PERSPECTIVES ON WORK ETHIC. AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

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Abstract:
In the last decades major changes have occurred in most European countries, in the structure of work and in the work environment of the companies. The composition of their workforce has changed (McMurray & Scott, 2013). Workers worldwide have become more mobile and distances and physical space are not anymore an obstacle in workforce mobility. Employees moving freely from a cultural space to another are carrying with them their home-values and the cultural settings that are influencing their way of working and behaving. In the last years researchers from different cultural spaces have analyzed the specificity of this influence upon work ethic. The paper will present a synthesis of these findings and will underline the cross-cultural approach and the influences upon the construction of Work Ethic.

Key words: work ethic, international human resources management, influences of ethnicity and cultural values upon ethic of work

JEL classification: F23, J24, J61, M12, M54

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity is an important issue in today's organizations and the dynamism of current world will lead continuously to multicultural organizations. Human resources specialists will need to give more attention to intercultural knowledge and mutual understanding of different needs and values of the employees, in a multicultural approach of Human Resources Management (HRM). The contribution of Hofstede (1980, 42) brought to the attention of management practitioners the connection between management and the cultural environment and the Strategic human resources management (SHRM) involves today "knowledge about a country's business culture and the ability to develop appropriate skills are a source of competitive advantage" (Hirt and Ortlieb, 2012). Further discussions related to globalization have lead to the development of international human resource management (IHRM) that emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural knowledge in global organizations.

The concept of "national responsiveness" is not a reality only for multinationals. It should also be a long-term goal for companies working with migrants, that must as well grasp the relevance of cultural differences in the work-environment.

The article will provide a narrative analysis of the studies that aimed to emphasize the connection between ethnicity, cultural values and the work ethic. Migration and the new "multiculti" profile of organizations will change the balance of debate on the field of convergence-divergence theory in HRM in the favor of divergence, meaning that the companies will need to have tailored measures for induction (and management) of human resources coming from other countries.

The article is describing the dilemma of the role played by the cultural background of employees and the connection between the values associated to the ethic of work and ethnicity. As well, is analyzing the mechanism of construction of work ethic, in a descriptive model that should be further developed and completed by additional research.

2. PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC AND CULTURE-DEPENDENT VALUES

Max Weber has developed the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) in 1904 and 1905 as a "multidimensional construct" (McHoskey, 1994) and stated that the capitalism development needs a

specific type of personality, based on certain beliefs and ideas. The protestant ethic "emphasizes characteristics such as hard work, soberness, frugality, sexual restraint and a constrained way of living life" (Bell, 1978). Weber's concept has influenced profoundly the theory of work ethic. According to Bozkurt et al. (2008, 743), "the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" was meant to deliver a response to the Marxist materialism.

From the writings of Weber, the complexity of the work ethic has changed, but his contribution known as the "Protestant work ethic" (PWE) continues to be marked as key factor in the success of capitalism in western European society (Van Ness et al., 2010).

An important further development of PWE was done by the contribution of Mirels and Garrett that have developed in 1971 a PWE scale that includes 19 items. According to Bozkurt (2008, 756), the specialists are recognizing the PWE scale of Mirels' and Garrett's as the most reliable instrument for measuring the PWE.

The scale was further intensively used by researchers in order to identify and compare the PWE items in different cultural spaces and to analyze the relationship of PWE and ethnic identity. Furnham (1993) had in focus 13 countries for analyzing and measuring the PWE specific items. The results are interesting and emphasize a connection between the degree of economic progress of the residence countries and PWE scores: "rich/developed tended to have lower scores than the poor/undeveloped countries" (Furnham et al. 1993).

The results are corresponding with the opinions of Daniel Bell (1978), cited by Bozkurt (2008, 750), that mentioned that "the Protestant Ethic was eroded before the 1960s, being undetermined by capitalism itself and being replaced by a reliance on hedonism as a prevailing value of our age". Bell was a visionary that understood that the work of ethic was diversified by a hedonistic motivation: the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification as way of life. Already since 1979, Beit-Hallami has concluded that the PWE scores reflect "elements of social and cultural background" (Bozkurt, 2008, 754).

Following the synthesis made by Bozkurt, we have depicted in table no. 1 a general descriptive framework that shows the differences of work ethic perception, according to the cultural space of respondents.

