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Supriya Sharma

While ample empirical evidence on cultural values highlights the difference between Indian and western cultures, substantial research done in India tests models and frameworks developed in Western culture. Assumptions underlying such frameworks may be contrary to Indian thought, practices and culture. Hence, applicability of these frameworks in India is largely questionable. Based on Indian sociological and philosophical thought, and studies grounded in India, this study develops a framework for understanding the meaning of work for Indians. A tripartite meaning of work classification – duty, status and connectedness – is proposed. These meanings are argued to be linked to cultural values of individuals and, a framework linking cultural values and meanings of work is proposed. Future directions are discussed.

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Introduction

The 'meaning-making-machines' that humans are (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010), we look for inherent meaning in all that we do, including work. Working serves functions to an individual other than the apparent economic one (Morse & Weiss, 1955). Meaning of work (MOW) has been understood from the perspective of sources of meaning, and examining mechanisms through which individuals make meaning (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). However, most of this literature is developed in a western, colonial context (Rosso et al., 2010 for composition of MOW literature). How Indians experience work has largely remained an unexplored territory. While domains such as motivation, leadership, commitment have been studied in an Indian context etc., what work means to an Indian, has largely remained unexplored (Panda & Gupta, 2007).

India presents a context that is different from western societies (Gopalan & Stahl, 1998; Pio, 2007). Cross-cultural comparisons have found that work related attitudes and behavior of Indians are different from residents of other countries (eg. Giacomin et al., 2011; Jackson, 2001; Kwantes, 2009; Varma, Srinivas & Stroh,

2005; Viswesvaran & Despande, 1998). Therefore, application of theories and frameworks developed in a Western context in India is questionable (Gopalan & Stahl, 1998; Mariappanadar, 2005). Since work experiences are linked with cultural values (Schwartz, 1999), frameworks of MOW that are relevant in India need to be developed drawing from Indian values, tradition and culture.

One country needs not signify one culture and cultural diversity in a country needs to be accounted for in theoretical development (Schwartz, 1999).While differences between Indian and Western cultures are largely accepted, India's cultural diversity finds patchy presence in theoretical development (notable exceptions being Panda & Gupta, 2004; Sinha, Gupta, Singh, Srinivas, & Vijaykumar, 2001). This study is an attempt towards incorporating India's cultural diversity in the development of a MOW framework.

Keeping in perspective the need for understanding MOW while incorporating cultural diversity in theoretical development, this study broadly aims to make two contributions. First, it proposes an introductory classification for MOW relevant in an Indian context. Second, this study argues towards linking the proposed MOW classification with individual cultural values. Such a linkage may aid in constructing a MOW framework that incorporates the cultural plurality and diversity in India.

MOW in India

MOW stands for what work signifies for an individual; it involves interpretation by an individual as to what roles does work play in his/her life (Pratt &Ashforth, 2003). Literature documents sources, mechanisms, and outcomes of MOW (Rosso et al., 2010). However, like most management literature, much of this work has been developed in a Western or capitalism oriented value system – its applicability to an Indian context is questionable (Gopinath, 1998).

MOW frameworks and concepts from extant (mainly Western literature) may not be applicable to Indians. In India, MOW is more than what a person accomplishes in his/her job (Heuer, 2006). Work is detached from and not considered central to the being of an individual (Chatterjee, 2009; Cross, 2009; Gopinath, 1998). This work detachment hypothesis is contrary to values and beliefs of the West, where work occupies a central position in an individual's life (Snir & Harpaz, 2006). Therefore, concepts such as work centrality and personal engagement (Kahn, 1990) that occupy a large domain of extant managerial psychology literature may be ill-suited to an Indian context.

Concepts such as work centrality and personal engagement that occupy a large domain of extant managerial psychology literature may be ill-suited to an Indian context.

