

# The young generation of employees and their attitude towards work – a comparison of three countries

Maria-Madela Abrudan\*, Mirabela Matei and Teodora Roman

*The purpose of this article is to analyse the attitude towards work of the new generation of employees and the way in which cultural factor influences this attitude. For this, an intercultural study on work attitude was conducted in three countries: India, Romania and Sweden. We found there are both similarities and differences between the young generations of the three countries. The cultural factor accounts for most of the differences, whereas similarities can be attributed to certain characteristics that could be considered universal for today's young generation. Further research findings are discussed.*

**Keywords:** Employees, national culture, work, young generation.

NOWADAYS in the business environment all over the world, where information is transmitted quickly and competition is increasingly tougher, companies are making efforts to reduce costs and identify creative resources and competitive advantages<sup>1</sup>. Thus, confronted with these new challenges, work motivation and innovation acquire more importance than ever before. The companies have to direct their attention to 'ordinary' employees, who can be 'exceptional innovators'<sup>1</sup> if they are provided the necessary environment and resources. Under these circumstances, it is essential to analyse the attitude towards work of employees, in general, and of the 'new' employees, in particular. We cannot discuss the attitude towards work without bringing in the concept of culture. Equally, individuals, organizations and theories regarding the organizations bear the mark of culture. The cultural values influence the way in which an individual perceives and interprets a situation; therefore, they have an influence on behaviour<sup>2</sup>.

## Methodology

This scientific endeavour aims at analysing the attitude towards work of the new generation of employees and the way in which cultural factor influences this attitude. For this purpose, we conducted intercultural research on work attitude in three national cultures: India, Romania and Sweden. The research was carried out in the time period

November 2014–April 2015 and is part of a larger study. The objectives of the present research are: (i) To identify possible correlations between the attitude towards work and cultural factor. (ii) To identify the evolution directions of the attitude towards work. (iii) To identify the workplace expectations of future employees.

In order to achieve the research objectives, two quantitative research studies were carried out.

## Analysis of secondary data

Research is interpretation of data, not necessarily the collection of data. According to Hofstede *et al.*<sup>3</sup>, as well as research of specialized literature and the internet will show that in many cases, there are relevant databases, drawn up in a professional way, which are waiting to be consulted and interpreted. For example, World Values Survey<sup>4</sup> (WVS) and European Values Survey<sup>5</sup> (EVS). Since WVS and EVS provide data that cover all social, gender and age groups within each country, data from these two-databases were taken into account and referred to as the national average. WVS was used to obtain data for India, whereas EVS provided information on Romania and Sweden.

## Students' survey research

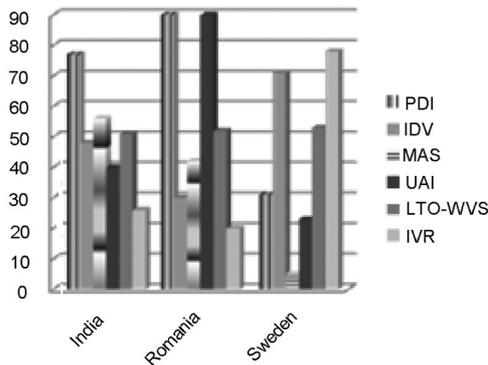
The studied population includes Master's students with work experience. The research was carried out in universities with the help of a self-administered questionnaire comprising 19 questions. Only three of these questions were analysed for the purpose of this research, of which

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**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents by country, gender and age

Country	Total no. of questionnaires	No. of valid questionnaires				
		Total	Women	Men	Aged 22–25 years	Aged 26–29 years
India	52	46	16	30	21	25
Romania	96	96	55	41	72	24
Sweden	65	44	23	21	19	25
Total	213	186	94	92	112	74



**Figure 1.** Hofstede's dimension scores for the three countries. PDI, Power distance small/large; IDV, Individualism/collectivism; MAS, Masculinity/femininity; UAI, Uncertainty avoidance low/high; LTO-WVS, Long/short-term orientation; IVR, Indulgence/restraint. Source: Based on the scores indicated by Hofstede *et al.*<sup>3</sup>.

two were drawn from the EVS questionnaire and to facilitated the identification of perceptions of the young generation towards life and work in comparison to the national average. The questionnaire was completed by 213 respondents, of which 186 were considered valid and retained for interpretation. Among the 186 respondents, 94 were women and 112 were in the 22–25 years of age group. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of respondents by country, gender and age.

