I. MICRO-LEVEL ISSUES

1. MOTIVATION AND VALUES
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Does autonomy affect the motivation of Indian and American managers differently? If it does, what psychological features can account for the variations in the two cultures? This chapter summarises empirical evidence that points towards cultural variations in covert personality systems. Specifically, Indians, owing to a distinct cultural background, hold unique conceptions of self, agency and social contexts, which in turn affect their motivation in the workplace. Some of the key assumptions prevalent in motivational research and theory originating from the West are questioned and new insights on business practices in the global workplace are offered.

Keywords: values, culture, Indian workforce, motivation, personality

MOTIVATION AND VALUES

Lokesh, the Global Delivery Head of a reputed multinational company in Bengaluru, India, is in a teleconference with Christopher, the Product Manager in Santa Clara, USA. Lokesh gets to the point right away, 'Hello Christopher, I am following up on my last e-mail. You have to send the updates on the product release to the rest of the team... I think you should go ahead and hire the services of the local free-lancer for the brochure as soon as possible. You should keep those ready by the end of the month for the review of our sales team...You must...' The conversation ends on a cordial note, but deep down Lokesh gets a sense that halfway through the conversation, he had lost Christopher. Christopher hung up the phone sounding not half as enthused as he was at the beginning of the call.

Christopher is on the line with Rahul, the Head of the Product Verification and Testing Team in Gurgaon, India. 'Hey Rahul, this is Chris... You might want to send the verification results to the rest of the team. If you prefer you may talk to Haritha about the change in the testing code... By the way, do you mind cc'ing me on the updates on the system automation test results...' Rahul is a little confused after Chris's jovial goodbye. What is Chris actually trying to tell him? Rahul is less clear whether Chris is expecting Rahul to do something, or is he just asking for his suggestions? Lost, Rahul feels less excited about this work.

Research evidence corroborates the aforementioned hypothetical case. Tripathi and Cervone (2010) conducted an online experiment to see the effects of *autonomy-supportive* versus *autonomy-suppressive* work contexts on work motivation. They solicited the voluntary participation of Indian versus American employees of Fortune 500 companies in an online unpaid task. Americans (self-reported ethnicity Caucasians) and Indians, residing in their home countries at the time of the study, were randomly assigned to complete the task under one of the two sets of instructions: one loaded with phrases such as 'should', 'should not'; the other emphasising personal choice and autonomy (e.g. 'if you want', 'you might', etc.). The behavioural dependent measure was the time spent on the task. Results indicated that the participants were willing to spend as much as 25 minutes in the voluntary online task. As predicted, however, the motivation for each cultural group derived uniquely from whether the instructions were phrased to suppress or support personal autonomy. Americans spent much more time in conditions that supported personal choice and autonomy than in the ones that suppressed it. In contrast, Indians spent more time on the task in conditions that suppressed autonomy than conditions that enhanced it.

A Phenomenon in Search of Explanations

What psychological mechanisms could potentially explain such cultural differences? Young psychologists, like me, can be both excited and perplexed by findings of such nature. Does difference reflect on how diverse cultural groups talk and interpret things? Is it about being accustomed to a certain conversational style? Or is it the plain old difference in manners and etiquette? How could subtle cues in language have such far-reaching effects on persistence on the task? In sum, are the differences only at the surface level, the overt level—in mannerisms, customs or etiquettes—or the covert level—in the cognitive, motivational and self systems of the cultural groups?

Recent advances in cultural psychology strongly favour the position that culture affects the covert personality systems, which in turn determine behaviours. The basic premise is that culture and psyche are 'mutually constitutive,' that is, the practices and meanings of culture, and the psychological processes and structures of members influence each other (Kitayama and Markus 1999; Markus and Kitayama 1991, Miller 2003; Misra and Gergen 1993; Shweder 1990). Therefore, our verbal scripts are not just that; these are enunciations of our mental scripts. People's modes of thinking, feeling and behaving are deeply rooted in the cultural and the social milieux.

