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MANAGERIAL MOTIVATION AND DETERMINANTS OF THEIR PERFORMANCE: A COMPARISON OF MIDDLE-LEVEL MANAGERS FROM THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

*Anil Mathur, Ph.D.**

ABSTRACT

This article examines differences and similarities in perceptions of middle level managers regarding factors that determine managerial performance and their motivations between the United States (N = 176) and Europe (N = 77). Although both of these regions could be considered to be similar in terms of their position on the individualism-collectivism dimension, important differences were found in determinants of managerial performance and their motivations. Implications of these findings are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid globalization of markets and corporations in the past two decades has impacted a wide range of organizations, governments, and people. It has also significantly impacted how corporations do business and manage their operations, and has served as an impetus for them to globalize too. Success in these rapidly globalizing markets critically depends upon one's understanding of people and processes across cultures and management effectiveness across cultures. Although the top leaders of any organization play a pivotal role in controlling and directing the actions a company takes while responding to such global changes, middle-level managers can play a vital role, too, because middle-level managers manage people and processes that lead to their effective utilization.

The objective of the present study is to explore differences and similarities in factors that contribute to managerial effectiveness and factors that motivate middle-level managers in the United States and some European countries. Unlike many other studies that have compared such management practices across the major global divide (East versus West), the present study focuses on managers from countries traditionally classified as Western countries. Data was collected from middle-level managers working in the United States, as well as from those working in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. In the following sections, a brief review of the relevant literature is presented followed by an empirical study and its findings. Finally, implications of the findings are also discussed.

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Cross-cultural studies of management have examined several issues, such as management values (e.g., Bigoness and Blakely 1996, Ralston et al. 1992), their motivations (e.g.,

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Badawy 1979, Reitz 1975), comparative management practices (e.g., Bartlett and Ghoshal 1992, Ronen 1986), and determinants of their performance (e.g., Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang 2000). Hofstede's work (1980, 1991, 2001) on the influence of culture on management practices, values, and assumptions has been a major contributor of our standing of cross-cultural management. Differences along the individualism-collectivism dimensions are believed to be major reasons that explain a wide range of managerial assumptions and behaviors across cultures. For example, Laurent (1986) suggested that ambition and drive of individualism-driven managers was a major factor contributing to the success of American managers. Managers in collectivistic societies, such as China, are more prone to focus on social interests rather than individual goals (Li 1978, Oh 1976).

Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang (2000) examined factors that contribute to managerial performance across four culturally diverse countries—the United States, China, India, and the Philippines. They also explained some of the observed differences in the determinants of managerial performance based on cultural differences among these countries along the individualism-collectivism dimension.

The present study follows the previous study of Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang (2000) and examines similarities and differences in factors that contribute to managerial performance between American and European managers, two regions of the world whose cultures have some degree of similarity in the sense that they are considered to be mainly individualistic. The question being investigated is whether managers from similarly individualistic countries, yet different geographic regions, would show greater similarities or differences with respect to their perceptions relating to factors that determine managerial performance.

MANAGERIAL MOTIVATION FACTORS

Human motivations represent the driving force that makes people do something. This driving force can originate within the individual or it could originate from outside the individual. Maslow (1943) presented an organizing theory that put all human needs into a hierarchy of needs. Although there have been many critics of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is one of the most influential theories of human motivation. The needs of middle-level managers in their workplace are fundamentally not much different from all other needs. As such, the types of motivations and related processes that drive all other human behavior can also drive managerial behavior in the workplace. Basic motivational process starts from unfulfilled needs that create some tension within the individual. This tension drives purposeful behavior directed to reduce the tension. Once the goal is achieved, original tension is reduced and the individual returns to the normal state. However, if the goal is not reached, tension may drive continued or modified behavior. Another aspect of human needs is that needs never do fully disappear. If one need is satisfied, another need may become active. Moreover, many times more than one need may be active at the same time.

Motivations of workers that direct their work-related behavior are critically important for the success of an organization. These motivations can not only contribute to achievement of personal goals of workers, but also can influence their productivity and efficiency that can help the organization reach its own goals. Motivations of managers are even more important because in addition to helping them achieve their personal goals and contributing to their productivity, the motivations of managers can also influence their decisions and other behav-

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ior that can in turn influence their subordinates and their motivations. Many scholars have examined managerial motivations (e.g., Alpander and Carter 1991, Reitz 1975). For example, Lee and Wilkins (2011) studied job-related motivations of managers in public and non-profit sectors and found important differences in their motivations. Studies have shown that motivations can play a major role in successful management (McConnell 1996, Sharp et al. 2009) and individuals that lack motivation perform poorly (Germann 2004, Wiley 1997). Studies have also shown that employee motivation can influence the choice of behavior they engage in, how long they are likely to engage in that behavior, and how much effort they are likely to apply to that behavior (Kanfer 1991).

