



Two dimensions of psychological country-level differences: Conservatism/Liberalism and Harshness/Softness



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ABSTRACT

We examined dimensions of noncognitive functioning based on the administration of 22 measures of personality, social attitudes, values, and social norms in 35 countries (N s ranging from 9 to 430; Total $N = 1895$). Four essentially identical factors were found at individual and country level: Personality/Social Attitudes; Values; Social Norms, and Conservatism. The four factors were correlated at country level, yielding a second-order Conservatism/Liberalism (combining Conservatism and Values) and a Harshness/Softness factor (combining Personality/Social Attitudes and Norms). Broad Conservatism/Liberalism is akin to Inglehart's (1997) contrast between survival and well-being; it was negatively correlated with countries' affluence, educational achievement indicators, and measures of mass communication and freedom. The Harshness/Softness factor contrasts countries that are tough and harsh/unforgiving and countries that are warm and tolerant; it is related to Gelfand et al.'s (2011) tightness/looseness dimension. Harshness/Softness factor was (negatively) correlated with death penalty, murder rate and muggings, and the proportion of Christians; it was positively correlated with Minkov's (2011) index of Industry and his index of countries' death penalty application. It is concluded that the domain of noncognitive psychological functioning has a fairly corresponding structure at individual and country levels.

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1. Introduction

The global structure of the noncognitive domains of psychological processing (i.e., domains that do not pertain to intelligence, notably personality, social attitudes, values, and social norms) has not been adequately studied. It has been suggested that there are various linkages across the domains and that the dimensionality of the noncognitive domain may be relatively simple (e.g., Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). There is as yet no theoretical framework that describes such a global structure; current psychological models mainly deal with specific domains, such as personality or values (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Schwartz, 2003). Nor is there an extensive empirical database on which such models could be based.

An attempt to form a database of the noncognitive domain was made by researchers at the Educational Testing Service. Some results of that work were reported by Stankov (2007) who administered a battery of noncognitive measures, conceptually close to those employed in the present study, to participants ($N = 1255$) recruited from 25 different US colleges and universities. A finding from that work was the emergence of three factors that correspond fairly closely to the broad

domains of psychology as studied within the individual differences tradition—i.e., three separate factors corresponding to personality/social attitudes, values and social norms with the fourth factor, Conservatism, cutting across the domains.

It may seem counterintuitive that scales of personality (or values) that have consistently been found to display a multifactorial structure merge in a single factor when combined with other measures of the noncognitive domain. However, from a theoretical point of view three types of constructs (factors) could emerge in analyses of measures with a broad coverage of the noncognitive domain. Firstly, commonalities across most or all noncognitive measures could be found. Such a factor can be expected if there would be normative or motivational syndromes that account for covariations across various noncognitive measures; as a consequence, such a factor would cut across different subdomains. For example, the need for order may underlie value preferences, personality characteristics, and social norms. Secondly, constructs could be found that integrate all measures of a single subdomain, such as a factor with high loadings on all personality measures. These factors will emerge if commonalities are stronger within than across subdomains. It is important to point out that these factors do not negate the existence of five, more or less independent factors when analyzed within the domain. Putting many different measures of the noncognitive domain in a multivariate analysis adds another perspective in which personality measures could have more

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in common than they have with, for example, measures of social norms. Personality instruments could then refer much less to social normativity than do measures of social norms. So, the structure that emerges could erroneously be taken to reflect a statistical anomaly by putting all instruments of a single subdomain together, where the factor would represent an important organizing principle of the noncognitive domain, such as normativity. Thirdly, response styles and social desirability could underlie commonalities of noncognitive instruments. If these response styles and social desirability would be domain dependent (and there are some indications to that effect; e.g., Van Dijk, Datema, Piggen, Welten, & Van de Vijver, 2009), domain-specific factors could emerge.

Given that in some of our analyses the social attitudes factor was separated from personality, this structure is consistent with the following Inside/Outside cascade of domains (factors) that depicts the incremental role of these domains in everyday social interactions:

Inside	Outside
(Personality Traits)
([Amoral] Social Attitudes)
(Value Systems)
(Social Norms)

We argue that a country-level model of the structure of the noncognitive domains can have important ramifications for our understanding of cross-cultural differences. The development of such a model requires conceptual advancements and empirical data. Given the paucity of both tried-and-tested conceptualizations and data, we addressed the meaning of country-level differences in the noncognitive domains, using data from 35 countries, in two ways. The first involves the cross-level equivalence of the structure of the noncognitive space: Are dimensions identical at individual and country levels (cf, Fischer, 2009; Fischer, Vauclair, Fontaine, & Schwartz, 2010; Van de Vijver, Van Hemert, & Poortinga, 2008)? This means that we investigate whether the factorial structure at the individual (i.e., within) level of analysis is the same as the structure at country (i.e., between) level of analysis. Only if the answer is “Yes”, we can conclude that individual and country differences have the same meaning.