Indians are predisposed to complexity (Chatterjee, 2009), with their values and behaviors showing great variation and divergence. Under influence of mul-

tinationals and modernization, managerial mindset in India is believed to be changing, with inclinations towards adoption of Western or capitalist values and practices (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2006). However, influence of Western values does not imply abandonment of traditional Indian values (Tripathi, 1990). Indian managers are believed to retain a strong orientation towards "an ancient but continuously living and evolving civilization", which allows them to accept change easily (Chatterjee &Heuer, 2006). Integration of capitalist ideology and Indian traditions creates multiple frames that guide managerial actions (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2006). Through 'cross-vergence', managers are able to bring together multiple competing values and belief systems, without modifying either (Gopalan & Dixon, 1996).Cross-vergence enables Indians to hold divergent values arranged in different layers; each value becoming salient in different situations (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2000). Behavior is also largely dependent on contextual and individual factors and it is expected to vary according to *desh* (location), *kal* (time) and *patra* (actor; Sinha & Kanungo, 1997).

A recent survey published by the newspaper Hindustan Times, reveals some trends in how Indians experience work. 52% of Indians do not enjoy their work and about 50% did not believe in taking responsibility of their work outcomes, including errors made. Fear of unemployment after the recent recession was cited as an important reason for not letting go of current jobs and "going through the motions". Respondents considered workplace as a ground for developing relationships, where 'friends' work as replacements in another's absence. Respondents also preferred to stay after office hours for benefits such as free food and commute. People also expressed feeling guilty after taking a holiday. Owing to this guilt, people worked harder once back from the holiday and pushed themselves at work, often resulting in better performance ratings (Maqsood, 2013).

Limited empirical evidence, and Indian philosophical and sociological texts, bring forth three broad meanings.

Work as *Duty*

Traditionally, work has been viewed as duty in India (Biswas, 2009; Sinha & Sinha, 1990). A sense of duty, and not increasing material needs, is considered the primary motive for action (Gopinath, 1998). Texts such as *Bhagwad Gita* and *Mahabharata* introduce *Dharma* or righteous duty as a guiding principle for work in India (Gopinath, 1998; Saha, 1992). *Karma,* or the belief that the outcomes of one's actions is the consequence of deeds in this life and previous lives, emphasizes the importance of duties to an individual (Pio, 2007). Duty, however, is not toward work per se, even though the quality of work matters (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2006). Duty is towards fulfilling one's responsibilities towards family or one's higher purpose (Sinha & Sinha, 1990). Work is conceptualized as a composite of duties or debts (*rin),* that an individual must fulfill through work (Chatterjee, 2009). Per-

haps, Indians feel guilty after a holiday because they conceptualize work as a duty, and taking a holiday from the higher duty is unacceptable.

Occupation is a part of an individual's higher purpose. Every individual is assumed to be born with a purpose and he/she expected to fulfill that destined purpose in his/her lifetime (Saha, 1992). Employees expect organizations to guide them see a purpose in their work and enable them achieve that higher purpose (Cappelli, Singh, Singh & Useem, 2010). Perhaps because of such expectations of clear directions and guidance that Indians have an inherent predisposition towards an "external locus of control" (Heuer, 2006), and thereby preference for formalized and bureaucratic organizational systems (Gopalan & Rivera, 1997).

Indians' detachment from work (Chatterjee, 2009) neither implies acceptance of poor performance nor indifference towards work oriented learning or growth (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2006). "Work must be done and done effectively...it is sacrosanct and not negotiable" (Sinha & Sinha, 1990). Work, considered as a *duty*, is performed under the doctrine of *Nishkam karma*, wherein an individual works because he/she 'must' and not because of attachment to results or desire for any gains from working (Biswas, 2009).

Duty orientation also highlights the salience of social responsibility. Indian managers have higher moralistic orientations than their counterparts from other western countries (England, 1978). Indian employees look down upon explicit pursuit of creating shareholder wealth at the cost of social welfare and they expect their organizations to work with a sense of mission, a social goal that goes beyond making money (Cappelli et al., 2010). The moral inclinations of Indian employees are based on a sense of community and a sense of *duty* towards welfare of that community(Gupta, Kumar & Singh, 2013).