Although human needs are universal in nature, studies have shown that culture can play an important role in employee motivations (Alpander 1984, Howard et al. 1983). For example, Reitz (1975) examined workers' needs in eight countries and found important culture-related differences in their needs. Similarly, Badawy (1979) studied managerial attitudes and needs and found culture-based differences. Understanding the impact of culture on the motivation of employees is critically important for global companies because this understanding can play a key role in their success on a global basis. However, there is a need for greater understanding of managerial motivation across cultures because current literature provides limited guidance in terms of how to adapt managerial policies to account for cultural differences in employee motivations (Mathur, Zhang, and Neelankavil 2001).

METHOD DATA COLLECTION

Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from middle-level managers from four countries—the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Chief executive officers (CEOs) of several publicly held companies in these four countries were contacted personally via phone/mail and were briefed about the background and purpose of the study. Their cooperation was requested for data collection in their respective organizations. Those CEOs that agreed to help were sent questionnaires and were requested to ask their middle-level managers to participate and complete the survey. Middle-level managers were defined as those with at least three years of experience and below the rank of vice-president. Completed questionnaires were returned by participating respondents directly to researchers, thereby ensuring anonymity of participating respondents. Of the 253 responses received from the four countries, 23 came from the United Kingdom, 34 from Germany, 20 from the Netherlands, and 176 from the United States.

Respondents from the U.K., Dutch, and American companies received the original English version of the questionnaire. Although English is not a native language of the Netherlands, only English speaking CEOs in the Netherlands were contacted and requested to ask only English speaking middle-level managers in their organizations to complete the survey. A German version of the questionnaire was used in Germany. The translation into German was carried out by a consulting firm in the United States specializing in cultural issues. The accuracy of translation was validated through the back-translation technique.

Initial analysis of the responses from European middle-level managers indicated very little differences in the key study variables across the three European countries. Most of the differences were statistically insignificant. Therefore, responses from the three European countries were combined into one group and compared to those from the United States. The

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demographic profiles of respondents from Europe and the United States are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of the Samples

Characteristics	U.S. (N=176)	Europe (N=77)	p-value
Gender			
Male	63.60%	90.90%	0.000
Female	36.40%	9.10%	
Age			
under 35 years	28.90%	29.90%	0.082
35 – 44 years	39.90%	24.70%	
45 – 54 years	24.90%	37.70%	
55 years or older	6.40%	7.80%	
Functional responsibility			
Data processing/computer	9.10%	20.80%	0.065
Engineering/research	9.70%	5.20%	
Finance/accounting	22.70%	18.20%	
Marketing/sales	18.20%	18.20%	
Personnel/HR	8.00%	2.60%	
Production/maintenance	2.80%	6.50%	
Others	29.50%	28.60%	
Number of direct subordinates (Mean)	7.81	9.85	0.240
Average number of hours spent on the job/per week	50.42	49.71	0.513
Time with the present company (number of years)	11.62	14.42	0.021
Time in the present job (number of years)	3.41	3.41	0.985
Number of years of formal education			
less than 13	6.30%	33.30%	0.000
13 – 17	46.30%	54.70%	
18 or more	47.40%	12.00%	

Note: The percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding errors.

As shown in Table 1, the proportion of females in the American sample was higher than that in the European sample (36.4% vs. 9.1%). There was sufficient variation in terms of age and functional responsibility. Moreover, the differences between the American sample and the European sample in terms of age and functional responsibility were not statistically significant. In terms of number of direct subordinates, average number of hours worked in a week, and number of years in current job, here too the differences between the American sample and the European sample were not significant. However, European managers had spent more time working for their current employer (14.42 years) compared with American managers (11.62 years, $p < .05$). Similarly, there were significant differences in terms of educational attainment of American managers as compared with European managers. One-third of European managers reported having less than 13 years of formal education compared with 6.3% of American managers. Also, 54.7% of European managers reported having between 13 and 17 years of formal education compared with 46.3% of American managers. However, 47.4% of American managers reported having 18 or more years of formal education compared with 12.0% of European managers.

