



## Comparing employment interviews in Latin America with other countries



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### ABSTRACT

This study compares job interviews ( $n = 11,667$ ) in Mexico with those in the following countries: Belgium, Russia, Taiwan, and the U.S. The findings support our hypotheses, which are based on a meta-cultural framework. The results reveal that in Mexico and Taiwan women are less likely to conduct interviews. In addition, interviewers asked different questions. Outside the U.S., interviewers asked applicants about their family, marital status, and children. In Russia and Taiwan, they asked about applicants' reasons for quitting their last job. In Belgium, Russia, and Taiwan, they asked about applicants' wage and salary expectations. In Belgium and Russia, they less often asked about applicants' values, opinions, and beliefs. This study suggests that in some countries employment interviews are more than a test of job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities. This report provides a taxonomy that is useful for comparing interview questions in Latin American and other countries as well as directions for future research.

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### 1. Introduction

Business globalization has enhanced the need for more cross-national research on human resource (HR) practices (Aycan, 2005; Von Glinow, Drost, & Teagarden, 2002). However, HR practices embed in the local cultures of different countries. A few studies have responded to this need by demonstrating how the cultures of various countries influence HR practices in those countries. The present study helps to fill a gap in the understanding of how country culture influences employment interviews conducted in different countries.

#### 1.1. Influence of country culture on employment interviews

Structured employment interviews can be successful in predicting actual job performance (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). Unfortunately, research on international employee selection procedures tends to focus primarily on selection of individuals for expatriate assignments at large multinational enterprises. A few studies have compared selection procedures used to hire local employees (e.g., host country nationals) in different countries, but almost no cross-cultural comparative

research on employment interviews exists. Even though the employment interview is one of the most common employee selection procedures, most of the research on employment interviews is in the contexts of the U.S., Canada, and a few European countries.

In addition, research on the employment interview in Latin America has important implications for both the academic and managerial communities. Structured employment interviews that focus on job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities can predict the future job performance of job candidates. However, in Latin America the questions asked in the interview may focus on issues that will not predict job performance. Researchers have reported that in Latin America interviewers ask women about their marital status and family planning during employment interviews (Bunse & Gonzalez, 2007). Some reports have suggested that job applicants receive questions about their socio-economic status and whether they are connected to important people (Rodriguez, 2010). Research should underscore the importance of moving toward more rational and validated HR practices (e.g., structured employment interviews) that focus on actual job qualifications. This would encourage organizations in Latin America to adopt these practices and thereby enhance the performance of their organizations (Klinger & Campos, 2001). Improved organizational performance will also enhance the economic development of Latin American countries (Arra, Eades, & Wilson, 2012).

Some scholars have argued that HR practices based on an Anglo-European model may not be useful in the Latin American context (Caldas, Tonelli, & Braga, 2011; Posthuma, Joplin, & Maertz, 2005).

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This perspective may be valid because Latin American countries have their own unique historical development and may resist the imposition of foreign practices or cultures (Behrens, 2009; Elvira & Davila, 2005b; Posthuma, Dworkin, Torres, & Bustillos, 2000). Nevertheless, the employment interview could be one of the most useful HR practices in Latin America. The employment interview is a social interaction that can help to evaluate the social connections, social skills, and personal loyalties of applicants (Rodriguez, 2010). These social competencies are important in Latin American cultures where employment relationships develop based on social connections and personal relationships (Elvira & Davila, 2005a; Rodriguez & Gomez, 2009; Tanure & Gonzalez Duarte, 2005). Therefore, the employment interview has great promise for assessing important job-related skills in this region (Elvira & Davila, 2005b).

In addition, in Latin America the employment interview may be more than just an oral test of the qualifications of applicants. Interviews may function as the initiation of a potential social contract between the job candidate and the organization (Elvira & Davila, 2005a). From this perspective, questions that delve into subjects about social and family relationships test and evaluate the applicant's social skills and connections. These questions act as a first step in establishing a social contract.

Moreover, evidence shows that employment interviews are common and important in Mexico and many countries outside the U.S. For example, in Taiwan, the employment interview is one of the most important parts of the employee selection process (Von Glinow et al., 2002). Although some single-country studies examined the employment interview outside the U.S., only a very few are cross-national comparisons involving more than one country (e.g., Lopes & Fletcher, 2004). The lack of cross-cultural research is a significant concern because national culture can significantly influence managerial practices (Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

The use of culture to study employment interviews receives support from institutional theory that suggests that organizations comply with norms of the institutional environment in which they operate to overcome uncertainty and gain legitimacy (Kostova & Roth, 2002). Organizational practices are often direct reflections of the institutional environment that includes the national culture within which organizations operate (Scott, 1995).