To argue for the inter-linkages of culture and psyche is to stress the obvious. Wilhelm Wundt's monumental thesis on *Völkerpsychologie* (1900–1920) or *folk psychology* set the epistemological foundation of the discipline vis-à-vis the spirit of experimental inquiry (Jahoda and Krewer 1997). Systematic efforts to capture cultural variations in personality functioning flourished at the turn of the twentieth century (Segall, Lonner and Berry 1998), taking up forms like indigenous psychology (e.g. Sinha 1993, 1997, 1998). Indigenous and cross-cultural research raises doubts about the universal application of Western models of psychological functioning (e.g. Cohen and Kitayama 2007). For example, individuals in Western and Eastern cultures differ in their self-concepts. European-Americans construe the self as an independent source of personal needs, traits and desires; Asians, in contrast, experience an interdependent self that is inextricably intertwined with the needs and expectations of others (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1995). Westerners and Easterners also differ in styles of thinking. European-Americans think analytically and East Asians thinking holistically (Nisbett et al. 2001; Nisbett 2003). The concept of self-esteem is not universally found either (Heine and Buchtel 2009). The fundamental attribution error that is the tendency to overestimate the dispositional, rather than situational, causes of behaviour is predominantly a Western phenomenon (Miller 1984). In sum, there is enough evidence showing that the assumptions, phenomena and the so-called norms governing human behaviours are only as fundamental as the extant culture allows them to be.

I review and integrate findings that point towards the unique psychological characteristics of the Indians against the European-American. In particular, I discuss three aspects of the Indian psyche: the socially-embedded conception of the self, the sensitivity to contexts, and conjoint model of agency. Given the Indian cultural values of *dharma* and *karma*, these culturally-contingent qualities differently impact the workplace motivation of distinct cultural groups. Finally, I discuss the relevance of this integration for business managers operating in the modern global economy.

Psychological Constructs in the Indian Context

Much of the recent cross-cultural research has focused on constructs that cut across a diverse set of theoretical and behavioural domains; the prominent ones being the conceptions of the self, context and agency. In the Indian context, cross-cultural research provides evidence of: (i) a socially-embedded self; (ii) enhanced context sensitivity; and (iii) a conjoint model of agency.

Socially-embedded Self

A person's self-concept or mental representation of one's personal qualities and attributes determines a large part of his or her behaviour in day-to-day life (Markus and Wurf 1987). For example, a person who thinks he is shy tends to avoid situations in which he would embarrass himself; a person who thinks herself to be assertive seeks situations in which she can dominate.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that cultural variations in self-construal explain the differences in the cognition, motivation and emotions of diverse cultural groups. Westerners construe the self as an *independent* entity; the self is unique and separate from others. Easterners, on the other hand, construe the self as *interdependent*; the self is inextricably tied to the needs and expectations of others. The distinct self-construal accounts for differences in psychological functioning across cultures. For example, the interdependent self, prevalent in East Asian cultures, predicts better memory of information about the self than that about others (Conway, Wang, Hanyu and Haque 2005). Recent evidence from cultural neuroscience suggests that not only are the neural substrates of self-reference processing affected by sociocultural contexts, but it also works the other way around, that is, culture shapes and modifies the brain structure and function (Zhu and Han 2008).

How do Indians construe the self? Dhawan et al. (1995) found that in contrast to the Americans who focused on personal attributes and evaluations in describing the self, Indians conceived of the self as being embedded in social categories and interpersonal relationships. In this study, college students in India and America responded to the question 'Who am I?' in the Twenty Statements Test (TST; Kuhn and McPartland 1954). Results showed significant differences in the self-concept of students from the two cultures: Out of the 20 statements, Americans on an average made 65 per cent statements in self-evaluative terms, compared to only 34 per cent such statements made by Indians. Moreover, when the self-evaluative statements were scored on such sub-categories such as general self worth and psychological attributes, researchers found that the American responses, in contrast to Indians', loaded heavily on these sub-categories. Out of the total responses in each cultural group, while Americans used self-worth descriptors, and description of psychological attributes one-third of the time, Indians tended not to use these labels at all. Indians inclined towards describing themselves in social identity terms—role, group, caste, gender—significantly more than Americans did.

