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Williams, S. & Sandler, R. L., (1995). Work Values and Attitudes: Protestant and Confucian Ethics as Predictors of Satisfaction and Commitment, *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 3(1), 1-13.

Work Values and Attitudes: Protestant and Confucian Ethics as Predictors of Satisfaction and Commitment

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Volume 3:
Issue 1
Editorial
Regular
Papers
Practitioner
Focus
Reviews

ABSTRACT

The Nomological validity of the work orientation of PE (Protestant Ethic) and CE (Confucian Ethic) and the extent to which these two work values were predictive of managerial job satisfaction and organizational commitment were explored using a comparative sample of American and Singaporean managers. Analysis revealed that PE and CE were distinct and unrelated constructs, lending support to their external validity. However, neither American nor Singaporean managers exhibited higher levels of PE or CE, suggesting that these two work orientations are not culturally specific. PE and CE were found to be significant predictors of organizational attitudes, although results were contrary to those hypothesized, with PE strongly committed to commitment and CE to satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Values have long been recognized as important determinants of behavior (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Morris, 1956; Rokeach, 1973), and of particular interest to organizational researchers are values which influence work attitudes and performance (Aldag & Brief, 1975; Blood, 1969; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Furnham, 1990; Ralston, Gustafson, Elsass, Cheung, & Terpstra, 1992). Preliminary findings have indicated that culturally based differences in work values may influence how employees feel toward and act within organizations (Hui, 1992). For example, Oliver (1990) reported that employees high in values associated with the Protestant Ethic tend to have higher organizational commitment, a finding similar to that presented by Putti, Aryee, and Tan (1989) in their study involving Singaporean electronics workers.

The underlying premise behind research involving culturally determined values is that value systems which are absorbed through family life and other social institutions shape the work-related expectations and desires of organizational members. Since work ethics "provide a reason for valuing work and having a positive attitude toward it" (Westwood, 1992a: 213), culturally derived work orientations are hypothesized to account for reported dissimilarities in worker attitudes and beliefs (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Ronen, 1986). However, some comparative management studies have failed to find significant cross-cultural differences in employee work-related attitudes (Chang, 1985; Elizur, Borg, Hunt, & Magyaribeck, 1991; McNeely, 1987), which suggests that the relationship between cultural work values and attitudes may be more complex than initially theorized. The present study was undertaken in an attempt to determine the extent to

which the cultural work values of Protestant Ethic and Confucian Ethic differed between two specific cultures (America and Singapore) and to test the extent to which these work orientations influenced subsequent organizational attitudes.

The Protestant Ethic (PE) was formulated by Max Weber (1904) to describe values which emphasize the inherent goodness of work itself and the obligation of people to pursue honest work as its own reward; Weber equated possession of PE values to the rise and success of modern capitalism. More recently, Cherrington (1980: 19) has defined PE as " a belief that work itself is important and that doing a good job is essential." Some researchers (cf. Buchholz, 1978) have argued that the values from which PE are derived are distinctly Western in their individualistic emphasis on personal achievement, while others have suggested that domestic culture may have its strongest influence on employee values and attitudes before other cultures are allowed to dilute value orientations; for example, worker needs, desires, and motivations of pre-industrialized societies are often seen as being altered by prolonged exposure to Western influence (cf. Kao & Levin, 1978; Orpen, 1978). This latter perspective argues that the greater the infusion and acceptance of Western ideas and beliefs into a non-Western culture, such as American and British influence within Singapore, the stronger the similarities in value orientations such as PE. For example, Orpen (1978) found that African employees who were more accepting of Western values were more likely to exhibit higher levels of PE than tribal-oriented employees.

