

# THE EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUALIST AND COLLECTIVIST VALUES ON RELATIONSHIPS IN WORKPLACE

(The case of Albania)

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## Abstract

The social-economic and cultural developments in every society bring the significant changes in the individual models of communication in society and organizations. So, is important that the management sciences and managing in practice must take into consideration cultural effects which can influence their employees' values, attitude, and the models of communication. The aim of this paper is to present the influence of one of the national culture dimensions – collectivism/individualism on the relations which include employees cooperation and communication. The first part of this article presents the analysis of dimension before and after the communist's dictatorship in Albania.

The second part of the paper is dedicated to presenting the results of the empirical study examining the individual values (collectivist-individualist) in workplace, for public and private organizations. In particular, article show the direction in which differences in this dimension influence relationships, patterns of behaviour and the degree of conflict in practices of organization. Also the article highlight on the problematic of socialization and use of individualistic values in the workplace and support the idea that individualism as a dimension of a civilized and democratic world must be encouraged but without leaving aside the stability of the relationships, tolerance and harmony with others, that is so important in survive of business today.

**Key Words.** Organization culture. Collectivism-Individualism. Values. Behaviour patterns. Relationship.

## Introducion

The treatment of values and practices in the workplace can not be seen and evaluated as separate from the general value's systems (individual, social and moral) that dominate a certain type of culture. National culture of a country and its dimensions determine the values' system of the individual in society. These values enriched or not are transmitted in the workplace and are the basis of perceptions and models of communication for each employee. The culture of organization is conceptualized by the researchers as the sum of the values and practices. National culture influences all activities in organization influencing direct the values and indirect the practices of work. Wanting to support this connection, the study is concentrated to analyses the collectivism/individualism dimension and the effects that it have on the individual values and the models of communication in the workplace. The research is focused on these areas (1) the analysis of dimension before and after the communist's dictatorship in Albania, (2) the analysis of dimension in the workplace, (3) the new values, relations and degree of conflict that encourage the change of dimension to the employees. (4) and lastly the challenges of management in fond of changes. The paper concludes that the relationship between this dimension - personal values and the models of communication is a close relationship.

Researchers of behavior have two different approaches to the role of the national culture on the culture of organizations. On the one hand representatives of the convergence approach perceive the practices of organizations as the independent factor of the national culture. On the other hand, the second group, which represents so-called divergence approach, emphasizes that practices of organizations are culture bounded and their transfer is not possible in all situations – it depends on contextual factors. After the research in organizational behavior and human resource management articles Adler and Bartholomew stated that 70 percent of the articles include the concept of culture, and 98,3 percent of this kind of articles conclude that culture is important and caused

differences to the organizational behavior and human resource management (Tayeb 1994). The researches of behaviour assessed in advance some of the values and behaviours that are dominated and are subject of the specific national cultures.

## Research methodology.

The methodology used to conduct the theoretical and practical research consisted in these directions. *First*, the research is supported on a specific theoric model of search. *Second*, discuss the specific issues, in order to understand the correlation between the dimension of collectivism/individualism – values and relations in organization.

Research process on this study is partly deductive and confirmation, for testing a model of relationships, starting from the predictions of human relations that derived from theory. The paper adopts an interpretative analysis with arguments that show how organizational reality is closely related to social attributes. Data collection and the methods used to analyses, think that will enrich the validity of the findings in this area and will serve as a multiple methodological and interpretative search. Research is focused on public and private organizations in Albania.

## Collectivism/Individualism Dimension

Through the dimensional analyses of culture given by <sup>495</sup>Hofstede (2005) as well as opinions and contributions of Alvesson (1993), Saxton, Martin (2002), Roasseau (1990), on this study, we will explain how the values of individuals and especially those related to work, change when are changing the dimensions of culture. Through interpretative analysing we will try to adapt this model from the conceptual point of view for the purpose of our study. This leaves opportunity for error and subjectivity as it is hard not to be powerful influenced by the concepts of authors by name. To recognize the cultural differences we are support widely on

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<sup>495</sup> “Culture of organization. Software of the mind” (2005) p. 32-60

the similar cultures studies and researchs in the field of sociology and psychology.