Such cultural variations owe to the distinct socialisation practices prevalent in the two cultures. Larson, Verma and Dworkin (2003) characterised Indian adolescence as a developmental stage 'without family disengagement'. Larson et

al. found, via experience sampling methods, that Indian adolescents reported feeling happier during time with their families, than Americans did. The pattern was reversed for time spent with friends—Indian adolescents were lower on positive affects with friends than American adolescents. Saraswathi and Ganapathy (2002) note that in contrast to India, American culture places a high priority on adolescents' development of self-reliance and fulfilment of each individual's distinct potentials. In another study, Larson et al. (2001) examined daily patterns of work and family life for a sample of middle-class men in northern India, again using the experience sampling method. Although men reported spending little time on family work per se, they reported substantial amounts of time with their children and thinking about their families. The home sphere elicited more favourable affects for these men than the work domain. In other words, Indian men were found to be happier when they were at home compared to when they were at the workplace.

In sum, conception of the self in the Indian setting is not limited to the individual but is derived from a web of social relationships, such as the bonding with family and the affiliations with community and creed. Alan Roland (1998: 8) termed it the familial self: 'By the familial self of Indians and Japanese, I mean a basic inner organisation that enables women and men to function well within the hierarchical intimacy relationships of the extended family, community, and other groups…. (The) experiential sense of self is of a "we-self" that is felt to be highly relational in different social contexts'.

Context Sensitivity

Indians are more context-sensitive than European-Americans. In an earlier work, Joan J. Miller (1984) demonstrated that in everyday social explanations, Indians filled in situational details to a much greater extent than Americans did.

Another contextual dimension is individualism–collectivism (Hofstede 1980, 1983; Triandis 1989). This dimension reflects an orientation towards one's own needs and impulses (individualism) or towards the needs and dictates of one's social groups such as families and communities (collectivism). East Asians are more collectivistic while North Americans and Europeans are individualistic. Sinha and Tripathi (1994) note that India occupies a curious position along the individualism–collectivism dimension. Hofstede (1980) predicted that India should score very low on his Individualism scale. The score for India was 48, which fell between 91 for the United States and 12 for Venezuela. Indian social psychologists argue for a 'coexistence of opposites' model, for the Indian psyche is defined by the contingencies of situational, interpersonal, and social contexts. In fact, Sinha and Tripathi found a

'mixed-orientation' among Indians in decision-making situations such as in work, concern for others, value of friendship, and the like. As hypothesised, 86.6 per cent of respondents showed mixed orientations, 12.2 per cent showed individualist orientations, and only 1.2 per cent showed collectivistic orientations (N=82). Thus, Sinha and Tripathi noted, 'In the Indian society, I/C (*individualism–collectivism*) act like figure and ground. Depending on the situation, one rises to form the figure while the other recedes into the background.' (1994: 324). Apparently, India offers a cultural setting where individualistic and collectivistic orientations are highly context-specific.

Sinha et al. (2001) found that the two tendencies are intricately linked in behavioural acts and implicit intentions. Self-report data from a mix of rural, semi-urban and urban samples showed that the preferred mode of functioning in 18 situations (e.g. marriage, job interview, voting, birth control measures, looking after the retired, paying the bill in the restaurant, etc.) showed that the predominant choice was a mix of the individualist–collectivistic orientations. For example, a large percentage of participants chose to not miss the interview for an attractive job offer, but arrange for the blood transfusion of a grieving friend from a relative. Likewise, a large percentage of participants agreed that a shopkeeper should make profits—an individualistic intention, without losing sight of a 'we-feeling' with customers—a collectivistic behaviour.

In sum, akin to many East Asian cultural groups (e.g. Nisbett 2003), Indian thinking is contextual, or holistic, in nature, rather than analytic. Holistic thinkers interpret and understand events within the larger framework of situational contingencies. Persons, viewed through the holistic lens, do not comprise a limited set of dispositional qualities. Rather, they are part of a larger reality.

