
DIVERSITY IN VALUE ORIENTATION IN EUROPE: INTERACTION CONFLICTS

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ABSTRACT

Owing to globalisation workplaces where employees working together got socialised in different social surroundings are emerging in abundance. Significant value and attitude differences within a multicultural company make it more difficult for people to work together even though they do not come from significantly different cultural blocks. People from different European countries, for example, are in direct working contact with each other. This study aims to highlight those differences in values and attitudes which are of importance in a working environment. To this end it uses data obtained from EVS survey results. The data presented make it quite obvious that although work is the second most important life component after the family within the system of values, the characteristic features of work and the circumstances (high income, long holidays etc.) are valued in quite different ways by those working in different European countries. Their views also differ regarding reliability of people. There also differences in their attitudes towards a number of different social groups.

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to find answers to the following questions: What kind of basic assumptions, values, norms and behaviour regulation characteristics should an individual possess within a multicultural company if the company is made up of individual employees who were socialised in a number of different national cultures? What kind of clashes are to be expected if—let us suppose—the company employs staff members originating from Denmark, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, and Romania to work together? The answers to the above questions are not provided on the basis of a survey carried out within a particular company, but by using—as a secondary basis—the results provided by EVS research and data. Data was obtained in 1999/2000 with a uniform methodology and questionnaire, and allowed a good comparison of the moral standings, attitudes and values preferences of European nations, including Hungary.

THE EVS

A longitudinal value survey entitled European Values Study was started by researchers from Tilburg University and Leuven Catholic University at the end of the 1970s. The initiating question was the following: Does European cultural unity which was formulated earlier under the influence of Christianity, still exist? The objective was to get a basic understanding of the fundamental value attitude of Europeans, with empirical methods of research. The first round of the survey involving members of the European Union at the time and Spain was completed in 1981. This survey very soon excited the interest of experts outside Europe, and through Ronald Inglehard, professor from Michigan University, overseas institutions joined in and became participants of data collecting. All participants used the questionnaires and data processing methods developed by the EVS. This is the way the World Value Survey (WVS) developed from the EVS, and covered the whole world.

In order to measure changes during the 1990s a new data collection was completed. With the exception of Greece, all countries of the European Union participated in this round together with a few East European countries and the Scandinavian countries.

The new, third survey carried out during 1999/2000 repeated the topics raised during the earlier rounds. The questions were concerned with the significance of the most important life issues (for example: family, work religion, etc.), attitudes towards issues of society, the presence of politics and environmental awareness within society, and, in addition, a number of moral issues (for example: abortion, euthanasia, illegal profits etc.) as well as attitudes towards different social groups (for example: immigrants, ethnic minorities etc.).

The project raised the following main issues:

Do Europeans share a homogenous and lasting set of values?

Are values changing in Europe and, if so, in what direction?

What are the implications for European unity?

The third round of EVS (which together with the results of WVS cover the whole world) involved 32 European countries and processed opinions of 39.797 respondents from Europe. Between 1000 and 2000 individuals were questioned

in each country. The representative survey carried out with the uniform questionnaire was conducted by experts (mainly from the Gallup Institute). The most comprehensive value orientation survey carried out up to the present time is of outstanding importance, because the data gathered simultaneously provide an excellent basis for the comparison of the national and cultural characteristics of European countries, including the East European countries. The presentation is based on the findings of the latest survey.

From the enormous data base I selected only data which are of special significance regarding the workplace cooperation between people. This is the reason why the selection of data is confined to the basic life components (family, work, friends, leisure time etc.), certain expectations regarding work, management, attitude towards competition, attitudes towards certain human groups, and certain moral issues playing a significant role in the working environment. The comparison is limited to extreme average values, although the available data would allow for a more sophisticated comparison (for example of characteristics by nation, by gender, age group, and education).

SOME IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF EUROPEAN VALUES

The importance of certain life components has a significant effect on employment and the way people work. For example the motivation for work well done, and the loyalty factor are influenced also by the roles that family, friends and acquaintances, leisure time and even religion play in the life of the individual.

