

## **Gender Mobility and the Work Ethic: an International Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Most of the previous analyses on the work ethic posit that it occurs within the context of the job. It is suggested in this article that the work ethic is, in part, a function of different socioeconomic environments. The variance between highly developed and less developed countries creates a variance in the corporate mobility of the female gender. Specifically, it is suggested that male workers in highly developed countries possess certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation that inhibit the mobility of women in the work force, whereas, in less developed countries, male workers lack certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation which in turn serve to foster the mobility of women in the work force. Implications for theory and research are given.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this article, the author will attempt to examine the existence of female gender mobility differences in the global labor market. Female gender mobility refers to the degree to which female workers in different socioeconomic environments enter the labor force by the number of people and the array of work positions.

A strikingly new theory is postulated which argues that differing socioeconomic factors between less developed and highly developed countries perpetuate the preexisting rise or fall of female gender mobility in different global labor markets. It is, therefore, assumed that female gender mobility is a function of the differing socioeconomic factors and work ethics between various cultures.

Traditionally, certain jobs have been dominated by women whereas other jobs have been traditionally dominated by men. In turn, wages for jobs dominated by women are generally less than wages for jobs dominated by men. In less developed countries, however, the ability of the female worker to enter an occupation and overcome certain segregation practices is less restricted. The question is why. It is postulated that male workers in less developed countries lack certain competitive strengths that serve to foster the mobility

of women in the work force whereas, in highly developed countries, male workers possess certain competitive strengths which serve to hinder the mobility of women in the work force. While the characteristics of traditional career paths and wage differentials for women versus men remains relatively unchanged within and between countries, the competition for a broader array of occupational categories becomes more penetrable by female workers in less developed countries.

#### **HYPOTHESIS**

Male workers in less developed countries lack certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation. Consequently, female workers in LDCs move in greater numbers to a wider array of work positions.

By contrast, male workers in highly developed countries possess certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation. Consequently, female workers in HDCs move in lesser numbers to a narrower array of work positions.

\*The hypotheses specifically includes less developed countries such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

#### **DEFINITIONS**

Competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation. Inherent characteristics which determine the degree to which male workers possess a preference for leisure time or consumption.

Female gender mobility. The degree to which female workers in different socioeconomic environments enter the labor force by the number of people and the array of work positions.

Less Developed Countries. A less developed country (LDC) refers to a country in the third world. LDC's are composed primarily of African, Asian, and Latin American countries. They have low per capita incomes and a high dependence on primary materials industries. (Grosse, pg. 712)

Highly Developed Countries. A highly developed country (HDC) refers to a country whose economy is dominated by industrial production with a relatively high per capita income and one which

employs a market economy. HDC's include the United States, Canada, France, and Germany. (Grosse, pg. 710)

Labor Market Segmentation. The segmentation of the labor market is defined as "the historical process whereby political-economic forces encourage the division of the labor market into separate submarkets, or segments, distinguished by different labor market characteristics and behavioral rules." (Reich, pg. 233)

Multinational Corporation. A multinational corporation refers to a corporation comprised of affiliated firms, in different countries which are linked by common ownership, resources, and strategies. (Vernon, pg. 31)

Work Ethic. The degree to which the accumulation of wealth is preferred over the enjoyment of leisure time.

**LABOR MARKET SEGMENTATION: A FUNCTION OF  
POOLED FAMILY INCOME BASED ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Divisions among global workers by race, sex, educational levels, and socio-economic levels differ between less developed countries and highly developed countries. Depending on the socio-economic development of a country, different groups are provided with different working conditions, promotional opportunities, and wages. (Reich, pg. 232)

In less developed countries, where survival is more important than job status, women are encouraged by their husbands and fathers to tend the fields, care for the livestock, and/or secure employment in town. In addition to this, women in less developed countries are expected to maintain their lower status as a family member and continue to assume a 'serving mentality' in spite of the fact that they may be the primary wage earner or contributor to wage income. (Reich, 1980) This suggestion creates a gender specific paradox between highly developed and less developed countries.

It is postulated that in less developed countries, male workers lack certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation. Consequently, female workers in LDCs move in greater numbers to a wider array of work positions. According to Mincer, family income,

regardless of a country's socioeconomic level, is assumed to be pooled thereby influencing the distribution of consumption and leisure. Decisions regarding which family members will be the sources of income, the determiners of the distribution of that income, and the division of leisure time are made by the family. The family member with the greatest influence in decision making is usually the male head of household. Any changes in income by various members of the family results in a redistribution of consumption patterns and leisure time. In less developed countries, an increase in income generated by the female family member through wage increases or extra hours worked is assumed to increase the leisure time of other family members--usually the male family members.(Mincer, pg. 44)

Specifically, in less developed countries where female family members are able to secure employment, male family members may perceive this as an opportunity for greater leisure time. Because total family income is pooled, the income generated by the female family member negates the need for the male family member to secure employment or additional hours of work to increase income. Since leisure time is preferred over consumption, the utility of additional wages is diminished.(Mincer, pg. 44) This suggestion supports the hypothesis that female family members in LDCs have a greater opportunity to move in larger numbers to a wider array of job positions and occupations.

