

Work Values: A Comparison Study Between Russia and the United States

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Understanding what motivates people to work is a critical concern for management. In preparing students for a global economy, awareness of cultural differences is motivation is important. Researchers have studied the effect of cultural values and most recently generational cohorts in identifying motivational values. This study examines motivational work values of Russian and U.S. millennials/Generation Z. While the findings show that U.S. and Russians have become more similar in motivation than in earlier studies supporting research on generational cohorts, there are still important cultural differences separating the cohorts. Implications for business and suggestions for classroom use are given.

Keywords: work values, United States, Russia, culture, generational cohorts

INTRODUCTION

“The only real value is human work.” Anatole France

Numerous studies and a growing body of literature and research has focused on the construct of meaningful work and work values. Central to this construct is a subjective understanding of wellbeing and job satisfaction for most adults in society (Super & Sverko, 1995). In the 1980s the ‘Meaning of Work’ studies were published by a group of researchers from eight industrialized countries. The study and subsequent publications of the research looked at the meaning of work that adults attach to the most important role they had in their lives (MOW International Research Team, 1987). Work occupies most of our time and generates economic benefits that are essential. As John Dewey said in 1930, work is the means through which individuals connect with society and receive a variety of benefits in many forms (Dewey, 1930). “Nord and Brief (1990) found empirical evidence for work centrality in most industrialized countries” (Ardichvili, 2009, p. 220)

The primary endeavor for those of us in higher education is to prepare students for their future. We are charged with motivating students with an eye towards high levels of professionalism and personal self-realization. Future work for our students is “...a means of developing their abilities and talents in a particular sphere of professional activity, as a means of realizing themselves and recognition in society.” (Khlopova & Ozernikova, 2004, p. 87). As future workers and managers, they need to be aware of how to motivate and work with others.

It is clear from the research that work is important to all cultures. However, the forms and values of work can perhaps be different across cultures. Triandis (1972) identified several reasons for examining work across cultures for the purpose of seeing how cultures differ in their approach and handling different experiences in the workplace. Hofstede's (1984) research also began as a study of values in motivating employees. He found that individual needs and desires regarding work value may depend on the system of values that is learned within our culture. The values that we possess create a framework that determines our understanding of what is meaningful or acceptable. Values come out of a system that is based on interests. Our values exert influence on us and motivate us to achieve our goals for life and future work. For example, the United States has traditionally valued high levels of work commitment (Ciulla, 2001; Shor, 1991), viewing work as a moral obligation and valuing achievement. Are these values the same for all countries?

Many recent studies on work values have focused on generational cohort values rather than values of individual countries. These studies identify values based on the time frame when people were born, noticeably Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z. Generation X refers to people born between 1965 and 1980, millennials to those born between 1981 and 1995 and Generation Z to those born between 1996-2010 (Deloitte, 2019; Loria & Lew, 2018). Deloitte Global (2019) interviewed millennials from thirty-six countries and Generation Z from six countries to identify overall global trends in expectations and needs for work. Among their key findings were: millennials and Generation Z workers want business leaders to be proactive about making an impact on society; want good pay and positive culture as well as diversity and flexibility, and are not afraid to turn to "gig" economy as an alternative. Are these factors equally held by all in these generational groups or viewed differently across cultures? Are generational cohorts becoming stronger than cultural orientations? This paper explored these questions by comparing work values of Russia and U.S. millennials in 2008 to recent values of Russian and U.S. participants,

RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES

The past several decades has seen increased attention to working with Russia on many economic fronts. Friedman (2005) estimated that 100,000 U.S. firms were engaged in global business ventures that involve trillions of dollars. In 2018 a survey of Russian and U.S. participants found that 33% of the United States and 70% of the Russian participants anticipated working with a person from the other culture in the future (Uecker & Schmidt, 2018).

Schmidt and Uecker (2009) surveyed U.S. and Russian participants (Millennials) to identify what were the two most important factors in job motivation and happiness for them from a list of eight options (amount of money, stability of positions, quality of work, relationships with other employees, freedom at work, authority and responsibility at work, work conditions, and work life balance). They also asked participants to explain the reasons for their choices. In order of importance for U.S. participants the results were: work/life balance (48%), quality of work (36%); relationship with employees/co-workers (32%), amount of money (28%); security of position (24%); amount of freedom at work (20%); amount of responsibility and authority (16%); and work conditions (16%).

