



A cross-cultural longitudinal analysis of the meaning of work and the socialization process of career starters

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Abstract

This research examines the cultural variations in the socialization process of youth, from seven different countries during their transition into the world of work. It represents one of the very few longitudinal studies among young career starters and their work values. We study the extent to which work centrality is trans-national or culturally/nationally specific. The most significant increase in work centrality was found to occur during the second year of employment. At the national level, cultural differences were identified using Hofstede's (1980) measures. Countries low in uncertainty avoidance were shown to have increased work centrality, while those high in masculinity–femininity appeared weakly influential.

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1. Introduction

Work occupies a central role in the life of individuals, as well as a primary societal objective. For most people, working and its outcomes are considered fundamental and significant. Research has demonstrated that age-related experience regarding attitudes towards work is both normative and universal (Krau, 1989; Van der Velde, Feij, & Emmerik, 1998). Most individuals derive their instrumental economic well being, as well as various socio-psychological functions, through their work (Harpaz, 1990; MOW-International Research Team, 1987).

Personal, family, community, and national identities at the individual level are balanced and counterbalanced with considerable complexity. While most studies on the topic of work focus on adult populations, much less attention has been devoted to studies of the meaning of work (MOW) for young adults who have just entered the labor market. Considering how recent, in historical perspective, the working day has achieved preeminence, we feel that efforts to understand some

of the cultural mechanisms that socialize young people into this activity are both worthwhile and potentially rewarding.

Youth constitutes a special period in the human life-span as well as comprising a particular social group. The main goal of this study is to gain knowledge about the MOW for young adults in various cultures. It is designed to provide an awareness of the values and attitudes that career starters attach to the role of work. Some of the causes, impacts, changes, and development of these values are examined, as well as illuminating various socialization characteristics through comparative longitudinal cross-national research. Such knowledge is important for understanding the sociological and psychological determinants of the beginning of work life and of the life of work beginners. Such an understanding may help public and corporate administrators to better confront a changing labor force, and will enable scholars to better address major theoretical issues in the social psychology of work and life-span development (Coetsier & Claes, 1990; Lorence, 1987).

1.1. Conceptualization of the MOW

The conceptualization presented here is based on the MOW research project, carried out comparatively in eight countries (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). This pioneering project may be considered an outcome of the expansion of the globalization process, and the increased need for empirical cross-national data on work values. Moreover, in light of the growth in multi-national

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organizations and cross-border operations, there were some concerns voiced regarding the parochialism of management research (Adler, Doctor, & Redding, 1986).

The MOW model is based on the conception that the MOW is determined by the choices and experiences of the individual and by the organizational and environmental context in which he or she works and lives (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). It should be noted that meanings attributed to a person's current work are not the only ones of interest; in this study we are concerned with the importance, value, and MOW in general.

The meaning of working has been conceptually defined for the purpose of this study in terms of three major domains: (a) *work centrality* as a life role, (b) *societal norms* about working, and (c) importance of *work goals*. Work centrality is conceived to be the core of the MOW model (England & Harpaz, 1983) as depicted in Fig. 1.

These domains as well as their measurement scales were developed and validated in a series of studies of adult workers conducted by the MOW international research team (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). Descriptions of the core notions addressed in each MOW domain are as follows.

1.1.1. Work centrality as a life role

The assertion that work plays a central and fundamental role in the life of individuals has been supported empirically in most industrialized countries (Brief & Nord, 1990; England & Misumi, 1986; Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997). Studies by Dubin and co-workers (Dubin, Champoux, & Porter, 1975) were helpful in developing the work centrality concept, which refers to the degree of general importance that working has in one's life at any given time. In general, work has been found to be of relatively high importance

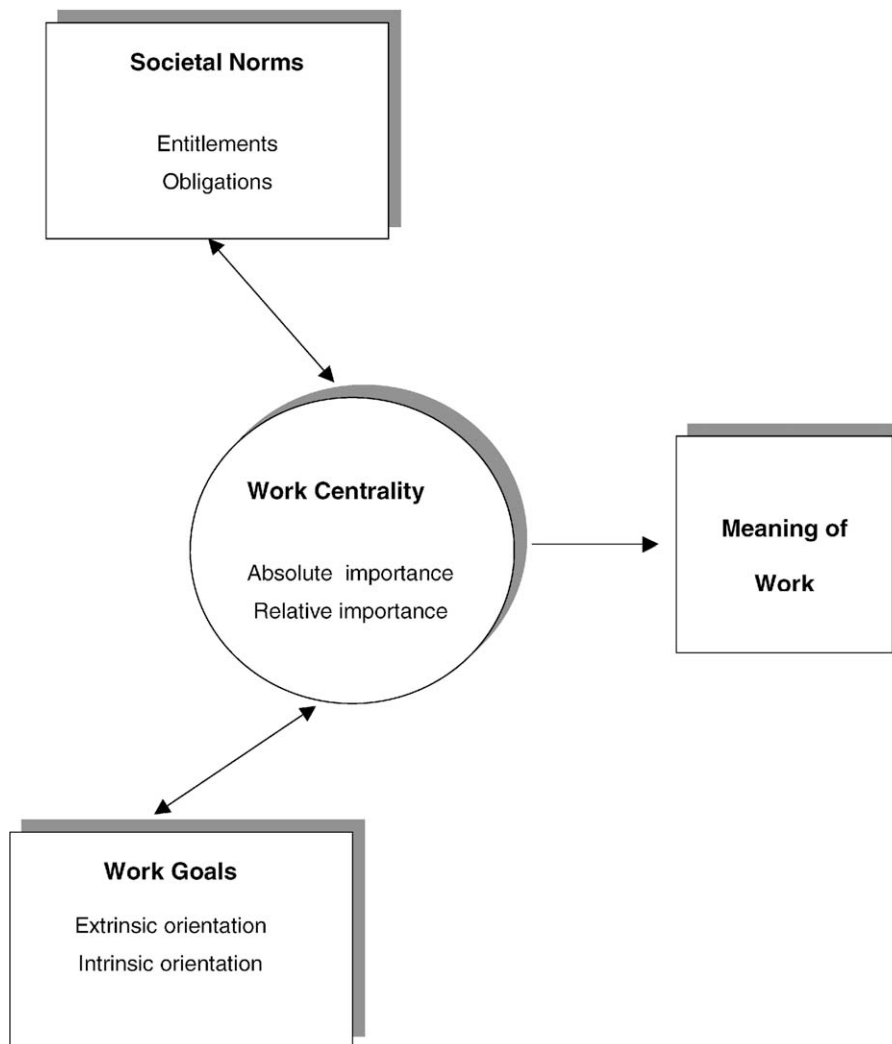


Fig. 1. The meaning of work model.

as compared with other areas of life (England, 1991; Ruiz-Quintanilla & Wilpert, 1991). It is usually considered to be of more importance than leisure, community, and religion and was found in several studies to rank second only to family (Harding & Hikspoors, 1995; Harpaz, 1999; MOW-International Research Team, 1987). High work centrality has been found to be positively related to important organizational variables, such as job satisfaction, participation in decision-making (Kanungo, 1982), and longer job tenure (Dubin et al., 1975).

