much enthusiasm among managers that they saw the Japanese model as a "one fits all" model. However, the results were not so exciting and much criticism was directed at Japanese practices (see Cooney, 2002; Kovács, 1998a). One aspect that is present in the potential success of work organization models is linked to the local constraints that companies have to cope with.

The main objective of this paper is to discuss how far culture is related to the implementation of different forms of work organization. That is, can the cultural environment be related to the potential that new forms of work organization have for success? This is a relevant question in so far as new forms of work organization can be seen as a set of management practices that are developed in a specific cultural context, and this context can enhance or inhibit the success of work design practices.

This paper starts by discussing new forms of work organization in two opposing paradigms. It follows on to describe the socio-technique systems (STS) approach, which represents the main theoretical background of the more humanist forms of work organization. The second part introduces the concept of culture in management studies, and in particular Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. Then after some methodological considerations, the results are presented and some conclusions drawn.

Work Organization Models

The debate around work organization models has been framed by two paradigms that present opposing perspectives and solutions. The models attached to each of the paradigms emphasize different dimensions and solutions. Work organization models can be classified in numerous ways. However, for the purpose of this paper, a classification adapted from Kovacs (1998b) will be used (Table 1).

Table 1: Two paradigms of work organization models

Technocentric Paradigm	Anthropocentric Paradigm
Introduction of new technologies in order to concentrate the potential control over production	Introduction of new technologies in order to obtain functional and organizational flexibility
Rigid working practices	Flexible working practices
Centralization and specialization	Decentralization and polyvalence
Vertical and horizontal division of work, strong hierarchical and professional divisions	Vertical and horizontal integration of work, unclear division between workers' tasks
Centralized technical solutions	Decentralized technical solutions

Source: adapted from Kovacs, 1998b

Work organization models based on the technocentric paradigm assume that the solution to challenges presented by the new economic context is using high technology, which is believed to guarantee competitiveness offering quality and flexibility. High technology will allow a higher centralization and automation of mechanisms and processes and, at the same time, allows diversification of the production process. Software can incorporate human knowledge and skills in a formalized and regular fashion.

The work organization model that better illustrates this perspective is known as neotaylorism, which can be defined as an update of Taylor's classic work organization model with the incorporation of high technology. The principles of Taylor's work organization model are well known. The introduction of high technology makes it possible to expand these principles reinforcing its rigid, centralised and controlling approach. The present control strategies are substituted by absent control strategies (Kovács *et al*., 1994).

Alternatively, the work organization framed by the anthropocentric paradigm argues that the best way to face a segmented and demanding market is with the ability to quickly change

and adapt. In this way, high technology is not sufficient to guarantee that competitive advantage. It should also be followed by flexible human resources and organization models.

Taking the opposite approach to technocentrism, the anthropocentric paradigm stresses the importance of human resources to promote a flexible organization capable of changing and adapting to market contingencies. This perspective can be seen in the adoption of participative approaches, decentralization of the decision-making process and information and cooperation among workers through the implementation of working teams.

Technology in this scenario looses its deterministic status and becomes an important backup for human skills, allowing individual and collective creativity. This principle reverses the classic thinking because it becomes necessary to develop technological systems capable of adapting to people and not vice versa. This is the basis of the development of anthropocentric technological systems, built on information, decision and control transparency and user friendly interfaces able to facilitate learning (Wobbe, 1991).

Although work organization models within the anthropocentric paradigm have been called "new organization models" (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007), in fact their principles and ideas may be considered an update of several models and theories developed since the 1950s, and widely applied by companies since the 1970s, such as the Volvo car manufacturer. One of the theoretical frameworks that have contributed heavily to the development of these "new organization models" is the socio-technique systems (STS) approach (Kovacs and Moniz, 1994).

This approach is based on the work of Eric Trust developed at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations (Torraco, 2005). Following the general theory of systems developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Carvalho Ferreira *et al.*, 2001), organizations are seen by the STS approach as open systems "made of people using tools, techniques and knowledge to produce goods or services valued by customers" (Liu, Shah and Schroeder, 2006). The transformation of inputs into outputs is done by people using technology, and the outputs are delivered to the market. Thus, according to the STS approach, organizations are built on three main subsystems: the technical, social and environmental.

