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## **Life/work values: Test of a universal single national culture versus diverse sub-cultures**

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### **Abstract**

We empirically tested the existence of a single national culture vs. diverse sub-cultures within a single country, and explored the implications for management practices and research. Measures of culture (defined by a set of work and life values was constructed) and data were obtained from 653 business students in two distinct geographical locations in Spain (South-West and North-East). Results suggested that the universal theory of culture as proposed by Hofstede and colleagues was not confirmed in the Spanish sample. Variances along the set of 8-value structure (4 work values and 4 life values) were widely spread, and significant differences for values were found for the two locations. Moreover, individual differences such as gender were major correlates of the work and life values.

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## Introduction

In a rapidly-changing, unpredictable modern world, forecasting how people will behave at work is often a risky affair. The field of organizational behavior is no exception in this respect. From the early days of theories on organizational behavior (taylorism, fordism), the various schools of thought have increasingly focused on the importance of the human factor (Mayo, 1975; Maslow, 1963). More recent conceptual approaches have centered on social and cultural components regarding organizations and people in attempting to explain performance.

Traditionally, the term 'culture' has been used by various scientific disciplines, including history, anthropology, and economics. In the management field, the interest in studying culture began to spread in the 1960s when theorists and practitioners realized the impact that culture may have on the future and survival of the firm. The anthropological and psychosocial concept of 'corporate culture' was popularized in the 1982 best-seller *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman. Working as consultants for McKinsey, they proposed that 'a type' of culture differentiated certain companies whose spectacular results outperformed their competitors. Taking a more academic perspective, Schein (1980, 1985, 1992) highlighted the companies' need to not be managed simply to maximize profits but also to consider non-economic aspects and employee well-being as part of the day-to-day conduct of business, forming the core of the concept of 'psychological contract.' It was then that Schein coined the term 'organizational culture.'

Schein further contended that all corporate cultures essentially operate at two levels:

1. The implicit in nature consists of the beliefs or basic assumptions and, above all, the essential values of an organization. These essential or shared values are the primary values underlying the predominant culture. These understandings provide meaning and cohesion to daily work activity and are critical for generating commitment beyond employees' immediate self-interest.
2. The explicit or observable are the cultural artifacts reflected in two dynamics. One is what the company 'does' (procedures, behavior, organization charts, rituals, technology, etc.); the other is what the company 'appears' to be (physical aspects and external image, such as logo, buildings, location, advertising and sponsorships, public relations, etc.).

In brief, the culture of a company refers to its characteristic way of thinking and acting. Corporate culture is analogous to the personality of an individual. It is both an inherited characteristic and the consequence of the learning process an organization undergoes in solving problems specific to its business, including external environmental circumstances and internal tensions. Culture may be 'imported' when powerful personalities join an organization and exert new influence. Often, just one or two individuals 'create' a culture (Dolan, Garcia, 2002).

Studies of culture *via* life and work values vary markedly in terms of concepts, methodology and level of analysis. Personal values are relevant to various life areas (or life domains), such as work, religion, culture, and sports. In the industrialized West, the way people value work is not only linked to production factors but also to personal, family, and social factors. *Laboro* is a universally known term, yet the meaning it is given depends on the culture involved. The present paper explores the underlying structure of work and life values most commonly found among European young people (business students or young future managers), which in turn bear upon their work and life expectations.

The purpose of the larger study is to explore value systems regarding work and life in general, with the assumption that it may have consequences for people's behavior in different socio-cultural environments. Values are assumed to represent a predisposition to behave in a particular way. Accordingly, the studies compared value systems (work and life) in three cultures: Mediterranean (in this case Spain), Central European (e.g. France), and Scandinavian (e.g. Sweden). This study represents the first phase of a larger comparative project, setting out the preliminary findings for Spain. In the future, two other national cultures (Sweden and France) will be added.

More specifically, this study empirically tests the existence or absence of stereotypical cross-national life and work values in business students by examining the spread of variance across a set of commonly studied life/work values within a given culture. The underlying assumption is that if the variance is spread among individuals (i.e. a large standard deviation), then the theory of common culture would be weakened, whereas a narrow variance would support the celebrated model proposed by Hofstede and colleagues (1980, 1981, 1991, 2002) pertaining to the existence of a single national culture.

The study has relevance to the management of human resources, as employee behaviors are often originated in their respective values and belief systems (Schuler, Jackson, 1987a, 1987b; Schuler, 1990; Dolan, Gosselin, Belout, 2000). The study also relates to the search for relationships between work and life values of future managers. Consequently, the effective strategy of human resource management can be derived from the aforementioned arguments and be addressed to develop a congruency with these employee value systems (O'Reilly, Chatman, Caldwell, 1991; Begley, Boyd, 2000). This represents the fundamental argument in the theory of contingency in managing human resources (Baird, Meshoulam, 1988).