Conjoint Model of Agency

Models of agency reflect descriptive, prescriptive and normative frameworks of how and why people act (e.g. Markus and Kitayama 2003; Miller 2003). Derived from the respective philosophical–ideological base, the model of agency prevalent in European-American contexts is different from that in India. The Western model is disjoint in nature, that is, it prescribes that 'actions are freely chosen, contingent on one's own preferences, goals, intentions, motives'; the model of agency in Indian cultural contexts is conjoint, according to which, 'actions are responsive to obligations and expectations of others, roles, and situations; preferences, goals, and intentions are interpersonally anchored' (Markus and Kitayma 2003: 7).

In a series of experimental studies, Krishna Savani and colleagues have demonstrated how the conjoint model of agency influences the expression and experience of choice. Savani, Markus and Conner (2008) drew upon the conceptual distinction between *preference* and *choice*. Preference represents a person's subjective evaluation of an object; choice, in contrast, is the overt act, it is a purposeful behaviour of choosing among multiple alternatives. The general assumption is that one's overt choices are guided by one's latent preferences. Savani et al. demonstrated that this assumption is unique to western cultural contexts. Indians, to a very great extent circumvent their personal preferences to meet the expectations of close others. Among Indians, choice does not necessarily follow from personal preference.

Savani et al. (2008) experimentally demonstrated that in the Indian contexts, people were slower to make choices, less likely to choose according to their personal preferences, and less motivated to express their preferences in their choices. For example, in one study (Savani et al. 2008, study 6), the experimenter 'usurped' the object the participant had chosen and replaced it with another. When asked to self-report their subjective liking for the replaced versus the chosen object, the American participants evaluated the replaced object less favourably than the freely chosen one. Indians found the replaced object just as good. Moreover, Americans found an object selected by the experimenter much less attractive when they were told by the experimenter, 'Here, I choose this for you' versus when they were told, 'please choose for yourself' (Savani et al., study 7). Indians, on the other hand, did not vary their judgements as a function of experimenter versus personal choice. Indians, owing to the conjoint model of agency, did not find it psychologically disconcerting when the choice was made by the experimenter. The decision made by close others or by persons in authority is willingly acceptable.

These findings offer viable explanations for the cultural differences found in Tripathi and Cervone (2010). Indians worked far longer in a task that suppressed autonomy. Aligning one's preferences to the expectations of others—rather than augmenting one's autonomy and personal choice—optimally motivated Indians.

In yet another study, Savani, Morris and Naidu (2012) showed that Indians, but not Americans, accommodate their personal choices to fit with the expectations of authority figures. For example, when primed with an authority figure, such as the father, Indian female students became more conservative in their dress choice than did Americans (Savani, Morris and Naidu 2012, study 1). Further, priming the Indian students with an authority figure, such as a project manager, shifted the choice of Indian students towards more technical courses but did not shift the choice of American students. The findings suggest

that acting according to social mandates—the conjoint model of agency—is more viable in the Indian culture than in western contexts.

Taken together, research evidence from cultural psychology suggests that Indian culture emphasises an interdependent construal of the self, sensitivity to contexts and a conjoint model of agency. These individual characteristics both germinate from and sustain some of the key cultural values in the Indian cultural context.

Indian Socio-cultural Context

Modern India seems to encompass what Hermann Ebbinghaus (1908) famously said for Psychology, 'a long past but only a short history'. Compared to most European-American nations, India is young as a liberal democracy and as a free-market economy. Nevertheless, the scriptures and treatises namely the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Ramayana and Mahabharata, are more than two-and-half millennia old. These resources prominently surface in contemporary public and academic discourses. For example, economist Amartya Sen draws upon the discourse between Krishna and Arjuna in the Bhagvad Gita to characterise the *Argumentative Indian* (Sen 2005). Political scientists (Nandy 1990; Kothari 2011) trace the roots of India's prevailing political practices to traditional customs and values. For example, consensus politics owes to the tradition of 'monistic pluralism in which infinite variety is admitted but no individual position is overstressed.' (Kothari 2011: 278). With regard to the psychological ethos of the nation, two cultural values are of particular interest: one is *Dharma* and the other is *Karma*.

Dharma

Dharma denotes the idea of moral duty. It implies right action, the code of conduct, and inherent character (Weightman and Pandey 1978). Dharma sets the implicit boundary of right and wrong in the personal and interpersonal domains of life.

