ASIAN-AMERICANS AND CAUCASIANS IN THE WORKPLACE: SOME ATTITUDINAL COMPARISONS

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The work force is now composed of a greater mix of culturally diverse employees than ever before, making an understanding of how such diversity impacts the work place of critical importance to organizational success. The present project examines differences in two important work-related cognitions, locus of control and job satisfaction, across two cultural groups, Asian-Americans and Caucasians. Studies show that social cognitions have an impact on a wide range of organizational behaviors including assessment and training; goal-setting; job performance; leadership effectiveness and employee job satisfaction. T-tests to examine differences across the two groups included in the present research showed that the Asian-American sample obtained a more external locus of control and a lower level of job satisfaction than the Caucasian sample. Implications of the results for the management of behavior in organizations are discussed.

A number of trends within the United States make an understanding of differences between culturally diverse groups imperative for effective management in today's work place. Between now and the year 2010, the population in the United States is projected to grow by 42 million. Hispanics are projected to account for 47% of this growth; Blacks for 22%; Asians and other people of color for 18%, while Whites will account for only 13% of the increase (Randle, 1990). By the year 2000, women and immigrants will constitute 85% of the net growth in the United States labor force (Johnston and Packer, 1987). A national study of almost 3000 worker attitudes indicated that more than 20% of people of color reported being discriminated against, with a corresponding higher incidence of burnout, reduced willingness to take risks and increased intention to quit (Shellenbarger, 1993). Understanding differences between cultural groups can assist not only in the management of a diverse labor force but can also contribute to the progressive notion of valuing diversity as a competitive resource (Cox, 1993; Loden and Rosener, 1991). One major contributor to the process of valuing diversity is the availability of research on how diversity affects organizational behavior, such research is evolving (Fukuyama and Greenfield, 1983; Hackett, Lent and Greenhaus, 1991; Weitzel and Waller, 1990; Zane,

Sue, Hu and Kwon, 1991). The present project aims to contribute to this stream of research by examining differences in two important work-related cognitions, locus of control and job satisfaction, across two cultural groups, Asian-Americans and Caucasians.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social cognitions in influencing organizational behavior has gained momentum over the past several decades. Studies looking at the influence of social cognitions on organizational behavior include such diverse topics as goal-setting (Latham and Yukl, 1975; Taylor, Locke, Lee and Gist, 1984), vocational behavior (Betz and Hackett, 1981; Betz and Hackett, 1983; Multon, Brown and Lent, 1991; Taylor, 1981; Taylor and Betz, 1983), assessment and training (Brockner, 1988; Frayne and Latham, 1987; Luthans and Kreitner, 1985; Manz and Sims, 1980; Snyder, 1987) and job performance (Barling and Beattie, 1983; Robertson and Sadri, 1993; Sadri and Robertson, 1993). House (1971; 1987) suggests that, among other variables, social cognitions affect leadership effectiveness. He suggests that leaders need to choose from four styles of leadership (directive, participative, achievement oriented and supportive) by examining two classes of contingency factors: environmental factors (task structure, formal authority systems and work group relationships) and subordinate characteristics (locus of control, experience and perceived ability). The correct match between leadership style and these contingency factors will affect job performance and employee job satisfaction. The present research aims to examine two constructs within this model (locus of control and job satisfaction) within a cross-cultural framework.

Locus of Control. Locus of control may be defined as a general expectancy regarding an individual's ability to control the major events in his/her life. Those who believe that they are masters of their fate are labelled internals while those who believe that their lives are reliant on luck, chance, fate or powerful others are classified as externals (Rotter, 1966). There is evidence that internals and externals interpret information with respect to their occupations in different manners (Sadri and Marcoulides, 1994; Spector, 1987). Internals perceive a greater degree of control over their work situation; they report having more autonomy and receiving more feedback than externals (Hammer and Vardi, 1981; Kimmons and Greenhaus, 1976). Internals are reported to view their jobs as more purposeful. They hold higher expectancies that effort will lead to enhanced performance, and exhibit greater personal career effectiveness when they feel that effort and performance will lead to valued rewards. Internals also show higher levels of job involvement and display a higher level of work motivation (Organ and Greene, 1974; Spector, 1982).