### **More on the concept of culture, work and life values**

Among the various theoretical perspectives on trans-cultural values and their impact on organizational behavior, the dominant approach was advanced by Hofstede (1980). Hofstede's theoretical stance is based on mental constructs such as values, attitudes and culture. He maintains that culture and values are strongly related but are far-removed from attitude. Attitudes are how one feels about a situation, whereas values describe what state of affairs one would prefer (Hofstede, 1998). The two concepts are different constructs, not only in the minds of researchers but also in those of respondents. For Hofstede (1991), culture is a kind of 'mental programming' that takes a set of patterns learned throughout one's life. Hofstede identified five dimensions of culture/values (power distance, individualism or collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and long-term versus short-term outlooks). His findings have served many subsequent researchers. According to him, cultural differences are manifested through symbols, heroes, rituals and values, and he established different cultural levels: national, regional/ethnic, religious, organizational, or those based on gender or social class.

Hofstede's work has been criticized for downplaying the importance of sub-cultures and individual differences within the same culture/nation. He considers a nation as a political unit and distinct from the concept of society. If one considers a nation, one can quickly appreciate that it contains groups and minorities (the Basque region being a case in point). For example, in

*Cultures and Organizations* (Hofstede, 1991) he emphasized the cultural differences that can be found at the national level. For this purpose he focused on the differences that may exist at the inter-regional level. According to Hofstede, one can study individual differences only at this level. In particular, he focused on significant individual differences according to gender, age and social class in each of the four dimensions he used to explain culture. However, according to him, one could not study these groups or minorities as if they represented sub-cultures. His arguments in this respect were based on universal principles. Hofstede stated that problems are universal and hence are shared by many nations/cultures but that the solutions to those problems were unique to each. Accordingly, he argued that values and attitudes (organizational practices) are quite different and should be treated separately.

According to Hofstede, values must be studied from an aggregate perspective, not an individual one. He defines individual values as sentiments, which in many cases are unconscious, implicit ones. Such sentiments are difficult to change, most of them being acquired before the individual reaches the age of ten. They cannot be discussed or directly observed. They can only be inferred from the way in which people act under certain circumstances. However, even this is ambiguous because people's questionnaire responses as to how they would act in given situations are often not what they do in practice.

In the literature, values have been approached *via* different perspectives. For example, as normative standards to choose amongst various behaviors (Becker, Mcklintock, 1967; Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1992); as basic components of cognitive maps which guides motivation and behavior (Hackman, Lawler, Porter, 1977); or a sub-group of attitudes (Levy, 1990).

In the 1940s, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote:

if you wish to build a ship, don't start looking for wood, cutting tables or begin allocating tasks; what you should do first is, find men with a desire to sail on the wide ocean (cited in: García, Dolan, 1997: xxi).

The question is whether this desire is universal in nature or whether it depends on socio-cultural factors that stem from the models adopted by each society. Though the words for our values may reflect relatively simple thought structures, they carry an important conceptual load, acting as long-term behavior predictors.

According to Schwartz (1999), values represent the concepts of what is really desirable that guides social actors in their selection of behaviors, assess other people and explain people responses in general. One of the central aspects that defines values is its preferential character, in that a value is primarily an activity or preferential process of singling out a given behavior. The preferential character of values also acts simultaneously in setting up an order or a hierarchical structure of respective values. Secondly, given that espoused values represent a sort of preference, it is obvious that, implicitly or explicitly, some kind of order is established. The totality of this order represents the value matrix/system of the person.

On the basis of this discussion, a number of questions can be raised with reference to the distinct values in each culture, organization or job setting. Are they universal or are they unique? Is cultural variation manifested only in its form or also in its content? Other relevant aspects seem to be the relationships between the value system and the predisposition to behave in distinct cultures. All the above topics enable researchers to render operational the concept of values.

Thus, values guide daily actions, bind groups, help resolve conflicts and stimulate development. All cultures contain more-or-less explicit value systems (Schein, 1985; Dunkel, Mayrhofer, 2001; García, Dolan, 1997) that determine behavior.

Work values, according to some scholars, represent a subset of our general values (Elizur, 1991; Elizur, Sagie, 1999). These values have been studied from different conceptual angles. They have been defined as vocational orientation (Pryor, 1981; Super, 1995); predisposition to behave in a work setting (England, 1967; Ravlin, Meglino, 1989); and importance in terms of work accomplishments (Elizur, 1984; Levy, Guttman, 1976; MOW studies, 1987). These definitions represent a refinement of necessities that emerge through socialization (Lofquist, Dawis, 1971; Super, 1995), or as ideologies or philosophies that enable us to understand individual behavior at work (England, 1967).