### Research limitations

Like many other studies, this research too has its limits. The research results cannot be extrapolated categorically to the whole country, because only one university from each country was considered; also the number of respondents was not very large. However, considering the specificity of intercultural research, we consider the results obtained as valid and intend to extend the study to more cultures.

### Overview on countries included in the study

Three countries included in the study: India, Romania and Sweden. The main reasoning behind our choice of countries is geographical location. Two are European countries and one is a South Asian country. Another reason

for our choice is the cultural dimension of the chosen countries. Thus, we included India in the study for two reasons: (1) in terms of Hofstede's approach<sup>3</sup> (which we will be mainly using here), India has a relatively similar culture to Romania (four out of six cultural dimensions are similar for the two countries) and (2) inclusion in the study of a country from outside of Europe could add to the relevance of the research findings. On the other hand, Sweden was included in the study because: (1) it is a well-developed northern European country and (2) from a cultural standpoint it has a significantly different culture from India and Romania.

Before we examine the attitude towards work, it is necessary to review the countries both from cultural and economic point of view. With regard to economic development, depending on the GDP/inhabitant, classification of the three countries analysed is as follows<sup>6</sup>: Sweden – US\$ 58,471 GDP/capita; Romania – US\$ 10,859 GDP/capita and India – US\$ 1761 GDP/capita.

In order to describe the culture of the countries analysed here, we will use the cultural dimensions of Hofstede. We chose Hofstede's approach because of the number of replications and citations of his research (according to Social Science Citation Index, Hofstede is the most quoted author in the field of social sciences). We consider Hofstede's approach to be a valid instrument in measuring cultures. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, we identified possible correlations between the attitude towards work and the cultural factor.

The characteristics of cultural dimension of each of these countries are presented exhaustively in the literature. Figure 1 illustrates the scores of the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede for the countries considered.

### Results and discussion

Among the subjects studied by WVS<sup>4</sup> and EVS<sup>5</sup>, two were found suitable for the present work: perception of life (important aspects in life) and work (important aspects in a job). Based on data collected from the two databases, hierarchies of important aspects in life and important aspects in a job were drawn up. Latter, these hierarchies were compared with those from the students' survey, to identify in what way the perceptions of the young generation differ from the national average.

**Table 2.** Hierarchy of issues considered important in life in the analysed countries

Importance in life	WVS (%)	Students' research – SR (%)	Difference (EVS–SR; %)
<b>India</b>			
Family	64.8	60.87	3.93
Friends	27.1	34.78	-7.68
Leisure time	29.9	43.48	-13.58
Politics	20.4	17.39	3.01
Religion	44.2	21.74	22.46
Work	44.2	56.52	-12.32
<b>Romania</b>			
Family	86.2	95.83	-9.63
Friends	28.3	33.33	-5.03
Leisure time	33.7	45.83	-12.13
Politics	6.3	0.00	6.30
Religion	56.5	20.83	35.67
Work	58.1	41.67	16.43
<b>Sweden</b>			
Family	55.2	63.64	-10.9
Friends	54.7	77.27	-23.3
Leisure time	7.2	81.82	-75.0
Politics	47.1	9.09	-0.8
Religion	8.6	4.55	40.2
Work	92.5	22.73	68.9

WVS, World Values Survey; EVS, European Values Survey.

Source: Authors' compilation based on EVS<sup>5</sup>/WVS<sup>4</sup> and students' survey data.

### *Important aspects in life: analysis of WVS and EVS data*

Six important aspects in life were analysed: family, friends, leisure time, politics, religion and work. In the hierarchy of aspects considered important in life, India and Romania place family first, whereas Swedish respondents place family third. From a cultural point of view, this can be explained by the collectivism that characterizes India and Romania (Figure 1). Family and affiliation tend to be more important in collectivistic cultures. Work is an important aspect in all the countries considered. In India and Romania religion seems to be almost as important as work, but that is not the case for Sweden. Romania places friends at bottom of the hierarchy of important aspects in life – fifth place out of six. Only politics is considered less important in Romania. In fact, politics is the least important issue in India as well. In Sweden, friends are more important than in India and Romania. The importance of friends could be explained by the pronounced femininity of Swedish culture.