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QUESTIONNAIRE AND MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

Determinants of managerial performance were measured by using the items used by Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang (2000). Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale the extent to which they feel each item was important in contributing to managerial performance (5 = extremely important, 1 = not at all important). Although the original survey had 40 items for measuring factors that could be important determinants of managerial performance, in line with Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang (2000), only 18 items were retained for the present comparison. Based on a factor analysis in several countries, Neelankavil, Mathur, and Zhang (2000) reported that these 18 items represented 6 factors: leadership ability, communication skills, planning and decision making ability, educational achievements, past experience, and self-confidence/charisma. Since this study used a part of the original data (for American managers), this factor analysis was not done again.

Measures of managerial motivations were taken from Mathur, Zhang, and Neelankavil (2001). The measure has twelve items based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943) and Alderfer's ERG theory (Alderfer 1969). Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale the extent to which each factor was important in motivating him or her personally in their work-related behavior (5 = extremely important, 1 = not important at all). Of these twelve items, two items represented job- and rewards-related needs, four items represented social interaction needs, five items represented personal growth and ego needs, and one item represented self-actualization needs. Items used to measure managerial motivations are presented in Table 3.

The questionnaire also had items that measured managerial styles and demographic information (e.g., sex, age, education, number of years with the company, number of years in current job, functional specialization, functional specialization, etc.). This study was a part of a larger multi-country study examining managerial success factors, motivations, and management styles.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Analysis of the data to ascertain differences and similarities between American and European managers in terms of their perceptions regarding success factors and their motivations was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the data were standardized and in the second stage, differences and similarities across the two groups were examined.

Literature focusing on examining cross-cultural differences has identified several problems that could possibly confound the results. Observed differences across culturally diverse countries could be confounded due to differences in response styles, unequal differences in scores, lack of sample equivalence, and measurement inequivalence (Aycan et al. 2000, van de Vijver and Leung 1997). In response to standardized scales, such as five-point scales used in this study, it is possible for one group of respondents to provide more extreme responses and some other group to respond toward the middle of the scale. Although this could be a true reflection of their responses, it could also be a reflection of simply their response styles. For example, Berger, Stern, and Johansson (1983) found that American respondents are more likely to give more extreme responses and Japanese respondents are more likely to give responses in the middle of the scale when similar response categories are used. Therefore, in the first stage of data analysis, the data were standardized to minimize bias due to response styles.

Standardization of data was carried out in two steps similar to that used by Aycan et al. (2000). The survey questionnaire had 104 items measured on a similar five-point scale. In the first step, the mean for all 104 items was subtracted from individual item scores. This resulted in within-subject adjustment, reducing any response bias. In the second step, the mean for all 104 items was calculated again separately for the American sample and the European sample. This mean was subtracted again from each item separately for each region. This second step resulted in mean adjustment so as to reduce response bias across regions. Resulting adjusted mean values were used for comparison of American and European managers in the next stage of the analysis.

DETERMINANTS OF MANAGERIAL PERFORMANCE

To test if middle-level managers from the United States and Europe were different or similar in terms of their perceptions relating to the determinants of managerial performance, MANOVA analysis was done with region (United States and Europe) as the independent variable and 18 selected items (adjusted values) representing six dimensions of factors that could determine managerial performance as the dependent variables. This analysis showed that managers from the United States and Europe perceived the importance of these factors differently (multivariate $F = 6.775$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$). The differences across the two groups on individual items were examined by t-tests. Results of t-tests are shown in Table 2.

Two items represented leadership ability as determinants of managerial performance. American managers indicated that leadership ability is more important than what European managers felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 1.00, Europe adjusted mean = 0.560, $p < .001$). Managers from the two regions did not differ in terms of the importance they attached to the ability to modify the approach to reach a goal (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.930, Europe adjusted mean = 0.860, n.s.).

American managers attached greater importance to both oral communication skills (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.790, Europe adjusted mean = 0.310, $p < .001$) and written communication skills (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.980, Europe adjusted mean = 0.660, $p < .001$) compared with the importance attached by European managers to the extent these skills contributed to managerial performance.

The planning and decision making factor was represented by five items. Although there was no difference between American and European managers to the extent they felt that the ability to organize the work effort is a determinant of managerial performance (U.S. adjusted score = 1.150, Europe adjusted score = 1.030, n.s.), on all other indicators, American managers attached greater importance to indicators of planning and decision making compared to the importance attached by their European counterparts. As shown in Table 2, adjusted scores for the American sample were consistently higher than adjusted scores for Europe on all four remaining items.