Table no. 1. Findings related to PWE values, correlated with the cultural space

Comparative studies	Lower values of PWE	Higher values of PWE
Heaven, 1980	American respondents	white English-speaking South Africans
Furnham and Muhiudeen, 1984	British	Malaysian
Furnham and Rajamanickam, 1992	British people	Indian people
Ali et al., 1995	Canadians	Americans
Baguma and Furnham, 1993	Britons	Ugandans
Niles, 1994, 1999	Australian students	Sri Lankan students
Furnham et. Al., 1993	British, Germans, New Zealanders	Indians, South Africans, people from Zimbabwe
Tand et al., 2003	Employees from the United States and the United Kindgdom	Chinese employees in Taiwan

The studies presented above show slight differences in PWE of respondents from different countries, confirming the opinion of Dell: respondents from developed countries are balancing the

orientation to hard work with appreciation of self-gratification and other hedonist values. As general conclusions, the students from less developed countries have a stronger commitment to the work ethic, according to PWE items.

There are limited studies about the PWE in Islamic countries, but the scores presented in existing researches, like many relatively less/late developed countries, are higher than Protestants and Catholics, contrary to Weber's thesis discussed in the theoretical framework. Arslan (2000, 2001) examined the work ethic characteristics of Protestant, Catholic and Muslim managers and found out that are differences between Muslims and other groups (Arsalan, cited by Bozkurt et al., 2008, 755). The Muslim managers showed the highest PWE endorsement, followed by the Protestant manager. We could assume that the level of economic development has more to do with endorsement of PWE than the religious beliefs. The cultural space is the one that in determining the general framework where the individual is formed, influencing the ethic of work and the values associated to the work commitment.

3. WORK ETHIC AND INDIVIDUAL ORIENTATION TO WORK

Ethic is defined as an internal set of moral codes and rationalities, based on written norms or by norms dictated by society (McDougle, 18). The work ethic is a term that sums up the secret recipe and combination of important values associated with the character and conscience of employees that are translated into a specific behavior that is beneficial to them and to the organization.

According to Van Ness (2010) the main question that remains without an answer is "why some people have more important work and are more conscientious than others."

In previous pages we have concluded, by analyzing the researches undertaken, that the cultural environment of employees is relevant for their work ethic orientation. The cultural values and values related to ethnicity are relevant, through orientation to hard work, empathy for other, sense of sacrifice or orientation to self-gratification.

According to Van Ness et al. (2010) additional values are associated with work ethic: integrity, sense of responsibility and emphasis of quality, discipline, sense of teamwork.

The work ethic is often defined by association with a number of other values: 'hard work and diligence', 'being reliable', 'having initiatives', 'pursuing new skills' according to the guide Work Ethics Professionals for Development (2012, 1). The work ethic concept is used by some authors (Woods, 2012) as work performance, being under the influence of personal issues, job suitability, motivation to succeed, working condition, job training and performance feedback. As well, Miller has in 2001 associated following values to ethic of work: 'great value on hard work', 'autonomy', 'fairness', 'wise and efficient use of time', 'delay of gratification' and the 'intrinsic value of work', mentioning that the "current conceptualizations tend to view work ethic as an attitudinal construct pertaining to work-oriented values" (Miller et al. 2001, 4).

The elements contributing to the work ethic could be figured in a conceptual model, a descriptive model based on qualitative assumptions about constructive elements of work ethic and their interdependence (figure no. 1).

The basic values related with work ethic are learned and interiorized during early family education and school education and are transformed in beliefs and intrinsic assumptions. The concept of work ethic is hard to explain, because it involves a hidden part (dependent on the consciousness of individuals, intrinsic motivations) and an observable part, at the level of behavior, as seen by others. Campbell and Zegwaard (2012: 1) have identified two parts involved in the ethical practice: the person and the collective that are negotiating positions in a specific context.
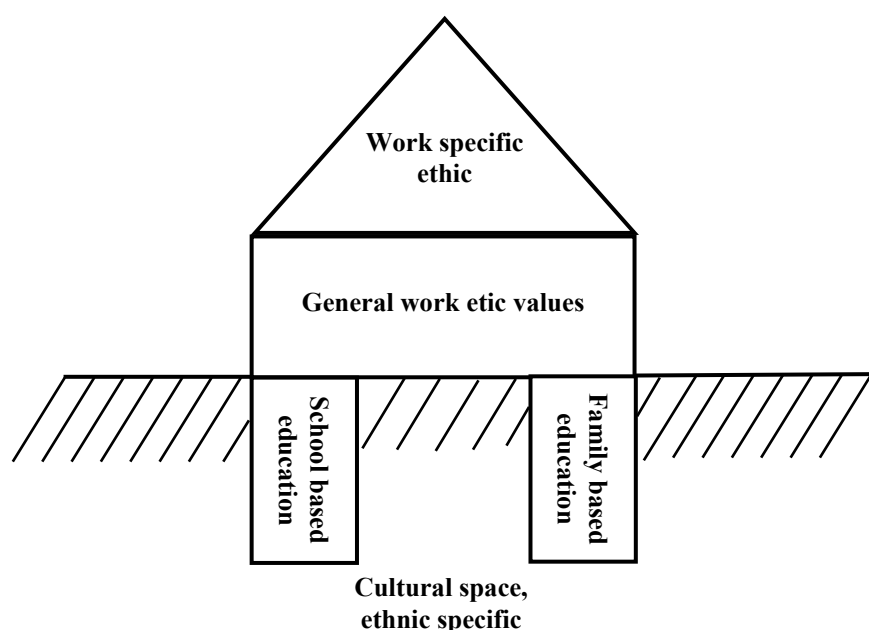
Figure no. 1. Conceptual model or work ethic