The similarity between the cultures of India and Romania is visible also in the light of the hierarchy of the most important aspects in life, which is identical in the two countries (Table 2). However, the intensity of importance given is significantly different in the two countries (for example, in Romania approximately 86% of respondents feel that family is an important aspect of life, while in India this is approximately 64%).

Work comes second, after family, in the hierarchy of the most important issues in life in two of the three

cultures analysed: India and Romania. Contrary to expectations, Sweden (a country with a pronounced femininity) is the only country which places work at the first place. To clarify this unexpected result, we analysed data of EVS 1999 and WVS (wave 6) and found that in case of EVS second wave, Sweden classifies work in the third place after family and friends and in the case of WVS sixth wave, work is ranked fourth.

Based on the analysis of importance assigned to different aspects of life by the respondents in the three countries, we can argue that there is a significant relation between the cultural factor and peoples' perception. This aspect is discussed further.

### *Important aspects in life: perceptions of the young generation*

If we compare the results of the students' survey with the national average retrieved from EVS and WVS, we will find there are significant differences in all the studied countries. At the same time, it can be noticed that there are commonalities between the young generations in all three countries. Table 2 presents the hierarchies of important aspects based on both EVS/WVS and students' survey data. Results of the comparison are discussed here.

For India, the most significant difference between EVS and the students' survey is about the importance of religion; the young generation apparently pays less importance to religion. On the other hand, work, leisure time and friends are more important aspects for the young generation in India. On the importance of family and

politics, there are no significant differences between WVS data and the research on students.

In the case of Romania, leisure time, family and friends are more important aspects for the young generation (Table 2). About 96% of Romanian respondents pay great importance to family, almost 10% more compared EVS 2008, whereas leisure time is important for 46% of respondents, 12% more compared to EVS 2008. On the other hand, religion, work and politics are not very important for the young generation from Romania.

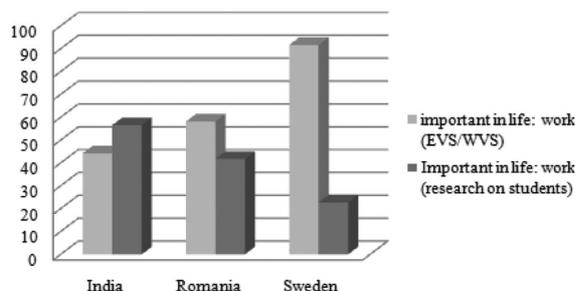
For Sweden, the importance of leisure time is significantly higher for the young generation, as there is a 75% difference compared to EVS. In contrast, the importance of work is significantly lesser for Sweden respondents, only 23% of them think that work is a 'very important' thing in life.

Regarding the future of work attitude, we can conclude that for the young generation from all the countries included in the study, leisure time and friends represent important aspects of life. Work is not as important for the young generation (Figure 2), although it is not a disregarded aspect. In Sweden, there is a real problem with youth unemployment<sup>7</sup>, and young people in Romania have difficulty in finding a suitable job in accordance with their abilities<sup>8</sup>.

In two of the three countries analysed, work is less important for the young generation; less in the case of Indian respondents. The highest percentage of young people who believe that work is an important aspect in life is registered in India, where there was recorded the lowest dissimilarity between the two studies. The largest gap between the perception of the young generation (from the research on students) and the national average (from EVS) is recorded in Sweden. For this reason we also analysed data from EVS 1999, when, as seen in Figure 2, the importance of work was significantly lower.

#### *Important aspects in a job: analysis of WVS and EVS data*

EVS<sup>5</sup> includes in the subject 'work' 27 questions about jobs. Among these, 17 questions refer to the importance



**Figure 2.** Importance attributed to work in the three countries included in the study. Source: Compilation based on data from EVS<sup>5</sup>/WVS<sup>4</sup> and research on students.

perceived by a respondent for certain issues connected with the job. On the other hand, WVS<sup>4</sup> contains 26 questions on the subject 'work', out of which 11 refer to the importance perceived by respondents of certain aspects related to workplace. Starting from the issues analysed by WVS and EVS, we established a hierarchy of the things considered important for a job (Table 3).