1.1.2. Entitlement and obligation: societal norms regarding work

Based on Triandis's (1972) work on subjective culture, a set of normative assumptions was developed about what individuals should expect from work and working (opportunities or entitlements) and what they should expect to contribute through working (obligations). The *entitlement norm* represents the underlying rights of individuals and the work related responsibilities of society and organizations to all individuals (i.e., all members of society are entitled to have work if they so desire). Entitlements derive from standards or reasoning about property rights and the psychological contract as applied to the work setting. The *obligation norm* represents the work duties of all individuals to organizations and to society (i.e., everyone has a duty to contribute to society by working). Obligations, norms or duties derive from standards of reasoning about internalized personal responsibility and social or institutional commitment in accordance with the Protestant work ethic (Randall & Cote, 1991). In the MOW study, an evaluative rather than a descriptive meaning of norms was utilized. That is, norms indicate what should be, rather than what is; they involve general expectations about appropriate behavior concerning working. Moreover, it appears that if a society generally holds positive norms and attitudes towards work, then work is central and highly cherished; in such a society, it would be considered a deviation from the norm to stay away from the work force, or not actively seek employment.

1.1.3. Work goals

Work goals are defined as the relative importance of various goals and values which are sought or preferred by individuals in their working lives. The relevant literature on work goals is voluminous and covers the areas of job satisfaction, work values, and work needs (i.e., Locke, 1976; Porter, 1964; Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1964).

Work goals such as expressive, instrumental, comfort, and learning emerged as important goals in various cultures. It seems that the importance or preference allotted to a work goal is considered a function of its centrality, prominence and importance in relation to other work goals (Harpaz, 1990). Results from a representative sample of the labor force in seven countries showed that the two most dominant work goals are "interesting work" and "good pay." These

were consistent internationally, across different managerial and organizational hierarchies, between the genders, and among different age categories (Harpaz, 1990). The pre-dominance of both of these dimensions suggest that the typical orientation of people toward their work may be quite complex. Workers are neither exclusively expressive nor completely instrumental in their attitudes, but highly concerned with both work aspects (Harpaz, 1990).

Through the assessment of these three major MOW domains, an attempt was made to portray the MOW in the socialization process of young career starters. The major MOW concepts are treated here separately for purposes of discussion, yet these concepts are related theoretically and empirically. The primary reason may lie in the structure of labor markets and occupations, and the influence of these on the salience and functional relationship of MOW concepts.

1.2. Young individuals and work

For young workers taking their first steps in the labor market, the MOW constitutes an important component. It influences and explains their attitudes, feelings, and behavior in the world of work. The MOW, in fact, may help determine the first experiences of career starters. On the other hand, the first experiences of young workers in the labor market may determine the meaning they themselves attach to work, and their MOW perception may reflect these experiences. Theory recognizes that youth are active producers of their own work socialization through their behavior and work personality, which include their MOW perceptions (WOSY International Research Group, 1989a, 1989b).

Youth not only reflect cultural norms regarding MOW values, but they may also be situated at the forefront of cultural changes and the dissemination of new values, thus helping to re-create and adjust cultural norms. Young people are often quick to adapt new technologies, styles, and modes of behavior. In this sense, they may represent cultural leaders or early adapters, forecasting the future direction of certain cultural characteristics. There is concern in Japan that contemporary youth are less willing to commit to the long-term employment contracts of their parent's generation, resulting in considerably more job mobility (Ishii-Kuntz, 1989). In order for us to understand whether these trends are leading or following events, or to identify their persistence, longitudinal study, such as that conducted in the present research, is essential.

1.3. Cross-cultural attitudes and the MOW for youth

Culture presents the most salient window with which to examine contemporary attitudes towards work. Culture refers to the set of behavior patterns responding to experience—culminating in the total way of life of society. These behaviors are learned, shared, and transmitted by members of a particular society. In Hofstede's terms, culture can be

defined as “beliefs and customs that define common characteristics of a human group much like personality explains an individual’s identity” (Hofstede, 1980).

Cultural values mold and direct individual action and behavior, that, as with culture, is in a constant process of change and adaptation. Because these values differ considerably from one society (nation–state) to another, we predict variation regarding the centrality of work for young people experiencing a new social institution, often for the first time in their lives.

Work socialization processes and their outcomes (i.e., becoming integrated into the work force) may be seen as providing an important foundation for all industrial societies (Dubin, 1956; MOW-International Research Team, 1987; WOSY International Research Group, 1989a, 1989b). According to Structural-Functionalist theory, social order and integration depend on the existence of general, shared values (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). Norms and values are transmitted, and their internalization through the process of socialization provides the linkage between personality and social systems (Boli & Thomas, 1997). When young career starters take their first steps in the world of work, they join society and find a place within it. Finding out about the nature of the MOW for young workers, including late adolescents or early adults, can make a significant theoretical and empirical contribution toward the issues of the integration of society and individuals, as well as the relationship between structure and personality (Kalleberg & Loscocco, 1983).

Young entry level workers arguably face the most important socialization process of their lives. Their introductory experiences adapting to organizational idiosyncrasies demonstrate an ability to manage and assume roles of membership. The inaugural period is considered particularly critical to this activity, and initial failure can be persistent (Lorence & Mortimer, 1985; Morrison, 1993; Van der Velde et al., 1998). People who believe they fit well into an organization are more likely to remain and achieve better results (Chatman, 1989). Various researchers have claimed that work socialization remains incompletely understood and is an inadequately researched process (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). There is a need, they urge, for more knowledge of the diversity and highly individualistic nature of work socialization processes as part of the description and explanation of work role development (Miller & Simon, 1979; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986; WOSY International Research Group, 1989a, 1989b). This leads to the first hypothesis under study as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *Over time, as young entry workers will increasingly become socialized, MOW values will demonstrate increased work centrality.*

Cross-cultural research on the subject of work continues to be relatively limited and is rarely longitudinally based. In one cross-cultural study of the psychology of work values,

Erez (1987) compared goal acceptance between students from the U.S.A., Israeli-urban, and Israeli-kibbutz (rural-communal) backgrounds. She found a weakly moderate effect of cultural values on goal-setting strategies, concluding that culture moderates the relation between goal-setting conditions and performance (Erez, 1987). Unfortunately, the study does not comprehensively examine the relative differences between the age cohorts. Further, it is not longitudinal and is limited to only two countries (Israel and the U.S.). While simulations may be insightful, we take the position that the world of work is both dynamic and multi-faceted, and cannot be adequately reproduced in a laboratory setting.

