

Students as Future Performers: Intercultural Differences

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to determinate students' intercultural differences in their viewpoint to human performance in organization according to group of factors using Blanchard and Thacker (2004) model. Corresponding survey was provided in Lithuania before (Kumpikaite and Alas, 2009). The following survey was decided to expand and to look at differences in intercultural context. Lithuania, Turkey, and Iran were taken as purpose countries. It was selected because countries are from different cultures, religions and situated from the West (Lithuania in Europe) to the East (Turkey situated in Europe and Asia – the Near East, and then Iran – the Middle East) in Eurasia and because authors of this paper work in these countries and deal with described problems.

Keywords: Students, Human Performance, Intercultural Differences, Motivation, KSA, Environment, Lithuania, Turkey, Iran.

1. Introduction

University students will become employees in organizations (Kumpikaite, 2009b). Professors try to give them the best knowledge and to teach them to be good specialists for the future (Kumpikaite and Alas, 2009). However, professors deal with the problem that students do not want to learn, to work every day and to get more knowledge (Brophy (1998), Dumciuviene *et al.* (2007), Bye *et al.* (2007), Debnat *et al.* (2007), Ruban *et al.* (2003) and Griffin *et al.* (2008)). Necessity to have good human performers in complicated economic situation and question how to motivate and prepare them in the best way gave an idea to explore students' attitudes to their studies and work in intercultural context.

Purpose: This paper reveals students' attitudes to human performance in organization. The paper reports the findings of intercultural differences of university students' study in Lithuania, Turkey, and Iran.

Methodology: The research design is based on Blanchard and Thacker's (2004) Human Performance model, which includes three main factors as i) Motivation, ii) Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA), and iii) Environment. This model indicates that a person's performance depends on the interaction of motivation, their knowledge, skills and attitudes, and environment. Both motivation and KSAs are part of person's memory and thinking and thinking systems. Environment refers to the physical surroundings in which performance must occur, including barriers and aids to performance, as well as objects and events that people might see as indicating that employees' performance will be rewarded or punished.

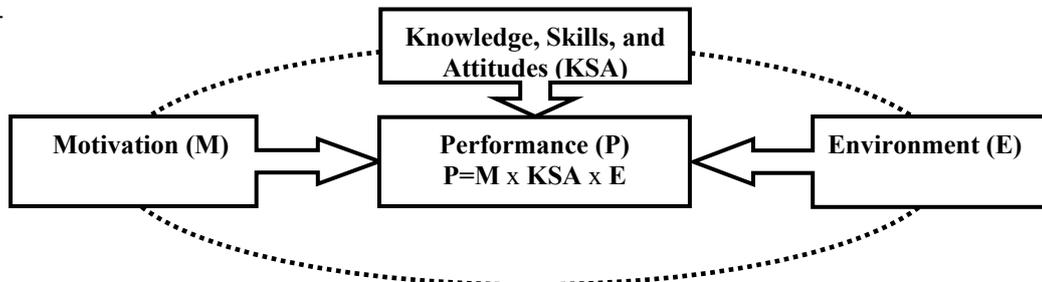
2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Introduction to Human Performance in Organization

Growing importance of globalization of knowledge and information technologies make us to understand the importance of lifelong learning, modern technologies, and knowledge spread (Kumpikaite and Alas, 2009, Kumpikaite and Sakalas, 2007). These changes with a resultant accessible diversity of cultural and moral choices enabling growing individual autonomy, leads to what sociologists call a "detraditionalization" of social life (Hake, 1999).

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Employees' job performance, employees' behavior in general, is a function of what they know, what they are able to do and what they believe. Figure 1 depicts a general performance model (Blanchard and Thacker, 2004). This model indicates that a person's performance depends on the interaction of motivation, their knowledge, skills and attitudes, and environment. If people do not have the KSAs, they cannot perform. Motivation arises from people needs their beliefs about how best to satisfy those needs. Both motivation and KSAs are part of person's memory and thinking and thinking systems. Environment refers to the physical surroundings in which performance must occur, including barriers and aids to performance, as well as objects and events that people might see as indicating that employees' performance will be rewarded or punished.