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Thus, when an individual experiences work as *duty*, he/she experiences an obligatory, higher order need to fulfill his/her purpose in life. He/she performs his/her work without expectation of any material reward or gain as an end. He/she also feels a sense of duty towards his/her family and community, and works towards fulfilling these obligations. While the corporate culture of multinational corporations may be bringing about a change in *duty* orientation (Chatterjee& Pearson, 2006), a sense of *duty* is still a primary meaning an Indian attaches to his/her work (Biswas, 2009).

Work as *Status*

Multiple hierarchical arrangements exist in India (Gupta, 2004; Mines, 1988). The Hindu caste system is one salient example of this (Chatterjee, 2009). Families from lower castes imitate rituals and

practices of higher castes with an aim to move up caste hierarchy over generations (Srinivas, 2003). Such predisposition and preference to hierarchies makes Indians highly status conscious (Saha, 1992; Sinha & Sinha, 1990). Since occupations in India are tied to social status (Driver, 1962; Majumder, 2010), Indians aspire to move up the social order by upward occupational mobility (Deshpande & Palshikar, 2008). At the workplace, distinct hierarchical superior-subordinate relationships exist, and both superior and subordinate are comfortable with such hierarchical arrangements (Aycan, Kanungo & Sinha, 1999; Kakar, 1971). Subordinates look up to superiors for directions and resources (Sinha & Sinha, 1990; Tripathi, 1990), while superiors value obedience and conformity to rules from subordinates (Chatterjee & Pearson, 2006).

Mixed results are found about the importance of materialism for Indians (Gopalan & Rivera, 1997). Pursuit of economic objectives, as an end in itself, is looked down upon (Gopalan & Rivera, 1997). Money is important since it provides for social celebrations such as weddings and festivals; these celebrations being considered as investments that help improve a family's social standing (Bloch, Rao & Desai, 2004; Rao, 2001). Materialism is, thus, significant for an individual to signal his/her social status.

Thus, an individual experiences work as *status* when he/she is able to signal his/her and his/her family's status enhancement. He/she acquires material possessions to signal the high (er) social status. He/she aspires to move up the occupational hierarchy to achieve a higher social standing for his/her family.

Work as *Connectedness*

India is a collectivist society (Hofstede, 2001). However, collectivism does not imply connectedness with everyone. There is a deep sense of in group (*apna/apne log)* and out group (*paraya/ paraye log*) and behavior towards each of these groups is radically different (Hattrup, Ghorpade & Lackritz, 2007). An individual derives his/her identity from his/her in-groups such as family or caste membership (Gopalan & Stahl, 1998). Relationship with in-groups is based on an obligatory commitment of an individual such that he/she takes decisions that promote group's interests (Jackson, 2001). Self abnegation to promote in-group's goals is respected (Gopalan & Stahl, 1998).

Leaders in India are expected to nurture, protect, guide, support and care for subordinates.

Dimensions of collectivism are visible in organizational functions and workplace behaviors (Aycan et al., 1999). Recruitment, promotions and rewards are linked to an individual's membership to a social group (Noronha, 2005:105-162). In family businesses, an individual's relationship with the owner family positively impacts his/her recruitment and rewards (Ramaswamy, Veliyath & Gomes, 2000). *Connectedness* is also visible in leadership behaviors. Leaders in India are expected to nurture, protect,

guide, support and care for subordinates (Sinha & Kanungo, 1997; Sinha & Sinha, 1990) and strictly ensure the pursuit and achievement of goals (see nurturant task leaders in Sinha, 1980:54-71).

