

WORKPLACE MOTIVATION IN ROMANIA: WHAT ARE THE MAIN FACTORS AND THEIR CULTURAL BACKGROUND?

Laurențiu HAUSER¹

ABSTRACT

Workplace motivation strongly depends on local cultural values. But while there is a large number of studies that focus on the US-American and Western European background, the specifically Romanian factors still remain in the shadow. This text aims to explain the main factors that form the „typically Romanian” set of social employee needs and their origin.

KEYWORDS: cultural values, employee needs, workplace motivation

JEL CLASSIFICATION: J24

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to globalisation and the consolidation of international markets, workplaces all over the world more and more resemble each other. But is the human workforce really the same in all cultures? Of course not. This basic fact has been surprisingly overlooked in the field of motivation at the workplace - especially in Romania. This text is going to throw a spotlight on the specifically Romanian motivation factors.

2. SAME NEEDS TO ALL OVER THE WORLD?

One classical starting point to understand motivation is the "hierarchy of human needs" by Abraham Harold Maslow:

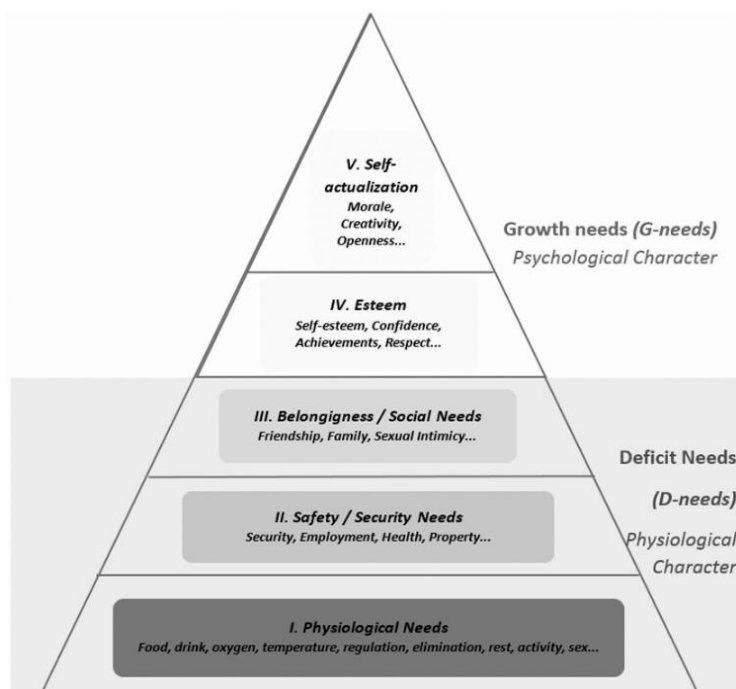


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs
Source: Adaptations after Maslow (1954) in Maslow (2007):

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, laurentiuhauser@gmail.com

But does it always translate into the same concrete needs in different cultures? And does it apply to all cultures at the same extent?

Let's look at a visible daily example. In spite of the low average income, the latest mobile versions are a must in Romania. An old mobile practically translates into lack of professional success and low income. Other cultures translate success into other objects: In France it is important to be able to afford high quality food, whereas in Germany a representative house or apartment is essential and shows that the owner is doing "well". Even simple gestures that seem universally valid are sometimes understood in a totally different way: "When they (McDonalds) came to Russia, they brought their very strong corporate culture. They decided to train the Russian sales boys and girls. They wanted to get them to smile in the McDonald's way that makes one display all thirty-two teeth. Yet, sometime later, the McDonald's experts found out that Russian customers were shocked by those broad smiles. They stared in amazement at the sales personnel: "Why are you grinning at me?" They did their research and found that a broad smile at a stranger does not work in Russia. The Russians never smile like that when they run across a stranger. When somebody does that to a Russian, the likely reaction is "What is wrong with this person?" " (Minkov, Hofstede & Hofstede (2010)