Other scholars classify values into three types according to their nature: **instrumental**, **affective** and **cognitive** (Zarhi, Elizur, 1996; Elizur, Koslowsky, 1996). In organizational behavior, instrumental values include relationship with others, such as colleagues and superiors; affective values are responsibility, influence, feedback, the importance of work, etc; and cognitive ones include status and contribution to society. This initial

classification of values has been termed 'Work Outcomes' (Elizur, 1984). The same author also described a second classification based on system contingencies and the behaviour of individuals with regard to an organization's need to pull things together to work effectively and to motivate its staff. **Job security** is one of the work values that is currently given the greatest importance in the present system of values. The results obtained in different countries corroborate these assertion (Elizur, 1991; Zarhi, Elizur, 1996; Dolan et al., 2002).

The perceived impact of organizational culture on individual behaviour has been articulated for many years. Hofstede likened culture to a collective programming of the minds of one group that differentiates them from other groups; he believes this programming derives from one's social culture. (Hofstede, 1991). However, he considers that national culture is differentiated from organizational culture in that the former is based more on values and socialization patterns occur in the family. By contrast, the latter is based more on practices and work is the sphere in which socialization takes place. The impact of culture on behaviour has been postulated for many years and its impact continues to be demonstrated. For example, 103 human resource professionals at major US-based organizations were asked to identify the most important factors influencing the management development programs in their organizations (*The Conference Board*, 2001). Four factors were mentioned by over two-thirds of the respondents: The CEO's vision and values, the organization's strategic plan, the operating needs of the line managers, and the organization's culture. Thus, the potential impact of individual's values on culture is a topic that is receiving increased interest as change, and change management, have emerged as important activities of the new human resource management roles (Schuler, Dolan, Jackson, 2001).

The effects of socio-demographic variables such as age, education, gender, and seniority upon this relationship have also been reported. The most often studied of these variables is gender. According to the literature, men tend place greater value on issues concerning socio-economic status, prestige and power (Dolan et al., 2002; Elizur, Sagie, 1994). By contrast, women are more concerned with socio-affective issues such as work climate, safety at work, and relationships with their colleagues. However, some authors (Elizur, Koslowsky, 1996; Koslowsky, Staskevsky, 2000) have emphasized that socio-demographic issues (such as gender) should not be divorced from the cultural characteristics of a given society or context.

## **The debate over methodologies in studying culture and values in organizations**

As mentioned above, perspectives on organizational culture condition the kind of research undertaken. Three lines of research have dominated the analysis of organizational culture: the integration perspective (dominant within the functionalist approach, and the most well-established of the three). The second is differentiation, and the last is fragmentation (i.e. the newer, post-modernist perspective).

Studies pertaining to the integration approach (e.g. Hofstede's studies on organizational culture, especially at IBM) also link up with Schein's line of research (quest for symbols, heroes, rituals and values). It seeks shared elements between cultures in order to generalize findings and assimilate cultural characteristics. By contrast, the differentiation approach focuses on seeking differentiating features between different cultures.

According to Hofstede, the world is full of conflicts between individuals, groups, and nations that feel and act differently. Nevertheless, all these cultures face common problems that require co-operation for their solution. He argues that despite differences in forms of expression, there is a common structure that permits 'universal' understanding. Hofstede describes these common problems in a homogeneous fashion for all countries, arguing that there is a common structure. He seeks the integration of cultures. We disagree with this idea, believing that both practices and structures are different. Accordingly, we would be in closer agreement with a research perspective based on differentiation rather than on integration. Other scholars defend the idea that the same basic structure applies to different cultural settings (Schwartz, 1992; Zarhi, Elizur, 1996). Nevertheless, these authors also stress that the importance of values depends on the context (Elizur et al., 1996).

There are numerous studies on values related to various ambits affecting the individual, most of them of a multi-dimensional nature. Thus one can find studies on work (Zarhi, Elizur, 1996) as well as ones on values linked to the personal sphere and life issues. However there are fewer studies that set out to analyze the relationship between both value structures—work and life. Among these, one should mention the work carried out by Elizur, Magyari-Beck, Singh-Sengupta, Tchaicovsky, and Yamauchi (1996), who

focused on life and work value structures in Israel, Hungary, India, Brazil and Japan.