Thus, when an individual experiences work as *connectedness*, he/she experiences being attached to his/her family by being able to provide for their needs. He/she experiences attachment to family by being employed in an occupation that is approved by them (Agarwala, 2008). Relationships may develop in the workplace and make the individual further embedded in his/her social connections at the workplace. He/she feels connected to his/her leader, who he/she looks up to for guidance and nurturance.

Duty, Status & Connectedness as MOW

The three primary meanings for Indians are *duty, status* and *connectedness*. However, these need not be complementary to each other. In most situations, it is likely that more than one meaning becoming salient for an individual. For instance, service to the society can be seen as an outcome of *duty* and *connectedness* aspects working together. *Connectedness* of an individual implies society's salience or importance to him/her while *duty* meaning brings him/her service the society in which he/she is rooted.

Since Indians have a predisposition to complexity, their reactions to each situation are dependent on *desh*, *kal*, and *patra* (Sinha & Kanungo, 1997). This predisposition to complexity would also manifest in meanings that Indians attach to work wherein MOW would be influenced by contextual and individual factors such as psychological traits and states, and cultural values of an individual (Kwantes, 2009).

Cultural Values Underlying MOW

Culture, or "collective programming of the mind", includes invisible, deeply embedded values (Hofstede, 2001:9-10). Cultural values are commonly found to be a source of work attitudes and behavior (Schwartz, 1999). Some prominent cross-cultural studies highlight the difference in cultural values between nations (Hofstede, 2001), leadership styles and values (House et al., 2004), and work values (Schwartz, 1999). Of these leading studies, Hofstede's cultural values dimensions find wide acceptance across contexts (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011).

Since meanings are influenced by cultural values, the MOW classification proposed earlier is argued to be connected to Hofstede's cultural values dimension. These value dimensions are suited to non-western (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011), including Indian contexts. These value dimensions, however, are not used to generalize how all Indians will view their work (McSweeney, 2002 for critique against 'national culture'). Doing so would ignore the cultural plurality of India. Thus, the linkage between cultural values and MOW is argued to be present at an individual's level i.e. the MOW for an Indian, linked to his/her cultural values.

Individualism–Collectivism. Individualism stands for a society in which ties between individuals are loose and everyone is expected to look after themselves, while collectivism implies a society in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups from birth, and these groups protect the people in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 2001:225). In a collectivist society, a family is the smallest unit, as against an individualist society when an individual is the smallest unit (Hofstede, 2001:227). Individualism-collectivism is evident in an individual's personality and behavior, family systems, educational systems, workplace practices, and consumer behavior (Hofstede, 2001:231-50). Collectivist societies are characterized by strong family ties, in-groups determining individual opinions, financial obligations of an individual to the in-group, and the salience of "we" in an individual's identity (Hofstede, 200:.236). At workplaces in collectivist societies, personal relationships prevail over work-relationships, organizations are characterized with family-like links, and particularism in treating co-workers is acceptable (Hofstede, 2001:244).

Power distance in a society is visible in its norms, families, educational systems, political systems and organizations.

Power Distance. This is the difference between the extent to which a boss can determine behavior of his/her subordinate and extent to which a subordinate can determine the behavior of his/her boss (Hofstede, 2001:83). Power distance in a society is visible in its norms, families, educational systems, political systems and organizations (Hofstede, 2001:97-113). High power distance at the workplace manifests in high formalization and centralization, subordinates' desire for a paternalistic leader and their dissatisfaction with participative/consultative decision-making styles. Subordinates are dependent on the leader for directions and there is general acceptance of un-equal rewards and rights between individuals placed along a hierarchical order (Hofstede, 2001:102-06).

Masculinity–Femininity. Differences between gender based roles and their manifestation in societal norms comes under this value dimension. Masculine cultures are those where social gender roles are clearly distinct; men are expected to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, while women are expected to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity in a society stands for overlap of social gender roles i.e. where both men and women are supposed to be modest,tender and concerned with quality of life (Hofstede, 2001:297). Importance of recognition for employees, preference for higher pay, ambitious career aspirations, and fewer women in managerial positions (Hofstede, 2001:318) are characteristics of a masculine society.