Externals tend to have higher absenteeism rates, are more anxious, and are more alienated from the work setting (Spector, 1982). Externals tend to perceive their jobs as more stressful than internals (Anderson, Hellriegel and Slocum, 1977; Gemmill and Heisler, 1972).

Furthermore, externals report greater psychological strains resulting from job specificity; more somatic complaints as a result of role conflict; and are more likely to respond to normal organizational frustrations with aggression, sabotage, or withdrawal than are internals (Anderson et al, 1977; Fusilier, Ganster and Mayes, 1987; Gemmill and Heisler, 1972; Marino and White, 1985; Sadri and Marcoulides, 1994; Storms and Spector, 1987).

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been the subject of job-related research for over 50 years (Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985). Job satisfaction refers to an affective or emotional response toward different facets of one's job, including financial compensation, colleagues, opportunities for promotion and challenge (Quinn and Shepard, 1974). It has been suggested that job satisfaction is linked to a number of work behaviors and attitudes such as job performance, absenteeism, turnover, organizational commitment and pro-union voting behavior. A brief review of studies examining job satisfaction is presented below.

The strongest empirical link between job satisfaction and work-related behavior relates to the negative relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. Mobley (1977) suggested that a primary result of job dissatisfaction is the stimulation of thoughts of leaving the organization which in turn, lead to the withdrawal decision and behavior. This general pattern of relationships has been supported in a number of studies (Griffeth and Hom, 1988; Lance, 1988; Lee and Mowday, 1987; Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth, 1978). Job satisfaction has also been shown to be negatively related to pro-union voting behavior (Heneman and Sandver, 1983; Klandermans, 1989; Mellor, 1990) and positively related to organizational citizenship behavior (behaviors that exceed the call of duty; Fisher and Locke, 1992; Organ, 1990; Podsakoff, Mackenzie and Hui, 1993).

While job satisfaction has also been linked to higher levels of absenteeism and lower levels of job performance, such relationships have demonstrated a much weaker magnitude than that to employee turnover (Hackett and Guion, 1985; Scott and Taylor, 1985). However, job satisfaction does show a link with a number of very important work-related and life attitudes. There is a strong link between job satisfaction and an individual's level of organizational commitment (defined as the extent to which an individual identifies with an organization and is committed to its goals; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Furthermore, job satisfaction is negatively linked to levels of physical and mental ill-health and positively related to life satisfaction (Cooper and Sadri, 1991; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980; Jenkins, 1971; Judge and Hulin, 1993).

Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction. A number of studies employing diverse samples (including police officers, nurses, managers and professionals) have examined the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction. The general finding which emerges from these studies is that internals tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than are externals (Gemmill and Heisler, 1972; Lester and Genz, 1978; Munoz, 1973; Organ and Greene, 1974). Moreover,

there is a stronger relationship between job satisfaction and performance for internals than externals. Evidence indicates that internals obtain higher salaries and greater salary increases than externals (Andrisani and Nestel, 1976; Nystrom, 1983).

Self-Expectancies and Cultural Background. One variable which remains under-researched in the study of both locus of control and job satisfaction is culture. Hofstede (1984) defines culture as a form of collective mental programming of a group of people; and research shows that such programming operates as a powerful influence on a person's beliefs, values and actions (Hackett, Lent and Greenhaus, 1991; Lent and Hackett, 1987; Weitzel and Waller, 1990). Fukuyama and Greenfield (1983) found that Asian-Americans students obtained lower assertion scores than Caucasian students on a number of dimensions (such as expressing feelings or making difficult requests, making requests in public, expressing compliments, disagreements with parents and expressing annoyance to the opposite sex). Zane, Sue, Hu and Kwon (1991) also found differences between Asian-Americans and Caucasians in self-efficacy (self-expectations of performance) and self-reported assertive responding.