An examination of the literature on the methodologies used to measure work values and life values reveals the use of different measurements. Cook et al. (1993) drew up a list of the 29 most important and frequently used measurement tools appearing in the literature on organizational culture, and identified two broad categories of tools. The first concerns those aimed at measuring organizational commitment toward staff. The second covers scales that measure individual needs, linked with self-fulfilment and development. There are also other tools that do not form a clear category. These include the 'Work Values Inventory' (Super, 1970), which is particularly relevant to the present study. According to Super, the tool provides 15 indexes on work values, both intrinsic and extrinsic, related to motivation. It also analyzes the satisfaction systems values that are directly linked to and derive from jobs. The process cannot be based on the supposition that society already knows and accepts a framework of common, shared values.

A paper by Dunkel and Mayerhofer (2001) criticizes Hofstede's position, calling it ethno-centric and universalist, failing to take account of the context. Nevertheless, Hofstede (1991) stated that while he was no disciple of ethno-centrism, he did take a relativist stance on culture. Dunkel proposed a 'cultural standard,' arguing that culture was too complex system to be measured by over-abstract dimensions. 'Cultural standards' would be the interpretations that people make of a specific context. Such interpretations can be revealed through interviews. Cultural standards would allow one to identify differences between pairs of national cultures. The fact that culture provides the reference framework implies a subjective view of the phenomenon. Cultural standards are not visible but become apparent in behavior in inter-cultural situations involving different countries.

## **Assumptions, proposition and research objectives**

The following premises are proposed as the framework for this study:

1. Levels of analysis of culture: Our study assumes that country is not synonymous with national culture; there may well be more than one

culture in a country. It is also possible that a culture can be shared among different countries (Dunkel, Mayrhofer, 2001; Harvey, 1997; Spector et al., 2002). We disagree with approaches such as Hofstede's that link national culture with a country, assuming the nation is homogeneous in this respect. Such approaches associate culture with territorial and geographic aspects. The study of culture would thus be applied at a national level. Scholars subscribing to the Hofstede school consider that if the research is conducted at other levels (e.g. on different autonomous communities), this would not allow one to study cultural aspects. It is curious that they accept that a nation may contain different groups and minorities but do not accept that these can be studied as sub-cultures with their own identity.

2. Object of study: Following Hofstede's position, he accepts that cultural differences can exist within the same country. This is based on the existence of different practices. Nevertheless, he continues to consider that the values systems are shared by all members of the country. In this respect, our position is far removed from Hofstede's given that we consider that practices are a reflection of a given type of culture or ideology (Foucault, 1975) and that study of various ways of acting and/or feeling can provide reliable indicators of a given type of culture.
3. The relationship between different mental constructs: attitudes, values and culture. We agree with those researchers (such as Hofstede, 1998) who establish conceptual differences between these terms. Nevertheless, we contend that there is a relationship between these constructs and each provides indirect indicator, at the very least, of the others.
4. To summarize our study, (a) we want to empirically test the existence (or absence) of stereotypical national culture measured by life and work values by examining the spread of variance across a set of commonly studied life/work values. (b) Our underlying assumption is that if the variance is spread among individuals (i.e. large standard deviation), then the theory of common culture would be weakened, whereas a narrow variance would support the Hofstede model of national culture.

## Method

### Sample

The population in this preliminary study are university students at Faculties of Business and Economics in two autonomous communities in Spain. Of the total population of 653 students, 307 studied at public University in Andalusia and 346 at a private business school in Catalonia. Respondents were drawn from different academic years: first-year students (307 students from Andalusia and 174 from Catalonia) and fourth year bachelor degree students (172 from Catalonia).

Four-fifths of the students were aged between 19 and 22, and women comprised half (52.4%) of the sample. Three-quarters of the sample lived in urban centers. Almost 70% lived with their families; the others were generally forced to live elsewhere to be close to the university. One-tenth combined university studies with work. With regard to their parents' cultural level, 70.8% of the respondents indicated medium to high level, 17.6% very high, and the remainder low or very low.

### Procedure

Data-gathering tools:

A structured questionnaire was used to evaluate the importance given by students to a set of values related to work, personal and family life. It included two Likert-type scales comprising 17 Work Value and 16 Life Values. Students were asked to grade the importance of each component on a scale of 1 to 5.

The tools employed in measuring values was inspired by the 'Work Values Inventory' (Super, 1970). Although this tool has been criticized as having some limitations (it is suitable only for full-time workers, and it does not incorporate multivariate analysis), nevertheless, its use is well-established. The tools have been improved *via* a Delphi process undertaken by the five researchers involved in the larger study. Convergence was sought and content validation produced satisfactory results.

The following social demographic variables were also determined: Age, gender, seniority at the university, work/no work status, residency with/without family, and educational level of the parents.

## Results

To test the underlying structure of work values and life values, an exploratory factor analysis was undertaken. Results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. In both tables, varimax solution was sought, and only items with factor loading greater than .5 were included.