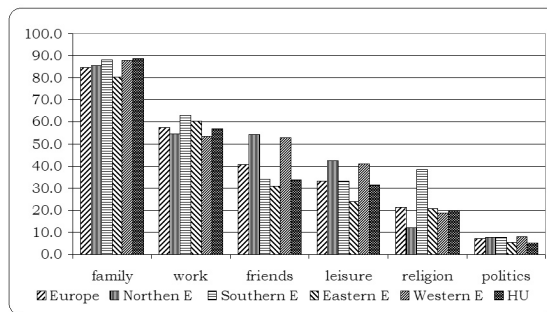
The importance of family, work, friends, leisure time, religion, and politics

The individuals answering the questions formulated their opinion regarding the importance of individual components of life for them. They could select among *very, quite, no, and not important* at all answers. It was found the *family* is outstandingly important within European values. Out of the total number of respondents (39,797) 84.4% marked '*very important*' and only 0.5% said the family is not important at all. Comparing different countries only small deviations were found, even within the possible answers given. Among the six factors work takes the second place. On the average 57.6% of Europeans ranked it as very important and only 3.5% said it is not important at all. However, the national differences are more significant among the respondents selecting '*very important*': the Poles are in the lead (for 78% of them it is

‘very important’ and for only 1.8% it is not). The Danes do not seem to be generally ‘workaholic’: only 39.5% of them think work is very important, while the majority class work as ‘quite important’.

The average European value regarding the high importance of *friends and acquaintances* is 40.1%. The difference between extreme values is even greater than in the case of work. While 70.7% of Swedes think this is a very important factor in their life, only 17.0% of Latvians think the same. Similarly, the differences are very big in relation to the importance of leisure time. The Swedes, the people of the Netherlands, and the British are in the front (with their values above 50 %) while less than 20% of the Latvians, Lithuanians and Russians consider leisure time as very important. Within the order of importance of life components *religion* takes fifth place. The European average of answers ‘*religion is very important*’ is 20.9%. But in the background of this average a great difference can be seen between the Maltese (67.2%) and the Czechs (7.3%). There is a similarly big difference between those who think religion is not important at all (Malta 1.9%, the Czech Republic 46.6%). Last in the order of life components is politics, where the European average is 7.2%. Malta is in the lead with 13.4% of answers ‘*politics is very important*’, and Romania shows the strongest response level saying ‘*politics is not important at all*’ (41.3%). (Fig. 1)

Fig 1. : The importance of most important life components in Europe

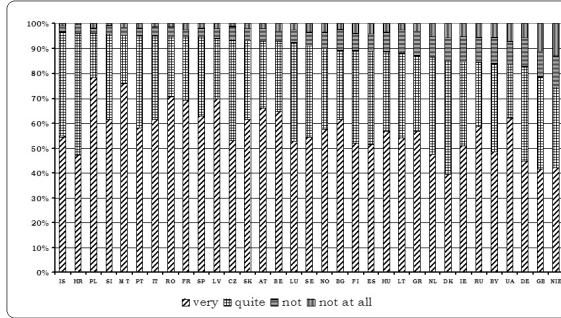


THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK

If we dig deeper in the comparison of the importance of work we find significantly more ‘very important’ values in East Europe and Malta than in North and Western Europe. Scores of Poland(78%), Romania (70.6%) and Latvia (69.7%) are significantly

higher than the European average of 57.6%. Slovakia, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Russia are also above average. It has to be added that the French (69.1%) and the Belgian (64%) values are also high, especially if we include the ‘quite important’ category too. Among the French only 5.2% say that work is not important or not important at all. Among the Maltese this group represents only 4.5%. It is surprising, however, that 25.5 % of the Irish think work is not important, or not important at all. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2. The importance of work in the European countries



VALUE PREFERENCES RELATED TO WORK

A significant role is played in cooperation within a workplace by the individual’s value preferences and the expectations connected to work. The EVS lines up 15 points of view which the respondents were asked to rank by order of importance. They are the following: *good pay, pleasant people, not too much pressure, good job security, good chances for promotion, a job respected by people in general, good hours, an opportunity to use initiative, a useful job for the society, generous holidays, meeting people, a job in which you can achieve something, a responsible job, an interesting job and a job that meets one’s abilities.*

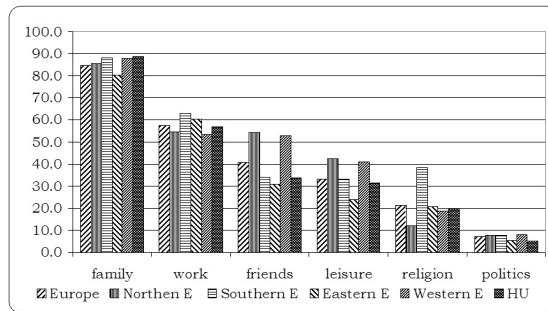
Good pay, regarding European average and in nearly all countries is important (80.5%) (Fig. 3). Similarly important is working together with pleasant people. (69.7%). The remaining factors are rated differently by Europeans.