A more recent work-value belief system which is receiving increasing attention is the Confucian Ethic (CE), which is a value orientation stressing interpersonal harmony, hierarchy, family integrity, and kinship affiliation, in addition to individual responsibility (Hui, 1992). Hui (1992: 67) suggests that " people favoring these values are characterized by a strong entrepreneurial spirit, wanting to succeed, and that a whole society that adopts such values has a high growth potential" ; others agree that CE values have been instrumental in the emergence and success of the Asian newly industrialized economies of Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1991; Kahn, 1979; Redding & Wong, 1986). Although micro-level analysis using CE is rare, Yang and Cheng (1986) found that employees with stronger Confucian values reported higher levels of organizational commitment, as well as higher work performance, than those who did not subscribe to Confucian values; however, it should be noted that Yang and Cheng did not specifically test CE. Generally, CE is presumed to be primarily an Asian orientation (Westwood, 1992b) which is regionally distinct from PE, even though empirical evidence supporting this assumption is scarce.

Although a fairly extensive body of research has investigated how PE influences individual work attitudes (cf. Buchanon, 1974; Cherrington, 1980; Kidron, 1978), CE has been used primarily at the national and societal level to measure how long-term aspects of Confucian philosophy are predictive of subsequent economic growth (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & Bond, 1988); scant attention has been focused on how CE influences individual work attitudes like satisfaction and commitment (Furnham, 1989; Oliver, 1990; Putti, Aryee, & Tan, 1989). Further, little work has been done to determine the extent to which PE and CE, which are both work ethics emphasizing the desirability and acceptability of work and economic success, are nomologically separate constructs. This study contrasts PE and CE using a comparative sample of managers from the U.S. and Singapore and tests the extent to which PE and CE are predictive of the employee attitudes of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Commitment and satisfaction were selected as appropriate outcome variables due to their anticipated relationship with culturally derived work orientations. Since culture socializes people to value certain aspects of life, such as individualism and autonomy in Western cultures and collectivism and harmony in Asian cultures (Ronen, 1986), workers within contrasting cultures are predicted to generate different expectations toward work (e.g., degree of employee involvement in decision making or level of self-control allowed to organizational members). Hence, it seems likely that the attitudes of satisfaction and commitment, which measure the extent to which the organization is meeting employee wants and desires, might differ among cultures which emphasize different needs, perceptions, and expectations.

Additionally, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are of major interest to organizational researchers with a significant proportion of new empirical work including one or both of these variables (Griffin & Bateman, 1986; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Shore & Martin, 1989). Locke (1976: 1300) has defined job satisfaction as a "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences," and Griffin and Bateman (1986: 158) have suggested that job satisfaction is "a global construct encompassing such specific facets of satisfaction as satisfaction with work, pay, supervision, benefits, promotion opportunities, working conditions, co-workers, and organizational practices." Organizational commitment has been defined in many ways (cf. Griffin & Bateman, 1986; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Morrow, 1983), but "the most commonly studied type of organizational commitment has been attitudinal, most often measured with a scale developed by Porter and his colleagues" (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990:172); this common measure of organizational commitment captures "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in an organization" (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982:27). Interest in job satisfaction and organizational commitment continues to grow as further research demonstrates that, although these attitudes do not consistently predict employee performance or productivity, they both are significant predictors of important organizational outcomes such as employee withdrawal and extra-role employee performance (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior) (cf. Griffin & Bateman, 1986; Organ, 1988; Shore & Martin, 1989; Teborg, Lee, Smith, Davis, & Turbin, 1982).

Further, these two attitudes may differ somewhat in their time orientation, with satisfaction related more to short-term concerns targeting how one's job is currently satisfying individual needs, while commitment is more of a long-term concern which focuses on one's willingness to maintain organizational affiliation in the future. It was anticipated that PE, which places greater importance on Western concepts like individualism, autonomy, and achievement needs and appears to have more of a short-term outlook, would likely have a greater influence on satisfaction. Furnham (1990), for example, reports that organizational behavior studies have shown that PB is generally a good indicator of job satisfaction. Similarly, CE, which includes more of an Asian emphasis on collectivism, dependence, and social needs and appears to have more of a long-term perspective, is expected to have a greater influence on commitment. Studies using CE at the macro level (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & Bond, 1988) have indicated that national levels of CE are generally related to long-term concerns, although individual-level relationships to attitudinal variables like commitment have not been reported.