The financial aspect represents the most frequently mentioned important aspect of a job in two of the three analysed countries: India and Romania. For these two countries, the importance of financial aspect could be explained by the economic development level; the two countries have a GDP/capita significantly smaller than Sweden. For India, this aspect could also be explained in the light of the masculinity that characterizes the Indian culture. Safety in a workplace comes second in the hierarchy of important aspects of a job in the same two countries, whereas for Sweden job security is not an important aspect. The importance of job security can be explained by the large uncertainty avoidance of Romania, and also by the level of economic development in the India and Romania.

In all three countries, the respondents consider that to have 'generous holidays' is not among the most important aspects of a job. Opportunity to use initiative is not important for the respondents from India. This aspect could be explained by the large power distance and collectivism of the Indian culture.

#### *Important aspects in a job: perceptions of the young generation*

For Indian respondents, the most significant differences between WVS data and research on students are recorded in connection with the opportunity to take the initiative and with the possibility of having a job that meets one's abilities. Apparently, these two aspects are not as important for the young generation, considering that there were differences recorded of over 20% compared to the national average provided by WVS. On the other hand, working hours, generous holidays, a respectable job and the lack of pressure in a job are more important for the young generation in India.

In the case of Romania, a well-paid job remains the most important aspect, being mentioned by 92% of respondents. On the other hand, with reference to working hours and the number of leave days, there are significant differences between the two research studies. Students' survey respondents desire convenient working hours and more leave days, aspects mentioned by 83%, 71% of respondents respectively. Therefore, we can conclude that the young generation in Romania desires flexible working hours and more leisure time. Another aspect of importance to the young generation is the opportunity to develop new skills; 71% of respondents mentioned this as an important aspect of a job. At the same time, the

**Table 3.** Important aspects in a job

Important aspects	Percentage	Less important aspects	Percentage
<b>India</b>			
Good pay	91.9	You can achieve something	68.9
Job security	90.6	Good hours	65.5
Respectable job	77.2	Opportunity to use initiative	63.5
A job that meets one's abilities	76.7	Generous holidays	55.9
Interesting job	74.5	Not too much pressure	54.1
<b>Romania</b>			
Good pay	92.5	Meeting people	50.5
Job security	81.5	Job useful to society	50.2
Pleasant people	73.5	Responsible job	49.8
People treated equally	73.1	Generous holidays	45.9
A job that meets one's abilities	71.8	Not too much pressure	41.4
<b>Sweden</b>			
Pleasant people	83.1	A job that meets one's abilities	32.1
Opportunity to use initiative	62.7	Meeting people	30.7
You can achieve something	60.9	Generous holidays	17.1
Good pay	60.5	Job useful to society	13.6
Interesting job	57.5	Family-friendly	12.5

Source: Based on data from WVS<sup>4</sup> and EVS<sup>5</sup>.

young generation of Romania wants a job where you can achieve something.

The most significant differences between the two research studies were recorded in Sweden, where differences higher than  $\pm 10\%$  were recorded for seven aspects. Three of these aspects can be associated with intrinsic work motivation: the opportunity to learn new skills (a difference of  $-43\%$  between the two studies), an interesting job (a difference of  $-35\%$  between EVS and students' survey), and the opportunity to use an initiative (a difference of  $-15\%$  between the two studies). 'An interesting job' is the most frequently mentioned aspect by students – 94% of respondents. Therefore, we can conclude that the young generation in Sweden shows preference for an intrinsically motivating job.

For Sweden, another aspect on which there is a significant difference between the two research studies is the equal treatment of people. This issue was mentioned by 68% of respondents (compared to 57.5% in EVS). The importance of equality is a characteristic of feminine cultures such as Sweden.

Job security and good working hours are two important aspects for the young generation of Sweden. The greater importance of job security for the young generation could be explained by the fact that Sweden registers the highest percentage of unemployed young people compared to total number of unemployed in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)<sup>7</sup>. A job useful to society is also more important for the Swedish young people; this aspect was mentioned by 32% of students' survey respondents, compared to 14% of EVS respondents.