**THE VALUE OF LEISURE TIME:  
A CULTURAL ANALYSIS AS IT IMPACTS FAMILY INCOME**

Different cultures view leisure time differently. It is suggested that male workers in less developed countries place a higher value on leisure time than male workers in highly developed countries. Depending on the socio-economic development of a country, individuals are assumed to choose between one of two possible scenarios. In LDC's, the commonly selected scenario among male family members is a greater preference for leisure time over

consumption. Conversely, in HDC's, the commonly selected scenario among male family members is a greater preference for consumption over leisure time.

In less developed countries where men lack certain competitive strengths, and value leisure time, the source of the family income shifts to the more subservient individual. The individual who will sacrifice leisure time in order to support and shelter the family is assumed to be the female member of the family--the individual with the 'serving mentality.' (Mincer, 1980)

In less developed countries, it is assumed that wages generated by the female family member increases the leisure time for the male family member thereby decreasing the male's necessity to enter the work force or seek additional work. If a greater preference for leisure time over consumption by males in LDCs exists, the necessity to secure additional employment is moot. (Mincer, pg. 44) In highly developed countries, where capricious consumption may be the goal, the male family member attempts to secure greater income through corporate progression, additional hours of work, and/or other available alternatives. One possible alternative may include the stifling of female co-worker mobility within the corporate hierarchy, thereby decreasing competition and increasing the opportunity for greater income among male co-workers.

**GLOBAL WORK ETHICS: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS  
OF VARIANCE ACCORDING TO SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The work ethic is defined as the degree to which the accumulation of wealth is preferred over the enjoyment of leisure time. There is assumed to be a direct relationship between the work ethic and the socio-economic development of a country. Specifically, that males in less developed countries have a lower work ethic and are predisposed toward the accumulation of leisure time over wealth. Conversely, males in highly developed countries have a higher work ethic and are predisposed toward the accumulation of wealth as opposed to leisure time. These assumptions influence the work choices of women.

Work choices among women are assumed to be a function of the countries' socioeconomic development and work ethic. Where subsistence and leisure time are the primary goals of male family members, women are afforded a greater opportunity to enter the work force in order to sustain subsistence for the family as a whole and leisure time for the male family members in general. According to Mincer, "Income is assumed to have a positive effect on the demand for leisure, hence a negative effect on total amount of work." (Mincer, pg. 45) In less developed countries where the work ethic is low, female family members have a greater opportunity to enter the labor market in order to sustain subsistence. Additionally, where the work ethic is low, motivated female family members have greater opportunities to move in larger numbers into a wider array of occupations and/or progress within the corporate hierarchy due to the lack of certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation in male workers. Because male family members in LDC's are more concerned with the accumulation of leisure time, a motivated female family member may use this opportunity to advance her way into the corporate structure. Any increase in the family income decreases the motivation for the male family member to enter the work force and/or to secure additional hours of work. Specifically, an increase in family income decreases the incentive of the male family member to seek work. (Mincer, 1980)

#### **THE EFFECT OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS ON THE PERCENTAGES OF INCOME EARNED**

As foreign investors move into less developed countries they create jobs and alter the percentages of income earned by various family members. The multinational corporation (MNC), while seeking 'cheap labor,' is willing to pay slightly higher wages than local industries in order to attract the most competent among the labor pool. The entry of the MNC into the local labor market provides a positive effect on the potential for greater family income. Conversely, and ironically so, the MNC also creates the negative effect of decreased incentives to enter the work force for the male

family member. When the MNC provides an equal opportunity for family members to enter the work force and provides higher wages than the local market, the male family member is afforded a greater opportunity for increased leisure time due to the pooled family income theory.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

It is concluded that the work ethic in less developed countries is a function of different socio-economic environments. The variance between highly developed and less developed countries creates a variance in the corporate mobility of the female gender.

While the characteristics of traditional career paths and wage differentials for women versus men remains relatively unchanged within and between countries, the competition for a broader array of occupational categories becomes more penetrable for female workers in less developed countries who are willing to struggle for a position in the labor market. When the socioeconomic development of a country is low, different groups are provided with different working conditions, promotional opportunities, and wages. (Reich, pg. 232)

Further, the composition of family status and the value of leisure time by male family members facilitates the entry of women into the work force.

Lastly, the entrance of the multinational corporation into LDC's provides a positive effect on the potential for greater family income. When the MNC provides equal employment opportunity for family members and provides higher wages than the local market, the male family member is afforded a greater opportunity for increased leisure time due to the pooled family income theory.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The view taken in this paper is that certain competitive strengths, work ethics, and motivation of male workers in LDCs facilitate entry into the labor market and the earning of income by female workers. Secondly, that certain competitive strengths, work

ethics, and motivation of male workers in HDCs have the opposite effect. An important question, and one not analyzed in this paper, is why this is so. For example, is the reason that male workers in LDCs have an inherently greater preference for leisure time over consumption as compared to males in HDCs? Alternatively, is the reason that the working opportunities and working conditions faced by male workers in LDCs are inferior to those available to males in HDCs?

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