Uncertainty Avoidance: This value dimension stands for 'the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations' (Hofstede, 2001:161). In a workplace,

high uncertainty avoidance has been associated with longer work tenures, high formalization, low tolerance for change and innovation, high task orientation, and subordinates expecting clear directions from leaders (Hofstede, 2001:165-70).

Long vs. Short-Term Orientation: Long-term orientation values future rewards, such as perseverance and thrift, while short-term orientation, values virtues related to past and present, such as preserving of 'face', respect for tradition, and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede, 2001: 359). Individuals in long-term orientation cultures value persistence, perseverance and humility as important human qualities and find everyday human relationships to be satisfying; they believe that most important events of one's life will occur in the future and value the old age and wisdom attached to it (Hofstede, 2001:359-69).

Cultural Values & Work as *Duty*

When an individual experiences work as *duty*, he/she experiences detachment from work. He/she is detached from the outcomes or gains from the task but there is a commitment to quality of performance. Guided by *karma*, an individual believes in a goal that is pre-destined for her. He/she looks forward to a long-term future and performs the destined tasks in the present with utmost integrity for that is the only way to meet his/her destiny. Present leisure time is not important to him/her and he/she believes in perseverance. Pecuniary outcomes, in the present, are not of significance to him/her. The pre-destined goal also manifests in his/her acceptance and desire for clear guidelines that could give him/her directions for the current performance – an expression of the uncertainty avoidance value. He/she welcomes formalization of rules that help him/her work, with detachment. He/she works to fulfill a higher order purpose (which could have been received from the superior) and hopes to fulfill his/her family needs and aspirations through work. Thus, one posits:

Proposition 1: Individuals who have salient long-term orientation and uncertainty avoidance cultural values will tend to experience work more as duty, such that long-term orientation and high uncertainty avoidance will influence an individual to view work more as duty.

Cultural Values & Work as *Status*

When an individual experiences work as *status*, he/she works to improve the social standing of his/her family. He/she is ambitious to get promoted at work, to be able to make the upward movement. He/she spends on materialistic possessions to signal his/her family's social standing. Cultural values of power distance serve as a basis for hierarchical social systems, wherein an individual is accepting the differential treatments/rewards/resources available to individuals (and families) placed at different levels of the hierarchy. A masculine value makes material success desirable, while, the collectivism value orientation emphasizes the importance of family needs and work, here, is seen as a source to fulfill those needs. The collectivist values are also known to influence the individuals'

self-concept with respect to the group. Thus:

Proposition 2: Individuals who have salient collectivism, power distance and masculinity cultural values will tend to experience work more as status, such that high collectivism, high power distance and high masculinity will influence an individual to view work more as status.

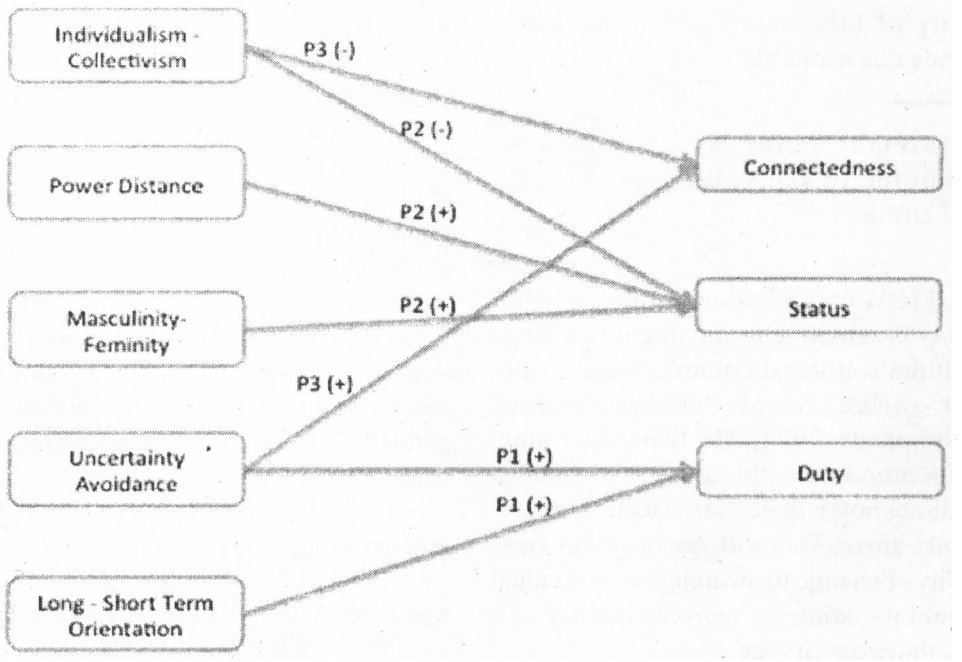
Cultural Values & Work as *Connectedness*