Russians participants (Millennials) completed the same survey. In order of importance their results were: security/stability of position (57%), amount of money they make (43%), balance of work/life (38%); work conditions (19%); quality of work (14%); amount of authority and responsibility (14%); amount of freedom at work (10%); and relationships with other employees/co-workers (5 %). These findings concur with Khakhulina's study (2008) on work and the system of life orientations in Russia, which found that "... the level of pay and having a guaranteed job represent the most important characteristics of their work." (p. 18)

This 2009 study shows more cultural differences between the countries than similarities from generational cohorts. Given a six point percentage range, motivations of Russians and U. S. millennials were similar only on two of the eight motivational values (work conditions and responsibility/authority at work). Both of these areas were not ranked high in importance of motivation.

However, since this initial study in 2009, the society and economies of both Russia and the United States have experienced challenges due to global market growth, volatility, and recently the worldwide

pandemic. Further, interaction between cultures/countries has been enhanced through technology. Given these changes are these cultural motivational choices still valid or are changes more similar to generational findings?

METHOD

In order to determine whether values and motivations have changed and if changes reflect cultural or generational cohorts, this study replicated the Schmidt and Uecker 2009 study. Participants (Millennials and Generation Z) were asked to identify the two most important factors for them in job motivation and happiness at work from the following categories: amount of money you make; security (stability) of your position; quality of work you do; relationships you have with employees/co-workers; amount of freedom given at work; amount of authority and responsibility you have; the work conditions; balance between work and family life. An option for other choices was given. Respondents were also asked to explain their choices. This study added one additional question to the original study which asked the participants to identify the two least important factors for them in terms of motivation and job happiness among this list and explain their reasons.

A total of 57 U.S. and 59 Russian participants between the ages of 18 to 27 and part of the millennial and Generation Z age groups completed the survey. The U.S. participants were from two Midwestern universities and the Russian participants were invited to complete the survey as a result of a posting on the CAER Facebook or as part of a class. The material was gathered fall of 2018.

RESULTS

The findings for U.S. respondents listed in order of importance were: work/life balance (37%), quality of work (33%), amount of money made (30%), relationships with other employees (28%), security/stability of position (21%), amount of freedom at work (19%), work conditions (19%), and amount of authority/responsibility (9%). The findings for Russian participants listed in order of importance were: amount of money made (66%), quality of work (27%), amount of freedom at work (25%), work/life balance (25%), security/stability of position (19%), work conditions (19%), amount of responsibility/authority at work (8%), and relationships with other employees (6%). (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
WORK VALUES AND ETHICS RESULTS: MOST IMPORTANT (IN PERCENTAGES)

Work Value/Ethic	US	Russia
The amount of money you can make	30	66
The security (stability) of your position	21	19
The quality of work you do:	33	27
The relationships you have with other employees	28	6
The amount of freedom you are given at work	19	25
The amount of authority and responsibility you have	9	8
The work conditions	19	19
The balance between family life and work demands	37	25

The findings for U.S. participants of the two least important items in job motivation and happiness listed in order of least importance were: amount of authority and responsibility (56%), amount of freedom at work (32%), amount of money made (30%), relationship with other employees (25%), security/stability of job (16%), work conditions (16%), work/life balance (14%), and quality of work (7%). The findings for Russian participants listed in order of least importance were: amount of authority and responsibility (56%),

relationships with other employees (36%), security/stability of job (25%), work/life balance (25%), amount of freedom at work (24%), work conditions (17%), quality of work (12%), and amount of money made (8%). (See Table 2).

TABLE 2
WORK VALUES AND ETHICS RESULTS: LEAST IMPORTANT (IN PERCENTAGES)

Work Value/Ethic	US	Russia
The amount of money you can make	30	8
The security (stability) of your position)	16	25
The quality of work you do:	7	12
The relationships you have with other employees	25	36
The amount of freedom you are given at work	32	24
The amount of authority and responsibility you have	56	56
The work conditions	16	17
The balance between family life and work demands	14	25

DISCUSSION

In examining the changes between 2009 and 2018 there are several differences and similarities that reflect both generational values and cultural orientation. Overall, given a range of 6 percentage points differentiation, Russian and U.S. millennials were similar on five (security/stability, quality of work, freedom at work, authority/responsibility, and work conditions) of the eight motivations chosen as important for motivation and job happiness. Although this increase in similarity from 2009 might suggest a stronger generational values orientation than in 2009, a closer examination of the results shows that both generational values and differences in cultural values exist.

