

The Relationship of Hofstede's Individualism Cultural Framework to ASAP Reporting in the United States Aviation Community

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Introduction

Hofstede's individualism index is a measurement of a society's willingness to place personal goals over the interests of group members on a global scale. The index value, when high, indicates a culture that is highly individualistic, which demonstrates an inward or me first paradigm hosted by the bulk of its members. With an index of 91, the United States ranks at the top of the Individualism Scale, which indicates that American culture is primarily egocentric in decision making, social processes, and individual behavior. The goal of this research is to evaluate the relationship of U.S. individualism and its relationship with the willingness of American aviation professionals to report to an Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP).

Background

Speculation forever exists regarding the authenticity, timeliness, accuracy, and breadth of safety reports garnered due to human fallibility concerns and technological gaps. It is commonly perceived that individualist societies which place self-interest above the betterment of the group are a negative cultural trait. Merritt (2000) shows that Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension of national culture translates directly to professionals within the aviation domain in the country. This may indicate that aviation professionals in the US also present these characteristics. ASAP is a safety reporting system designed by the FAA to promote an increase in the number of reports received from airline flight crew and ground personnel. It is intended to provide an environment in which front-line personnel feel encouraged to voluntarily report safety issues or errors, without the fear of receiving sanctions from authorities or other punitive actions from the airline (Federal Aviation Administration, 2002). Further exploration and research has yet to be done to apply this to the ASAP system in particular, marking this work as original.

Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

RQ₁: How does U.S. individualistic culture influence reporting in ASAP?

RQ₂: What management approaches could be adopted to increase reporting in this context?

Approach

The researchers evaluated how Hofstede's individualism index would impact willingness of aviation professionals to report to ASAP. A discussion on the literature available on individualism and its impact in safety culture was conducted as well as an analysis of possible benefits of the adoption of transformational style of management to encourage it.

Conclusions

Individualism directly impacts the way in which people entertain the ASAP reporting program. Cultural norms, perceived consequences, and individual goals are at the crux of this discourse, with symptoms occurring such as cognitive switching or vicarious dissonance in the subjects being reviewed. Managers must understand the fundamental psychological attributes that underpin an individualistic society if they are to take advantage of those properties and leverage them to become successful. Research seems to indicate that, although subjects are more likely to make decisions based on self-interest, they are also susceptible to developing a positive safety culture, given the right circumstances, which can contribute to ASAPs effectiveness. All four factors of transformational leadership (Bass, 1997) can be used to support the development of a positive safety culture and increase the willingness to report in individualistic cultures, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.



Results

The factors of transformational management can support promoting positive safety culture in individualistic cultures. In *idealized influence*, leaders function as role models and build up their followers' sense of "self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem" by displaying confidence and articulating a sense of mission. Through *inspirational motivation*, leaders set high expectations and confidence of the followers, developing commitments toward long-term goals. Another approach is breaking the high-level goals down so they can be assigned to self-centered individuals. Within safety processes, establishing the importance of proactive identification and correction of safety issues identified through reporting mechanisms can support in increasing its effectiveness.

Via *intellectual stimulation*, followers are encouraged to question their values, traditions, and beliefs and to present novel solutions to old problems. The effectiveness of such innovative approaches is intrinsically related to the availability of data on the problem at hand, which argues for increased participation in voluntary reporting programs such as ASAP. All of these factors can support *individualized consideration*. Through direct attention it is possible to identify issues hindering reporting and praising and recognizing individual contributions to these systems, without unnecessarily exposure.

References

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*A total of 41 cited and sourced references were utilized for this project. Please inquire with Chris or Joao for an unabridged collection.