To summarize, this study compares the extent to which PE and CE are nomologically separate constructs which tap into distinct work orientations by comparing Singaporean managers, who are expected to be higher in the Asian work orientation of CE, and American managers, who are expected to be higher in the Western work orientation of PB. In addition, it was anticipated that PE and CE would have a differential impact on organizational attitudes such that PE, which leads to the expectation that work can satisfy personal needs and individualistic concerns, would have a greater influence on worker satisfaction, while CE, which focuses more on harmony and relationships, would have a greater influence on organizational commitment. That is, it was hypothesized that managers with higher levels of PE would also express greater work satisfaction, and managers who were higher in CE would express stronger organizational commitment.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study came from Singaporean and U.S. subsidiaries of a global petroleum products firm with branches in several countries. The company expressed an interest in participating in the study because it was experiencing what it believed to be high levels of managerial turnover for new hires, and it was hopeful that information collected from employees might indicate potential problem areas; therefore, only managers with less than five years of tenure were surveyed. Participation was voluntary, and of the thirty U.S. and forty Singaporean managers who were eligible, 20 Americans (5 female managers) and 31 Singaporeans (3 female managers)

returned questionnaires for a response rate of 67% and 78%, respectively. Most respondents were male (84%), with an average age of 26.2 and an average of 2.6 years of tenure with the company; all participants had some university education and four had graduate degrees. The majority of Americans were Caucasian (75%), while the majority of Singaporeans were Chinese (90%). Additionally, all participants were citizens of the countries where they were employed. English was the primary language for all participants and was used for the survey instrument.

Demographic characteristics (i.e., sex, age, education, job tenure, and nationality) were collected for all respondents to determine if personal differences shared explained variance with PE, CE, and work attitudes. Previous research has indicated that gender (Beutell & Brenner, 1986), age (Cherrington, 1977; Taylor & Thompson, 1976), education (Wijting, Arnold, & Conrad, 1978), and job tenure (Gomez-Mejia, 1983) can be significantly related to work values; these demographic variables have also been found to be related to some extent to satisfaction and commitment (cf. Griffin & Bateman, 1986).

Instruments

Protestant Ethic. PE was measured using Blood's (1969) eight-item scale using a 7-point interval rating (1 =strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree); Blood (1969) reports reliabilities of .70 for this instrument. For this study, the PE scale (mean=36.5, SD=6.2) displayed a relatively poor Cronbach's alpha of .48, suggesting an attenuated measure of the construct (cf. Cook & Campbell, 1979). It should be noted, however, that while low reliability increases the probability of making a Type II error, a low alpha only becomes problematic if findings are nonsignificant (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Confucian Ethic. CE was measured using the Chinese Cultural Connection's (1987) eight-item scale, which was derived from a factor analysis of their original 40-item Chinese values questionnaire. Although others have also used this scale (cf. Ralston, et al., 1992), reliabilities have not been reported. For this study, this 7-point interval scale (mean=4.9, SD=1.1) exhibited a coefficient alpha of .86.

Satisfaction. Overall satisfaction was measured using the five-item General Job Satisfaction questionnaire developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) which has reported reliabilities of .76. This 7-point satisfaction scale (mean=25.5, SD=7.0) exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for this study.

Commitment. Organizational commitment was measured using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). This 15-item measure uses a 7-point interval scale which has reported reliabilities of around .90. The coefficient alpha for this study was .92 (mean=80.4, SD= 13.3).