The technical or technological subsystem is composed not only of tools and machinery, but also of knowledge and techniques. Thus, the term technology in the STS approach assumes a wider definition, incorporating everything that can be handled by people or is the result of human intervention. The introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the management and production processes, with the capacity to store, process and relay information and also to improve quality by self-monitoring, self-regulation and self-correction raises the debate around how these new technologies should be incorporated in the management and production processes. According to the STS approach, the compatibility and integration between the three subsystems is the key to the success of an organization's design. Thus, the introduction of new technologies should be made in a way that takes into account the characteristics of the other subsystems, namely the social and the environmental.

The social subsystem is considered to be of utmost importance for an STS design, because it is the only subsystem that has the ability to introduce changes, namely conceive and implement improvements in organizational processes. It includes not only people who work at the organization, but also every aspect that is correlated with each individual alone and the interaction between individuals. Thus, it includes social and individual attributes of each individual, their attitudes, beliefs, relationships (formal and informal, vertical and lateral), and finally the influence of traditions and cultures (Shani *et al.*, 1992).

Finally, the environmental subsystem is defined as the set of exogenous players that, in some way, affect the purposes of the organization, and its technological and social subsystems. Among these exogenous players, customers and competitors are seen as the most important, whose demands and strategic actions can influence the decisions and actions of organizations. The nature of the environment can have a substantial influence on the technological and social subsystems, especially its complexity and degree of stability. With an increasing degree of competitiveness among competitors and the sophistication of customers' demands it is more likely to expect much more complex and less stable environments, which can influence the way technology is used, but also the characteristics of the social subsystem (Shani *et al.*, 1992).

Along with organizational structure and strategy, one of the most emphasized dimensions of the STS approach is work design. This can be defined as "the system of arrangements and procedures for organizing work… [which comprise] the set of activities that are undertaken to develop, produce and deliver a product – a physical and/or informational good or service" (Sinha and Van de Ven, 2005). From this definition we can understand how the technological and social subsystems of an organization must be interconnected in order to meet the demands and requirements of the external environmental subsystem (Shani *et al.*, 1992). In fact, one of the principles of the STS approach claims that organizational objectives are best met by the joint optimization of the technological and social aspects of an organization (Liu, Shah and Schroeder, 2006).

Following the main premises of STS approach, Cherns (1976; 1987) presented the nine STS work-design principles summarised below (Table 2).

Table 2: Work-design principles of the STS approach

Principle	What it means…	What implies for work design…
Compatibility	System design must be compatible with organization's long-term objectives	Employees involvement and empowerment
Minimal critical specification	State as little as possible about how jobs are performed	Creativity, autonomy, adaptation
Socio-technical criterion	Control should be local and given to the work team	Autonomy, teamwork, decision-making authority
Multi-function	Workers should be capable of performing a diverse range of jobs	Multifunctional employees with a high degree of versatility
Boundary location	Organization boundaries should be drawn so as to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge and learning	Cellular setup, combining interdependent jobs and employees from several specialized skill areas
Information flow	The organization should provide workers with the right feedback	Communication flows, feedback to employees, autonomous maintenance
Support congruence	The system of social support should be designed in a way to reinforce the desired behaviours	Task-related training, reward and incentive systems and other HR support mechanisms
Design and human values	In organization design the quality of working life should be an important consideration	Worker responsibility, variety, growth, involvement, security
Incompletion	Organization design is a continuous process	Continuous improvement and learning

Source: adapted from Cherns (1976; 1987) and Liu, Shah and Schroeder (2006)

These principles have some consequences in work design and in the needs workers must meet to successfully perform their job. First, teamwork is a practice that underpins all the principles; the characteristics and dynamics of teamwork enhance the probability of the success of each principle. Principles such as multi-function, socio-technique criterion, boundary location or even support congruence are better transposed to practice in a team context.

Another underlying consequence of these principles is autonomy. The ability to decide about certain aspects of how work is planned and performed is of utmost importance for the success of STS. In fact, the lack of autonomy is incompatible with some principles such as socio-technical criterion or information flow, to name a few. Without autonomy it is impossible to decide on how work should be done (minimal critical specification) or to decide on the planning of tasks (multi-function), or even to give control to local teams. Thus, the STS approach should be supported by a social subsystem well prepared to embed autonomy as an underlying value.

Although the STS approach presents a flexible and modern view of work design, suited to the new constraints of market economies, it is not immune to criticisms. In a review of several theories on work design, Torraco (2005) points out some of the most common criticisms. The STS approach is history bound; that is, its main ideas were developed in a specific socio-historic context as a response to the concerns about the effects of advancements in manufacturing technologies on people and productivity. Because the major concern of the STS approach is the compatibility of technical and social subsystems, it is argued that it stresses what is called the "design of organizational systems". This characteristic limits its scope of analysis or range of application. Finally, the STS approach doesn't seem to be able to accommodate the new reality of virtual work situations; it cannot, according to the critics, adequately explain how to organize, design and articulate work activities for an environment characterized by flexible work situations that are not time and place specific.