**Table 1: Results of the Principal Component Factor Analysis for Work Values**

FACTOR I	FACTOR II	FACTOR III	FACTOR IV
Extrinsic Work Values	Social-Economic Work Status	Intrinsic Work Values	Self Realization Values
Job Security	Prestige	Team work	Creativity
Work Climate	Power	Job variety	Achievement
Friendship at Work (collegiality)		Commitment	
Efficacy			
Equity			

Note: 12 of the 17 original values were employed in subsequent analyses

FACTOR I: was labeled **Extrinsic work values**. This sub-scale comprises 5 components. These refer to the aspects or characteristics that are external to the person, and that are highly valued by most of the population. This is the most heavily weighted factor in the scale. Respondents who scored high in this section consider the following work aspects important: working atmosphere, friendly colleagues, efficacy and efficiency in carrying out tasks, and recognition of effort and individual achievements.

FACTOR II: was labeled **Social-economic work status**. This is a factor strongly oriented toward success, purchasing power, and social power. Respondents scoring high on this scale considered work value to reside in climbing the social ladder or making more money.

FACTOR III: was **Intrinsic work values**. This sub-scale is the opposite of the first scale (i.e., extrinsic factors). It takes in the values associated with work that concern how tasks are organized and co-ordinated: team work, commitment, variety. These values concern social aspects that are not strictly rational in connection with work organization. Respondents scoring

high on this sub-scale tend to be people who commit themselves and actively participate in the work.

FACTOR IV: was **Self realization**. These aspects are directly related to the characteristics of the work or task to be carried out. A high score on this sub-scale indicates that the person places a high value on the opportunities for personal and/or professional development and growth in the job. The most important motivational factors are to be found in the characteristics of the job carried out and not so much in external recognition, remuneration, etc. These are people whose interests and personal goals make them identify strongly with the post they wish to occupy.

**Table 2: Results of the Principal Components Factor Analysis for Life Values**

FACTOR I	FACTOR II	FACTOR III	FACTOR IV
Ego and Social Values	Order and Family Life	Universal Happiness	Social-Economic status in Life
Life Satisfaction	Order	Happiness	Materialism
Friendship	Healthy life	Liberty	Status Demonstration
Responsibility	Family	Peace	
Trust			

Note: 12 of the 16 original values were employed in subsequent analyses

FACTOR I: was **Ego and social values**. This is the most heavily weighted factor in the scale. It refers to values that are mainly linked to social and personal factors. A high score on this sub-scale indicates that the person places a high value on meeting personal goals. These people are committed, sociable, and dedicated to helping others and satisfying their needs.

FACTOR II: was **Order and family life**. Respondents who scored high in this section consider family life to be of great importance. Their personal and professional decisions are conditioned by the family environment. In addition, they are sensitive to achieving balance in their lives and in reconciling their professional and personal roles.

FACTOR III: was **Universal happiness**. Respondents scoring high on this sub-scale are committed to preserving social order and balance. They try to avoid conflicts and tend to be calm, rational and responsible in their actions.

FACTOR IV: was **Social economic status in life**. A high score on this sub-scale indicates that the person places a high value on social and socio-economic success such as material wealth or showing status. A high score for this factor reveals a greater importance given to material values, based on economic success and social recognition. Respondents scoring high on this sub-scale tend to seek power and economic benefits, both in their personal and professional lives.

Figures 1 and 2 present the histograms (including variance and standard deviation) of the eight respective work and life values. Results suggest that although not all factors are distributed normally (some distributions are right-skewed), generally the spread is wide and consequently makes it difficult to argue the existence of a single national culture.

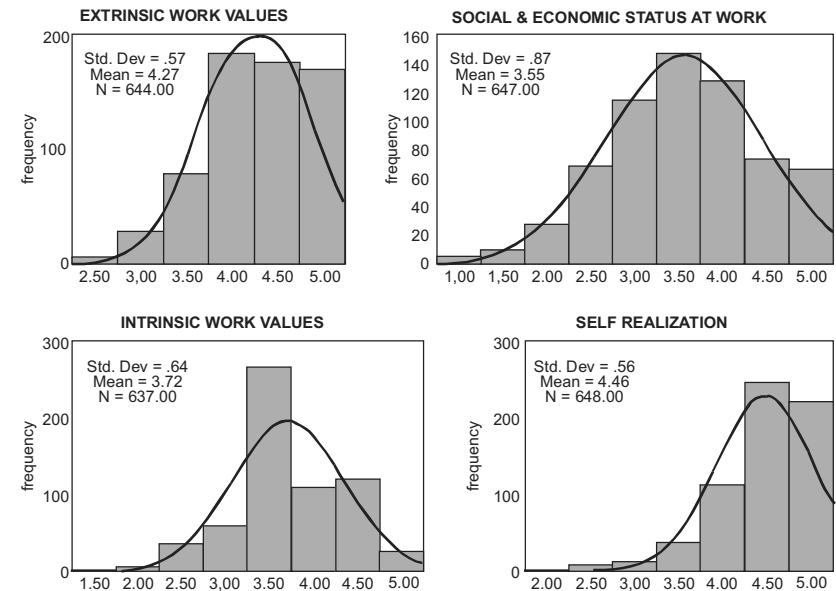
Table 3 shows the ANOVA for regional differences of the participants' work values and life values, for the South-West and the North-East of Spain.