In fact, dharma is a 'universal selfhood' (Paranjape 1998) because living as per the ideals of dharma unites the individual with his or her social, physical and spiritual worlds. The individual becomes a fully-functioning, mature entity in society by learning, imbibing and acting in accord with the dharma. Such development is psychologically adaptive and healthy for the individual. In Indian culture then, dharma is personally meaningful and rewarding:

Traditional India regards duty as emanating from one's nature—one can't help doing it—while the Western idea of duty requires a struggle against oneself, and the idea of "glad concurrence" is far less prominent in Western attitudes to duty than is the image of bitter medicine. (O'Flaherty and Derrett 1978: xix)

In contrast to the dharmic duty-bound tradition of India, Western culture is inspired by the Enlightenment-era Protestant ethics. According to the Protestant ethic, the individual's highest moral obligation is towards oneself, to pursue one's calling through industriousness, worldly austerity, integrity and hard work (Weber 1930/1904). In European-American contexts, therefore, this emphasis is on individual autonomy, independence and uniqueness.

Whereas dharma emphasises universal selfhood or inherent unity in the cosmos, *American Dream*—a manifestation of the Protestant ideology—emphasises uniqueness (Plaut and Markus 2005; Spence 1985). Each individual is an entity separate from every other and from the group, and as such is endowed with natural rights. Every person, regardless of family background or personal history, may reasonably seek success through actions and traits under their own control, and it is important to possess such a mindset. Boundaries, if any, can be challenged by personal grit and will power.

In contrast, in the Indian context, the boundary between personal aspirations and dharma is blurred. Dharma-bound action is embedded in the matrix of duties and interpersonal obligations that, unlike the American Dream, is implicitly binding upon the individual, and not a matter of personal choice.

Karma

The doctrine of karma suggests a natural and inevitable causal connection between actions and their consequences. All actions are necessarily followed by lawful and legitimate consequences in one's lifetime, or even after death. 'This implies the assumption of a cosmic moral order similar to what modern psychologists call the just world hypothesis' (Paranjpe 1996: 18).

The analogy to the just world, however, goes deeper than that. Unlike the conception of just world as an attributional bias or a delusion wherein the observer tries to rationalise worldly affairs with a naïve—occasionally mistaken—set of assumptions (e.g. Lerner 1980), the Gita recommends practical steps on how to circumvent the effects of undesirable action. As Paranjpe (1996: 18) elaborates:

> According to the Bhagvad Gita, the key to liberating oneself from the burden of the consequences of one's own past is to recognise that what ties one to the effects of one's action is the expectation of reward and the fear of punishment or other unpleasant consequences. The stronger the emotional attachment to the expected rewards, the greater the effects on one's behaviour of its consequences, desired or undesired. The Gita recommends, therefore, that one should cultivate an attitude of emotional detachment towards the results of one's actions. It is claimed that by cultivating increasingly detached attitudes one can continue to act so as to minimise the emotional impact of success and failure.

The law of karma not only governs folk conceptions of human thought and action, but also shapes the philosophical and scientific schools of thought. Scholars speculate that the undiluted authority of the law of karma precluded from the Indian philosophy debates about the nature of agency such as 'Free Will versus Determinism' and 'Plastic versus Autonomous Man' (Hollis 1977, discussed in Paranjpe 1998). These debates occupied the centre-stage in classical Western philosophy. '[T]here is a conspicuous absence of a parallel debate in India even among those Indian thinkers who hotly debated related issues such as causality over the centuries' (Paranjpe 1998: 300). Similarly, 'The problem of freedom of will has never been systematically discussed in the history of Indian philosophy' (Bhattacharya 1967: 315).

In sum, the basic assumptions that underlie the folk theories and scholarly understanding of human nature are fundamentally different in the Indian versus the European-American contexts. Whereas the average Indian is bound— and liberated—by the laws of dharma and karma, the average American is encouraged to go unfettered in a personal quest of self-identity. While Indian culture respects fulfilling interpersonal obligations and social role expectations, the European-American values independence, autonomy, and personal choice. Indian culture places a premium on obedience and deference to authority. American culture finds this disconcerting. These cultural variations in basic psychological processes raise doubts about the presumed universality of some of the prevailing concepts and theories of work motivation.