The amount of money one makes increased in importance for both the United States and Russia although more so for Russians. Thirty percent of U.S. participants listed amount of money as one of two most important factors in motivation and happiness at work up 2% from 2009, while 66% of the Russian participants listed money as one of the two most important factors up 23% from 2009.

One explanation for the increase in this value could be generational orientation. In the 2009 study the group was largely millennial while in 2018 study the group was composed of millennials and Generation Z. Deloitte (2019) using a world-wide sample of millennials and Generation Z found 63% of millennials and 51% of Generation Z list salary as very important for them in a job. A study in Forbes (Patel, 2018) found that U.S. Generation Z are more motivated by money than millennials as many of them had experienced the financial problems of the 2009 recession. Although this increase for both groups does reflect this generational focus, the percentage difference between the U.S. and Russian respondents was 33% both in 2009 and 2018. Additionally, 30% of U.S. participants listed the amount of money made as one of their two least important factors while only 8% of the Russians did. This variation between the two groups demonstrates that strong cultural differences in motivation still exist.

At the same time money increased as a motivator, the importance of the balance between family life and work category for both U.S. and Russian participants decreased from 2009. U.S. responses dropped 11% from 48% to 37% and Russian responses dropped 13% from 38% to 25%. While decreasing for both U.S. and Russian participants, these findings still show a stronger preference for work/life balance among U.S. than Russian respondents. The decrease in work/life balance also seems to run contradictory to recent studies which contend that for U.S. millennials and Generational Z work/ life balance is listed as a very important motivator at work (Calveria, 2019; Mcavoy 2016; Deloitte, 2019).

The relationship between the increase in money made and the decrease in work/life balance as a motivator for both U.S. and Russian participants might stem from the interpretation of the question and the

perception that money provided work/life balance. In the explanations for choosing money especially for the Russians the reason for making money frequently was family. Examples of comments from Russians were:

Because I want to have a big house and family, I need to make good money.
Because my family is the most important thing in my life. They deserve a better life. I want to earn much money to buy everything they need.
The main factor for me is salary. So if I have a high salary the quality of my life will be better.

Similarly, several U.S. participants commented:

I am working in order to provide for my family.
Without time for family the job would not be worthwhile.
Life can't just be about work.

Another category that shows differences in cultural values was relationships with other employees/co-workers. Twenty-eight percent of the U.S. participants felt it was one of two most important factors for motivation and job happiness (down 7% from 2009), but at the same time 25% identified it as one of the two least important. Russians responses were very different from U.S. responses with only 6% identifying relationships with other employees as most important (up 1% from 2009) and 36% identifying it as one of the two least important. One explanation for this difference might be in the view of friends at work. Schmidt and Uecker (2015) found differences in perceptions of the importance of friends at work between Russians and U.S. participants. They found that workers from the United States view friends at work as important and often comment about work friends versus other types of friends at work, whereas Russians tended to view work as work and did not necessarily look for or identify co-workers as friends. This difference is also reflected in the following comments from U.S. and Russian participants in the current study. Some of the comments from U.S. participants were:

I am a people driven person so if I can work well with my co-workers then I will feel fueled to work hard.
Happiness comes in the form of quality relationships
You need to do what you love and love who you work with in order to have most happiness in your career and job satisfaction.

In contrast as a Russians said:

I think relations with other employees can be improved to such an extent as is necessary for productive work if required.

Given the impact of COVID-19 and more people working from home the importance of relationships with other employees will be an area to watch in terms of motivation. Currently Deloitte Global Survey (2020) found in surveys conducted in April-May 2020, 60% of millennials and Generation Z would like to work from home in the future. In fact, 2/3 of them felt working remotely improved the work/life balance. The adjustment to this new work/life rhythm may result in less socializing and interaction with friends at work particularly for U.S. millennials (Chainey, 2020) (Friedman, 2020). Mo (2020) suggests relationships of convenience from work will likely change and workers will devote more time to relationships outside of work.

A major change in motivation for Russian participants was in job stability/security. In 2009, 57% of Russians felt this was one of the two most important factors, but in 2018 only 19% listed it as of the two most important a drop of 38%. U.S. participants stayed about the same 24% in 2009 and 21% in 2018.