These results suggest that there are significant differences in some work/life values shown by Andalusian business students versus their Catalonian counterparts. In relation to work values, extrinsic values depend most on cultural factors, followed by intrinsic ones. The Andalusians attribute higher importance to work values associated with both intrinsic and extrinsic values. With regard to life values, those linked to socio-economic status and to order and family life are the ones that are most strongly influenced by cultural issues. Moreover, the students in South-West Spain attribute higher preferences to such life values as order and family life on the one hand, and to social-economic status on the other. The same differences are maintained when 'year of study' is controlled for.

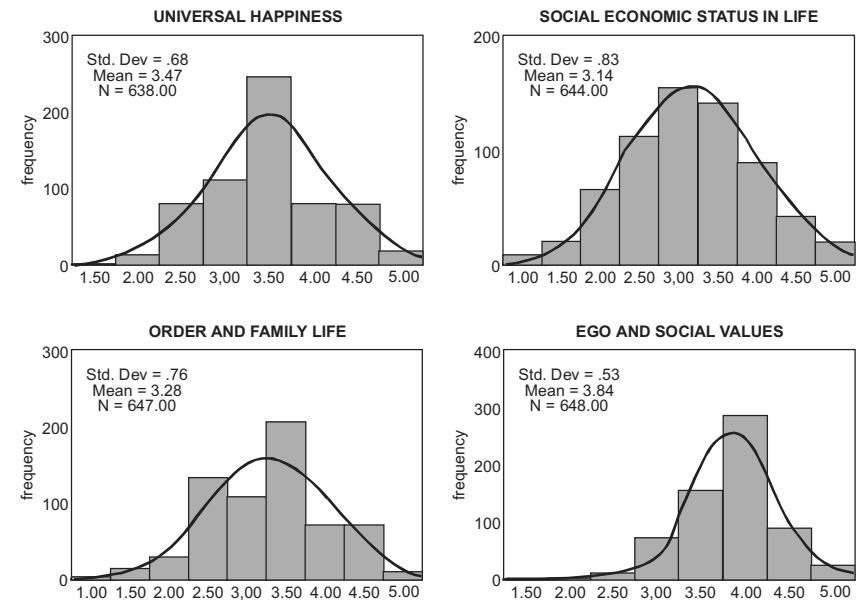
Table 4 shows that significant gender differences on work and life values are found. Female students attributed more importance to extrinsic and intrinsic work values than male students; they also placed higher importance on life values such as order and family life. By contrast, the males manifested higher motivation to achieve social economic status at work and in life.

Other series of ANOVA analyses was undertaken but no significant differences were found. An example is for students who work versus those who do not (though it has been found that even those who reported they were working did only part-time at work), nor were there significant differences for students who live in urban versus non-urban zones.

**Figure 1: Histogram of the Four Work Values Factors**



**Figure 2: Histogram of the Four Life Values Factors**



**Table 3: ANOVA Comparison of Values: Andalusia (South-West) versus Catalonia (North-East) of Spain**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Extrinsic Work Values	Between Groups	48.841	1	48.841	197.941	<b>.000</b>
	Within Groups	158.410	642	.247		
	Total	207.251	643			
Social & Economic Status at Work	Between Groups	.450	1	.450	.590	.443
	Within Groups	492.852	645	.764		
	Total	493.302	646			
Intrinsic Work Values	Between Groups	8.575	1	8.575	21.769	<b>.000</b>
	Within Groups	250.130	635	.394		
	Total	258.705	636			
Self Realization	Between Groups	.314	1	.314	1.009	.316
	Within Groups	201.143	646	.311		
	Total	201.457	647			
Ego and Social Values	Between Groups	.594	1	.594	2.138	.144
	Within Groups	179.423	646	.278		
	Total	180.016	647			
Order and Family Life	Between Groups	2.301	1	2.301	3.955	<b>.047</b>
	Within Groups	375.161	645	.582		
	Total	377.462	646			
Universal Happiness	Between Groups	1.878E-03	1	1.878E-03	.004	.949
	Within Groups	295.213	636	.464		
	Total	295.214	637			
Social Economic Status in Life	Between Groups	11.605	1	11.605	17.083	<b>.000</b>
	Within Groups	436.144	642	.679		
	Total	447.750	643			