Implications for Work Motivation Research and Practice

Work motivation is described as the psychological processes that direct, energise and maintain action towards a job, task, role or project (Campbell and

Pritchard 1976; Kanfer 1990). The construct has been of more than academic interest: from the famous Hawthorne Plant to modern-day corporate offices, academicians and managers have been looking for the basic determinants as well as ingenious drivers of work motivation.

Models of work motivation that commonly guide this search have evolved out of Western industrialised nations. These are rooted in the Western conception of the self as an independent, autonomous entity. This conception tilts the axis of work motivation theories, concepts and measures in favour of the European and North American workforce. In an era in which workforces are increasingly multinational (Guthridge and Komm 2008), the cross-cultural applicability of these models demands empirical scrutiny. To this end, the following research done in the Indian context provides empirical evidence on cultural variations in achievement motivation and autonomy-supportive work environments.

Achievement Motivation

Why do people approach success but avoid failure? McClelland (1961) focused on cultural variations in achievement motivation. However, most prior work assumed a unidimensional nature of achievement motivation, that is, cultures were presumed to be high or low in the aggregate achievement motive. Tripathi and Cervone (2008) posited that difference between cultures is qualitative, not merely quantitative. It is inadequate, therefore, to ask whether persons of different cultural backgrounds are *more or less motivated* to work or possess *higher or lower goals*. Rather, they may strive for success for different reasons.

They found that Indian and American corporate professionals, despite being equivalent on multiple demographic indicators as well as on the traditional indices of motivational strength measured via modified version of TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) measures, differed strikingly when achievement concerns were assessed via a novel measure they developed. This novel self-report measure was sensitive to variability in the role that others (e.g. co-workers, extended family, community members) play in motivation at the workplace. Items asked whether a given type of achievement-related concern was experienced with respect to a given type of person. Five types of interpersonal categories (self, immediate family, extended family, community members and co-workers) were crossed with eight classes of achievement-related concerns (happiness, pride, guilt, anxiety, expectations for career growth, competence, overall welfare and financial wellbeing), yielding 40 items. Sample items included, 'I want to excel in my job because it makes (me

feel a sense of pride in myself), (my immediate family members feel proud of me), (my extended family members feel proud of me), (my co-workers feel proud of me), (members of my community feel proud of me)' and 'I aspire for professional growth in my career because I am concerned about the financial wellbeing of (my own self), (my immediate family members), (my extended family members), (my community), (my company).'

Results indicated that Indians, far more than Americans did, grounded their sense of achievement motivation in concerns for others. For example, the nationalities did not differ in ratings of pride in *oneself*. Americans more strongly felt that they wished to excel at work because excellence makes them and immediate family members proud. Indians, however, more strongly indicated that they 'want to excel in my job' because excellence makes extended family members and members of the community 'feel proud of me.' The professional strivings among Indians reflected the socially-embedded and contextually sensitive conceptions of the self.

Another indigenous concept that serves to explain the motivational strivings in the Indian context is that of *karma yoga* (Mulla and Krishnan 2006) and *anaskti* (Pande and Naidu 1992). As reviewed earlier, these inter-related concepts are derived from the ancient Hindu scripture of Bhagvad Gita. *Asakti* means attachment; *an*asakti, then, refers to *de*tachment. *Anaskt* action is 'an intense, though disinterested action, performed with a spirit of dispassion, without nurturing concerns about success or failure, loss or gain, likes or dislikes' (Pande and Naidu 1992: 91). Pande and Naidu empirically tested the idea that the belief in anaskti is related to lower levels of experienced stress and strain. They administered a standardised inventory of anaskti and distress among a professionally diverse sample. As predicted, they found that after controlling for the total number of stressful events faced by the person, those high on self-reported levels of anaskti were lower on experienced levels of distress. In other words, those who performed action with an attitude of equanimity towards success and failure were better equipped to deal with the stressors in life.