Culturally specific work values of youth have many practical implications both for their own careers, and for the labor market. The work environment, which includes the nature of the technology and social organization, also influences their work values (Kanungo, 1982). Technological change, for example, may affect one’s alienation, and this state may even cause deviant behavior at the work place. The entrance of career starters to the world of work constitutes a special stage within their life-span development (Harpaz, 1987; Lorence & Mortimer, 1985; Van der Velde, 1998). Young workers have a culturally unique perception of the MOW that determines and is related to their expectations, job satisfaction, motivation, productivity, etc. Their employers must take this perception into consideration, and therefore consider the impact of their decisions on young workers’ MOW. Bewayo (1986), for example, suggested that companies’ strategies for attracting first time job seekers should be more complex and emphasize not only compensation but also the self-actualization potential of the job in question (Bewayo, 1986). The importance of the cultural dimension to youth socialization of work provides the following two hypotheses in this study:

Hypothesis 2: *MOW values among young entry workers will be markedly different between various national cultures.*

Hypothesis 3: *Young entry workers will socialize MOW values at different rates in different cultures, providing notable different longitudinal affects among various national cultures.*

At the individual level, Social Exchange theory is useful for understanding the perspective of young workers. It views work socialization as a cumulative process involving dynamic interaction among the workers as social actors and their social environment: family, peer groups, employers, work team, etc. (Blau, 1964). Young workers enter the world of work with a MOW that reflects their previous stage of socialization and values. According to theories of socialization and social learning, the formation of work values in children and adults constitutes part of an intergenerational transmission of values (Krau, 1989). In this process the younger generation is exposed to the economic behavior, experience, and values of their parents, or significant others,

and of their schooling. Hence, children's values, including work values, will generally be similar to those of adults in that particular society. Miller and Simon (1979) concluded that despite some differences, the majority of people, regardless of age, share similar values as to what is desirable or important in work. Our research was designed to investigate both the processes and the time of emergence for MOW values among youth. By comparing these values cross-culturally, we hope to understand to what extent they represent culturally specific or universal norms. Although sub-national and regional cultural differences continue to play a role in our understanding of organizations, national cultures have been shown as an effective unit of analysis. Nation-states share a common history as well as educational, administrative, military, judicial, political, and social structure.

Hofstede's (1980) comprehensive study contributed significantly towards the establishment of an empirically based cultural terminology. According to Hofstede's (1980) paradigm, national cultural characteristics may be classified under four dimensions, individualism vs. collectivism, large or small power distance, strong or weak uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity.³

Hofstede (1980) identifies two dimensions, individualism vs. collectivism, and large or small power distance, as being most relevant to the dimension of leadership. He claims they are useful for understanding obligation, group identity, and leadership styles, particularly from the organizational level. The individualism vs. collectivism dimension has proven useful for the study of achievement motivation and we utilize it in this study (Sagie & Elizur, 1996).

Uncertainty avoidance examines risk taking. It is meant to characterize how a society deals with the uncertainty of the future. Societies weak in uncertainty avoidance will take each day as it comes, be more inclined to take risks, feel relatively secure, and will not work as hard as "strong uncertainty avoidance" societies (Hofstede, 1980). Weak uncertainty avoidance indicates the willingness to take risks. The outcomes of work related willingness to take risks should be observable after the activity—in later stages of career activity, once the performance itself has been evaluated (Sagie & Elizur, 1996). This leads to the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: *Young entry workers from national cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance will begin their working career with less work centrality than those from high uncertainty avoidance cultures.*

Hypothesis 5: *Over time, young entry workers from national cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance will demon-*

strate increased work centrality at later stages of their careers than those entry workers from strong uncertainty avoidance national cultures.

Hofstede (1980) points out that social roles are culturally arbitrary constructions. Some societies minimize arbitrary gender-role distinctions, while others accentuate them. Societies that do the latter normatively assign work and career to the domain of the male, and are ascribed as having a high masculine dimension. Feminine values include more service oriented and caring roles, less central to work identity. We predicted that countries with more feminine values would demonstrate less and more latently developed work centrality; while those high in masculinity would exhibit more, earlier work centrality. This hypothesis is stated as follows:

Hypothesis 6: *Young entry workers from national cultures high in masculinity will begin their working career with more work centrality than those from national cultures high in femininity.*

Individualism–collectivism is a dimension that examines how close an individual's ties are to his/her community. In highly individualistic countries these ties are relatively loose, with a focus on individual merit, action, and interest. In highly collectivist national cultures, individuals look after an extended network or clan, and are more willing to subsume their own interests to the needs of the collective. These societies are more tightly integrated, and individuals are more embedded in their respective groups (Granovetter, 1985). In such societies, there is a stronger sense of personal obligation, and we expected increased work centrality. Limited empirical data support this hypothesis: Japan, a highly collectivist nation, was found to have very high work centrality among its general working population, while England and Germany which are individualistic countries demonstrated relatively low work centrality (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). Stated as a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: *Young entry workers from national cultures high in collectivism will begin their working career with a higher work centrality than those from national cultures high in individualism.*

2. Method

The Work Socialization of Youth (WOSY) research used a longitudinal design to follow two target groups of youth from the beginning of their working career until 2 years later. Original members of the WOSY research team are represented in this new data analysis. There is no data available in the present study regarding work experience prior to entering into regular employment (i.e., part time youth work). Nevertheless, in Europe, unlike the U.S., this practice is less

³ Countries high in power distance may inculcate autocratic work attitudes at all levels of society. For technical reasons, we elected not to explore the relationship in this study. Future research, however, may benefit from its inclusion.

prevalent. Hence, the focus of the WOSY project was on full time career starters.