**Table 4: ANOVA Comparison of Values Based on Gender**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Extrinsic Work Values	Between Groups	48.841	1	48.841	197.941	<b>.000</b>
	Within Groups	158.410	642	.247		
	Total	207.251	643			
Social & Economic Status at Work	Between Groups	.450	1	.450	.590	.443
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	Within Groups	436.144	642	.679		
	Total	447.750	643			

## Discussion

The objective of the study was to identify the principal work values and life values among business students in two distinct geographical areas in Spain and to find if significant differences prevail. A number of control variables such as gender, zone of living and cultural background of the family, was also studied.

Results showed that the vast majority of work/life values have a normal distribution yet around a rather large variance. Results also confirmed that in distinct geographical locations there is a distinct subculture characterized by significant values and preferences. Although not all values shows these significant differences, the work values that varied significantly had to do with extrinsic and intrinsic nature of work, and at life sphere, variation existed for values pertaining to order and family life, as well as to achieving social economic status.

The results obtained support Triandis' (1994) theory, which argued that individual values (efficacy, power, prestige) co-exist alongside collective ones (work atmosphere, teamwork, etc.) in relation to work. However, we share Schwartz's (1990) idea that the Spanish population operates within an individualist cultural context. In this connection, it should be noted that there are certain nuances in the results within the same country (in the case of Spain, between Andalusia and Catalonia, for example).

There are also differences at a personal level between the two populations. The Andalusia youngsters set a high value on respect, particularly as regards family life, seeing family life as a way of achieving personal balance and stability. By contrast, this is not an important value for the Barcelona youngsters. The latter consider self-fulfilment to be a relevant personal value. The results support the hypothesis that work and life value systems are complementary (particularly for the Andalusia youngsters), giving the individual emotional stability. According to Schwartz, one would expect work to cover values like conservatism, dominance, hierarchy and intellectual autonomy. By contrast, at a personal level, values such as affective autonomy, equality, and harmony are the expected ones. However, the results of this study do not allow one to clearly differentiate between the two spheres. For example, we have seen how youngsters in Catalonia set a high value on self-realization, associating this with professional and work issues.

The significant differences found between students in Andalusia and Catalonia in valuing aspects related to students' work and personal expectations imply that one cannot speak of a single national system of values that holds good for any part of Spain. The value systems depend largely on the characteristics of the local setting in which organizations find themselves. In contrast with the theoretical position adopted by Hofstede, we believe that one can study cultural differences from an individual perspective without falling into what he terms an 'ecological fallacy.' We agree with Hofstede that individual differences can exist in each of the four dimensions with which he describes national culture. Hofstede would say that it is logical that these four dimensions cannot be identified with national culture in groups forming part of the same nation given that they differ with regard to gender, generation, and social class and that categories have nothing to do with cultures. However, we believe that these four dimensions can be found among different ethnic groups within the same country. Unlike Hofstede, we believe that the individual differences found between both populations cannot be solely ascribed to interpersonal variation but rather to aggregated characteristics at the group level. In particular, we feel that the results lend support to the hypothesis that one can identify various sub-cultures with their own values within a given national culture (in this case, the Spanish one). The sub-culture's values may or may not be close to those of the national culture.

If we were to adopt the universal postulates defended by Hofstede and other researchers, we might reach the conclusion that the differences found in both populations (Catalonia and Andalusia) are the result of different practices that nevertheless stem from the same structure of national values. However, we consider that these different practices arise from distinct cultural reference models. In addition, from a cross-cultural viewpoint, we assume that different countries may not only be differentiated by value systems but also by specific behaviours and practices. This is congruent with the institutional and contingent arguments (Meyer and Rowan, 1991).

We consider that knowledge of the factors motivating students allows one to make inferences concerning their cultural values. According to the cultural model defended here, the constructs measured by the questionnaire are a reflection of cultural values. We can gain knowledge of a country's cultures through information on individuals. By contrast, Hofstede would

argue that values cannot be discussed because many of them operate at an unconscious level and thus cannot be observed by external observers; they can only be inferred from the way in which people act under certain circumstances. However, even this is ambiguous because people's questionnaire responses as to how they would act in given situations are often not what they do in practice.

The preliminary results obtained from the ANOVA analysis for the Spanish sample reveal the existence of different value systems (sub-cultures) within the same nation. It would seem that both populations share some values, such as social-economic-work status (prestige, power) and self-fulfilment values (creativity, achievement). However, their value systems vary in other dimensions such as extrinsic (job security, work climate, friendship at work, efficacy and equity) and intrinsic work values (team work, job variety, and commitment). In particular, the Andalusia youngsters scored higher than those in Catalonia in both respects.