Argue by Martin, J (2002) the underlying of cultural differences is a fundamental issue, the role of individual versus group. He is defining the role of personal relationships in business. In individualistic societies relationships with others are not visible and are not predetermined or self-regulated. They are more voluntary character relationships. Individualism and collectivism are two ways opposite extreme of the same dimension. Individualism is expressed as a trend toward themselves rather than orientation towards the group or its rules.

According Hofsted, a considerable number of countries in the world live in the societies where group interests are dominant over those of the individual. Those societies, where the interests of the group exceed those of the individual are considered collectivist. The collectivist societies from birth onwards are integrated powerful, no group cooperation, loyalty and continued protection. While only a limited number of them are living very close to the other extreme that is individualism. In these societies individualistic values are supreme and the individual is one who has full capacity and ability to control his destiny.

Individualism consists in a society where the connections between individuals are missing and where everyone does not expect to see beyond his own or his family. In the classification of <sup>496</sup>Hofsted (2005), the U.S. has the highest level of this dimension. According to him this is related to the values that dominate society and patterns of communication. Far this dimension he deploys a part of developing countries and those in development.

<sup>497</sup>Inglehart's (1997), argues that the dominant values in the collectivist society are: tolerance, harmony, lack of competition, solidarity, being conservative, the dependence on parents, the financial support, the exploitation of women. While, in individualistic societies relationships with others are unpredictable and unregulated.

"collectivism is associated with significant patterns of dependency, psychological and practical high power distance. The increased tendency to change the type of relations in society, and communication patterns, inevitably lead removal from collectivism"

Referring psycho-sociology researchs, the position of a country on this dimension shows the solution of a universal dilemma, desirable strength of the relationship of the individual with the group with whom he is identified.

Wanting to judge the individualism/collectivism values in Albania's society, the analysis will be based on time. If we refer to developments in time, of the Albanian society, the picture presented us mixed relationships.

We are living in a unprecedented time and is intensifying the international communication. Will this lead us towards a world standard? Can we say that we are far away the

extreme of collectivism? How dose this dimension appear in Albanian society?

Collectivism in Albania is not obtained, but arose from the characteristics of the system itself. This pattern of relationships prevailed everywhere, in the families, the schools and the organizations For the Albanian society the collectivism continues to be no rule of our world and the individualism is its new trend. It is passed by the culture of supporting the group, towards individualism. The harmony and loyalty is substituted by confrontation or compromise. The individual-group relationship is no longer an emotional relationship.

Referring to the Albanian society, according Andromaq George, observed significant changes in the family structure and its functioning.

The family' structure is considered linear in the sense of what it is changing from a big family, where immediate preservation of harmony was close, to a family dominated by confrontation. The family obligations are becoming more ritual than financial. This is more evident for younger age groups. Also, have changed today the marriage relationship models:

- From a critic event not only for the partners but for the family as well, in less critic events.
- From a matchmaking marriage, emotional stability into models of coexistence, mutual interest (wealth, beauty) and equal communication rapports. In the Albanian case, this can be strongly related with economic and financial difficulties.
- The increase of possibilities for education in women and the growth of opportunities has changed the tendency of marriages' model. The latter gave women more space and privacy.
- From an agreement between families to an agreement between people.

These models have brought new behaviors and new life styles.

The individual-group relationship is established and strengthened also at schools. This relationship in Albania has begun to change and will continue to change throughout the education system, reflected especially in younger generations. The hesitation to speak in the group without the presence of leaders, is substituted by spontaneity and freedom. This debate and discussion is increasing degree of self-assessment and self-confidence among the students. The equal treatment in schools, is substituted by groupings according to status and preferential treatment. Discussion and open confrontation are evaluated as deemed healthy.

Argued by Isak, A (2009), the individualistic tendencies are embodied in the change of goals that the schools have today. If before 1990 the learning was a process to learn how to do things and taken a part in society, the new system aims are to provide educational and skill competencies required of a contemporary man. The role of diplomas and certificates is changing. Today the Albanians diploma improves the economic value of the owner, but also increases self-respect of the individual. There are few cases where it is considered as one of the owners and the means to be positioned in a group with higher status.

