American and Australian Work Reward Preference Patterns

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Cross-national research has become increasingly important given the rising prominence of multinational firms. The efficacy of universal managerial practices has been found insufficient when applied over heterogeneous economic cultural and political environments. In fact, a study conducted by Negandhi and Robey (1977: p. 16) resulted in a new emphasis on identifying pertinent managerial practices specific to a national setting. More recently, however, Herbert and Popp (1982), studying cross-cultural commonality of psychological attributes of MBA students, found within-culture differences to be more significant than between-cultural differences.

Management theory has begun to stress the necessity of responding to employees as individuals. Central to these formulations is the recognition that employee work activity response is moderated by individual differences. Hackman (1977) has postulated motivational propensity to be a function of task characteristics. Job attributes are influenced by the person's need for growth to yield outcomes such as intrinsic motivation, quality of performance, job satisfaction, absenteeism and turnover.

Critically important to the consideration of motivation is the individual's preference for specific work-related rewards. Rand's (1977) research indicates that managers and foremen significantly misjudge predictions of how hourly workers value various work rewards. Incentives that motivated behaviours appropriate to the attainment of those incentives are person-specific and not susceptible to universal treatments (Luthans and Kreitner, 1975: p. 9).

**THE STUDY, INSTRUMENTS AND SUBJECTS**

The present study was undertaken to determine and compare work-related reward preferences of MBAs from Australia and a significantly different group of US MBAs. This study is an extension of earlier work by Popp and Herbert (1983a and 1983b) and Herbert, Popp and Davis (1979a and 1979b) which found no significant differences in work-related preferences between US and Australian MBA students and industrial employees. The specific hypothesis to be tested were that no cultural differences would be reflected in the work reward preference of the two MBA groups studied.

Blood’s (1973) Job Orientation Inventory (JOI), an ipsative self-report instrument which identifies the subject's relative preferences for 10 job work-related rewards, was used. An ipsative test differs from other instruments conceptually by requiring the subject to allocate a fixed pool of choices among given alternatives. One can express greater desire for one alternative only by diminishing the opportunities for choosing another. The JOI gives a preference rank ordering of the

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work-related rewards provided by one’s job. The items include opportunities for
growth, achievement, responsibility, support for hobbies or advocacy activities,
interpersonal relationships, provisions for family, job status, pay, job security, and
recognition from the community and friends.

The JOI was administered to fifty eight Australian male MBA candidates at an
urban Western Australian university. Their ages ranged from twenty-two to forty-nine
years, with an average of 31.1 and a standard deviation of 6.7 years.

The US sample consisted of thirty male MBA candidates at a small private urban
southwestern university. Their ages ranged from twenty-four to forty-nine, with an
average of 30.4 and a standard deviations of 6.5 years.

WORK REWARD PREFERENCES

For each of the MBA groups opportunity for growth was the most preferred work
reward. After growth each sample ranked achievement second and responsibility
third. These findings may not be surprising given the nature of the sample groups.
The reward-rankings of the diverse groups tested in the development of the JOI
showed highest preference for the opportunity for growth category in every group.
Achievement was also a category ranked high in preference for Blood’s test
groups (Blood, 1973: p.7).

Interestingly, the fourth most-preferred work reward for the Australians was hobb-
ies or avocational activities, which would indicate a concern for leisure-time
considerations. The private southwest MBA group ranked concern for family fourth
and hobbies fifth. The Australian MBA’s ranked family concerns sixth. This may in-
dicate a common recognition among the individuals in the sample that the family
can be supported in a multiplicity of ways, but the ability to realize personal values
in the context of the job can lead to the family support outcomes among others.

The social motive ranked fifth on the ten reward categories for Australians, and
sixth for the US private university MBAs, as inter-personal relationships develop-
ing from job contact. The power of the informal organization to shape and maintain
employee behaviour may be seen to derive from high valence from such a reward.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has strongly supported the hypothesis that no significant cultural,
regional or types of university differences would be found in work reward pre-
ferences. Confirmation of MBA work reward preference similarity between US
MBAs in different university environments and regions has also been supported.

The identification of preferred outcomes is an important part of the motivational
process. Results from such studies can assist managers in the understanding of
human behaviour in organizational settings. The ability to identify a general order-
ing of work rewards for an entire group gives the opportunity of developing
general incentive strategies plus modifying them for individual situations. Addition-
ally, these findings may permit more useful applications of some aspects of the ex-
pectancy theory of motivation.

These findings concerning curricula can be useful in the academic environment
and to potential employers of MBA students. The present study provides a better
understanding of work-related preferences of US and Australian MBAs. These
findings are compatible with Sirota and Greenwood’s (1971) work that indicated
that differences in occupational groups’ work goals across national boundaries
were minor and between occupations differences were far greater. Obviously care
should be exercised in applying these results through administrative approaches.
Admittedly no claim is made that the samples utilized are representative of all