The second analysis involves the nomological network of the dimensions at country level. Therefore, we examine correlations between a host of measures of countries' economic, social, and educational performance, and factors at the between-countries level so as to gain an improved understanding of the nomological network of country-level differences.

2. Noncognitive domains covered in cross-cultural comparisons

Our focus has been on four main noncognitive domains:

1. *Personality* refers to stable and enduring dispositions that encompass emotions, thoughts, and behavior patterns unique to a person. These patterns are captured by statements that describe the way we habitually think, feel or act.
2. *Social Attitudes* involve states of mind, feelings towards a specific object or social interaction. They are captured by statements that elicit the expression of beliefs about what is true, real or good in social situations (Saucier, 2004).
3. *Values* are guiding principles and standards about some desirable end-state of existence (Schwartz, 2003). They are criteria people use to evaluate others, themselves, actions, and events.
4. *Social Norms* represent a set of beliefs (or perceptions) about behaviors that are common in (and in some cases sanctioned or enforced by) society.

Each of these four refers to culture-related domains of psychological functioning; not surprisingly, all have been studied from a cross-cultural

perspective (e.g., Diener & Diener, 1995; Fischer et al., 2010; Georgas, Van de Vijver, & Berry, 2004; Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; McCrae, Terracciano, & 79 Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Stankov, 2007, 2010, 2011; Stankov & Lee, 2008, 2009). Even though some of the cited studies included variables from two or even three domains, none included measures from all four domains.

A recent example of such an approach is the study by Von Collani and Grumm (2009) who employed two samples of German students ($N_s = 302$ and 154) and a battery of measures of personality, values, and social attitudes/ideological beliefs. The three factors that were extracted in that study resembled the Conservatism dimension that emerged in Stankov (2007, 2010, 2011) and Stankov and Lee (2008, 2009). The major difference between the latter studies and Von Collani and Grumm's (2009) study involves the split of domains across factors. Von Collani and Grumm (2009) found that each of their three factors combined two domains; for example, the ideology factor combined a “right-wing, conservative orientation, social prejudice, ideological beliefs, the value orientations of self-enhancement, low self-transcendence, and the personality trait of low Openness to Experience” (p. 107). However, Stankov (2007, 2010, 2011) and Stankov and Lee (2008, 2009) found that all scales of a domain (such as personality) showed on separate factors. So, whereas Von Collani and Grumm's (2009) factors cut across domains, Stankov's factors did not. We argue that the discrepancy does not reflect a fundamental difference in findings, but merely reflects the composition of the survey battery. The domain of social attitudes (including measures of political affiliation) was strongly represented in Von Collani and Grumm (2009) study while no measures of social norms were included. Factors associated with domains (e.g., all personality scales loading on a single factor) are more likely in broader surveys, as correlations between instruments are less likely to be triggered by item content overlap and more by differences in perspectives present in instruments (e.g., personality scales as referring to self-reported traits and values as self-reported desired states), in line with the Inside/Outside model, describe above. So, in order to identify the structure of the noncognitive domains it is important to get a broad representation of the constructs of the domain.

3. Individual level versus between-countries level of analysis

Psychological studies usually employ individuals as unit of analysis, even when individuals are nested within some other higher-order units like schools, regions or countries. Thus, in what is sometimes called pancultural analysis, participants from different countries are treated as if they come from the same sample and factorial structure is determined on this total sample. Such an analysis can yield a misleading picture of individual-level differences, as it confounds individual and country-level sources of variance (Van de Vijver et al., 2008). The correlations in such an analysis combine sources of individual- and country-level variation. If there are systematic country differences in item means, these differences may produce positive interitem correlations, which will boost the size of the first factor in the factor analysis. Also, if the individual- and country-level structures are very different, a pancultural analysis may yield results that are difficult or even impossible to interpret.

School administrators, political scientists, and economists, on the other hand, are frequently interested in these larger, supra-individual units. In what became known as ecological factor analysis, aggregates of individual-level raw scores are calculated first (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). Thus, one would compute, say, France's score on Extraversion by calculating the mean Extraversion scores for all French people who took the test. In this approach, countries rather than individuals are units of analysis. Factor analysis is carried out on such aggregated raw scores. Multilevel equivalence is investigated by comparing the factor structures found at individual and country levels (cf. Van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002; Van de Vijver et al., 2008).

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