Although it is not the objective of this paper to refute the criticisms of the STS approach, it should be said that the bases on which those critics rely on are not well grounded. First, and although STS theory has been developed in a specific socio-historic context, its concerns remain relevant. Second, STS theory is not only concerned with the integration of technical and social subsystems. As a matter of fact, it is more focused on the response given by the organization – consisting of two subsystems, technical and social – to the environmental subsystem. Finally, STS theory adopts an approach flexible enough to integrate new realities. The principles elaborated by Cherns (1976; 1987) are a good example, and should be understood as broader guidelines for work design. Moreover, it could be argued that the basic principles of virtual work do not differ so much from the "traditional" work environment. In other words, even in a virtual environment, the principle of compatibility between technical and social subsystems still persists.

Cultural Approach to Work Organization Models

The integration of culture into management studies is not widely accepted. In fact, some scholars (Ajiferuke and Boddewyn, 1970; Levitt, 1983; Ohmae, 1985) advocate a culture-free approach to management studies based on two arguments. First, it is argued that culture is not an essential variable in management studies because its assumed effects are surpassed by structural and economic factors. The second argument rests on the cultural convergence effect of globalization, especially on the business world, where the disappearance of cultural barriers diminishes the diversity and difference between cultures (Yeganeh and Su, 2006).

The culture-bound management supporters (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993;

Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 1999), however, argue that culture is one of the most important variables when analysing management practices and they cannot be considered in a context-free and universal fashion. This view of the culture/management relationship stresses that management is about people with their personal and social characteristics, which are necessarily mediated by the cultural environment. Thus, the argument favouring cultural homogenization is completely rejected; instead they advocate cultural relativism claiming that management practices should be tailored to cultural contexts. The last decade shows that scholars have adhered to this view of culture, and there is a generalized consensus on the importance of culture in the study of management practices (Yeganeh and Su, 2006).

The concept of culture used in management studies is borrowed and adapted from other social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. There is no consensual definition of the concept maybe due to its complexity, but also because each scientific paradigm emphasizes different dimensions. Being such a complex phenomenon we have to agree that is difficult to grasp all of its nuances in a conceptual definition. Yeganeh and Su (2006) suggest that one possible way is to build a flexible concept of culture with several dimensions that would be used by researchers depending on the purposes of the research. In this way it should be possible to develop research without compromising the complexity of the phenomenon. According to Inglehart and Baker (2000), individualism, hierarchical distance, modernity or religiosity could be some of those referred dimensions.

Several models use dimensions to describe cultures. One of them is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 1997). Hofstede's interest in the cultural phenomenon goes back to the 1970's when he started the study of cultural differences using IBM workers from over 50 countries as an empirical basis. He starts from the definition of culture, which can be seen as the collective mental programming that distinguishes members of a group (Hofstede, 1997). This computer metaphor does not mean that there is no room for creativity; on the contrary, individuals can adapt their "software" in order to adjust to different contexts and goals. Another important point about culture is that it allows individuals and groups to solve problems and, thus, facing the same problem, individuals from different cultures can present different solutions.

The theoretical model is made up of dimensions. In Hofstede's terms, this means that (1) they are independent of each other, (2) it is possible to combine them in different ways, and (3) they operate with two opposing extremes along a continuum. The theoretical model initially presented four dimensions (Hofstede, 1983):

Power Distance (PDI)

Defines how people deal with inequalities. These inequalities can be measured in terms of power and wealth. The power distance index gives us a clue to the social and individual level of the tolerance of those differences. This dimension seems to be correlated with collectivism: in countries where collectivism scores high, there is also a tendency to score high on power distance. However, the results are not so clear to relation to individualism and power distance.

Individualism (IDV)

This dimension is about the relationship between one individual and other individuals. Individualism is at one extreme and signifies very loose ties. This dimension seems to be correlated with national wealth: more individualist societies tend to be wealthier.

Masculinity (MAS)

Masculinity accounts for the (social) division of roles between the sexes. When a society is mainly "masculine" it means that masculine values, such as performing, achieving and materialism, exist throughout the society even for women. The opposite, "feminine" societ-

ies, are more concerned with relationships, quality of life and the preservation of the environment.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the way societies deal with the unknown, an unchangeable characteristic of the future. Societies that score low on uncertainty avoidance tend to prepare their members to accept uncertainty with ease, taking risks more easily. Another characteristic of low uncertainty avoidance societies is the high level of tolerance regarding others' opinions and behaviour.