<sup>496</sup> The original term in English - "Individualism versus Collectivism, Hofstede (1985)

<sup>497</sup> "Modernization and post modernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies. (1997) p. 94-97

## **The collectiviste values or individualist values in workplace?**

### **New relationships in the context of changes.**

The development of new system assured us the features of modern life: competition, taking over the risk, flexibility, the new challenges. The profound changes in the educational system, the frequency of contacts with neighbors, work or membership in other groups are the important elements that affect the values' system of employees.

How does this dimension appear in workplace?

With what kind of values is individualism represented in organizations?

Can individualism be considered as a challenge of relationships in organizations?

The displacement of collectivism is reflected in the business world with the way how the businesses were born and developed. They were the product of individual initiative and not the state. Free enterprise, the rise of self-management strengthens the value of independence and ambition. As recently, to put emphasis on collective decision making has undergone a shift in the other direction, individual decision making.

The research discovered new attitudes toward work. We can see more independence in the election. It's become a normal phenomenon the partial employment, involvement in the new education system and the use of loans for education. Lack of stability in employment and increase of turnover shows that we are moving away from collectivist tendency. The group has been the primary unit of enterprises in Albania. Today, this attribute is waning and even risk to lose the collectivist sentiments. This risk the social status of individual and his performance<sup>498</sup>Vokaj, A (2009). Individual-group relationship has a lower level of emotional withdrawal, less the collective action and the multiple assistance to the individual. Employees are emotionally independent from the organization.

The nature that has employer-employee relationship also is changing. Argued by P. Ferraro (1998) this relationship in the capitalist world is a business transaction "as buyer-seller relationship" in a labor market. In Albania, the relationship partly is removing from the moral terms of the obligation and loyalty. We say partly, because in the private and especially public sector, still continue the obligation constrained by the need for a job and a minimum income (for most employees) or the need for career and other material benefits (for retail). There are no few cases of dismissal under motivation (hidden) the lack of loyalty, and superior-subordinate conflicts on this issue. Such a relationship that is based on personal interests and the lack of loyalty can't be considered supportive of collectivism. The changes of recruitment and employment policies are arouse the interest of business leaders. Some of them aimed to go away from the trend to hire relatives and to support the family reputation, considering the family relationships at work as undesirable.

Taking into account the conceptual distinction<sup>499</sup>Eduard.T.

Hall, on the ways of communication, we can consider the aspects of this dimension in the organization. "Communication with high context is one in which little is said or written, rather it is known and understood by the others. This type of communication is present in the collectivist cultures. In low-context communication most of the information is documented and expressed in separate codes". For Albania many phenomena, before 1990, were implied norms or unconditioned taboos by individuals in society and in organizations.

<sup>500</sup>Harry Traindis (1998) & Georgas, J (1989) greek scholars, talk about the collectivist society in which the individual makes a series of sacrifices to conform to rules and norms of the group. For Albania, as a part of Balkans such psychology still remain and are particularly parts of rural traditions. While urban areas today, being far from these norms and taboos mean closer the integration. Albanians tend to use the specific codes of communication today, which are common to most of the Balkan countries and Europe. The formalization of documentation: employment contracts, business contracts, business plans and the tendency to respect the labor code are indexes of individualistic trend in organizations.

The patterns of communication in the organization accept as something common the confrontation and the word "No" is replaced by the phrase "I am thinking about it". On the other hand the word "Yes" does not show in all cases the approval, but the maintenance of an online communication. Confrontations are natural phenomena in organizations (in particular match cases of interest) rather than problems directly related to work. The personal opinions often appear open and the fear to stand against is get in low, especially for professionals and specialists who seek close communication with their leaders. They are urged to encourage the development of their own opinions, reflecting the opinions of others.

Argued by Hofstede, the movement along the dimension is justified by the factors that are more challenging or important in the work. In these factors are:

- Training, physical conditions of work and the use of skills in general.
- Challenging work, opportunity to be free, to possess a job that offer enough personal time.