2.1. *Samples, procedures, and instrumentation*

Eight countries were selected for a spread of cultural differences as indicated by Hofstede's (1980) measures and included: Belgium (Flanders only), France, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Italy was chosen as country high in masculinity, and The Netherlands as being low. Spain and Portugal were chosen as high in uncertainty avoidance, with the U.K. and The Netherlands low. Finally, the U.K. was chosen to represent a country high in individualism, while Spain and Portugal low. Israel was utilized as a non-European country for comparative purposes. It is high in uncertainty avoidance, and moderate in individualism and masculinity. France was also included, but insufficient sample size disallowed further comprehensive analysis. With the inclusion of Belgium, our study consisted of counties located in all four quadrants of Hofstede's (1980) classic masculinity–femininity by uncertainty—avoidance plot. Each participating country recruited respondents from at least 20 organizations that had 20 or more employees. Although geographical representation within countries was not specified, with the exception of Belgium (Flanders only) the samples were more or less geographically diverse.

Within each participating country, two occupational panels of career starters, were selected: (1) end-users of office information technology, and (2) machine operatives.

2.1.1. *End-users of office information technology*

This group was comprised of youth beginning employment in office automation, and their jobs were mainly concerned with data handling and processing. The group included job titles such as word processor operators, typists', micro or mini computer operators, clerks, and other data processing and office machine operators. Note that it excluded software writers and computer science personnel, and most of the job incumbents were female.

2.1.2. *Machine operatives in production and manufacturing*

This group primarily worked with machines, and included job titles such as die casting machine operatives, machine molders, lathe and milling machine operatives, machine core makers, machine tool fitter-assemblers, welders and flame-cutter operators. Job incumbents in this category were more likely to be males.

WOSY's project was to include occupations with good opportunities which have historically employed many youth, but where unemployment remains one career possibility for some members of each panel. The second objective was to include occupations that were likely to emphasize either the "data" or "things" dimensions of the Functional Job Analysis (FJA) categories in order to provide a link between our research and prior studies of youth, and to improve the

generalizability of our study's findings. The third objective was to include two occupational panels with varying gender compositions acknowledging the gender-based nature of occupations and labor markets in the countries studied. Therefore, the study's measures reflect gender-related features in the work environment and work processes, which better characterize the wider occupational structures in the eight countries. The samples were not initially intended to be representative of either national or regional labor forces, but to reflect the typical gender composition of particular occupations in the participating countries. In addition, both occupational categories were standardized in all countries in terms of jobs that could be included or should be excluded (WOSY International Research Group, 1989a). Respondent selection was made by either contacting training schools for the names, addresses, and work location of individuals meeting our selection criteria, or by contacting employers for the same information. Participant selection was made by the project researchers using information gathered from these sources. In addition to the occupational and gender sample selection criteria mentioned above, several other criteria were used to standardize subject selection in the eight countries. All respondents were between 17 and 22 years of age at the beginning of the study. The respondents had been employed for 3–9 months at the beginning of the study, which coincides with the common probationary period in Europe. This criterion is consistent with industrial psychology research that indicates that such a period is necessary for behaviors, preferences and performance to stabilize in jobs like those included in this study (Katz, 1982; Schmitt & Schneider, 1983). Such stabilization of behavior is necessary to improve the internal validity of our research.

The interview schedule was developed through a series of pilot studies conducted in each country (WOSY International Research Group, 1989a, 1989b). The subjects in the pilot studies met all of the criteria as the main study subjects. In the pilot studies, the selected questions and scales were evaluated with respect to their applicability for the population in question, their reliability, and the four aspects of equivalence of central concern. Measurement and psychological equivalence were established by using measures of some constructs (work centrality and work values) drawn from a previous comparative study conducted in eight countries (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). Many of those countries and the same researchers were involved in both the previous and the current (WOSY) study. Responses to these questions and scales from the pilot studies were subjected to statistical analysis including item and factor analysis in all countries. A comparison of these results with each other and with the Meaning of Working Study findings (MOW-International Research Team, 1987) indicated substantial similarity. Similar procedures were also used on all questions in the preliminary schedule. This procedure also provided some evidence of the construct validity of the measures that were retained in the final schedule.

Finally, the linguistic equivalence of our measures was established through the use of translation-back-translation procedures by employing individuals who were fluent in both the language of that country and English. The method used was not a mechanical back translation procedure of first having one person translate from English to the native language, then another from the native language back to English. Rather, the procedure used was to discuss each question and the alternatives in a small group of persons fluent in both languages. Discussion occurred until agreement was reached as to the linguistic equivalence of the questions in both languages. These procedures for establishing equivalent measures were used in all non-English-speaking countries. The final formulation of the instructions (general and per question) and the sequence of the questions were standardized, as were interviewing techniques and procedural aspects such as the letters or phone appointment methods, anonymity, and feedback procedures.

Interviewers were trained in appropriate questioning techniques for obtaining information for each question and in standardized techniques for explaining the question to respondents. Interviews were conducted in the home of the subject or in some other convenient place. The final interview schedule required about 40 min to complete. Space limitations do not allow inclusion of the questionnaire, however interested readers may refer to [MOW-International Research Team \(1987\)](#), or [Whitely, Peiro, and Sarchielli \(1992\)](#) for its full description.

2.2. Data collection

Three data waves were collected in this study through the international WOSY research project ([WOSY International Research Group, 1989a, 1989b](#)). The first was 9–12 months after respondents entered the work force, in 1989, the second, 1 year after initial employment (1990), and the third was collected after 2 years of full employment (1991). The initial sample (at time one) in each country

consisted of about 300–400 individuals in both occupational categories. [Table 1](#) depicts the sample size at each data collection point.

Overall, 58.5% of the sample population survived at time three, office technology end-users surviving with a rate of 60.7%, and machine operators 56.1%. The panel consisted of 94% men machine operators (6% women) and 68% women office technology end-users (32% men). The total sample consisted of 60% males and 40% females. The final sample size, after the third interviewing point, were: Belgium 202, France 19, England 304, Israel 188, Italy 234, The Netherlands 162, Portugal 110, and Spain 272, totaling 1,491 participants. Total sample's mean age was 20.6 years, ranging from 18 to 23 years old. The analysis conducted in this paper focuses on the same individuals that prevailed over the 3-year study duration period (three measurement points) early in their working careers.

2.3. Measurement

The MOW was conceptualized in terms of three major domains: centrality of work as a life role, societal norms about working, and work goals ([MOW-International Research Team, 1987](#)). Descriptions of each MOW domain and the resulting measurement scales follow.

2.3.1. Centrality of work as a life role

Two measures were used to construct the work centrality index. The first was an *absolute* measure (Likert-type scale) that indicated the importance of work, from 1 (low) to 7 (high). The second was a *relative* measure for which respondents had to assign up to a total of 100 points to the following areas of their lives: leisure, community, work, religion, and family.