A fifth dimension was added after a study developed by Chinese scholars (Hofstede, 1983):

Long/short term orientation (LTO)

This deals with what has been called Virtue and Truth, which is found in the thinking of Confucius. The former is associated with thrift and perseverance; the latter emphasises tradition and the fulfilling of social obligations.

Although Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions present a comprehensive model, which allows the study of national cultures and comparisons between cultures, it has been subject to extensive criticism. One of its more fierce opponents is McSweeney (2002), who criticizes the entire model from its basis (the notion of culture) to the methodology. Others, such as Baskerville (2003), build their criticism on the argument that anthropology and sociology, the scientific disciplines where the concept was constructed and refined, do not use Hofstede's model.

It is not our goal to go through the arguments of McSweeney (2002) or Baskerville (2003) step by step, and an answer to such criticisms has already been given by Hofstede himself elsewhere (2002). However, it should be said that although the model is far from perfect, to cover all aspects of such a complex concept as culture, the wide applicability of its principles in areas such as organizations, consumption, tourism, marketing and others should be considered. Furthermore, every theoretical development should be scrutinized, but this should be done on a constructive rather than destructive basis. In other words, the criticisms should be followed by new enlightening proposals, which was not the case.

Methodological Considerations

The main goal of this paper is to comprehend how culture can be related to new work organization practices. It is assumed that the introduction and success of these practices is culture bound and, as such, the cultural characteristics of each country can act as promoters or as inhibitors of new work organization practices.

According to the STS approach, and as stated before, some of the principles stated by Cherns (1976; 1987) rely on some work design practices to succeed, such as autonomy and teamwork. In order to measure the presence or the potential introduction of new work forms in the countries studied, these two characteristics of work design will be used in this paper as indicators of new forms of work organization.

Data from the 4th European Work Conditions Survey developed by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) will be used along with data from 2005. The data for the item "Autonomy" follows the method used in the 4th European Work Conditions Survey (2007: 51-60) – using a six-point scale, ranging from 0 (no autonomy) to 5 (full autonomy). The data for "Teamwork" uses a simple indicator that results from the answers given to the question "Does your job involve doing all or part of your work in a team" (with a yes or no answer).

The use of culture to study how national characteristics can help explain the success of different work organization models needs an approach that presents some particular characteristics, namely: (1) it should be able to allow comparisons between countries, (2) a

typology well tested and suited to the organizational context, and finally (3) it should present characteristics allowing comparison with organizational models. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) fulfil these requisites in so far that his model offers solid standards that had been used to understand the cultures of many countries. Furthermore, it was born from the study of the organizational context and uses data from surveys conducted in the countries selected for this study. This data can be found on Hofstede's webpage (http://www.geert-hofstede.com).

Following the main objective of this paper, the association between the selected variables for new forms of work organization and the dimensions of Hofstede's model will be tested.

Results

Autonomy

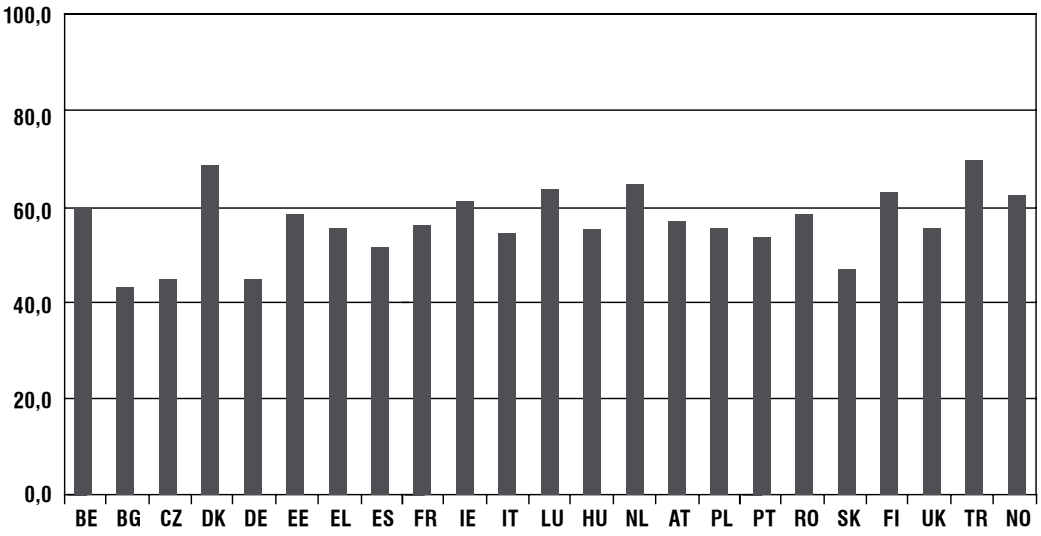
Autonomy is one of the characteristics of new forms of work organization. Graph 1 presents the results for the EU countries selected. According to these figures, the global values for autonomy are relatively high with all countries showing a rate of autonomy over 40%. The countries presenting the highest practices of autonomy are to the north (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Ireland). Exceptions include the Netherlands and, notably, Turkey, the country with the highest autonomy index (69.2%). Countries with lowest levels of autonomy are to the south (Spain and Portugal) and east (Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia).