HYPOTHESES

In attempting to formulate some hypotheses concerning how the two groups included in this study (Asian-Americans and Caucasians) might differ, it is necessary to review previous research in this area. Hofstede (1984; 1991) found differences between the dominant American culture and many of the Asian cultures which he surveyed on three of his four dimensions of national culture (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism). On the dimension of power distance (the pattern of interpersonal relationships when differences in power are perceived) America emerged as below average while all of the Asian countries included in Hofstede's study (the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan and Japan) emerged as above average. On the dimension of uncertainty avoidance (the extent to which people are threatened by ambiguous situations or stimuli and have beliefs and institutions that help them to avoid this uncertainty) America was again below average, while most of the Asian countries (included here were Japan, Taiwan and Thailand) were above average. In terms of individualism versus collectivism (the extent to which individuals are concerned with the welfare of themselves and their immediate family as opposed to the welfare of the group) America emerged as a highly individualistic country whereas all of the Asian countries surveyed emerged as collectivistic.

Hall's construct of high-versus low-context has been used extensively in cross-cultural research. He suggests that in high-context cultures, people rely heavily on situational cues such as status or position for meaning when communicating with others, while in low-context cultures, written and spoken words are heavily relied upon in important communication (Hall,

1973; 1976; 1983). America is a low-context culture, Asian cultures are predominantly high-context (Dulek, Fielden and Hill, 1991; Gudykunst, 1988, 1991).

Three of the dimensions of culture identified by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) serve to further identify differences between the two groups identified here. The three dimensions are: relationship to the environment, time orientation, and focus of responsibility. Relationship to the environment addresses societal perceptions of whether individuals are subjugated to their environment, in harmony with it or able to dominate it. Individuals living in North America generally believe that they can control nature while most Asian cultures seek harmony with it. Time orientation addresses whether the culture focuses on the past, present, or future. The American culture has typically focussed on the present and the immediate future while the Asian cultures have generally taken a longer term perspective. Focus of responsibility addresses the issue of where responsibility lies for the welfare of others in society. As stated above, Americans are basically individualistic and believe that responsibility lies with the individual; Asian cultures are more group oriented and believe that responsibility lies with the larger group (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961).

The dimensions of national culture identified above serve to show that there is some reason to believe that there are different perceptions of reality between the two cultural groups included in this study. The following are some tentative suggestions about how such cultural differences might impact perceptions of locus of control and job satisfaction. Cultures which place greater importance on the individual and his/her roles and responsibilities (as opposed to the group) are likely to lead towards a greater internal locus of control in the general population. Also, cultures which adopt an orientation of control toward the environment would be expected to produce a more internal locus of control orientation. Conversely, uncertainty avoidance as a cultural attribute communicates less tolerance of risk and ambiguity (with the implication that such risk and ambiguity is less controllable by individual members of society). Thus, cultures high on uncertainty avoidance would be likely to exhibit greater levels of external locus of control among the general population. The two dimensions of power distance and high-context are cultural attributes which place great importance on one's position and other contextual factors (such as age). This implies that an individual's position in life is, in large part, a determinant of the important events which occur in his/her life. Again, this would tend to promote a more external locus of control orientation.

Based on these tentative suggestions, it is hypothesized that the Caucasian group included in this study will obtain a more internal locus of control than the Asian-American group. Consistent with previous research in the field demonstrating that internals are more satisfied with their jobs than are externals (Gemmill and Heisler, 1972; Lester and Genz, 1978; Munoz, 1973; Organ and Greene, 1974), it is hypothesized that the Caucasian sample included here will also show a higher level of job satisfaction than the Asian-American group. In summary, the present research aims to test the following two hypotheses:

H1: The Caucasian group included in this study will obtain a more internal locus of control than the Asian-American group.

H2: The Caucasian group included in this study will demonstrate a higher level of job satisfaction than the Asian-American group.