Prior research that shows how national culture influences the degree of importance of particular selection methods and the choice of criteria used to evaluate job candidates supports the need for cross-cultural research on employment interviews (Von Glinow et al., 2002). Moreover, cultural influences that reduce the use of good interview practices that are successful in predicting future job performance may impair the validity of the employment interviews in predicting future job performance in some countries (Aycan, 2005). Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which country culture influences the ways in which employers conduct interviews in Latin America and other countries.

### 1.2. Meta-cultural integration of competing cultural frameworks

This study adopts a meta-cultural perspective. This perspective uses similar and overlapping culture constructs (e.g., collectivism, embeddedness) from several culture frameworks: Hofstede (2001), House et al. (2004) (GLOBE), and Schwartz (1994). For example, House et al. (2004) reported a .66 correlation between GLOBE's measure of in-group collectivism on their society practices scale and Schwartz's embeddedness value scale (Schwartz, 1994). The overlapping culture constructs serve as the theoretical justification for the hypothesized differences in employment interviews across countries.

Several frameworks describe how cultures differ across countries. Hofstede's (2001) framework is one of the most popular and widely used. Schwartz's (1994) values perspective offers another useful point of view. More recently, the GLOBE project has developed another cultural framework (House et al., 2004). These are three prominent examples of the many culture frameworks available to researchers.

Although these frameworks have substantial differences, they often contain similar or overlapping cultural concepts that use different names.

Each of these frameworks has strengths and weaknesses. For example, Hofstede's framework used data from a single organization and although the data collection occurred years ago, it has withstood the test of time. The GLOBE data are much more recent, but GLOBE uses data from many different organizations. Ongoing debates among scholars question which framework is the most valid and useful for international research. These debates create a dilemma for researchers who are trying to choose the best framework for their research.

Recent scholarship has encouraged the collection of original data from research participants using the scales developed under these competing frameworks. Ideally, researchers collect data using several different survey instruments from different cultural frameworks, then compare and contrast the results. However, this too creates a dilemma because collecting sufficient numbers of responses to lengthy survey instruments that contain many questions from multiple cultural frameworks can be difficult.

This study proposes an alternative meta-cultural perspective that can help to resolve these dilemmas. In this meta-cultural perspective, the proposed hypothesized relationships rely on similar and overlapping cultural concepts. In this way, the study triangulates theoretical justifications for the expected relationships across cultural models. For example, where concepts from Hofstede, GLOBE, and Schwartz lead to the same expectation about observed relationships, the study triangulates theoretical justification for the hypothesis with multiple cultural perspectives.

Where multicultural theory-based expectations rely on more than one country-level cultural framework, the likelihood that these overlapping conceptualizations of culture are the cause of the observed relationships is significantly increased. When multiple cultural frameworks all serve as the basis for the same predictions, methodological artifacts are less likely viable alternative explanations for the observed relationships. Thus, factors such as survey instrument wording, question scaling, and data sampling collection methods are less likely to be the source of data variance and less likely to constitute a threat to the validity of the study.

Therefore, this study applies a multi-cultural framework. Differences between cultures are a reason that employment interview practices vary from country to country. Therefore, in this study, the differences across countries are not limited to a particular cultural framework. Using this meta-cultural framework also mitigates concerns about whether within-country culture differences, differences in culture across time, and differences across organizational cultures are confounding the results. In addition, from the applied perspective for multi-national corporations, country-level differences in employment practices are an important topic to study because regional or country-level administrative structures dictate organizational design, and culture theories do not.

The Appendix highlights the similarities of the country culture scores from the sample of countries used. The figures in the Appendix A show the country-level culture scores for Mexico, Belgium, Russia, Taiwan, and the U.S. In a few cases, French scores serve as substitutes for missing Belgian scores. The scores across these five countries were standardized because each culture model uses different scaling techniques. Standardized Z-scores were used to create plots of culture measures that serve as the basis for the hypotheses explained below.

## 2. Cultural influences on employment interviews

This study focuses on three aspects of employment interviews to evaluate the influence of country culture. These aspects are: 1) the sex of the person conducting the interview, 2) constructs measured in the interview, and 3) the selection ratio used in the interview process.

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