Source: Prepared by authors according to Blanchard and Thacker, 2004

Fig. 1: Factors Determining Human Performance

Each of the factors M, KSA, and E in Figure 1 can influence performance, but it is the combination of these factors that determines the person's performance. It helps us to understand whether poor job performance is due to KSAs or other factors. The likelihood of engaging in any activity, then, is limited by the weakest factor. For instance, no matter how knowledgeable or skilled a person is, if he is not motivated to perform the activity – or worse, is motivated not to perform it – then he will not. The model in the figure is important for determining employee's training needs. It is also important in the design of training. When putting together the learning modules and training methods, the trainer must consider how they will affect the trainees' motivation to learn. A deeper understanding of the three determinants of performance will increase ability to design and implement effective studies programs.

2.2. Intercultural Differences

Speaking about effective performance during rapid globalization process, it is necessary to speak about intercultural differences and especially differences in communication. Huber-Krieger and Strange, (2003) state the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary for successful intercultural work and communication have to be observed, discussed and practiced. Effective communication is a key to organizational accomplishment (Al-Nashmi and Syd Zim, 2011). According to Kumpikaite (2009), effective intercultural communication skill is an individual's or a group's ability to achieve understanding through verbal or non-verbal interaction between cultures. Van Bakel (2002) has claimed that the literature about intercultural communication shows that differences in culture are the major cause of any international assignment problems. Therefore we can see necessity to speak about intercultural differences in communication as well as in performing in organizations what is done in this paper.

3. Methodology of the Research

Skills' evaluation was made using Katz's (1974) managerial categories of skills evaluation, which are divided to *Technical*, *Human or interpersonal* and *Conceptual skills*.

Trying to evaluate students' expectations and motives from work Maslow's (1967) hierarchy needs were used:

- *Physiological needs* are to do with the maintenance of the human body. If we are unwell, then little else matters until we recover.
- *Safety needs* are about putting a roof over our heads and keeping us from harm. If we are rich, strong and powerful, or have good friends, we can make ourselves safe.

- *Social (belonging) needs* introduce our tribal nature. If we are helpful and kind to others they will want us as friends.
- *Esteem needs* are for a higher position within a group. If people respect us, we have greater power.
- *Self-actualization needs* are to 'become what we are capable of becoming', which would our greatest achievement.

When we speak about environment, mostly *internal* and *external* environment factors are used. Analyzing universities' students their internal environment could be everything at university. It would be based on university's culture, programs, learning methods and on professors' abilities to provide knowledge for students (Kumpikaite and Alas, 2009). External environment are factors outside of university such as family, economic or political situation etc.

It was used Spearman correlation analysis looking for statistical differences among respondents answers by country.

4. Intercultural Study and its Results

4.1. General information about sample

A survey was carried out by distributing questionnaires, which were designed and tested for this purpose earlier (Kumpikaite and Alas (2009)). Original questionnaire was prepared in Lithuanian. It was translated in to English later, using double translation method for checking, and given to Turkey and Iran where it was translated to these languages and distributed for students.

The research was provided in three universities in Kaunas (Lithuania), Erzincan (Turkey) and Teheran (Iran). 196 students studying business from Iran, 162 from Turkey and 203 from Lithuania participated in the poll. 52,8% of all respondents were females. The biggest amount of them were in Lithuania - 68,0%, 45,9% in Iran and 42,0% in Turkey. However differences according to gender are not presented in this paper.

4.2. Results of the research

Table 1 presents results of students' skills evaluation. We can see that there is no any statistical difference between answers of Turkey and Iran students. However we find differences with Lithuanian students.