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the correlations among the variables used in this study. For this sample, sex was significantly correlated with age, nationality, and education — male employees were more likely to be younger, have more education, and be Singaporean than female managers. Also, gender was marginally related to PE, with males exhibiting more PE than females. The correlation matrix also shows that older managers tended to have more education and longer tenure than younger managers. American managers differed from Singaporeans in education and tenure, with Americans having more education and longer tenure. However, no significant national differences existed for PE (U.S. mean=38.1, Singapore mean=35.4), CE (U.S. mean=5.1, Singapore mean=4.8), job satisfaction (U.S. mean=27.4, Singapore=24.2), or organizational commitment (U.S. mean=80.5, Singapore mean=80.4). PE was significantly correlated with both satisfaction and commitment, while CE was significantly correlated with satisfaction and marginally correlated $r=.20, p<.07$ with commitment. As with other studies, the attitudinal variables were found to be significantly related to one another.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix

	Sex	Age	Nation	Educ	Tenure	PE	CE	Sat
Age	.34							
Nat	-.34	-.07						
Educ	.51	.56	-.26					
Ten	.19	.56	-.60	.28				
PE	-.22	.00	-.21	-.07	.22			
CE	-.08	-.02	-.10	.07	-.07	.03		
Sat	.09	.08	.10	.23	.02	.23	.43	
Com	-.09	-.08	-.01	-.03	-.05	.31	.20	.43

Correlations above .23 ($p < .05$), .32 ($p < .01$), .43 ($p < .001$)

PE and CE were not correlated (.03, n.s.), indicating that these two work value orientations are different constructs which tap into different perceptual processes. That is, although both PE and CE are measures of the extent to which individuals subscribe to certain work-related values, the values associated with each appear to be unrelated, as suggested by Hofstede (1991).

To test the extent to which PE and CE were predictive of satisfaction and commitment, blockwise multiple regression analysis was used (Pedhazur, 1982). The demographic variables of sex, age, education, nationality, and tenure were entered as a set, followed by the attitudinal variables of PE and CE. Entering the personal characteristics before work values partialled out shared variance such that any changes in R^2 would be due to the unique contribution associated exclusively with work values. To control for experiment-wise Type I error inflation, the set of factors was required to be significant before individual variables in the block were considered, following the logic of the Fisher protected (LSD) test. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis.

Demographic differences did not significantly influence either job satisfaction or organizational commitment. However, work values were significant predictors of both outcome variables. For satisfaction, CE explained an additional 17% of the variance ($p < .01$) above that explained by the five demographic variables, while PE was marginally ($p < .09$) related to job satisfaction.

For commitment, PE explained an additional 13% of the variance ($p < .03$) above that explained by demographic characteristics. CE was not a significant predictor of organizational commitment.

Table 2
MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS
Dependent Variable — Satisfaction

Variables entered into the equation	R^2 Change	F	Beta	F
Sex Age Education Nationality Tenure	.145	n.s.		
PE			.24	.09
CE	.167	.01	.37	.009

Dependent Variable — Commitment

Variables entered into the equation	R^2 Change	F	Beta	F
Sex Age Education Nationality Tenure	.038	n.s.		
PE			.35	.03
CE	.131	.05	.19	n.s.

The purpose of this study was to compare the work orientations of PE and CE to uncover the extent to which they were unique constructs unrelated to one another, as well as to determine the extent to which the work values of PE and CE were predictive of managerial job satisfaction and organizational commitment in an international context. PE and CE were found to be unrelated to one another, suggesting that they are distinct constructs measuring different aspects of work orientation. However, neither American nor Singaporean managers exhibited higher levels of PE or CE, suggesting that these two work orientations are not culturally specific. PE and CE were found to be significant predictors of organizational attitudes, with PE strongly related to commitment and CE strongly related to satisfaction.