Using Pearson's correlation coefficient to test the association between autonomy and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the following results were obtained:

Table 3: Association between autonomy and Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Cultural Dimensions	Pearson's correlation coefficient
PDI	-0,406
IDV	0,278
MAS	-0,489
UAI	-0,319

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the results. First, the association is moderated for every dimension; second, except for IDV, the



Graph 1: Autonomy in 23 EU Countries (%)
Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (2007)

association is always negative, meaning that high scores for PDI, MAS and UAI represent the lower use of autonomy as a working practice. However, the PDI and MAS dimensions present solid negative associations with autonomy.

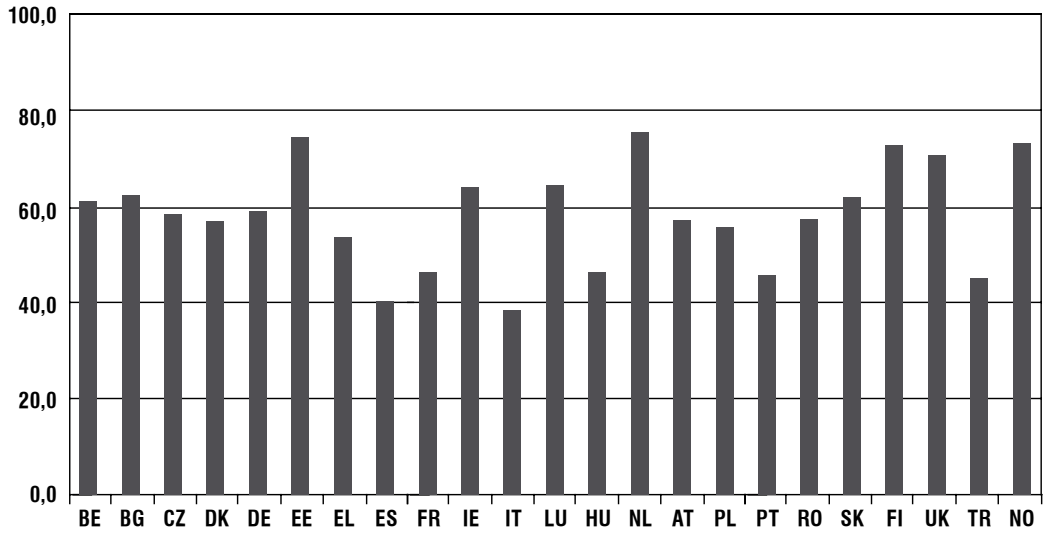
The negative correlation between autonomy and PDI means that a stronger social acceptance of power distance presents more obstacles to the introduction of autonomy. This can be explained by the nature of the STS principles for work design stated earlier, such as "minimal critical specification" or "socio-technical criterion", just to mention two. Also, some practices usually associated with autonomy that generally include the power to decide over the order of tasks, methods of work and even the pace of work, can help to explain this negative correlation. These principles and practices call for a decentralized and flexible work organization model, which is not compatible with a high index of power distance because control is decentralized and the decision-making process is the responsibility of teams.

On the other hand, the negative association between autonomy and the MAS dimension means that cultures with a high index for the MAS dimension will show stronger resistance to the introduction of principles and practices conducive to autonomy. The stronger division of roles and work associated with masculine societies can probably help explain this evidence. Autonomy practices imply a loose division of work and the assumption of different tasks and roles along the work process.