Although both groups attached relatively lower importance to educational achievement as a determinant of managerial performance, the importance attached by American managers was greater than that attached by European managers. American managers attached greater importance to the level of formal educational achievement compared with that attached by their European counterparts (U.S. adjusted mean = -0.630, Europe adjusted mean = -1.000, $p < .001$). Similarly, American managers considered the reputation of the school or

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Table 2. Perception of Middle-Level Managers from the United States and Europe Regarding the Determinants of Managerial Success

	U.S. (n=176) Mean	Europe (n=77) Mean	p-value
<u>Leadership ability</u>			
The ability to lead a group to accomplish a task without arousing hostility	1.000	0.560	0.000
The ability to modify your approach or behavior tendencies in order to reach a goal	0.930	0.860	0.329
<u>Communication skills</u>			
The ability to effectively present an oral report to a conference group	0.790	0.310	0.000
The ability to effectively express your ideas in writing	0.980	0.660	0.001
<u>Planning and decision making</u>			
The ability to effectively organize the work effort	1.150	1.030	0.133
The ability to effectively plan and follow through on those plans	1.110	0.710	0.000
Consistently making decisions in a timely manner	0.870	0.690	0.031
The ability to sort out all the relevant facts related to a problem or situation	1.050	0.840	0.026
The ability to solve problems effectively	1.220	1.000	0.003
<u>Educational achievements</u>			
The reputation of the college or university where degree was obtained	-1.010	-1.490	0.000
Level of formal educational achievement in terms of degrees and grades	-0.630	-1.000	0.001
<u>Past experience</u>			
Degree of experience, either on-the-job or in related jobs or fields	0.530	0.320	0.035
A track record of favorable results on previous assignments	0.710	0.060	0.000
<u>Self-confidence/charisma</u>			
Having an optimistic outlook on life	0.670	0.690	0.904
Degree of self-confidence	0.990	0.830	0.019
Level of charisma	0.200	0.130	0.476
Level of self-esteem	0.800	0.470	0.000
Level of self-confidence	0.960	0.820	0.072

Note: Table entries are mean values of standardized variables.

university to be more important than how European managers felt about it (U.S. adjusted mean = -1.010, Europe adjusted mean = -1.490, $p < .001$).

American managers generally considered that past experience is more important as a determinant of managerial performance compared with how European managers felt. On the degree of experience, the adjusted score for the American sample was 0.530 compared with 0.320 for European managers ($p < .001$). Similarly, on a track record of favorable results on previous assignments, the adjusted mean score for the American sample was 0.710 compared with 0.060 for European sample ($p < .05$).

Finally, five items represented self-confidence and charisma as determinant of managerial performance. Of these five, there were no differences with respect to three items (having an optimistic outlook, level of charisma, and level of self-confidence). However, on the remaining two items American managers assigned greater importance compared with that assigned by European managers. Degree of self-confidence was considered more important by American managers compared with their European counterparts (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.990, European adjusted mean = 0.830, $p < .05$). Similarly, the level of self-esteem was

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considered more important by American managers compared with European managers (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.800, Europe adjusted mean = 0.470, $p < .001$).

MANAGERIAL MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

To test if middle-level managers from the United States and Europe differed in terms of their overall motivations related to their work, MANOVA analysis was done with region (United States and Europe) as the independent variable and twelve motivational items (adjusted values) as dependent variables. This analysis showed that managers from the United States and Europe differed significantly in terms of their motivations on the job (multivariate $F = 8.829$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$). T-tests were used to test for differences in individual motivating factors across the two groups. Results of t-test of twelve motivation items across the two regions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Motivating Factors of Middle-Level Managers from the United States and Europe

	U.S. (n=176) Mean	Europe (n=77) Mean	p-value
<u>Safety needs</u>			
Financial rewards	0.640	0.390	0.010
To avoid failure and rejection	0.150	-0.100	0.033
<u>Social needs</u>			
Gain admiration and respect from others	0.720	0.320	0.000
Enjoyment of work activities	0.910	1.120	0.026
Interaction and association with others	0.500	0.610	0.233
Pleasing or meeting expectations of others	0.200	-0.180	0.000
<u>Ego needs</u>			
Opportunity for advancement	0.770	0.410	0.002
Desire for continuous personal growth	0.970	0.790	0.064
Competitive desire to excel	0.710	0.040	0.000
Gain higher social status	-0.470	-0.510	0.737
Improve or retain self-esteem through achievement	0.720	0.220	0.000
<u>Self-actualization needs</u>			
Reach full potential	1.080	0.470	0.000

Note: Table entries are mean values of standardized variables.