2.3.2. Societal norms about working

Respondents evaluated a set of normative statements about work, both in terms of what one should expect from working, or “*entitlements*” (i.e., if a worker's skills become

Table 1
Samples distributions by occupation and sex (at time three)

Country	Time one		Time two		Time three				Total
	Office technology	Machine operators	Office technology	Machine operators	Office technology		Machine operators		
					Male	Female	Male	Female	
Belgium	195	188	163	123	31	72	99	–	202
England	211	203	178	165	57	100	135	12	304
France	27	107	8	62	–	8	11	–	19
Israel	182	165	133	125	13	76	93	8	190
Italy	175	109	159	96	64	83	87	–	234
Spain	242	174	178	121	42	122	111	–	275
The Netherlands	128	134	97	121	52	28	78	3	161
Portugal	202	201	119	130	17	50	42	5	114
Total sample	1,345	1,281	1,035	943	276	539	531	28	1,499

outdated, his/her employer should be responsible for retraining), and what one should expect to contribute through working, or *obligations* i.e., “It is the duty of every able-bodied citizen to contribute to society by working.” Respondents rated each of such 10 normative statements from 1 (disagree) to 4 (agree).

2.3.3. Work goals

Respondents ranked 11 goals or aspects of work according to their importance: opportunity to learn, interpersonal relations, possibility of promotion, working hours, variety, interesting work, job security, match between job and abilities, pay, working conditions, and autonomy.

As indicated above, responses to the MOW surveys were collected using a variety of methods. These included: (a) scoring items on a 1–7 Likert-scale, (b) scoring items on 1–4 Likert-scale, (c) an allocation of a 100 points among several items according to their importance, and (d) ranking items according to a given priority. A utilization of different measurement approaches is a unique characteristic of the MOW study; however, comparing relationships among all items becomes problematic. This is mainly apparent in our ability to create indices, moreover, to examine their reliability in the standard psychometric procedures. Consequently, in order to surmount this difficulty, an alternative procedure, that of Multi Dimensional Scaling (MDS), was employed. For the reader unfamiliar with this process, MDS is a scaling method that attempts to estimate the number of variables underlying an attribute or issue. It is based on the same mathematical models as factor analysis and may be used when it is not known which dimensions individuals are using in responding to a group of stimuli. Hence, it enables the researcher to determine the composition of those dimensions (Nunnally, 1978), determine the number of dimensions, and to obtain scale values for the stimuli on a selected set of dimensions (Ghiselli, Campbell, & Zedeck, 1981).

Analysis of the MDS output configurations resulted in a model comprising the six-factor pattern or dimensions of

“work centrality,” “entitlement norm,” “obligation norm,” “instrumental orientation,” “intrinsic orientation” and “interpersonal relations.” (Space limitations does not allow further elaboration here, more details regarding this procedure are available upon request from the authors.) Table 2 portrays the five MOW domains and their components, as well as the variables comprising the resulting six dimensions.

The analysis disclosed that the measurement model is solid, and that these variables or dimensions consistently represent the MOW constructs. Consequently, these dimensions serve as the main independent variables in the present study. The items composing each dimension are as follows:

1. *Work centrality*: (a) absolute significance of work in an individual's life, (b) relative importance of work in relation to other life areas.
2. *Societal norm: Entitlement*: (a) retraining responsibility, (b) opportunity to make suggestions at work, (c) a right to meaningful work, (d) entitlement to a job.
3. *Societal norm: Obligation*: (a) a responsibility to save for future, (b) reward for monotonous/ simplistic work, (c) value any work even if boring or unskilled.
4. *Extrinsic orientation* (extracted from work goals domain): (a) opportunity for promotion, (b) the significant role of money.
5. *Intrinsic orientation* (extracted from work goals domain): (a) variety, (b) interesting work that you really like, (c) a match between job requirements and individual's abilities, (d) a lot of autonomy.

Cultural indices for the selected countries were obtained from Hofstede's (1980) masculinity–femininity; uncertainty avoidance; and individualism–collectivism cross-national statistics. These dimensions have been extensively tested in multiple research studies. They were originally derived through questionnaire sampling primarily conducted on managers representing more than 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980, 1983). Employee values were shown to be quite stable

Table 2
Description of central MOW domains, their components and final MOW dimensions

Central MOW domains	Theoretical items/components (utilized in factor analysis)	Composition of final (empirical) MOW dimensions
(a) Centrality of work as a life role	(a1) Absolute importance of work, (a2) relative importance of work	Work centrality (a1, a2)
(b) Societal norms about working	(b1) Retraining responsibility, (b2) duty to work, (b3) educational preparation, (b4) saving responsibility, (b5) employee participation, (b6) worker contribution, (b7) meaningful work entitlement, (b8) monotony-pay acceptance, (b9) job providing responsibility, (b10) value any work	Entitlement norm (b1, b5, b7, b9), obligation norm (b4, b8, b10)
(c) Importance of work goals	(c1) Learning opportunity, (c2) interpersonal relations, (c3) promotion opportunity, (c4) convenient hours, (c5) variety, (c6) interesting work, (c7) job security, (c8) ability-job match, (c9) pay, (c10) working conditions, (c11) autonomy	Extrinsic orientation (c3, c9), intrinsic orientation (c5, c6, c8, c11)

between the different countries—values being a set of consistent desires believed to represent national character. Four values emerged accounting for 49% of the variance in country mean scores on 32 values and perceptions questions (Hofstede et al., 1990).

Masculinity–femininity questions examined whether or not a society minimizes or maximizes sex role divisions. Masculine values included showing off, performing, achieving something visible, making money, and “big is beautiful.” Feminine values included not showing off, putting relationships with people before money, quality of life and environmental concerns, helping others, and “small is beautiful.”

Uncertainty avoidance examined how society deals with the uncertainty of the future. Weak uncertainty avoidance cultures will be accepting of this uncertainty. They are relatively tolerant of different behaviors and opinions. Strong uncertainty avoidance cultures are characterized as having more anxiety, nervousness, and aggressiveness. Their institutions try to promote a secure environment and minimize risk, and tend to be more technological, “scientifically oriented,” legal, and expert oriented, they also have a greater tendency toward dogma and religion.

Individualism–collectivism measured the relationship between an individual to others. It examined the strength of ties between individuals and their community, family, and the collective. In highly collective national cultures, individuals are more concerned with being tightly integrated into their communities. In highly individualistic countries, individuals are more concerned with their own standing and discrete accomplishments (Hofstede, 1980).

2.4. Analysis

Outcomes of country level data for our sample as analyzed in Hofstede’s (1980) study, are presented in Fig. 2.