METHOD

Subjects

Data were collected from respondents at a major university in the Southern California area. Questionnaires were distributed on campus in the library and the student union building by volunteers. The initial number of questionnaires distributed was 270, of which 205 were returned (a response rate of 76%). In total, 85% of the sample respondentswere employed at the time of data collection: 64% of respondents worked full-time, 21% worked part-time and 15% were unemployed. The unemployed respondents were asked to think about their last job when responding to the job satisfaction questions described below. Across the sample, 47% were male and 53% female. The median age of the sample was between 25 and 34 years (62% fall into this category). Data collected on the ethnic-racial background of participants showed that 100 were Caucasian, 90 Asian-American, and 15 from a number of other ethnic-racial backgrounds. Due to the small sample size, the third group was excluded from the present study. The final sample size was 190 respondents, 53% of whom were Caucasian and 47% Asian-American. The two groups were comparable in age, gender and working status.

Measures

Locus of Control. Locus of control was assessed though an abbreviated version of Rotter's locus of control scale (Rotter, 1966). The measure used in the present study consists of seven items. Each item presents two alternatives, and respondents were required to choose the response which most closely matched their perception. Each response which indicated an internal locus of control orientation was given a positive score. Hence, the higher the score, the greater the internal locus of control orientation.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using a 35-item questionnaire designed to measure six aspects of the job (Quinn and Shepard, 1974). These six components include satisfaction with the degree of comfort (7 items), financial rewards (3 items), resource adequacy (11 items), challenge (6 items), co-workers (4 items) and promotion (3 items). Responses were summed for each set of items to derive facet-specific subscale scores. In addition to the facet-specific questions, one facet-free question asked respondents how satisfied they were with their jobs on a general level. Copies of the locus of control and job satisfaction questionnaires used in this study are provided in Appendix A.

RESULTS

All the quantitative analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; Norusis, 1990).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Coefficients of Reliability for Locus of Control and Job Description

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Alpha
Locus	4.28	1.84	.64
Comfort	20.01	3.54	.67
Challenge	17.8	4.04	.85
Rewards	7.99	2.30	.70
Co-workers	12.08	2.55	.78
Adequacy	32.04	6.71	.90
Promotion	7.38	2.48	.84
Facet-free	2.88	0.86	

Table 1 shows summary statistics and Cronbach alpha coefficients of reliability for the locus of control scale and the six facets of the job satisfaction measure. As can be seen, the alpha coefficients for all the scales are at acceptable levels (.64 and above) which indicates reasonable levels of internal consistency for the locus of control scale and the six subscales of the job satisfaction measure. No alpha is presented for facet-free job satisfaction as this is a single item indicator.

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix for locus of control and the seven aspects of job satisfaction measured in this study. It can be seen that there is a high level of correlation between the seven aspects of job satisfaction. This indicates that individuals satisfied with one facet of their jobs were also satisfied with other aspects of their job and were also generally satisfied (facet-free). Furthermore, respondents with an internal locus of control showed a

significantly higher level of satisfaction with the challenge offered in their jobs (p<.001) and the rewards received from their jobs (p<.01).

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Locus							
2. Comfort	.12						
3. Chanllenge	.25**	.29**					
4. Rewards	.21*	.39**	.44**				
5. Co-workers	.18	.44**	.47**	.49**			
6. Adequacy	.14	.45**	.50**	.47**	.62**		
7. Promotion	.14	.33**	.50**	.45**	.46**	.56**	
8. Facet-free	.14	.43**	.54**	.53**	.64**	.62**	.62**

*p<.01; **p<.001

Table 3 shows t-tests for locus of control and job satisfaction across the two groups. It may be seen that the Asian-American group obtained a significantly more external locus of control (p<.000). Furthermore, the Asian-American respondents included in the present study were significantly less satisfied with a number of aspects of their jobs. The Asian-American group obtained significantly lower mean scores for levels of physical comfort at work, the amount of challenge their jobs offered, the type and amount of rewards, their co-workers, the adequacy of resources necessary to do their jobs and the promotional opportunities offered by their jobs. The Asian-American group also scored lower on the facet-free item, indicating a lower level of overall satisfaction with their jobs.

