

Cover Page



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CHAPTER 2

An exploration study into differences in work-related attitudes between Western employers and Vietnamese employees in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam

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Abstract

In this globalized and internationalized world, intercultural communication at workplaces is a topic often examined. This study aimed to shed light on the cultural differences in work-related values between Western and Vietnamese professionals in Vietnam. In total, 94 Western and Vietnamese companies in two areas in the South of Vietnam participated. Questionnaires were completed by 763 Vietnamese employees, 43 Vietnamese employers/managers and 33 Western employers/managers. The findings from the questionnaire data indicate that there are substantial differences in work-related attitudes between Western employers and Vietnamese employees that are related to both cultural differences and position in a company. *Sense of time* and *face-concern* are the two prominent differences between Western and Vietnamese professionals. Implications are discussed for further training of Vietnamese prospective graduates so that they can work effectively with Western employers/managers in the future.

2.1 Introduction

As a result of globalization, many foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures are mushrooming in East Asia, where expatriates from Western nations and local staff work and interact together on a daily basis (Brew & Cairns, 2004). Since the two parties are from two divergent cultures, conflicts and misunderstandings at the workplace are inevitable. This can make it difficult for both parties to complete their tasks and work productively. In such a setting, cultural distance has been understood to be the key reason for conflicts and misunderstandings (Brew & Cairns, 2004; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011; Hofstede, 2001; Peltokorpi, 2008; Redmond, 2000). Cultural distance can be defined as the degree of dissimilarity between two cultures. The more dissimilar the cultures are, the harder it is for interlocutors to adjust. Peltokorpi (2008) argued that living in a culturally similar country is less stressful than living in a culturally distant country since similarities help to predict and explain host national behavior. She also discussed the negative influence of cultural distance on interaction in work settings. Cultural distance creates challenges and communication barriers for both employees and employers. In addition, cultural distance in communication and management style can negatively affect the organization's workforce productivity. Higher education programs could prepare Vietnamese students to work in this international work situation. However, we do not know much about cultural distance and its effects in the Vietnamese setting. The current study was aimed at providing greater insight into differences between employers and employees from different cultural backgrounds in organizations in Vietnam.

2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 The Vietnamese workplace context

The economies in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam have recently witnessed a transitional development. After the economic reform "Doi Moi" was implemented in 1986, the Vietnamese government activated the country's economic activities by reorganizing state-owned enterprises, encouraging private businesses, and attracting foreign direct investment (Weng, 2015). Because of the need to transform but still dominated by Confucian ideology, the Vietnamese economy has been in a mixed landscape, undergoing dramatic changes and struggling within the old and novel typologies simultaneously. This transformation brought in international managers, since the current personnel were not adequately qualified to keep pace with the new trend (Weng, 2015). Local managers lacked the management knowledge to cope with the human-related issues arising in a market economy (Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007). McDaniel, Schermerhorn & Huynh (1999) suggested that the managerial competencies of those local managers must be upgraded to align with world levels of Human Resource Management in order to survive fierce economic competition. Moreover, following the influx of foreign companies into the country, the call for more industry-ready graduates has been taken into account by many policy makers. Still, "many of the companies apparently found it difficult to find local employees that match their needs" (Weng, 2015, p. 82). Graduate employability has become a topic of both concern and debate among higher education institutions, employers, enterprises, students and their families (Tran, 2012). The main mission of higher education institutions

is training and producing an educated labor force for the industry. However, in Vietnamese universities, this mission is difficult to reach because of the lack of connections between university, research institutions and the internal industry. This absence of collaboration hinders preparing students with the necessary skills and knowledge required by the contemporary labor market. Moreover, since Vietnamese culture bears similar traits to China in many aspects such as high collectivism, large power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation (Vuong, 2002). Although recently there have been studies indicating that Vietnamese professionals have shown their attitudes towards individualism, which means that employees direct more to individual achievement and the high power distance dimension is not as high as it was 10 years ago thanks to the trend that the younger generations are becoming more individualistic and independent, lots of studies noted certain attributes of Vietnamese workers such as indirectness in their communication with others, respect for hierarchy, lack of work orientation and adherence to timeline and lack of language ability to communicate effectively with foreign workers (Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007; Tran, 2012; Pham, 2014; Weng, 2015). Accordingly, the educational system have difficulties to address Western norms on, for example, trainees' communication skills, teamwork skills and other interpersonal skills. To prepare future workers better, teaching and learning about interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills should be done in both enterprises and higher education institutions.