Hungarians think several aspects are very important, scoring higher than the European average and higher even than the Northern or Southern averages. They lead the list regarding several aspects. It looks as if they would like to secure several aspects of work at the same time: secure job, good chances for promotion, the possibility of meeting other people, the possibility of doing a responsible job. This data

significantly contradicts the statement of foreigners, according to which Hungarians (similarly to other post-communist countries) do not readily accept responsibility at their work. Appreciation by the community was also given a high value.

Apparently it is very important for Hungarians to do a kind of work which is respected by people in general (83.5%) in contrast with the Danish employees (10.9%). The greatest difference in this category was found in comparison with the European average of 4.4%. Attitude towards stressful situations is also significantly different. While 67.6% of the Maltese think that their work should not lead to high stress, only 8.4% of the Latvians have the same opinion.

Fig 3. Work-related expectations



The importance of 'good pay'

HUMAN RELATIONS

One of the cornerstones of organisational culture is the quality of relationship among employees. The requirements of mutual respect, correctness, and humane behaviour at the workplace are getting stronger nowadays. Trust is one of the most important values in human relationships.

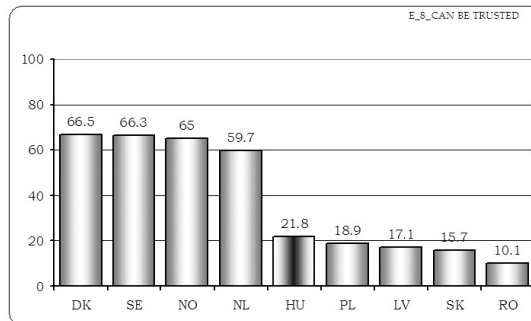
Trust

Trust means belief in the correctness of other people, rather than their devious behaviour, in their moral steadfastness, and that they will not abuse our weaknesses. Trust may replace the control exerted by a third party, the direct enforcement of legality; it makes the exchange of goods and information easier and facilitates communication among co-operating partners. On the other hand, distrust is a negative attitude and destroys communications.

Societies and organisations based on trust spend less time, money and energy on documenting and checking. EVS data strongly suggests that within Europe the differences are great regarding judgement of trust. In answer to the question concerning trustworthiness of fellow citizens ('Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?') the highest percentage was provided by the citizens of the North European countries and the lowest by the East Europeans. On the European average one third of the citizens think that one can trust most of the people and two thirds think one has to be very careful.

Behind this average, however, very different, even extreme data can be found. Romanians are the most distrustful (only 10.7% trust in others) followed by the Slovaks (15.7%) the Latvians (17.1%) and the Poles (18.9%). The highest percentages are shown by Denmark (66.5%), the Netherlands (59.7%) and Finland (58%) where respondents think that most people could be trusted. 21,8% of Hungarians have trust in other people. These findings suggest that trust-based clashes might easily occur during co-operation between the Central Eastern European countries (including Hungary) and the Scandinavian countries, for example about the division of information (Fig. 4.).

Fig 4.: The issues of trust



Most people can be trusted

Negative attitudes

Negative attitudes (prejudice, hostility) are phenomena, which make interpersonal relations or communications very difficult. Regarding communications those

phenomena are interpreted as 'psychological noise', which prevents the individual with prejudice and hostility from interpreting the message without distortion. Because of a negative attitude towards the communication partner, the hostile individual will detect hostile and non-desired signals even if the sending party has not encoded those. His or her behaviour will be hostile even if the partner makes efforts to avert it.

