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## Shifting and persistent human resources' positional/motivational profiles in the context of the latest economic crisis: the cases of Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal

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### Abstract

The latest financial and ensuing economic crisis has created successive shock waves in the eurozone countries. Their capacity to deal effectively with the impact of the crisis depends not only on reforms introduced as a response to the need for improved competitiveness but also on how the world of work would react to them. This reaction, whether it is dynamic and change-oriented or passive and backwards-looking, is assumed to be mediated by various dispositional and positional dimensions related to both motivational values, such as self-directedness and conformity and work-related realities, such as organizational and job characteristics. This paper explores the interplay between motivational and work-related dimensions for people in employment in Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. For this purpose, the European Social Survey datasets for the 2008 and 2012 rounds are analyzed using multidimensional techniques. The aim is to reveal and discuss dominant profiles and possible shifts between the year 2008, when the crisis began, and four years later, when its impact has been strongly felt, particularly in the last two countries.

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### 1. Introduction

The latest financial and ensuing economic crisis has created successive shock waves in most European countries. As a response, EU went forward to create assistance mechanisms for countries having problems financing their

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debts. In return, the affected countries had to introduce and implement measures and reforms related to, among others, the labour market. The big challenge for Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, and other countries with shaky economies, was and still is how they can make those measures work. This depends not only on the efficiency of the measures or reforms but also on how the affected parts of society, and the world of work in particular, will react on them. People, by consuming and producing economic goods and services, are engaged in the whole situation of the economic crisis and therefore, as Hayo (2005) underlines, psychological and behavioural factors can shape the contours, dynamics and remedies of economic crises.

It is reasonable to assume that in times of economic crisis, those who are affected the most are the weakest segments of our societies. However, as Polavieja (2013) points out, an economic crisis can influence the attitudes of all members of a society, irrespective of their objective economic circumstances. The distrust, the frustration and the disaffection experienced are expanded to different socioeconomic layers. This may work like a social mood, an aggregate emotional state of interacting individuals that is spread throughout the society (Olson, 2006). Moreover, according to Prechter's (1999) "socioeconomic hypothesis", social mood regulates many fields of action, particularly micro and macro economic behaviour. Therefore, a dramatic economic change influences not only people's beliefs and attitudes but emotions as well, and vice versa. Shared beliefs, attitudes and emotions can influence people's decisions and actions leading to substantial socio-economic changes.

Changes in social systems are also connected to basic values that prevail in them. As Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz (2008) stress, fundamental social changes can be reflected in values. The direction and speed of a change is also affected by values, since values can restrain or make easier social changes (Schwartz, 2007). Values are usually defined as conceptions of the desirable that lead the way social actors evaluate people and events, explain their actions and evaluations, and choose courses of action (e.g. Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz, 1999; Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv, & Wrzesniewski, 2005). According to Schwartz (2012), there are ten broad values which are based on fundamental biological, social and welfare needs of all human beings, each one of them connected to a core motivational goal that drives human action (see table 1).

Table 1. Basic values and core motivational goals (Source: Bilsky, Janik & Schwartz, 2011).

Basic value	Core motivational goal
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion impose on the individual.
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
Self Direction	Independent thought and action choosing, creating, exploring.

Among these basic motivational values there are dynamic relations, relations of dissonance (e.g. between tradition and stimulation) or of harmony (e.g. between tradition and security). The dynamic patterns that emerge are organized in a "structure" of values that has been identified by researchers in different cultures and groups (Bilsky et al, 2011; Davidov et al, 2008). As Davidov et al (2008) suggest, there is a circular values structure that symbolizes a motivational continuum. According to Schwartz (2012) values are organized in two basic dimensions: self-enhancement (achievement and power values) vs self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence values), and openness to change (self-direction, stimulation and hedonism) vs conservation (tradition, conformity and security values). As Schwartz (2012) argues, self-enhancement and conservation values are self-protective values since they help people to cope with anxiety in a precarious and constantly changing world.

Schwartz (2007), based on an analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS) round 1 data (2002), showed that the most important values adopted by Europeans tend to be benevolence, universalism, self-direction and security. The least important values seem to be power, followed by stimulation and achievement. Another interesting finding is that in all EU countries, self-transcendence values are more important than those related to self-enhancement. Moreover, common value priorities emerge between neighbouring countries or countries which share a common historical background. For example, German and Dutch people appear to give higher priority to openness, while Spanish and Portuguese tend to give higher priority on conservation. Schwartz (2007) also discusses differences

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