Table 3

T-tests for Differences in Mean Scores Across the Caucasian and Asian Groups on Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction

	Variable	Mean	S.D.	T-value
Locus of Control				
	Caucasian	4.81	1.75	3.72***
	Asian	3.83	1.84	
Comfort				
	Caucasian	21.12	3.33	4.50***
	Asian	18.86	3.52	
Challenge				
	Caucasian	18.82	4.14	3.25**
	Asian	16.96	3.71	
Rewards				
	Caucasian	8.55	2.26	3.10**
	Asian	7.52	2.31	
Co-workers				
	Caucasian	12.71	2.53	3.34**
	Asian	11.49	2.48	
Adequacy				
	Caucasian	33.87	6.18	4.24***
	Asian	29.88	6.65	
Promotion				
	Caucasian	7.99	2.26	3.14**
	Asian	6.88	2.58	
Facet-free				
	Caucasian	3.00	.82	2.20*
	Asian	2.72	.91	

*p<.01   **p<.001   ***p<.0001

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As stated earlier, the reality of working in multi-cultural environments, in multinational companies and in a global marketplace has made an understanding of cultural differences imperative. The United States labor force is becoming more culturally diverse and valuing diversity is likely to become a key competitive advantage (Kiplinger and Kiplinger, 1989; Loden and Rosener, 1991). Valuing diversity assumes that differences between groups based on cultural background are understood and accepted. The present research aimed to take one step toward understanding such differences by examining differences in locus of control and job satisfaction across two cultural groups: Asian-Americans and Caucasians. Prior research demonstrates that the dominant American culture does differ from the dominant cultures observed in Asian countries. For example, Hofstede (1984; 1991) found major differences across these cultures on three of his four dimensions of culture (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism). The dominant American culture is low-context while Asian cultures are predominantly high-context (Dulek, Fielden and Hill, 1991). Individuals living in North America generally believe that they can control nature while most Asian cultures seek harmony with nature. Americans and Asians also differ in terms of their time orientation, Americans typically take a short-term perspective whereas the Asian cultures generally take a longer term view (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). The present results highlighted some more micro-focussed differences between these two cultural groups: the Asian-American group included in this study showed a more external locus of control and a lower level of job satisfaction than the Caucasian group.

The constructs of locus of control and job satisfaction are important because they influence perceptions, experiences and behavior in organizations. Studies show that individuals with an internal locus of control are more satisfied with their work, suffer from less stress-related outcomes and have higher levels of organizational commitment and life satisfaction (Anderson et al, 1977; Fusilier et al 1987; Gemmill and Heisler, 1972; Sadri and Marcoulides, 1994; Storms and Spector, 1987). Research emanating from the Path-Goal theory of leadership (House, 1971; 1987) shows that employees with an external locus of control are more satisfied with a directive style of leadership while those with an internal locus of control are more satisfied with a participative style (Indik, 1986; Keller, 1989; Wofford and Liska, 1993).

Further research is needed to investigate whether Asian-American respondents consistently report a more external locus of control. Should such a pattern emerge, then it is plausible to assume that the experience of Asian-Americans in a workplace which overlooks this will be adversely affected. This was substantiated in the present research. The present results have significant implications for the management of a diverse work force. Currently, work in most American organizations is structured in a manner which tends to motivate or satisfy individuals with an internal locus of control. The current interest in employee empowerment is likely to make the work context more so. Research shows that employees with an external locus of

control prefer more structure, more direction and higher levels of supervision (Indik, 1986; Keller, 1989; Wofford and Liska, 1993). Individuals with an external locus of control and those from collectivistic cultures are likely to value group level reward systems and a more collaborative work environment which fosters mutual (rather than individual) dependence.