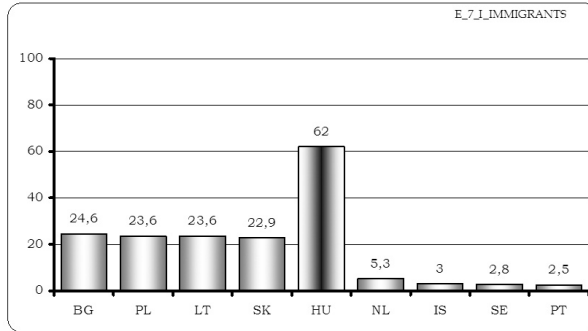
Prejudice means aversion, hostile feelings, negative attitudes towards a single person, or a group of people, based exclusively on the fact that the given individual, or group is a member of a certain (larger) group of people. It plays a significant role in cultural, value related conflicts.

The issue raised by the EVS ('On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours?') has revealed negative attitudes towards people. It selects 14 social groups: people with criminal record, people belonging to different race, left wing extremists, right wing extremists, heavy drinkers, large families, emotionally unstable people, Muslims, immigrants and foreign workers, people with AIDS, drug addicts, homosexuals, Jews, Gypsies. The survey regarding Hungary provided shocking results.

Attitude to immigrants and guest workers is very hostile: 62 out of 100 interviewed individuals said that would not like to have an immigrant or foreign worker as a neighbour, and only 24.6% of Bulgarians, the next in the level of hostility think similarly! The most accepting nations are the Portuguese followed by the Swedes (only 2.5%, and 2.8% of them respectively have a rejection attitude to the above mentioned groups). (Fig. 5.)

As regards the other social groups listed the Hungarians are not less hostile. Among all European countries Hungarians reject individuals with criminal records (88.5%) drug users (91.5%) and people belonging to other races the most strongly (however in this last case the rate is 'only' 52%). The Bulgarians are again the next in line: 28% of them reject the mentioned groups. The Swedes are the most tolerant again: 97.5% of them have no objection to neighbours of a different race.

Fig 5.: Prejudices



Whom you would not like to be your neighbour? Immigrants, foreign workers

Similarly, Hungarians are the leading nation regarding the rejection of alcoholics (91%), the emotionally instable (62.8%), those suffering from AIDS (77.8%), the extreme left (65.3%), the extreme right (68%), Moslems (60.3%) and Jews (44.4%).

The above data raise concerns regarding the acceptance of otherness, the willingness to live together and co-operate with people socialised in different cultures. Even if the data presented here contain statistical distortions the managers of multicultural companies have to take into consideration the appearance of negative emotions.

Moral issues

EVS deals with a large number of issues relating to the morality of society, connected to different walks of life. Of the range of issues involved only a few of will be analysed here, for example those, which could be summarised under the title of illegal benefits and relating directly to economic activity (claiming state benefits which one is not entitled to, cheating on tax if one has a chance, accepting a bribe in the course of one's duties, lies made for personal interest and paying cash for services to avoid taxes).

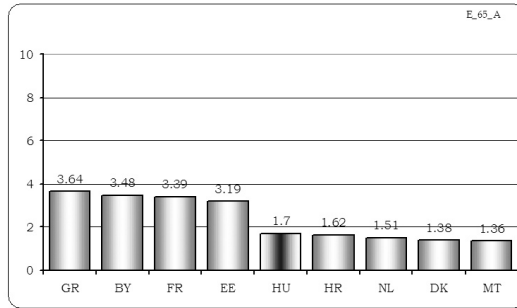
It is quite clear from the answers given that Europeans reject and deem unallowable those kinds of advantages. Differences are observed only in the strength and measure of rejection. Out of the above listed five illegal actions leading to personal gain, bribery is rejected most strongly by Europeans. On a ten-point scale (where 1 means 'can never be justified' and 10 means 'can always be justified') the European average is 1.82. Similarly, 'claiming state benefits which one is not

entitled to' is unaccepted (the average is 2.82). 'Paying cash for provided services to avoid taxes' is judged to be the most forgivable issue.

Claiming state benefits which one is not entitled to is judged similarly by the northern and some of the western countries but the reactions of East Europeans are very sensitive. Croatia (1.62), Hungary 1.70), Romania (1.82), Bulgaria (1.86) and the Czech Republic (1.87) are very near the 'can never be justified' category. It seems that Greece and France are the most allowing nations, their values are 3.64 and 3.39 respectively. The strictest are Malta and Denmark with the averages of 1.36 and 1.38 (Fig. 6.)

