The Effects of Culture on Psychological Mobility: Comparative Analyses of Turkish and Canadian Academicians*

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Abstract

The present study comparatively examines the effects of culture on psychological mobility of academicians in Turkey and Canada. Questionnaires were completed by 382 respondents, of them 277 Turkish and 105 Canadian. Data were collected using INDCOL for measuring the four cultural dimensions. Psychological mobility that consisted of boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference was measured using the Boundaryless Career Attitude Scale. Findings of the study revealed that there were differences between Turkish and Canadian academicians in terms of four cultural dimensions and psychological mobility. It was also found that culture has influence on psychological mobility. Turkish academicians were more collectivist and had higher organizational mobility preference than Canadian counterparts.

Over the last decade, two new career perspectives have emerged and become popular: The protean career and the boundaryless career (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006). In this study boundaryless career perspective is preferred to examine career mobility. The boundaryless career can be defined as "a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of any single employment setting" (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994, p. 307). The most typical distinction between traditional career and boundaryless career is high level of mobility between different organizational boundaries (Arthur, 1994; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Garavan & Coolahan, 1996; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Miner & Robinson, 1994; Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006).

Employability is one of the key concepts of boundaryless career. It helps adaptation to business life (Brown et al., 2002). In knowledge economy employability shifted power to employees (Drucker, 1993). Knowledge economy and knowledge workers posed boundaryless careers (Donnelly, 2009; Zhao, Li, & Yu, 2007). Knowledge workers produce value using their mental skills instead of physical skills (Horibe, 1999). Social and human capital provide job opportunites (McArdle et al., 2007). Individuals invest their competencies to be employable (DeFlippi et al., 2003; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Fugate et al., 2004). Since employability is a psycho-social structure, it is also affected by culture (Noordin, Williams, & Zimmer, 2002).

The boundaryless career was criticized that it was valid for only qualified workers and jobs in technology or knowledge intensive sectors (Pringle &

Mallon, 2003; Van Buren III, 2003). Furthermore, some researchers have also argued that it consists of excessively individualistic features and it is common in some developed countries such as USA and Canada (Briscoe et al., 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Rodrigues & Guest, 2009; Thomas & Inkson, 2007). There was no enough empirically tested finding about the idea "valid for specific groups or cultures." Therefore testing the validity of boundaryless career in non - western context will be a contribution to the field.

Hofstede (1984; 2001) classified cultures as individualist and collectivist. After Hofstede, some researchers studied the components of individualism and collectivism such as values, autonomy, responsibility and self-concept (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Ho & Chiu, 1994). Traditional conceptualization of individualism/collectivism as a simple dichotomy and analyzing culture at country level were criticised (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Wasti & Erdil, 2007). Later culture was examined in four dimensions: Horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism and vertical collectivism (Singelis et al., 1995). It is argued that the cultural dimensions are not repugnant to each other; instead they could be available in a person simultaneously (Basabe & Ros, 2005; De Guzman & Carlo, 2004; Göregenli, 1995; Triandis, 1989).

Culture influences careers (Briscoe et al., 2006; Chudzikowski, et al., 2009; Khapova, Vinkenburg, & Arnold, 2009; Schein, 1984). It was argued that individualism increased career mobility and decreased organizational commitment (Ituma & Simpson 2009; Segers, Inceoğlu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2008; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Psychological contract was supported in collectivist cultures (Thomas et al., 2010) and individuals in collectivist cultures take others into account in decision making process (Fisher, 2006). Therefore in collectivist cultures lower career mobility and higher organizational commitment than individualistic ones were expected.

Career mobility is a distinctive feature of boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006). Career mobility can be defined as an individual's job change cycles in business life (Hegedus & Haman, 1992). It is also defined as changing occupation and organization (Tolbert, 1996). According to Ibarra (2002) career mobility may be towards a position that has higher position or a similar job in another organization or lateral movement in the same field. Career mobility

can be confined by individual and environmental factors (Ituma & Simpson, 2009). It was argued that career mobility was affected by internal factors (Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom, & Svensson, 2007) and external factors such as family, society, workforce supply and demand (Barnett & Minor, 1992; Dobrey, 2005; Hope, 1984; Taris & Feij, 1999; Topel & Ward, 1992; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009). Sex, marital status, having children had influence on physical and psychological career mobility (Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010).

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) made a distinction between physical and psychological career mobility. Physical mobility is defined as the actual movement between jobs, organizations, occupations and countries. On the contrary, psychological mobility is the individual's perceptions of career structures and his or her beliefs about how much he or she was constrained by them or can transcend them. Psychological mobility has two components: Organizational mobility preference and boundaryless mindset. Organizational mobility preference can be defined as "the strength of interest in remaining with a single (or multiple) employer(s)" and boundaryless mindset is conceptualized as "one's general attitude to working across organizational boundaries" (Briscoe et al., 2006, p. 33).

In existing literature, an emphasis was placed on physical mobility for a long time. According to Sullivan and Arthur (2006) possible reasons for this emphasis were career literature used to explain mobility in physical terms and physical mobility might be easier to measure (Briscoe et al., 2006). Sullivan and Arthur (2006) argued that because of this emphasis, the versatility of career models isn't always acknowledged.

The primary objective of our study is to empirically examine the direct effects of culture on psychological career mobility. The specific focus of the study is to compare Turkish and Canadian academicians on the basis of cultural dimensions and psychological mobility. In this research working group is academicians who have boundaryless career (Baruch & Hall, 2004) and their careers were also regarded as one of the typical examples of boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6).