The work ethic, as pointed in the figure above, is determined by the general work ethic values and by job-related work ethic. The ethical values learned and practiced in the family and school education, are indirect influenced by the cultural space and type of ethnic specific values. Rizzardi (2005, 42, cited by Campbell and Zegwaard, 2012, 1) had pointed out the need to think of work ethics in different terms, depending on different types of occupations. They have brought as examples the lawyers and the values associated with this profession in the USA: character, competence, and commitment.

The theory of human resources dealt more with the ethic codes in business or with ethical practices at the workplace, and less with the work ethic. The ethical behavior is seen as a result of a confrontation between the ethical values of the individual and the work environment and the work context that leads to a chosen action. According to the above-mentioned model, in recruitment phase, the work ethic should be as well investigated, as other items relevant in the selection of new employees. Of course that the motivation and organizational culture and leadership can both optimize the work ethic, but the recruitment could optimize the quality of new selected human resources, the work ethic being dependent on the employees' own personal characteristics, values and needs.

According to Goldthorpe (cited by Mullins, 2010, 47) work ethic, called "orientation to work" could be instrumental, bureaucratic and solidaristic. Each type of individual orientation has some characteristics, centralized in the table below.

Table No. 2. Individual orientations to work

	Instrumental orientation	Bureaucratic orientation	Solidaristic orientation
Valuing work	Work is not a central life issue, but just a means to an end.	Work is a central life issue.	Work is associated with group activities; Work is more than just a means to an end.
Meaning of work	There is a calculative or economic involvement with work.	Sense of obligation to the work; Positive involvement in terms of a career structure.	There is an ego involvement with work groups rather than with the organisation itself.

Relation between work and non-work related activities	A clear distinction between work-related and non-work-related activities; Primary concern for economic interests as payment and security.	A close link between work-related and non-work-related Activities.	Non-work activities are linked to work Relationships.

Source: elaborated by the author, according to orientation to work theory of Gordthorpe (Mullins, 2010, 47).

Mullins has also structured the opinions of another important author (Bunting, cited by Mullins, 2010, 16). According to him, the ethic of work is different and dependent on the choices that the employees can make: "some people in poorly-paid jobs requiring long hours do not have any choice, for the majority there is a degree of choice in how hard they work. People make their own choices. If they want to work hard, or if they wish to opt out and live the good life, it is up to them".

4. CONCLUSIONS

We could conclude that the work ethic is like a solid construction at the adult age that is perceived in the work behavior. Has a solid basis consolidated through education, by the values achieved from early stages of work-life, developed with the support with the work ethic values delivered by family and school education, consolidated through early work experience. The fundament is given by cultural national identity and ethnic context that is influencing the development and formation of the future employee. Finally, the work ethic has two important components that define the work performance of employees: general work ethic and job-specific work ethic requirements.

The question that is still waiting for responses is that the work ethic is followed by companies in practice, or is just a general description used by companies for sending a message to their employees that is important to comply with high standards of honesty, to be correct, not to cheat on work, to work hard.

The ability of employees to interact with other co-workers and customers with different cultural background is a must (Kramar and Jawad, 2012, 64). Moreover, managers are travelling across countries and continents. People are mobile, in search of a better work place, forced to immerse in new cultures. More and more, "the ability to recognize and use cultural differences as a resource for learning and to design action in specific contexts" is described as being nowadays a core intercultural competence. In the next years the HRM theories will follow the challenges raised by the mobility of human resources and the context of multi cultural organizations. The HR function within the company should be adjusted to the intercultural profile of the employees, assuring in this way the proper emotional fit of new employees and the performance wanted by organizations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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