Collectivism implies that an individual is highly influenced by values that emphasize "we" orientation. He/she is attached to some groups by birth (family, caste, religion etc.) to which his/her loyalty is unquestionable. He/she is hired based on his/her affiliations to a group or relationships to the owner/manager. Personal relationships prevail and in-groups become salient at the workplace. Family, relatives and supervisors influence an individual's decisions. Work is therefore, an expression of his/her social rootedness in his/her family, caste, religion, friends, relatives and other in-groups.

Proposition 3: Individuals who have salient collectivism and uncertainty avoidance cultural values will tend to experience work more as connectedness, such that high collectivism and high uncertainty avoidance will influence an individual to visualize work more as connectedness.

The relationships described above are depicted in Fig.1.

Fig. 1 Cultural Values and MOW



Conclusion

Application of MOW frameworks from extant literature in India is debatable. A leader MOW classification proposes five MOW dimensions (a) work centrality as a life role (b) societal norms regarding work entitlement and obligations (c) valued work outcomes (d) importance of work goals and (e) work role identification (Harpaz & Fu, 2002). However, concepts such as work centrality are incoherent with evidence, and value and beliefs in India. Another classification divides MOW into job, career or calling (Wrzesniewski, Mccauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). This classification posits that individuals with 'job' orientation work only for financial gains that accrue from it (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). As discussed earlier, material gains as an end are counter to the values and beliefs of Indians – the applicability of this classification on Indian, hence questionable.

Material gains as an end are counter to the values and beliefs of Indians.

MOW classification proposed in this study is sensitive to the ongoing change in India's cultural context, which is under influence of 'modernization' (Deshpande, 2004).The tripartite framework proposed in this study is linked to a well-acknowledged classification of cultural values. This linkage provides flexibility of change to meanings an individual would associate to work as his/her values undergo change.

The MOW classification proposed here does not arrange the three meanings in a hierarchy. The three meanings are also not mutually exclusive. In line with cross-vergence argument, an Indian could associate more than one meaning to work. Depending on which cultural values take precedence for an individual, he/she will experience the respective meanings as salient.

In this paper, the attempt has been to develop an understanding of MOW suitable to an Indian context. While the classification of meaning is done based on diverse literature and evidence from India, one is mindful of contrary evidence wherein, for instance, an individual is not found to experience a sense of *duty* or detachment from his/her work. Predispositions of Indians to complexity could also be one reason why one finds multiple, paradoxical views on MOW. However, there is a need to empirically test the framework proposed herewith and explore changes that would improve applicability and rigor of this framework. A cross sectional study, capturing diverse demographics (including age, gender, language, religion, caste, profession, region etc.) would provide a rich evidence to test this framework. Such a data set would also provide further directions into the associations of MOW and cultural values with region, language, profession, gender etc. – an aspect missing in India based literature.

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