Method

Sample

In the study a survey method was used to collect data. Data for the current study were obtained

from 382 academicians who currently work in state universities of Turkey and Canada. The universities located in İstanbul and Ankara in Turkey, and Ottowa and Toronto in Canada. Fifty-five percent of the survey respondents were male and forty-five percent of the respondents were female. Respondents had the academic title as 9% Ph.D, 34% assistant professor, 23% associated professor and 28% professor. Seventy-two percent of the respondents (n=277) worked in Turkey and twenty-eight percent of the respondents (n=105) worked in Canada. The sample therefore offered the scope to explore career mobility in two different national contexts from individualist and collectivist cultures.

Instrument

Culture was measured using INDCOL scale (Singelis et al., 1995). 32 items measured the four dimensions of culture. The original version of INDCOL was used for Canadian sample. Turkish version of INDCOL adapted by Wasti and Erdil (2007) was used for Turkish sample. In INDCOL scale, culture was divided into four dimensions as horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism and vertical collectivism.

Psychological mobility was measured by using "Boundaryless Career Attitude Scale" (Briscoe et al., 2006). 8 items measured the boundaryless mindset and 5 items measured the organizational mobility preference. The items in both scales were responded on a 5-point scale.

Results

When we compare Turkish and Canadian academicians on the basis of cultural dimensions, t-test results showed that average scores of Turkish sample were 3,76 for horizontal individualism, 3,03 for vertical individualism, 4,14 for horizontal collectivism and 3,87 for vertical collectivism. The average scores of Canadian sample were 3,71 for horizontal individualism, 2,82 for vertical individualism, 3,88 for horizontal collectivism and 3,55 for vertical collectivism. It was also found that there was not significant difference between Turkish and Canadian samples in horizontal individualism (t=0,75; p=0,45); on the contrary, there were significant differences between two samples in vertical individualism (t=2,82; p=0,01), in horizontal collectivism (t=5,01; p=0,000) and in vertical collectivism (t=2,75; 0,01).

T- test results of two samples on the basis of psychological mobility showed that average score of Turkish sample in boundaryless mindset was 3,8 and Canadian sample was 3,98. The result revealed that there was not significant difference in boundaryless mindset between Turkish and Canadian samples (t=-1,86; p=0,06). For organizational mobility preference average score of Turkish sample was 3,05 and 2,69 for Canadian sample. This demonstrated that there was a significant difference between two samples (t=4,76; p=0,000).

The hypothesized relationships were tested using correlations and regression analyses. The correlations revealed that boundaryless mindset was significantly correlated with horizontal individualism (r=0,174; **α =0,**01) *, vertical individualism (r=0,101; α=0,05) and horizontal collectivism (r=0,266; α=0,01). Organizational mobility preference was significantly correlated with horizontal collectivism (r=0,106; **α =0,**05) and vertical collectivism (r=0,177; α=0,01). Interestingly position title was significantly correlated with vertical individualism (r=0,113; **α =0,**05).

The results of regression analyses revealed that culture has significant influence on boundaryless mindset (R=0,112; p=0.000). Boundaryless mindset was affected by horizontal collectivism (B=0,266; p=0,000), horizontal individualism (B=0,174; p=0,000) and vertical individualism (B=0,101; p=0,038). Organizational mobility preference was influenced by horizontal collectivism (B=0,106; p=0,035) and vertical collectivism (B=0,177; p=0,000).

Discussion

The results of the study showed that there were differences between Turkish and Canadian academicians in terms of the cultural dimensions. Turkish sample was more collectivist than Canadian sample in both dimensions, namely vertical and horizontal collectivism. On the contrary there was not found significant difference between two samples in terms of horizontal individualism. Unexpectedly Turkish sample had higher score on vertical individualism than Canadian sample. This interesting finding might stem from measurement. In some previous studies, Singelis et al. (1995), Triandis (1995), Coon and Kemmelmeir (2001), Li and Aksoy (2007), Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener (2005) and Chiou (2001), vertical individualism dimension of INDCOL was criticized as measuring power instead of individualism.

The average scores of Turkish sample were 3,76 for horizontal individualism, and 3,87 for vertical collectivism. The scores of the two cultural dimensions were very close to each other. The result showed that the argument, cultural dimensions are not repugnant to each other and they could be available in a person simultaneously, was supported. This implies that individualism and collectivism could be found in a person simultaneously. Similar results had also seen in the Canadian context.

In terms of boundaryless mindset there was not significant difference between Turkish and Canadian academicians. On the contrary it was found that two samples differ in organizational mobility preference. Turkish sample had significantly higher scores on organizational mobility preference than Canadian sample. Organizational mobility preference was also positively correlated with the dimensions of collectivism. This demonstrated that individuals in collectivist cultures had high organizational mobility preference than individuals in individualistic cultures. The findings of this study supported Dowd and Kaplan (2005) who stated that academicians had more tendency toward boundaryless career. The average scores of boundaryless mindset of both countries were extensively higher than organizational mobility preference. It can also be said that the criticism, boundaryless career is valid for only individualist cultures, was not supported in this study.

This study also revealed that there were significant effects of cultures on career mobility. As regression analyses results indicated that horizontal individualism, vertical individualism and horizontal collectivism had significant effects on boundaryless mindset; while both dimensions of collectivism have significant effects on organizational mobility preference. These results demonstrated that cultures were among the variables that effect the variances of career mobility attitudes.

The study of the effects of culture on psychological mobility has two major implications for future research. First, the result of high vertical individualism in Turkish sample should be refined whether it is because the measurement problem of INDCOL or high power distance in collectivist cultures. Second, this survey has just conducted on academicians who worked in big and developed cities of both countries, it will be useful to extend similar research in different regions, professions and sectors.

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