Although previous research has found that demographic differences can influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Griffin & Bateman, 1986), this study failed to find any significant relationships between the variables of sex, age, education, company tenure, and nationality and the outcome variables of commitment and satisfaction; one possible reason for this is that the sample size was relatively small which may have attenuated possible relationships. The findings presented here suggest that PE and CE are not culturally specific since the two ethics were not related to nationality. That is, while PE and CE did not differ between Americans and Singaporeans in this study, the extent to which individuals subscribed to these values was still predictive of subsequent managerial work attitudes. However, caution is warranted for nonsignificant findings such as the lack of work value differences between Singaporean and U.S. managers since PE exhibited a relatively low reliability coefficient which may account for the failure to reject the null hypothesis (cf. Cook & Campbell, 1979). Further research needs to be done to determine if the extent to which managers hold work-related values might be influenced by national culture, or if work ethics are cross-national in the extent to which they influence managerial attitudes. Additionally, the findings presented here may suffer from threats to internal validity since a nonrandomized convenience sample was used. Since all participants were members of the same organization, the results may not be representative of all organizations and industries within the two countries surveyed. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to access corporate hiring criteria to determine if an organizational selection bias exists; however, the second author's previous employment within the organization as a manager suggests that a selection effect is unlikely. Although the attitudinal outcome variables may have been skewed by the use of only one cross-national organization, there is little reason to believe that the findings using the work orientations of PE and CE were not representative of their respective cultures; again, further research in this area is needed to clarify this assumption.

It was originally hypothesized that managers with higher levels of PE would express greater work satisfaction, while managers who were higher in CE would express stronger organizational commitment. However, regression analysis revealed that PE was a strong predictor of organizational commitment, explaining an additional 13% of commitment variance; PE was related to satisfaction, but only marginally so. Similarly, CE was found to be a strong predictor of satisfaction, explaining an additional 17% of satisfaction variance; CE was unrelated to commitment. Contrary to expectations, this study found that managers who reported higher levels of PE were more likely to exhibit stronger organizational commitment, while managers with higher levels of CE were more likely to exhibit greater satisfaction.

Previous studies have generally found PE to be a good indicator of employee job satisfaction (Furnham, 1990). In this study, although PE was slightly related to satisfaction, CE was found to be more strongly related to overall employee satisfaction. That is, while PE did predict job satisfaction, CE was a better predictor. One possible explanation for this relationship is suggested by Wang (1981), who describes the traditional Confucian work ethic as instilling beliefs that people should revere and enjoy their work. Reverence to one's work involves devoting one's effort to a task with diligent concentration and a lack of distraction until the job is completed. Similarly, enjoyment reflects the belief that people should accept both their role and station in life, expressing happiness in task completion which avoids inequitable feelings and maintains harmony. It may be that managers with high levels of CE experience greater job satisfaction because the

Confucian ethic emphasizes that workers can and should be satisfied with the work they perform.

Contrary to expectations, PE was found to be a stronger predictor of organizational commitment than CE. Previous research involving PE has primarily focused on the relationship between the Protestant ethic and organizational outcomes like job satisfaction, equity beliefs, competitiveness, and the desire to work hard (Furnham, 1990); organizational commitment has received scant attention, although theorists have hypothesized that PE might render more likely the possibility of a dissatisfied but committed worker (cf. Griffin & Bateman, 1986: 178). However, indications exist that commitment may be a consequent of PE. For example, Merrens and Garrett (1975) reported that subjects with higher PE were significantly more likely to continue to perform due to an increased commitment resulting from a self-imposed moral obligation. That is, it is possible that managers with higher PE express greater organizational commitment due to a greater acceptance of personal responsibility for their actions: joining an organization is a personal choice and those with high PE feel morally obliged to be committed to and responsible for their actions. Additional support for this possibility is offered by the goal congruence theory of organizational commitment (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974), which suggests that individual differences in employee goals and values, such as PE, will influence subsequent commitment.

Another possible explanation for this study's unexpected results may be the multidimensionality of the meaning of work. In addition to individual work orientation, a host of factors, ranging from cultural and socioeconomic to historical and developmental stage, can influence people's expectations of what they want from work. That is, it may be that differences in other factors which influence employee perceptions may have an equal or even greater impact on organizational attitudes than culturally derived work orientations. Although some demographic aspects of the participants of this study were captured, such as age, sex, and education, a more thorough study encompassing a greater range of attitudinal predictors may reveal a more accurate picture of the relationship between work ethic and organizational attitudes. Therefore, the findings presented here should be viewed cautiously until additional research confirms the relationships between work orientation and organizational attitudes.

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