Are there any models that adapt the Maslow pyramid to Romanian conditions? The consultant Dorin Bodea (2013) attempts to do this (figure 2).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs	Hierarchy of Work Needs	Cultural Characteristics	Shared Values
I. PHYSIOLOGICAL Food drink, oxygen, temperature, regulation, elimination, rest, activity, sex.	minimum financial income minimum working conditions	family hospitality	financial income family hospitality
II. Safety Security, Employment, Health, Property	Job security Occupational Safety fair rules freedom (freedom of association)	stability	safety peace freedom
III. Belonging / Love Friendship, Family, Sexual Intimacy	Teamwork collaboration help each other empathy	family spirit Tendency to gossip	--
IV. Esteem Self-esteem, Confidence, Achievements, Respect	competence recognition independent	intelligence independent Desire for change Desire to be the boss	--
V. Self-actualization Morale, Creativity,	Increased self-esteem through work	creativity and innovation	financial income power, fame Advancement in Hierarchy competition
<i>Source: Adaptations after Maslow (1954)³</i>	<i>Source: Adaptations after Dorin Bodea, "Valorile angajaților români" (The Values of Romanian Employees), Editura Result, București, 2013</i>		

Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs and Bodea's Hierarchy of Work Needs, Cultural Characteristics and Shared Values

Needs, Main Cultural Values and Behavioural Characteristics of Romanian employees

Unfortunately his explanations are based on personal opinion. Therefore it is difficult to verify his findings.

3. THE HOFSTEDE DIMENSIONS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR MOTIVATION AT THE WORKPLACE IN ROMANIA

To understand the Romanian specifics, the Hofstede model of Dimensions of National cultures helps to place Romania into an international context.

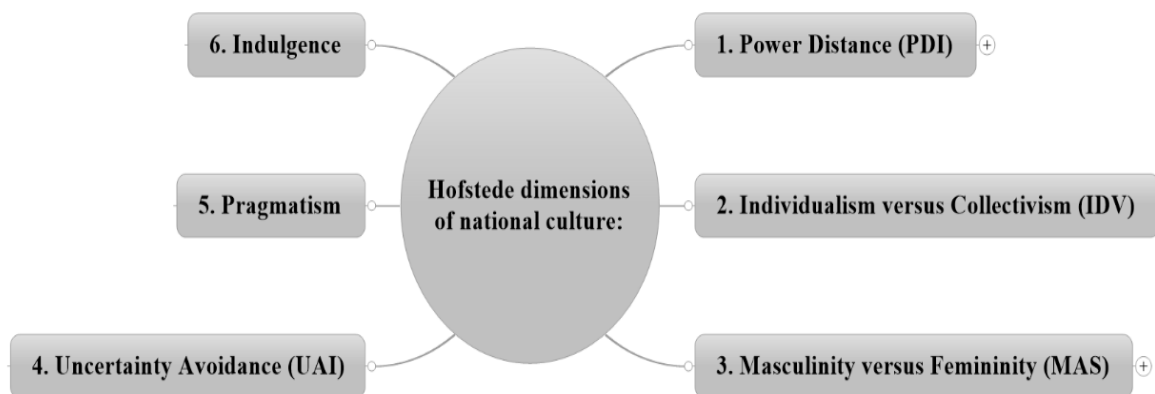


Figure 3. Geert Hofstede, "Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory"

Retrieved 15.10.2011, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hofstede%27s_cultural_dimensions_theory

According to the Hofstede Organisation (<http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>, last visited on 01.10.2014) Romania fares as follows:

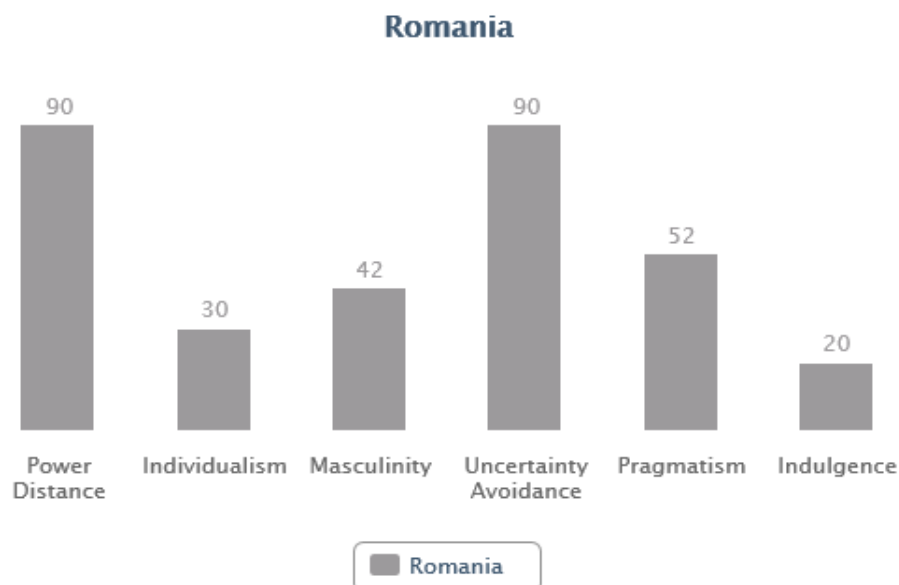


Figure 3. Geert Hofstede, "Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory"

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3.1 Power distance

Hofstede defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Geert Hofstede, "Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory", Retrieved 01.10.2014, from <http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>).

In this regard Romania scores very high with 90 points out of 100. The hierarchical order is generally not questioned and the distance between e.g. managers and lower employees is not only accepted but also expected. Gabriela Marinescu underlines: "Formal leaders coordinates, organizes, monitors and influences people and process by strict rules and procedures. It is difficult to introduce new ideas and concepts" (Marinescu & Marinescu, 2013). Flat hierarchies therefore are not a major motivation factor. While this is true for the majority of the workforce, this may change in the future due to more international contacts of students and returning migrant workers who have learned to appreciate a more equal status in international companies.

3.2 Individualism (IDV) – Collectivism

"The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty" (<http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>). With a score of 30 points, Romania is clearly a collectivistic society. The loyalty to the family or extended relationships is much more important than individual needs. Harmony and good working relationships are of high importance. If the management stresses the work objectives too much, the motivation of Romanian employees is likely to decrease.

3.3 Masculinity (MAS) - femininity

"A high score (masculine) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field. (...) A low score (feminine) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A feminine society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable" (<http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>). With 42 points Romania tends more to the feminine side. At the workplace, people are therefore motivated by free time and flexible working hours. Overtime is regarded as hardship and should be rewarded.

3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

"The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these is reflected in the UAI score" (<http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>).

In this regard Romania score with 90 points, which means that unorthodox behaviour, is not welcome and not encouraged. Rules provide security. For the workplace motivation this means, that spontaneity is not regarded as a positive asset. Marinescu and Marinescu (2013) underline that *"people want to avoid uncertainty. Most (...) agree to have highly structured jobs with few unexpected events. Management requirements and instructions are spelled out in detail, so people know what they are expected to do. The organization has rules or procedures to cover work situations. Respondents want job stability and they don't like to be surprised by unknown situations"*(Marinescu & Marinescu, 2013).

3.5 Pragmatism

"Normative societies who score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future" (<http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>).

With a score of 52 Romania does not tend to either extreme. The attitude towards work is equally influenced by traditions but also pragmatic. Due to the socialist past, people had to learn to "make do", which is still a common attitude. Due to this attitude perfection is not a common aim:

3.6 Indulgence

Indulgence is defined as "the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses. (...) Relatively weak control is called "indulgence" and relatively strong control is called "restraint" (Geert Hofstede, "Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory", Retrieved 01.10.2014, from <http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html>). In this regard Romania is a very restraint culture: The score of 20 indicates a pessimistic approach to life. Therefore motivation plays a very important role at the workplace. Due to the pessimistic outlook high involvement at the workplace needs to be repetitively praised.

4. CONCLUSION

Extrinsic factors play a major role at the workplace: Romanian employees are dominantly motivated by salary, job security and incentives. The importance of the group versus the individual is also visible at the workplace: Harmony and stability are highly valued. Change and spontaneous developments, which may be welcome in other cultures, are not always regarded as positive. Further research in this field of human resources is needed: Motivation plays a major role in the improvement of productivity and effectivity.

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