Studies on values carried out in other European countries have produced results that support our findings. For example, a study on work values among French youngsters (Wach, 1996) revealed that the most important values were related to earning money, job security and personal development. According to that study, the structure of work values in other European countries is similar, and this suppose to consider an European model on the human resource management field. We are in agreement with some authors asserting that there are some values of a more trans-national character than other (a point with which Hofstede also agrees). Nevertheless, we consider that this 'universality' should be limited to those countries that have similar socio-political and economic models. This is explained through the cognitive dimension of the institutional mechanisms, that explain the differences because of the different institutional contexts. Future researches should analyse the incidence of the institutional context and in specific of the values on the management practices (Dijck and Schrujjer, 1994). In this way, the European model on human resource management would be explained for countries that share common institutional structures regulatory, normative and cognitive (Nagelkerke, 1994; Gooderham, Nordhaug, Ringdal, 1999). This is a novelty in the management field, the adoption of sociological theoretical frameworks—the institutional theory—that regard the impact of institutions on the organizational and individuals values. In this case, Spain

and France both form part of the European Union. Accordingly, it is logical to find certain similarities regarding their work values. As Kornblit (2002) found in a study on the work values of young Argentineans, it seems that both the students in Andalusia and Catalonia agree on values that motivate achievement and self-fulfilment (both consistent with the 'neo-Liberal' economic model). However, the two populations vary with regard to cultural values concerning social aspects and democratic values. It seems that Andalusians are more concerned about these kinds of issues than are youngsters in Catalonia. This could be related again to the fact that each group responds to a different cultural model. Work culture in Andalusia is closer to a collectivist culture, in which aspects of emotional experience and social relations are more important. By contrast, work culture in Catalonia is closer to an individualist culture in which emotional experience is much more part of one's inner world. According to Schwartz and Ros (1993a), this type of cultural pattern is found among American students. In this respect, one should note the American influence on the sample of Catalan youngsters.

The results also indicated that men and women show differences regarding their respective systems of work and life values. These differences should be related to cultural factors and not simply to individual ones. In a study on women managers Pallarés (1993) emphasized that most of the women had to make big sacrifices regarding their family lives in taking up senior positions in their organizations. This situation does not occur so frequently among men. This might explain why the satisfaction systems of men and women respond to different scales of values. In our study, women placed greater value on self-realization and the working climate than did the men, who preferred to achieve greater status and/or power.

## Conclusion

We consider that the differences found in our study make the concept of values based on a national stereotype inappropriate in the Spanish context. The value system depends to a large extent on the special cultural characteristics of the geographical location of the institutions studied. We may therefore conclude that the theory of national stereotypical culture as advanced by Hofstede does not hold true in Spain; geographical dispersion

and individual differences explain more of the variance in values than some common denominators.

The further implications are as follows.

**1. Inter-cultural differences not only exist between countries but also within them.** A globalized work market implies greater attention to cultural diversity associated more with socio-economic and political factors than with geographical ones. One can therefore find countries and regions that are culturally different despite their geographical proximity and vice versa. As Maruyama (1994) argued,

[. . .] corporate and national cultures differ in their logic [. . .]. Until very recently, the logic of each corporate or national culture was considered homogeneous. But in any culture, individual heterogeneity—expressed in different kinds of epistemologies—lurks beneath an apparently homogeneous surface [. . .].

Institutional theorists conclude that that the geographical proximity hardly explain the similarity, but the institutional embeddedness that implies common institutional structures and pillars.

**2. Gender equality should be approached from a diversity perspective.** The results indicate that there are differences between men and women with regard to their work and life value systems. These differences are related to cultural aspects. We therefore hold that the battle for gender equality should not be fought from a masculine or feminine perspective but rather take into account the diversity that exists. Tackling the issue in this way should ensure that Human Resources policies satisfy the expectations and needs of all members of an organization.

In future research it would be worthwhile to contrast the significance currently attributed to the work values employed in this study with those proposed by Super (1970) in his *Work Values Inventory*. Super proposed a definition for each of the 15 work values he identified. However, the preliminary results obtained in our study suggest that each population conceptualizes the same work values in a different way. Furthermore, these differences cannot solely be explained on the basis of individual differences. If we understand values to be one of the elements making up a given

culture of work, we can infer that there are no universal work values (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2002) but rather that these depend directly on the socio-economic setting involved.

Limitations of our study includes the possibility of ‘method-variance,’ as all information was generated from the same source. But due to the fact that this study did not propose a traditional model of (independent/dependent) relationships, this apparent limitation in the design is negligible.

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