More research of a similar nature is needed to determine whether different environments are consistently perceived as more satisfying for individuals from different cultural backgrounds. If so, often relatively minor changes in the structure of the workplace or the job itself may accommodate such differences. Clearly, it is not always possible to adapt one's organization structure to suit different types of employees, and in such instances, managers (avoiding the assumption that employees are predominantly homogeneous) should explicitly identify expectations and explain procedures. Previous studies have shown that job redesign techniques such as increased participation in decision making and improvements in communication within the American organization have resulted in positive individual and organizational outcomes (Jackson, 1983; Pierce and Newstrom, 1983; Wall and Clegg, 1981). Future research needs to address the role of such techniques within a multi-cultural setting. It is important to note that the present results do not imply differences in productivity or effectiveness across the two groups included here, and are not intended to suggest that one way of observing reality is better than another. However, these results do suggest that to ignore differences may be detrimental to organizations operating in today's multi-cultural environment.

There are a number of shortcomings with the present research. First, only two ethnic-racial groups were included which is not representative of the truly multi-cultural environment of the bulk of organizations operating within America and across the world. Future research of a similar nature might try to incorporate a more ethnically diverse mix of respondents. A second shortcoming with this research is that the respondents were working for a diverse range of companies in a diverse range of occupations and there are no statistical controls in the analysis for differences in occupation, job type and job tenure. Further research which controls for such disparities may shed more light on the exclusive influence of cultural background on work-related attitudes. Third, the present study examined work attitudes (which are of great importance to the practice of management) but lacked any measures of job performance. Again, future researchers would make a significant contribution to the field if performance measures are incorporated into their research along with measures of work-related perceptions and attitudes. This research presents one small step in the evolving stream of research addressing the effects of a culturally diverse work force on organizational behavior. Such research serves to show where culture is important and where it is not so that the role of culture is neither over- nor under-stated (Yeh and Lawrence, 1995). Research of this nature is likely to have significant implications for the management of behavior in organizations in the 1990s and beyond.

Appendix A

Questionnaire Used to Measure Locus of Control

<u>Locus of Control</u>

1. A. Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
   B. People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
2. A. Unfortunately an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.
   B. In the long run, people get the respect they deserve.
3. A. Without the right breaks one can not be an effective leader.
   B. Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
4. A. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.
   B. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
5. A. Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.
   B. There really is no such thing as "luck."
6. A. In the long run, the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.
   B. Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness or all three.
7. A. Many times I feel I have little influence over the things that happen to me.
   B. It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.

Questionnaire Used to Measure Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction

1. I have enough time to get the job done.
2. The hours are good.
3. Travel to and from work is convenient.
4. The physical surroundings are pleasant.
5. I can forget about my personal problems.
6. I am free from the conflicting demands that other people make of me.
7. I am not asked to do excessive amounts of work.
8. The work is interesting.
9. I have an opportunity to develop my own special abilities.
10. I can see the results of my work.
11. I am given a chance to do the things I do best.
12. I am give a lot of freedom to decide how I do my own work.
13. The problems I am expected to solve are hard enough.
14. The pay is good.
15. The job security is good.
16. My fringe benefits are good.
17. The people I work with are helpful.
18. The people I work with are friendly.
19. I am given a lot of chances to make friends.
20. The people I work with take a personal interest in me.
21. I have enough information to get the job done.
22. I receive enough help and equipment to get the job done.
23. I have enough authority to do my job.
24. My supervisor is competent in doing his/her job.
25. My responsibilities are clearly defined.
26. The people I work with are competent in doing their jobs.
27. My supervisor is very concerned about the welfare of those under him/her.
28. My supervisor is successful in getting people to work together.
29. My supervisor is helpful to me in getting my job done.
30. The people I work with are helpful to me in getting my job done.
31. My supervisor is friendly.
32. Promotions are handled fairly.
33. The chances for promotion are good.
34. My employer is concerned about giving everyone a chance to get ahead.
35. Now, taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole?

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