Teamwork

The principles stated by Cherns (1976; 1987) clearly show that teamwork is a very important work design practice for the STS approach. Based on the 4th European Working Conditions Survey the results for teamwork in the 23 EU countries selected is presented:

Globally, the selected countries present a wide range of results for teamwork. From Italy (38.5%) to the Netherlands (75.2%) there is a strong divergence within Europe on the use of teamwork as a work design practice. However, there are several countries where its presence is strong, such as the Netherlands, Greece, Norway and Finland. Alternatively, Italy, Spain, France, Hungary, Portugal and Turkey are weak users of teamwork.



Graph 2: Teamwork in 23 EU Countries (%)

Source: 4th European Working Conditions Survey (2007)

These data, when crossed with the cultural dimensions, present the following correlation results:

Table 4: Association between Teamwork and Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Cultural Dimensions	Pearson's correlation coefficient
PDI	-0,322
IDV	0,276
MAS	-0,313
UAI	-0,576

An overall perspective shows, once again as in the case of autonomy, a moderate association. Moreover, teamwork and autonomy present similar results for the direction of the correlation. Only the correlation with the IDV dimension is positive; all the others are negative. However, UAI is the one dimension that presents a stronger association with teamwork. With a solid result of -0.576, a looser uncertainty avoidance index seems to be favourable to the use of team working practices. This can be explained by the characteristics of a low uncertainty avoidance culture. As was stated before, societies with low scores on UAI tend to be more open to taking risks and, most of all, are more tolerant regarding others' opinions, which is a very important characteristic for teamwork to succeed. Teamwork implies a lot of interaction among its members and the capacity to solve problems and find solutions, which implies strong communication skills.

Concluding Remarks

The main objective of this paper was to understand the influence of national cultures on the success of new forms of work organization. It was assumed that the cultural characteristics of countries have some impact on the management practices related to work design. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model was used to test cultural influences on two important characteristics of new forms of work organization inspired by STS, namely autonomy and teamwork.

The main conclusion to be drawn is that we cannot ignore culture as a fundamental factor in the explanation of differences and similarities, and the success and failure of new forms of work organization. The moderate, but significant, association between the selected work design indicators and cultural dimensions underlines the importance of culture as a moderator of new forms of work implementation. Although this is not new to scholars and managers, the transposition of management practices between cultures regardless of cultural constraints is still a reality.

Nonetheless, there are differences between the impacts of different cultural dimensions; they do not seem to play a similar role in influencing work design indicators. For autonomy, PDI seems to be the most crucial factor, and UAI is more relevant for teamwork. This conclusion is supported by Hofstede's (1994) argument, which states that some cultural dimensions, such as PDI and UAI, are more significant than others when explaining the functioning of organizations.

Another important conclusion is that there are some significant differences among EU countries. Northern and some Central European countries present greater application of the selected work design indicators. Although it was not within the scope of this paper, the role that similarities and differences play on the use of work organization practices should also be investigated. Kogut and Singh (1988) have already used the notion of "cultural distance" to express the degree of difference among the cultural traits of two or more countries. However, as Yeganeh and Su (2006) put it, it is important not only to understand differences, but also to understand similarities. Thus, another frame of research should try to understand similarities among cultures and to what degree they are similar. Finally, the similarities and differences that seem to exist among some EU countries should be

examined more closely using other variables besides culture. Hofstede (1983) pointed out that dimensions could be related to national wealth. Thus, and following Yeganeh and Su (2006), the influence of the culture/economy relationship on work design practices should also be explored.

Another limitation of this study is the work design indicators used because autonomy and teamwork can be insufficient in representing the wide variety of work design practices in the STS approach. The same is true for Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions; they don't express the wide complexity of the cultural phenomenon. However, as Yeganeh and Su (2006) state, the apprehension of the phenomenon should be easier if one uses simpler, well-demarcated and limited constructs to compare countries.

When a company starts its approach to a new market in a different country, one of the main concerns is to research the new market, namely its competitors, but also potential consumers. This is done in order to prepare and adapt the penetration strategy to a new reality. This should also be the case when dealing with the implementation of new units in new cultural realities. Managers should also try to understand the cultural environment in order to prepare and adapt their management practices, in order to take advantage of their resources.

Culture can be a "soft" element of human life in society. Nonetheless, its effects belong to the "hard" dimension, that is, they can be seen, felt and measured, but not so often these "hard" consequences are attributed to cultural constraints. If the question is incorrectly formulated, the answer will not serve the right purpose. This may be the reason why, sometimes, the wrong answers lead us on a road to nowhere…

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