Two items in the list of work-related motivational factors were close to the safety needs recognized by Maslow (1943): financial rewards, and to avoid failure. For both of these items, the adjusted score for American managers were higher (financial rewards = 0.640, avoid failure = 0.150) compared with those of European managers (financial rewards = 0.390, avoid failure = -0.100). Moreover, both of these differences were statistically significant ($p < .01$ and $p < .05$, respectively).

Social needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs were operationalized by four items within the context of work-related motivations for middle-level managers. American managers felt that gaining admiration was more important compared with how European managers felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.720, Europe adjusted mean = 0.320, $p < .001$). Similarly, American managers felt that pleasing or meeting expectations of others was more important com-

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pared with how European managers felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.200, Europe adjusted mean = -0.180, $p < .001$). However, European managers felt enjoyment of work activities is more important compared with how their American counterparts felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.910, Europe adjusted mean = 1.120, $p < .05$). Finally, with respect to the fourth item, interaction with others, there was no difference (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.500, Europe adjusted mean = 0.610, n.s.).

Work-related motivation factors for middle managers representing ego needs of the hierarchy of needs were measured by five items. American respondents felt opportunity for advancement was more important compared with how European respondents felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.770, Europe adjusted mean = 0.410, $p < .01$). Similarly, American managers attached greater importance to competitive desire to excel (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.710, Europe adjusted mean = 0.040, $p < .001$). Also, American managers assigned greater importance to improving or retaining self-esteem through achievement compared with that attached by European managers (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.720, Europe adjusted mean = 0.220, $p < .001$). However, with respect to the desire for continuous personal growth (U.S. adjusted mean = 0.970, Europe adjusted mean = 0.790, n.s.) and gaining higher social status (U.S. adjusted mean = -0.470, Europe adjusted mean = -0.510, n.s.) there are no differences across the two groups.

Finally, self-actualization needs in the hierarchy of needs was represented by one item in the factors for work-related motivations. American middle-level managers felt reaching full potential was more important compared with how European managers felt (U.S. adjusted mean = 1.080, Europe adjusted mean = 0.470, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to examine differences and similarities between American and European middle-level managers in terms of the factors they consider as important contributors to managerial performance and their motivations. Although it was not the intention to find the relative importance of various factors, interesting observations can be made. Among factors for managerial performance, educational achievements were considered the least important contributors to managerial performance. Besides educational achievements, both groups considered level of charisma to be of very low importance in terms of its contribution to managerial performance. Interestingly, a similar pattern was found with respect to factors considered most important contributors. Both groups considered the ability to effectively organize the work effort and the ability to solve problems effectively to be the two most important factors.

In terms of their motivations for work, American and European managers were similar and considered motivations to gain high social status to be the least important. However, for American managers, reaching their full potential was the most important motivator and for European managers, enjoyment of work activities was the most important motivator. Based on a study of managerial values, Bigoness and Blakely (1996) found support for the view that managerial values are "becoming increasing homogenous across nations" and that value differences continue to exist. Similarly, Hofstede (1983) found that American managers are close to managers from many European countries, including Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, in terms of their individualism and power distance—but different in terms of their uncertainty avoidance. The findings of the present study, in a way, mirror that of previ-

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ous researchers. First, this present study found some similarities between middle managers from the United States and those from three European countries. The study also found many differences across these two groups in terms of their perceptions and motivations.

Caution should be exercised while interpreting and extrapolating these findings. This study was based on a comparison of small convenience samples from these two regions. These samples cannot be considered to be representative of the two regions studied. However, this should not undermine the value of this research. These findings highlight important differences and some similarities between American and European managers. Many studies comparing managers across different countries have attempted to compare managers from Eastern countries with those from the West. Whenever broad East versus West comparisons are made, an underlying assumption is made that managers in the Western countries are essentially the same. As the findings of this research have shown, that is not a correct assumption. There could be important differences among Western countries. Also, the critics of the unified Europe have generally highlighted cultural differences among European countries. However, in this study, we did not find any differences among managers from three European countries. Although this finding is important, because of the nature of the sample from European countries, caution should be exercised while extrapolating the findings. Future researchers might attempt to collect more representative samples from these and other European countries to compare performance factors and managerial motivators.

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