Additionally, in the current study 25% of Russians and 16% of U.S. respondents listed stability as one of the two least motivating factors. These changes for Russians could be largely due to improved conditions in Russian economy since 2009. This finding on stability/security of your position as a motivator supports studies on millennials and Generation Z that they are not afraid to change jobs or even work independently (Deloitte, 2019; Adkins, 2016). Given COVID-19 and the changes in the workplace, this value may increase in importance in the future.

The amount of authority or responsibility at work was the least important motivator for both Russian and U.S. participants. Both 56% of the U.S. and 56% of the Russian participants list the amount of authority or responsibility at work you have as one of the two least important motivations for work. This was the largest percentage for either sample. Furthermore, only 9 % of U.S. and 8% of Russian participants listed authority and responsibility as one of the top two important factors. This finding contradicts findings on U.S. millennials and Generation Z who identify that they want to work for themselves and run their own business (Williams, 2015). Some of the comments from U.S. participants were:

Authority does not matter as much. You're all working towards the same goal, right?
The amount of authority and responsibility is not as important to me because I am a good team member.
In terms of power and authority you have in business-why climb a ladder that is entirely on the wrong wall?

Among the comments from Russians regarding responsibility and authority at work:

It is better to be happy and healthy than to be a leader who has a lot of responsibility.
Ambition is important but not as important as the other terms.
I don't care about being a manager, a leader, and I like to have clear rules.

Compare this factor of authority with the responses to the quality of work. On the value of quality of work as an important motivator, U.S. respondents stayed relatively the same 36% in 2009 and 33% in 2018. However, Russian respondents increased from 14% in 2009 to 27% in 2018. This finding confirms studies indicating that millennials and Generation Z want themselves and their companies to have impact on society (Deloitte, 2019, 2020)

Comments from U.S. participants:

I want to have a job where I can succeed via my work quality.
I want to feel that I am engaging in meaningful and important work that is making a difference in some way.

Russians also responded that quality of work was important.

I am also a perfectionist so I do need to do my job as good as possible.

Similarly, the value of freedom at work as an important motivator stayed relatively similar for U. S. participants decreasing from 20% in 2009 to 19% in 2018. However, for Russian participants it increased from 10% in 2009 to 25% in 2018. Overall, the 2018 scores on freedom of work are very similar and reflect generational values (Deloitte, 2019).

Perhaps the most consistent value for both Russians and U.S participants in 2009 and 2018 was work conditions. For U.S. participants work conditions increased 3 percentage points from 16 to 19 in 2018 and for Russian participants it stayed the same as a motivator 19% in both 2009 and 2018.

CONCLUSION

This study offers several important insights on work motivation and job happiness values. First, this study shows that in the areas of security/stability of job, quality of work, freedom at work, authority/responsibility, and work conditions, Russian and U.S. millennials are becoming more similar in motivation and work values. These findings support studies such as the Deloitte study that examines work motivations and attitudes from a global and generational perspective.

However, the study also shows that unlike the global profile of millennials and Generation Z there are still substantial differences in motivations between cultures/countries such as those between Russian and U.S. participants in areas of amount of money made, relationships with other employees, and work/life balance. It is important that studies such as this one continue to be done to analyze these differences much in the same way as Hofstede's analysis was done on individual countries to ensure that people are aware that motivation is still tied to cultural values and will vary by country/culture. Global generational studies should also provide individual country results along their findings to identify any major differences.

Second, the study demonstrates the importance of asking both what is most and what is least important in the analysis of motivation. This inclusion in the study demonstrated that for U.S. participants the percentage of respondents choosing most important or least important were almost equal on the values of amount of money made and relationships with other employees. These variations suggest that these values should be analyzed more fully to attempt to identify which factors (age, gender, type of occupation, etc.) might be part of the polarization of these concepts.

Finally, this study emphasizes the need to remind students as they interact with different cultures to be mindful of ethnocentrism in using generational or cultural values and that not all people value or interact in the same way. One approach for instructors would be to conduct work values surveys for their own classes and then compare the results of their class with the findings of larger global generational studies such as those by Deloitte (2019, 2020). Given the results of the current study in the areas of amount of money and relationship with other employees there will be differences. In this manner students can become aware that not everyone is motivated in the same way and that as we move in a global economy, differences and similarities for both cultural and generational values will still need to be identified. Given the current global impact of COVID-19, these findings and variations will be even more important.

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