The problems of welfare in Albania make the first factors relatively important as the employment purposes. When these needs are met then we can say that the new values arise as independence, competitiveness, ambition, the lack of conservatism. In various subcultures such as gender and generational are found the powerful elements of differentiation Men and young people, compared with

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<sup>500</sup> "Changing family values in Greece: From collectivist to individualist". *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 20: 80-91.

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<sup>498</sup> "The national identity" 2009

<sup>499</sup> "Beyond Culture" (1976) p. 234-263

women and the elderly, consider as important and tend to the new values as independence, competitiveness, ambition, persistence. They give more importance the freedom and challenging work. In some cases the distinctiveness in value, can lead to the emergence of a conflict between subgroups or managers and employees. This increases the reluctance on the part of managers (particularly those of foreign firms) to use or not some kind of contemporary practice. The adaption with changes is different in different subcultures, depending on the values that are dominant.

Treatment of the other better than ourselves has been the practice of organizations in collectivist societies<sup>501</sup>Nikaj, I (2004). Today this practice is let the country competition. The individual competition is increased, because the individual don't have the support of his own group. The competition between groups is relatively low levels, the individual also is paid for the work he do, than for inclusion in the group. The successes of firms are achieved in part by the results of the efforts of a group and the individual activities. There are no more heroes or groups that distinguish at work. There are no people to be sacrificed for the organization, but there is more facade, disguised intentions. The lack of models means the lack of orientation and commitment. Argued by Cabej, E, the voice of honesty doesn't exist. It is substituted by deliberate hostile trends or the conflicts of interests. These trends are spoil the reality of many entrepreneurial activities and may cause the birth of counter-cultures. Facing with such situations the managers have very difficult to create and maintain a stable relationships in workplace.

Findings of research showed that what motivates the employee in organizations is the economic motiv. Individuals do not feel strong when belonging to the group, or when working for a common thing. The purpose of joining in the group is more natural feeling of solidarity among members, rather than internal organization and their motivation. There is no penalty for lack of loyalty to the organization, high inactivity or the tendency to abandon it. Argued by<sup>502</sup>Schroeder, J (1986), the group's solidarity (in a democratic society) is partly emotional. It is not difficult to overcome the group and to work individually. Individual involved with the group when existe the emotional and economic benefits.

Also, there is no existe the general consensus. This means that many rational ideas arise from individuals and questioned harmony. The trend is to go away from the conservative management plans of (previous system) because they do not allow the development of individualistic independence as the new value. Not all employees are obliged to share the same goals and values. Most of them believe that the development of the firm is for profit and therefore little or no trust that is for social purposes. So, everything is assessed in terms of "if it is good or bad" for the firm and not the community.

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<sup>501</sup> "Albanian cultural thought and his relationship with globale European culture" (2002)

<sup>502</sup> "On democratic values in America" New York (1986)

Research confirms the mixture of individualistic and collectivist values and often unclear relations. We don't find the values of pure individualism. In the public and private enterprises, still don't dominates the principle that "being a good employee should only belong to the job, also the work is not a sufficient reason to drop by other purposes. The albanians are resisting the reality only partially. The maximum of individual freedom is emerging among young people or very old people.

Step forward the outcome or the problems of dealing with the requirements that the market in general, are phenomena that lead to a certain extent in the absence of initiative. Argumented by, Sokol, L (1999), Albania is still the obligation to parents, teachers, favors, and therefore can not act without consideration of individual actions by persons from whom he depends. So many come from individual successes of kindness, understanding, cooperation with many other people, so many ego melts completely addictive. While there existed a culture more binding, today the trend is somewhat fade her. So there are many situations in Albania (in organizational life and overseas), in which the obligation minimized and flexibility in meeting the obligations maximized. Employees feel obliged by those who do favors.

The orientation towards a individualistic culture will undoubtedly set us against the threat of organizational harmony, so we think that companies must preserve at all costs. The reason for such a thing is because when switching to individualistic societies, the demand for individual freedom exceeds the social emphasis which supports the order and harmony.