Fig 6. Morality of society

Claiming state benefits which one is not entitled to



Can always be justified: 10 points. Can never be justified: 1 point

The European average of rejecting *tax evasion* is 2.63. Concerning this issue Malta is again the nearest to the 'can never be justified' opinion with 1.53. The Belarus average is, however, 4.22, that is in their opinion tax evasion is not judged so strictly. The averages of Lithuania (3.77) and Ukraine (3.45) are relatively high, similarly to Belgium, Luxemburg and France where the average value is above 3. Hungary, with the value of 2.12 is stricter than the European average.

While the Hungarians have higher levels of rejection regarding the first two questions than the European average, *bribery* is judged more mildly. The European average is 1.8, and Hungary is not very far behind the most permissive Belarus (3.09) and Slovakia (2.94), with their average of 2.67.

It is Malta that judges the *lie in self-interest* most negatively (1.62) while the Hungarians with their 2.53 value are somewhere in the middle range and the French have proved to be the most permissive towards liars with a value of 3.71.

Concerning the method of payment in cash to evade taxation within Europe the Latvians, the Danes and the Belgians deem the action to be most acceptable.

It is significant, that the respondents expressed their view on the extent to which their fellow citizens (countrymen and women) practice those morally rejected actions. As to '*claiming state benefits which one is not entitled to*' Hungarians have the most negative opinion in Europe according to respondents' statements. Their answer that '*nearly everybody obtains illegally state benefits*' has the highest score (70.5%). The European average regarding this issue is 6.1%! Similarly, the majority of Hungarians think that among the Europeans nearly every individual commits tax evasion, when it is possible (78.4%), while only 6.5% of the Finns have such a negative opinion of their fellow citizens (the European average is 13.2%). The picture regarding cash payments made to avoid taxation is just as bad. 76.2% of the Hungarian respondents think that nearly everybody uses this method of tax evasion, while the European average is merely 11.1.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Although the EVS does not deal with values belonging specifically to management, several important data can be found in the database that are relevant to this field. They include obeying a manager's instructions and the issue of judging competition.

Obeying the manager's instructions

The core of the issue is '*Should one follow instructions of one's superiors even when one does not fully agree with them, or should one follow one's superior's instructions only when one is convinced that they are right?*'. The respondents could choose from the following answers: '*follow instructions*', '*be convinced*' and '*it depends*'. As to the European averages, the answers revealed only small differences (32.7%, 38.8%, and 28.4%). However, it is significant that it is the Northern Irish, the British and the Hungarians who had the highest percentage of the answer: '*the employee must follow the managers instructions even in if the employee does not agree with them completely*' (Northern Ireland 47.9%, Britain 44.4%, Hungarian 43%), while the lowest percentage

was provided by Belarus and Slovenia (16.3% and 18.7% respectively). The conviction is supported to the greatest extent by the Finns (59.3%). Using the above data, for example, for a joint project between British and Slovenian participants we can easily forecast clashes developing around managers' instructions.

Competition is a very important sphere of behaviour and activity. Significantly differing judgements were made by the respondents coming from various national cultures to the following statements, when they were asked to place their views on a 10 point-scale: *Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas. Competition is harmful because it brings out the worst in people.* Altogether, the European opinion tends to favour the view that competition is good. However the individuals from Western Europe think it is significantly less useful and less positive than East Europeans do. In other words West Europeans think its adverse effect is more important than its positive side. The French, the Belgians and the Dutch are the least enthusiastic about competition, while the Romanians, Croatians and Icelanders are of opinion that its bad effects are less significant.

SUMMARY

Within the European value orientation there is mostly unity in judging the importance of basic life components. In every country *the family is the greatest value, followed by work.* The Europeans are relatively united in their judgement of the importance of politics. However, as far as religion, leisure time, friends and acquaintances concerned, we find significant variations. The differences in opinion are even more significant regarding values and priorities tied to work. In this context Hungarians represent an exceptional view because for them everything is important: high wages, secure working place, pleasant colleagues, important job for the society, the work has to be respected by the society, etc. Also attitudes towards others, especially trust and tolerance, opinions on civil morality, on obeying superiors' instructions differ from country to country.

The differences outlined by the EVS results and the significant differences within Europe strengthen the supposition, that within multicultural workplaces or joint projects in Europe harmonious interactions and maintenance of good communications require the conflict solving ability of a very able management.

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