In sum, emerging research evidence suggests that the indigenous concepts derived from Indian culture provide new insights on work motivation theories. Western workplace practices highlight the value of focusing on concrete, well-specified personal objectives that are designed to enhance the individual's personal motive to succeed (e.g. Goal Theory, Locke and Latham 1990). Among Indian professionals, that very different conception of anaskt action, which deemphasises thoughts of personally successful endpoints, may be a pathway to success. This possibility is entirely unaddressed in Western psychological literature.

Empowerment and Autonomy-supportive Work Contexts

Robert et al. (2000) studied, via self-report survey measures, the concept of 'empowerment' among employees of a U.S.-based manufacturing company in multiple nations: U.S., Mexico, Poland and India. Unlike other nations, in the Indian sample, the relationship of empowerment with job satisfaction was negative; uniquely in India, higher empowerment was associated with lesser satisfaction. The researchers ascribed these results to Indian culture being hierarchical or vertical (Triandis 1998) in structure: directives from supervisors and top management are perceived favourably in the workplace. Individual empowerment resulted in a mismatch between cultural values and work practices, resulting in negative psychological consequences for the employee.

As briefly discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Tripathi and Cervone (2010) experimentally examined the effects of autonomy support among Indian and American corporate professionals. They employed methods that were sensitive to culture-specific modes of thinking; sensitivity was achieved while nonetheless retaining a structure of testing that was understood in a similar manner across cultures, thereby enabling cross-cultural comparison. Participants performed a voluntary online task under conditions that were either autonomy-supportive or autonomy-suppressive. Researchers found that Americans spent more time on task in the autonomy-supportive condition, whereas Indians worked longer in the autonomy-suppressive condition. The results supported the argument that psychological processes are culturally constituted (Cohen and Kitayama 2007) but contradicted western theories of motivation (e.g. Ryan and Deci 2000). Americans and Indians did equally well on the task depending on whether autonomy was supported or suppressed.

Implications for the Workplace

Globalisation has altered the social landscape in diverse ways. Transnational immigration, international telecommunication and worldwide web networking are only some of the roots and offshoots of this change. Nowhere is the spirit of globalisation more evident than in the case of the modern-day workplace, which harnesses human capital from across the globe and thereby creates sizeable multicultural communities. In multinational corporations, persons from diverse cultures generally often experience a uniform work environment. Role structures, work climate, financial options, and even the physical layout of cubicles and conference rooms are kept as consistent as possible, worldwide. Uniformity in diversity appears to be an implicit motto.

Uniformity may bring costs. It may inadvertently breed an attitude of cultural blindness (e.g. Richeson and Nussbaum 2004) wherein managers and workers mask the culture-specific modes in favour of the norms, values and practices of the dominant culture. This is psychologically and interpersonally debilitating to the individual members, as well as counter-productive to the organisational goals. Conversely, unique cultural qualities of the workforce can be harnessed as strengths in global work organisations. For example, the popular press (e.g. Gladwell 2009; Power 2011) eulogises the grit and innovative styles of Indian business leaders in the global economy, alluding many of the business qualities to their culture of origin.

Some of the key findings discussed in the chapter come from the corporate world, a sample that comprises less than 20 per cent of Indian population. The obvious question is then about the generalisability of the findings to the rest of the country. It is left to empirical scrutiny, but my contention is that the corporate sample does offer a rather conservative test of the cultural differences. If the Indian corporate workforce exhibits cultural differences even after the post-liberalisation phase, one can imagine how deeply embedded Indian culture is. Differences might only get augmented, bringing to the fore many more 'emics' as the researchers go deeper inside Indian cultural society, in semi-urban towns and villages. Future research may also unravel, through sophisticated experimental designs, what aspect of the cultural past 'causally' explains work outcomes. For example, one might argue that the history of colonisation in India explains the debilitating effects of autonomy. Although the effects of the colonial work culture are less likely in India-based multinational companies (Tripathi and Cervone 2010), rigorous empirical tests would help provide more definitive answers.

In conclusion, understanding work motivation requires a proper consideration of the cultural contexts within which organisational behaviours unfold. Lokesh and Chris—or, for that matter, any other individuals in the multicultural workforce, say, Siu, Jemima or Wang—are all pieces of the puzzle that have to be meaningfully put together by a coherent and constructive perspective.

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