#### *Important aspects in a job: analysis of open-ended question responses*

In order to identify the most important aspects of a job for the participants we included one open question in the questionnaire which was positioned before the closed question drawn from EVS to avoid the risk of suggestibility. The purpose of the open question was to allow the liberty of an individualized expression of answers.

The answers to this were grouped so that those of the same kind could be quantified for the realization of hierarchy of the most important issues for each country included in the research. We included in the category 'intrinsic motivation' all the answers which refer to intrinsic elements of work, such as interesting job, autonomy, challenge, independence, novelty, etc. The issues mentioned by the respondents from the three countries to this question could be grouped into five categories in the case of India, 14 categories for Romania, and 10 categories for Sweden. Table 3 presents the three most frequently mentioned important issues of a job for each of the countries.

In India, good pay and job security are aspects mentioned by more than 90% of respondents (Table 4). An explanation for this could be the level of economic development in the country. The importance of the financial aspect could be also explained by the masculinity of the Indian culture. Money is seen as a measure of success in masculine cultures.

In Romania, the aspects mentioned by respondents were grouped into 14 categories, significantly more than in the other two countries included in the study. Because of the variety of the issues mentioned, only one category

**Table 4.** Three most important aspects in a job

Country	Percentage
India	
Good pay	95.65
Job security	91.30
Respect from superiors and peers	78.26
Romania	
Good pay	56.25
Good relations with peers	47.92
Intrinsic motivation	41.67
Sweden	
Intrinsic motivation	95.45
Good pay	68.18
More leisure time	50.00

Source: Based on responses recorded for the open-ended question.

accumulated a higher percentage than 50% of respondents. The most frequent issued mentioned by Romanian respondents (56% of respondents) is the financial aspect: sufficient amount of wages, financial rewards, bonuses (Table 4). On the one hand, the importance of money can be attributed to the intense uncertainty avoidance specific to Romania; wages contribute to reduction of anxiety related to 'the safety of tomorrow'. On the other hand, the importance of this aspect can be explained by the level of economic development of the country. Aspects related to intrinsic motivation are ranked third in the case of Romania.

In Sweden aspects related to intrinsic motivation of work are ranked first in the hierarchy of important aspects of a job, being mentioned by 95% of Swedish respondents. For Sweden respondents, diversity, a pleasant activity and the opportunity to improve skills are essential elements of a job. The respondents also assign importance to leisure time and money. Still, in the case of Sweden, the financial aspect was almost unanimously associated with the quality of life that a good pay can guarantee. Quality of life is important in feminine cultures such as Sweden.

As we can observe, intrinsic motivation tends to be more important in feminine cultures. This observation was tested and confirmed as part of a complementary research that we conducted. This is an important aspect to be considered by companies in feminine cultures when designing work motivation schemes.

## Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this article, the present study aimed at achieving three objectives: (1) to identify possible correlations between the attitude towards work and the cultural factor, (2) to identify the evolution directions of the attitude towards work, and (3) to identify the workplace expectations of future employees.

The relationship between cultural factor and attitude towards work is obvious. In the present study, we could observe the correlation between the respondents' perception regarding the important aspects in life and for a job. Of the six cultural dimensions, masculinity–femininity, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and power distance were used to explain the differences of perception of the respondents. As for the evolution directions of the attitude towards work, we can conclude that for the young generation from all the countries included in the study, leisure time and friends represent important aspects of life. Flexible hours are preferred. Work is not as important for the young generation, although it is not a disregarded aspect. With regard to workplace expectations of future employees, there are both similarities and differences between the young generations of the three countries. As expected, the financial aspect is more important in the masculine culture analysed (India). On the other hand, future employees from the feminine cultures studied (Sweden and Romania) show a preference for intrinsic motivating jobs. In cultures where power distance is large (India and Romania), the relation with superiors is important. In these cultures, there is significant dependence of employees on their superiors.

To identify efficient motivation tools suitable for the new generation of employees, is a challenge companies must accept. The companies concerned with work motivation of employees must take into consideration the cultural factor, because the influence of culture on behaviour (individual and/or organizational) is certain, significant and undeniable.

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