# Age differences in work motivation: Same in different countries?

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## BACKGROUND

- Research on work motives (Inceoglu, Segers & Bartram, 2012; Kooij et al., 2011) shows that
  - Older employees are more motivated by intrinsically rewarding job features (e.g. autonomy, contributing to society)
  - Younger employees value more extrinsically rewarding job features (e.g. career progression)
- Research on relationships between age and work motives pre-dominantly based on UK, US and Northern European samples
- Cultural values influence motives by encouraging individuals to express or follow certain motives (Erez, 2008)
- Do values and work contexts influence the relationship between age and work motives?

- Inceoglu, Segers, Bartram & Vloeberghs (2009) found that in Northern European countries the negative relationship between age and Career Progression was moderated by membership in countries with different retirement policies (early vs. late exit)

**RESEARCH QUESTION**:
Are relationships between age and different work motives consistent across countries?

| Country | N |
|---|---|
| UK_IRL | 27188 |
| AUS_NZ | 6847 |
| INDIA | 1366 |
| SGP | 1317 |
| CHINA | 713 |
| MALAYSIA | 657 |
| BEL | 2599 |
| GER_CHE | 1842 |
| DK | 589 |
| FIN | 6350 |
| FRANCE | 1007 |
| ITA | 1421 |
| NL | 1489 |
| NOR | 456 |
| POLAND | 317 |
| RUSS | 507 |
| SWE | 4466 |
| US_CAN | 896 |
| ARE_SAU | 679 |
| **Total** | **60706** |

## METHOD

- **SAMPLE**. Data from 60706 working adults who completed the SHL Motivation Questionnaire (MQ, SHL, 1992) for selection or development from 19 countries/regions. Age was recorded in 5 groups (see Table 2).
- **INSTRUMENT.** MQ: 18 dimensions measure the extent to which employees are motivated by specific job features and work outcomes.
- **CONSTRUCT EQUIVALENCE across countries.** The sample comprised 32 countries and language versions (e.g. French and Flemish in Belgium). The pattern of scale inter-correlations was compared across these 32 country samples, using structural equation modelling (SEM). Each country sample (using matched sample sizes) was compared with the UK sample by constraining correlation matrices to be equal. Model fit was good for all paired country samples (Table 1). Language versions and some countries were combined to increase sample sizes in age groups, resulting in 19 countries/regions (e.g. US and Canada, UK and Ireland combined).

Table 1: Summary of fit indices for comparing paired country samples (recommended cut-offs in brackets)

|  | CFI (> .95) | SRMR (< .10) | RMSEA (good < .05, acceptable < .08) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | .97 | .08 | .05 |
| Median | .98 | .07 | .05 |
| Min | .94 | .05 | .03 |

- **UNIVARIATE ANALYSES**. Dependent variable: MQ scales, fixed effects: age categories, random effects: country, testing the interaction between the two terms. These analyses were re-run by controlling for gender as a covariate.
- **MULTILEVEL ANALYSES.** Accounts for nested design of age and MQ within countries. Level 1 dependent variable: MQ scales, with gender as control variable (Level 1). First fixed effect tested with age as predictor, then slopes were allowed to vary (random effects). Age variable was country mean centered. Level of significance set at p<0.01.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Standardized age differences (z-scores) across five age groups for motivation scales where r > 0.10 (for whole sample, N= 60706)
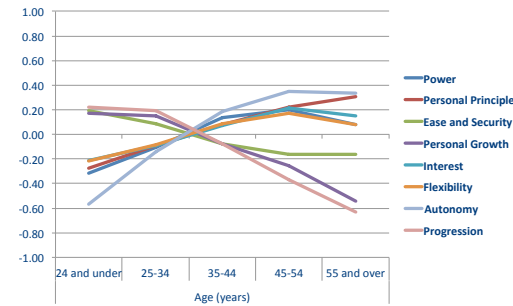


- **OVERALL SAMPLE.** Same pattern as in previous research: older employees are more motivated by intrinsically rewarding job features, younger by extrinsically (see Table 2 for largest effects).
- **UNIVARIATE ANALYSES**. Country effects on motivation scales for some scales larger than age effects. No interaction effects.
- **MULTILEVEL ANALYSES.**
  - Conducted for Personal Growth, Autonomy and Progression (were largest effects found)
  - Significant relationships with age across countries (fixed effects)
  - Slopes did not significantly vary across countries, showing that relationships between age and motivation are fairly stable across countries (see Table 3 for examples)

Table 3: Slopes presenting the relationships between age and being motivated by autonomy across a subset of the 19 countries (overall sample N= 60706). Y axis: age (grand mean)
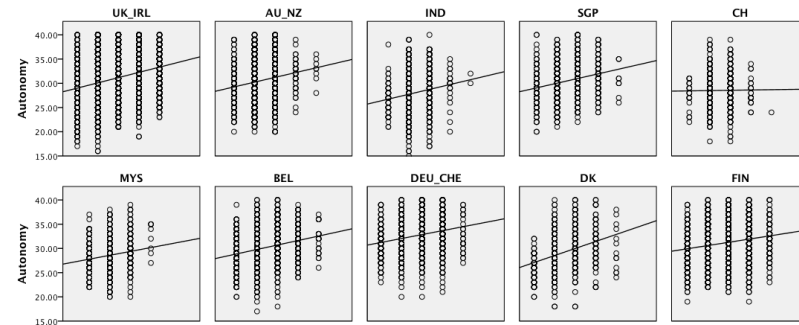


**CONCLUSION.** Older employees value intrinsically motivating job features more, and younger employees value extrinsic ones more. Culture did not affect these relationships. Are these patterns rooted in developmental changes in adulthood that are universal? Or have working cultures and norms across countries become very similar?

**LIMITATIONS.** (1) Sample sizes vary across countries; not representative of working populations. (2) Analysis only controlled for gender (more demographics data available but lower sample sizes). (3) Generational effects not accounted for.