

Cultural Variations in Work Motivation: Dissimilar Determinants of Work Performance
among Indian and American Corporate Professionals

Employee motivation is key to corporate performance; particularly, during economic downturns corporate managers seek non-monetary motivators of behavior. Western models of work motivation commonly guide this search. In an era of globalization and multinational corporate workforces, the applicability of Western models of work motivation worldwide demand empirical scrutiny. Present research addresses this concern by drawing upon the methods of experimental social and personality psychology to detect the variability in work motivation among corporate professionals of Indian versus American cultural backgrounds. Using novel self-report and experimental measures, this research provides evidence that key aspects of work such as achievement motives (Tripathi & Cervone, 2008) and autonomy (Tripathi & Cervone, under review) vary considerably among Indian and American corporate professionals.

In the latter study, using an online randomized, controlled experiment for detecting the influence of autonomy support on motivated action, we found that, in contrast to the prevailing view, autonomy exerts opposite effects in American and Indian cultural contexts. American and Indian corporate professionals performed a voluntary online task under autonomy-supportive or autonomy-suppressive conditions. Americans worked far longer in the autonomy-supportive condition whereas Indians worked far longer in the autonomy-suppressive condition. In both, cultural differences were extraordinarily large, the populations exhibiting little statistical overlap. The results refute the claim, made regularly in both basic and applied psychology, that enhancing autonomy boosts motivation universally. Methodologically, our internet-based behavioral measure was able to detect a cultural variation, previously unreported in the literature in psychological science, that is profoundly large.