The scales in Fig. 2 show the countries that we have studied according to three of Hofstede’s measures: uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity, and collectivism. Italy is shown as having strong uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity, while The Netherlands is weak in uncertainty avoidance high in femininity. Israel is strong in uncertainty avoidance, but very near the border (mean) for masculinity–femininity. Thus, the countries we studied provide a range of differing scores.

For an understanding of the complex interrelationships among variables (especially as both ordinal-level and ratio-level variables were involved) the data were analyzed using the LISREL method (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1981). LISREL combines aspects of factor analysis and multiple regression, and allows the simultaneous estimation of a measurement model to define unmeasured latent variables in terms of measured indicators, and a structural model to estimate the relationships among the latent variables. In the LISREL model, for each participating country every MOW index was considered as an unobserved latent variable. (Note: due to

the small sample size in France, it could not be analyzed individually but only in the analysis conducted for the combined national samples.) The two occupational groups were treated as a dummy variable in the model, with office technology end-users coded as zero, and machine operators as one.

3. Results

A LISREL analysis was conducted for each country (except France, due to its small sample size), as well as a model combining all countries. Each model tested the stability of our five dimensions or indices, across three time points, and the structural relationships between these five dimensions and work centrality. The stability test examined the relationships between the same variables across time. Each model included five latent variables (or indices): work centrality, entitlement norm, obligation norm, extrinsic orientation, and intrinsic orientation. In this section, we summarize the major findings for reasons of brevity, however, detailed analyses are available by request from the authors.

In every country, the stability parameters across the three measurement points (from times one to three) for the five MOW dimensions (dependent and independent variables) were all significant. This indicates that these variables did measure across time the concept intended to be measured (MOW), and that the reliability of the measurement was statistically significant across the three time periods.

3.1. Work centrality over time

A consistent pattern emerging from the data in every country is that of a relatively low contribution of the MOW variables to work centrality at the beginning of an individual’s work career. This ranged from 2% in The Netherlands to 11.5% in Spain. Another universal pattern consistent across all countries was the significant increase that occurred in the contribution of the MOW variables to the variance in work centrality between measurements at time one (9–12 months after starting first job) and time two (1 year later). Most notable are Portugal (27.3%), Belgium (25.6%), Spain (24.2%), and The Netherlands (23.6%). Lowest level increase was observed in Israel (10.6%). Thus, both Hypothesis 1, that predicted gradual socialization, and Hypothesis 2, that predicted a difference between cultures, were upheld.

3.2. MOW values for different countries

At the third measurement point (about 3 years after starting first job) we observed some marked differences among the countries. MOW variables assumed even greater importance in their explanation of work centrality for young workers in Portugal—an increase of 7% to a total of 41.6%, the highest of all countries, and in Italy—an increase of 10%

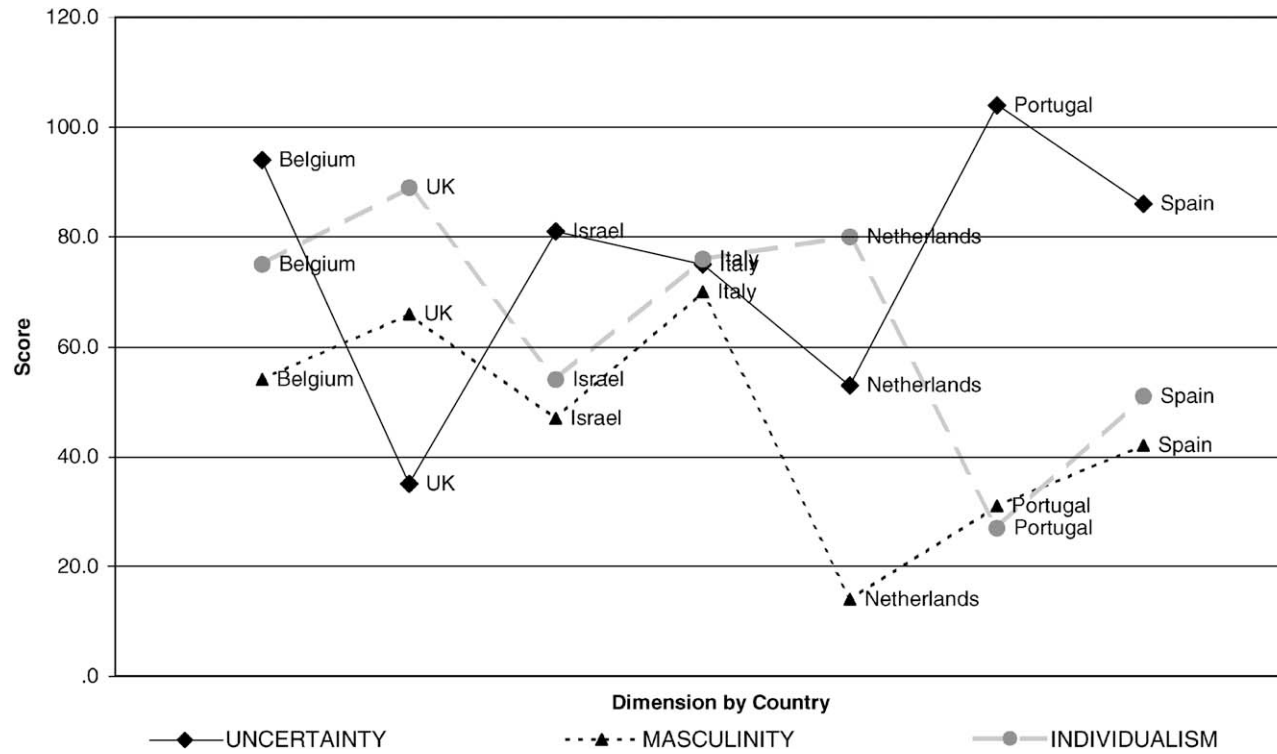


Fig. 2. Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity, individualism–collectivism. Countries examined in both studies.

to a total of 33.7%. Two countries demonstrated a sharp decline in the contribution of MOW variables to work centrality: The Netherlands—a fall of 13.8% from times two to three, and Spain, a fall of 9% from times two to three.

The differential longitudinal rates predicted by *Hypothesis 3*, were confirmed by the analysis. At the second time point, about 1 year later, there was a significant increase in the explained variance in work centrality. At the third time point, measured about 1 year after the second interview, the variance in work centrality further increased in three countries, fell slightly in three other countries, and fell significantly in The Netherlands and Spain. Other countries showed a relative stability between times two and three, with a very small decrease for Belgium and Israel (0.9% and 1.4%, respectively) and a slight increase for England (2.8%).