### **Individualism challenge or opportunity?**

Is really the individualism of Western type, resolution or base from which we must initiate the construction of an enterprise?

Some scholars consider individualism as superior considering it "god", while Mao Can (scholar of Chinese culture) call the "devil" he considers him responsible for the selfishness, pallor of discipline and total change of relations between individuals.

The Western democratic societies value individualism as a development tool, while the Albanian society in the era of post-communist collectivism, it is difficult to leave behind uniformity and imposed conformity. While these barriers are the consequence of changing systems, the individualism appears with a different face from that of pure democracies.<sup>503</sup>Cabej, E(1994). Here, more than in any other countrys, there is the extreme and sick individualism. People try to extort from the government or from each other, corrupt and unfairly benefit from the organization. So, the individualism is very important, but it will be even more valuable, if granted by society as a whole and does not serve the indifference, the struggle for money, power and irresponsibility.

The selfishness and individualism stand side by side and are the mobility engine that effect the relations between individuals in organizations. This kind of egoism arises

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<sup>503</sup> "Albanian between west and east" Tiranë 1994

snobbish and conformist, who eradicate any human sense of itself and no longer consider themselves part of the unit where they work. The feelings of humanity and social solidarity are already disappearing and their place was busy by personal egoism, professional sick selfishness, fight for money and power, the extreme individualism, total indifference to the fate of the other, the progressive reduction of the sense of civic humanism and solidarity, fear and uncertainty for future.

Individualism is introduced as a template in Albania, not as something justified and founded as fair and honest. There is a deep conviction among Albanians that Western culture should be the basis on which they need to support their economic progress. But, what is required as a priority by the Albanians is to develop the personal and original way of their individuality, based on the available Western models. Facing with unknown and new economic and social values does not indicate that we have less capacity than other people. The problem is, how to put in use this capacity. So, each of us must contribute to the perfection of individualistic values.

In terms of new events and new economic relations, can't pretend to maintain the old forms of connectivity and interpersonal relations among people. But, now that has changed the essence of life, the relations between people are different, they do not obey the old concepts and practices. This does not mean that in these relations does not need a new humanism and solidarity. In this context, it appears that the reduction of humanism and solidarity in group, is becoming a "burden" of the new organization, which in addition to other duties and responsibilities, should even be obliged to calculate the "bill of solidarity." Obviously, this social cost of the organization is a consequence of the fact that our democracy is still not complete, functional and effective. "The effective democracy is one, that can be placed forming the working groups that communicate mutually and support the humanism and solidarity".<sup>504</sup>Schroheder, J (1986)

Now there is no doubt, we work in the modern situation and often is created the idea that we are helpless before the realities that we have created. If there is no efforts in order to redesigne the patterns of communication the organizational coordination has to be more difficult.

### **Conclusione**

We can draw some conclusions from the research conducted.

- The first findings confirm that if we refer to developments in time, of the Albanian society, the picture presented us mixed relationships. We are living in a unprecedented time and is intensifying the international communication. For the Albanian society the collectivism continues to be no rule of our world and the individualism is its new trend. It is passed by the culture of supporting the group, towards individualism. The harmony and loyalty is substituted by confrontation or compromise. The individual-group relationship is no longer an emotional relationship.

- Also, in the work environment the individualistic tend dominate that collectivist. Moral and emotional involvement in the group are replaced with more formal links. Individuals protects their interests rather than those of the organization. Has changed the attitude towards work, obligation, dependence and motivation. All these develop the values of self-confidence, courage, ambition, independence, competition, selfishness. Other reports are placed between "ego" and "others". Is moving from collectivist psychology who describes "ego" as inseparable from social context, to "ego" proper to "individual" on everything.

- Individualism as a dimension of a civilized and democratic world should be encouraged in the live of organizations, but without putting into question the stability of relations between employees and the commitment to the organization. As a solution, which can ensure the harmony between values and interests of the individual and the organization will be a strong organizational culture.

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<sup>504</sup> "On democratic values in America" New York (1986) 150-151

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