Table 1 Students' skills evaluation's differences according to their country

| | Skills | Lithuania and Turkey | Lithuania and Iran | Turkey and Iran |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Technical skills | Subject knowledge | -0.083 | -0.039 | 0.042 |
| | Specialty experience | 0.071 | 0.082 | 0.015 |
| | Application experience | 0.027 | 0.031 | 0.000 |
| Interpersonal skills | Self-presentation | 0.121* | 0.109* | -0.020 |
| | Ability to contact | 0.024 | 0.027 | -0.007 |
| | Ability to show own opinion | -0.004 | -0.011 | -0.012 |
| | Communicability | -0.028 | -0.024 | 0.000 |
| | Ability to work in team | 0.015 | -0.022 | -0.034 |
| Conceptual | Self-reliance | 0.058 | 0.074 | 0.003 |
| | Ability to solve problems | 0.006 | -0.013 | -0.030 |
| | Analytic thinking | -0.143** | -0.118* | 0.028 |
| Personal skills | Goal understanding, ability to plan | -0.176** | -0.144** | 0.046 |
| | Responsibility sense | 0.317** | 0.255** | -0.076 |
| | Creativeness | -0.021 | -0.012 | 0.006 |
| | Activity | 0.081 | 0.073 | -0.015 |
| | Criticism tolerance | -0.420** | -0.364** | 0.074 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Lithuanians evaluate their analytical thinking, goal understanding, ability to plan and analyze results better than Iranians and Turks (see Table 1). However Turks and Iranians can self-present better than Lithuanians. And as the biggest statistical differences we should mention that respondents from Iran and Turkey are much less criticism tolerant than Lithuanians are.

Students' motives evaluation results are given in Table 2. We see again that there is no statistical difference among answers of Turkish and Iranian respondents. Attractive salary, attractive work conditions and possibilities to be promoted are more important for Lithuanians than for respondents of other countries. However prestige of work place, wish to belong to some social group and quick career are more important for respondents from Turkey and Iran.

Table 2 Students' motives to work evaluation's differences according to country

| | Motives | Lithuania and Turkey | Lithuania and Iran | Turkey and Iran |
|--------------|--|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Safety needs | Attractive salary | -0.161** | -0.153** | 0.017 |
| | Attractive work conditions | -0.133* | -0.140** | -0.003 |
| Social needs | Self-expression | 0.162* | 0.119* | -0.051 |
| | Good work atmosphere | -0.101 | -0.090 | 0.018 |
| | Understanding supervisor | 0.073 | 0.043 | -0.046 |
| | Good interpersonal relations | -0.034 | -0.062 | -0.031 |
| | Whish to belong to some social group | 0.149** | 0.152** | -0.007 |
| Higher needs | Quick career | 0.181** | 0.160** | -0.030 |
| | Prestige of workplace | 0.253* | 0.185** | -0.071 |
| | Possibilities to be promoted | -0.171** | -0.154** | 0.028 |
| | Possibility to use your skills and knowledge | -0.096 | -0.121* | -0.030 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Looking at environments' factors among analysed countries following statistical differnces were found between Lithuania and Turkey and Lithuania and Iran (see Table 3). No significat statistical difference was found between Turkey and Iran. Education, Experience and Economical situation of country are more important for Lithuanians than for Turkish and Iranias. Governmental educational policy is more important for Turks and Iranians than for Lithuanians. Political situation and Health are more important for Iranians than for Lithuanians. Family is more important for Turks than for Lithuanians.

Table 3 Students' environment evaluation's differences according to country

| | Lithuania and Turkey | Lithuania and Iran | Turkey and Iran |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Experience | -0.288** | -0.233** | 0.062 |
| Education (background) | -0.303** | -0.29** | 0.029 |
| Political situation of country | 0.100 | 0.131** | 0.026 |
| Economical situation of country | -0.116* | -0.112* | 0.004 |
| Governmental educational policy | 0.202** | 0.166** | -0.033 |
| Family/parents | 0.391** | 0.017 | -0.104 |
| Your health | 0.47 | 0.205** | -0.017 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that no statistical differences were found between Turkish and Iranian respondents. However differences among these respondents and Lithuanians appeared. This can be explained by intercultural differences. Explored students from Turkey and Iran were from universities located in Asia and Lithuania is in Eastern Europe. We could expect different results if analysing students from middle Turkey or European part. However this was not done in this research and stays as a proposition for future research.

Generalizing we could suggest that it should be taken in to account these different altitudes of students in different countries when teaching and working with them. The adapting process is the same for almost every culture, but it can relate many problems in the case of cultures that are not close to the home culture. Globalization influence increasing migration and moving into different countries. Even countries which were quite isolated for a long time such as Lithuania or Iran are influenced by movements and have to prepare facing intercultural mix at universities and organizations. As a limitation of this survey it could be

mentioned not equal distribution of respondents' gender which was the biggest in Lithuania and could influence presented results.

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