As the two occupational groups examined and compared in this study were nominal groups, they were treated as dummy variables in the LISREL analysis. Since office technology end-users served as the comparison category, its coefficients could not be shown in the LISREL model. Therefore, only those of machine operators in each country are exhibited in *Table 3*.

The model indicates that when the four independent variables extrinsic orientation, intrinsic orientation, obligation, and entitlement are controlled, machine operators had significantly higher work centrality rating than office technology end-users in about half of the observations. Most of the significant changes occurred between times one and two, except in Israel. In Belgium, only these significant differences were consistent across the three time points, while in England and Israel they were significant only at one time point (two and three, respectively). For times one and two, the countries that fail to show significant coefficients were weak in uncertainty avoidance (U.K., The Netherlands), with the exception of Israel. Israel plots out as not particularly strong in the region of uncertainty avoidance, and nearly neutral regarding the masculinity–femininity index. The overall emerging pattern for most countries is that of a relatively higher level of work centrality at time one, a drop in its levels at time two, and then an even greater decrease at time three. Deviation from this pattern can be observed for

The Netherlands, showing after the drop in work centrality between times one and two an increase at time three. Another difference can be seen for England as the only country having an increase in work centrality between times one and two, but then it becomes similar to the other countries (except for The Netherlands), and shows a decline at time three. Both deviations represent countries weak in uncertainty avoidance.

At time one, entitlement shows a negative non-significant relationship with work centrality. However, at time two, the relationship between these two variables becomes positive and significant. This suggests a causal effect, since this relationship is obtained when the changes across times are controlled for both independent and dependent variables. It means that in spite of a non-significant negative correlation at time one, when the changes across time are considered for these two variables, there is a positive and significant causal relation between these two variables. The same explanation can be applied to obligation and intrinsic orientation from times one to two. Extrinsic orientation has significant relations with work centrality at both times one and two. None of the four independent variables, however, have significant causal relations with work centrality from times two to three. At time three all independent variables except extrinsic orientation significantly affect work centrality.

Israel is used as the comparison category, for it is the only non-European country and it seems reasonable to compare it with the other European countries (it is also an approximate mid-point in the masculinity–femininity and individualism–collectivism scales). We found that all European countries in the study are categorically different from Israel in their work centrality responses: they all have a higher rating on it than Israel. The parameters were also comparable among themselves, since they were standardized. At time one, the parameters for The Netherlands on work centrality were larger than that for Italy. This means that in addition to both countries having a higher loading than Israel, The Netherlands is higher than Italy in its overall ratings of work centrality at time one, when the four independent variables are controlled. We also observed that Italy was higher than England, England higher than Spain, Spain higher than Belgium, and finally Belgium was higher than Portugal, at time one. *Hypothesis 4* predicted less work centrality from national cultures weak in uncertainly avoidance. The U.K. and The Netherlands were the two weakest countries with respect to uncertainty avoidance, and they showed fairly robust work centrality at time one. *Hypothesis 4* is not supported by the data. *Hypothesis 5* predicted that over time, national cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance would demonstrate increased work centrality, particularly at later stages of their careers. The data support the hypothesis, as at time three, The Netherlands and England showed the highest work centrality.

It is interesting to note that machine operators demonstrated almost universally higher levels of work centrality

Table 3
Work centrality coefficients of machine operators (LISREL loadings) in each country

	Time one	Time two	Time three
Belgium	0.165*	0.136*	0.070*
England	0.031	0.119*	0.034
Israel	−0.058	−0.044	0.083*
Italy	−0.037	0.113*	0.122*
The Netherlands	0.075	0.180*	0.188*
Portugal	0.210*	0.149*	0.061
Spain	0.096*	0.067*	0.019
All	0.028	0.161*	0.074*

than office workers. The model clearly indicates that when the four independent variables are controlled, machine operators had a higher work centrality rating than office technology end-users at all three times, but this relationship was not significant for work centrality at time one.

3.3. Work centrality and cultural masculinity–femininity

We also predicted that youth from countries high in masculinity would begin their careers with more work centrality than those from more feminine national cultures. We found that the U.K. and Italy demonstrate very strong centrality, dwarfed only by The Netherlands, which is uncharacteristically the most feminine country in the study. Belgium, another highly masculine country, also demonstrated high work centrality at time one, hence, [Hypothesis 6](#) is partially supported by the data.

Finally, we predicted that young entry workers from national cultures high in collectivism would begin their working careers with more work centrality than those from highly individualistic cultures. Portugal and Spain were both very high in collectivism. Portugal, the most collectivist country in the study, had the lowest work centrality. [Hypothesis 7](#) is not supported by the data.

4. Discussion

Because every society must derive its own unique solution to the balance of social welfare and the demand of the market, we expected considerable variation in terms of the process and the outcomes of work socialization among youth. We hypothesized that young workers would gradually become socialized into work over time, and that this process would occur differently, both regarding time and centrality, between different national cultures.

The analysis confirmed these hypotheses. The emerging general pattern in all countries was that the models usually explained a relatively small amount of the variance in work centrality at time one. The findings regarding the variance in work centrality may be associated with the reality shock that young workers face at the very early stages of their careers. Most people in non-managerial positions start with meaningless jobs requiring low-level skills that do not allow the fullest utilization of their abilities.

At the beginning of the individual's working career, MOW variables seemed less instrumental in explaining work centrality. Perhaps other variables such as the need for surviving the hardships, frustrations and challenges presented by the new job were stronger, and assumed greater importance in the person's life at that stage. Only once the turbulence of the initial stages in the young person's first job calmed down, and stabilization occurred, was a significant change, universal to all countries, observed. At this stage, about 1 year after starting first job, MOW variables such as intrinsic and extrinsic orientation, and obligation and

entitlement norms, became very important contributors to work centrality. This may indicate a universal pattern in the development of work centrality across countries. It appears that only some of the variance in work centrality is determined by variables prior to one's entry into the labor market (e.g., upbringing, values, personality, as well as other antecedent variables). The work environment provides an opportunity for the MOW variables to become important contributors to work centrality only after the initial stage (which may take about 1 year) in one's first job. If this assumption is valid, as evidenced by the data, then work centrality may be considered developmental in nature. It becomes important only after the individual has worked some time on their first job.

The only variable found to be significant regarding work centrality was extrinsic orientation, which demonstrated a decline for those on the job longer than 2 years. This finding highlights the importance of monetary and economic rewards at the initial employment stage, with an apparent growth in the importance of other aspects of the working environment with increased working experience. Intrinsic orientation and obligation increased in importance at time two, and obligation and entitlement norms were significant predictors of work centrality at time three. These variables, evolving around the notion of giving and contributing to the organization and society (obligation) vs. receiving various outcomes from the organization and society (entitlement), appeared to be balanced in their importance at this stage in the life of career starters. Individuals' perceptions of this exchange relationship appear to stabilize, and both aspects are recognized as contributors to work centrality at time three. Further, a very significant predictor of work centrality at time three was notably work centrality at time two. Once a high relatively work centrality was established at time two, it continued to maintain its high level at time three, as well.

From a cultural perspective, after the sharp increase in the explained variance of work centrality between times one and two, some differences were observed among the countries at time three, about 3 years after initial employment. A relative stability was observed in Belgium, Israel, and England. The variance in work centrality hardly changed in these countries, which may indicate that conditions in work environment of the groups studied did not change sufficiently to affect work centrality significantly. In contrast, we observe marked differences for the other countries. MOW variables continued to explain work centrality at time three even at a greater rate in Italy and Portugal. In these countries, conditions may have improved by their third year of employment, thus allowing MOW variables to further increase their explanatory power of work centrality over time. An opposite trend seemed to occur in The Netherlands and Spain. A significant drop was observed in the ability of the MOW variables to explain work centrality. In neither case, however, did it fall to the very low levels observed at time one. In these two countries, the work environment and job content apparently became less favorable to the young workers

during their third year compared with their second year. In these cases, the work environment may have negatively affected their work centrality.

Another consistent finding across all countries is the trend which emerged in the occupational groups analysis. In each country, the model indicated that when the independent variables were controlled, machine operators had a higher work centrality rating than office technology end-users. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that the machine operator category in all countries consisted mainly of males, while office workers in most countries included about 40% or more females in their samples. This factor may have contributed to lower ability of MOW variables to explain the variance in work centrality. Earlier studies also found men to have higher work centrality than women (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). In addition, the office jobs under study apparently included some tasks that did not seem significant to their occupants for providing long-term career opportunities (e.g., word processing, typing, teletyping, clerical work, etc.). On balance, even though machine operators were also engaged in entry level jobs, these jobs were perhaps perceived by their occupants to be more related to greater career opportunities, such as die casting, molding, lathing and milling, coremaking, tool fitting, and welding.

This study was unable to confirm a relationship between cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance and low in work centrality at the start of a career. The general population of England, our sample with the lowest measures of uncertainty avoidance, was shown to have low overall work centrality. Our study suggests that this cultural attribute is not a good indicator of *initial* values at entry (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). Longitudinally, however, a comparatively strong relationship was shown to emerge at later stages of a young person's career. Young workers in countries characterized as having cultures that "take each day as it comes" were shown to develop comparatively high levels of centrality, as they gradually immersed themselves into the working world.

We expected that countries with a strong national culture of masculinity would begin their working careers with more centrality. In these cultures, work is highly genderized, men are expected to occupy a role as provider, with women typically occupying service oriented careers, such as nursing, day care, and teaching. To a large extent, the data supported this view, with the exception of The Netherlands. The Netherlands continues to be in the forefront of de-genderization. Outside Scandinavia, The Netherlands was one of the first countries in the world to legislate paternal child-care leave (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999). While youth in masculine societies continue to demonstrate a high degree of work centrality, those from societies on the forefront of de-genderization, such as The Netherlands, may be successfully socializing new young workers in different ways. Interestingly, this is not the case with the general population of workers. As The Netherlands was found to be quite low on

work centrality as compared to others (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). This finding may also be the result of cultural changes that are working themselves through the contemporary cohort—that is, children may have different values regarding gender than their parents. Unfortunately, we were unable to test this proposition in our study.

Lastly, we expected that highly collectivist national cultures would demonstrate more early work centrality than individualistic cultures. We did not find this to be the case. Perhaps collectivist cultures require more time to indoctrinate youth into the working world. Alternatively, individualistic cultures may promote autonomy that leads to early work centrality. This would appear to be a fruitful area for future research.

It should be noted that a new population of entry level workers is currently transitioning to the work force. Considerable attention has recently been devoted to the so called "Generation X," children of the post WWII baby boom. Much of our knowledge is the result of polling and marketing research, suggesting that this generation is materialistic, pessimistic and cynical (Arnett, 2000). Regarding their attitudes towards work, two main factors are likely to provide considerable influence on how this new generation perceives the centrality of work. First there are the trends and characteristics of the generation itself, shaped by changing normative values, including those held by parents and opinion. The second consists of the economic environment and labor market characteristics during the period of initial labor market entry (Lowe & Krahn, 2000). A number of economic and labor market factors are common in the industrialized West, the result of globalization trends evident in liberal economies. These include increasing job competition, higher qualifications, and comparatively high levels of youth unemployment in the labor market.

Despite the widespread view that Generation X'ers are both cynical and materialistic, there is some evidence to suggest that most members have high expectations regarding success (Arnett, 2000). A Canadian study comparing young adults of 1985 with those of 1996 found a significant rise in expectations regarding job entitlement for the more recent cohort. However, most other work attitudes and occupational aspirations were found to be relatively constant (Lowe & Krahn, 2000). A British study comparing employment commitment between those born in 1958 with those born in 1970, found the more recent cohort to have increased commitment to the work ethic, but reduced commitment for those of both the highest and the lowest levels of education (Bynner & Parsons, 2000). Common to both the British and Canadian study was an increase in the commitment to work by young "Generation X" women, reflecting general changes and trends regarding gender in the workforce. In sum, the limited empirical research available suggests that intergenerational changes in the attitudes and values of work for the same age cohorts are actually quite modest.

In conclusion, the overall trend observed in the present study is that work centrality, as explained by the MOW

variables, is relatively slow to emerge. We also found that the work socialization processes vary considerably across youth in different countries. After an initial phase, work centrality showed relative stability in the second and third years of employment of career starters in most of the countries examined. Countries weak in uncertainty avoidance were shown to have increased work centrality, particularly at the later stages of their careers.

In this research we demonstrated how work centrality is subject to cultural variation. Understanding how youth are socialized into the working world provides a critical social policy tool. Further longitudinal study and international comparison are necessary to better understand these processes. In particular, further research examining work centrality and its implications on citizenship, productivity and human resource management represent a potentially fruitful area of study. Further, given that our findings suggest the importance of cultural variation, a better understanding of work socialization for youth is particularly important for newly emerging countries in Eastern Europe and developing countries. Environments that lack both institutional development and existing empirical research should provide an opportunity to develop important policy guidelines at a critical juncture.

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