2.2.2 Cultural distance in work-related values between Western and Vietnamese culture

In general, belief systems are crucial to the study of intercultural communication because they entail the core of our thoughts and actions (Qingxue, 2003). In this study, the four cultural dimensions reflecting the differences in belief system between Vietnamese and Western culture: *sense of time*, *power distance*, *low versus high cultural context orientation* and *work-related value orientations* are selected as the basics for the questionnaire item generation because of the following reasons. *First*, we aimed to examine the gap in preferences and expectations between Western employers and Vietnamese employees; Vietnamese employers and employees; Western and Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees working in Vietnamese companies and Vietnamese employees working in Western companies. Previous studies in Vietnam (Chi, 2012; Pham, 2012; Thang, Rowley, Quang & Warner, 2007; Tran, 2013; Truong & Nguyen, 2002) have just touched one or two cultural dimensions and they have not focused much on *work-related value orientations* yet. *Second*, we endeavored to tackle what cultural dimensions causing the most problems to professionals from two different cultures and according to many other studies (Hofstede, 2001; Pham, 2014; He & Liu, 2010, etc.), *sense of time*, *power distance* and *low versus high cultural context orientation* are three significant differences between Vietnamese and Western culture. Vietnam is strongly imprinted by Confucianism which was the last dimension Hofstede added to his work for Eastern countries. In Hofstede's framework, Vietnam scored high on long term orientation (perception of time) (80) which indicated that in this dimension, Vietnam was proved to be greatly distant from other Western countries (The United States: 29; The United Kingdom: 25; The Netherlands: 44; Sweden: 33; Germany: 31; New Zealand: 30; etc.). In addition, previous studies (Ali, 1993; Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Podrug, 2011) adopted *power distance* and *low versus high cultural context orientation* to determine *participants' decision-making styles* and *relationship with superiors* in other contexts different from South East Asia. In this study, we chose the same values but for an examination in the context of Vietnam. However, when we conducted factor analyses for the questionnaire items with these four cultural dimensions as four scales, these four cultural dimensions became 7 dimensions afterwards (see method

section). In the following sections, elaborations and definitions of the four main basic dimensions together with their sub-dimensions are presented.

1. Sense of time

“*Sense of time*” is the way people feel, experience and evaluate time (Venter, 2006). Different culture has different perspective towards time, punctuality and pace of life and those concepts are manifested in their manners and attitudes. Many researchers have conceptualized the distance in time perception between Western and Eastern culture which affects professionals’ manners, decisions and expectations in a cross cultural workplace. Wang, Wang, Ruona & Rojewski (2007) and Brew & Cairns (2004) contended that time orientation in Confucian cultures like Chinese and other Eastern countries tends to be more past-oriented than present and future-oriented. This means that people in those cultures are inclined towards tradition and time is considered to be flexible and repeatable and is used to achieve ultimate human reward. This perspective notifies a sharp contrast with Western culture, which focuses on efficiency and, thus, time is carefully designated in order to achieve personal and organizational goals (Arman & Adair, 2012; Kathryn, 2006; Kawar, 2012; Kvassov, 2003; Smith & Pham, 1996).

This dimension has also been divided into two sub-dimensions (thanks to factor analysis): *being on time in a direct way* and *being on time with a condition*.

- a) *Being on time in a direct way*: the items aimed to measure the extent to which employers and employees evaluate the degree of punctuality in daily work situations.
- b) *Being on time with a condition*: the items also aimed to measure the extent of punctuality the employers and employees evaluate in daily work situations, but with a condition added.

2. Power distance

The concept of “power distance” is defined as the extent of human inequality among individuals of the society and how people cope with it. Equivalently, power distance can be interpreted as a cultural dimension illustrating the degree to which individuals feel comfortable with an unequal distribution of power and how much of an equal distribution they expect and find acceptable (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Merkin, 2006)

In Hofstede’s survey results, Vietnam earned the score of 70 which indicates that Vietnam is a high power distance society in which people “accept a hierarchical order”; thus people are aware of their positions in that hierarchy and needs no further justification. On the contrary, most of the countries in Western cultures are regarded as small power distance societies because in Hofstede’s survey results (1984), they performed the low score on power distance, for instance, Australia (36), Newzealand (22), America (40), United Kingdom (35), Germany (35), The Netherlands (38), Switzerland (34), Belgium (65), Norway (31), Sweden (31), Denmark (18), etc. In those cultures, egalitarianism is significantly valued and subordinates have a say in important matters; thus “hierarchy is considered an arrangement of convenience” (Hofstede, 2001).

Similarly, this value has been split into two sub-dimensions: *taking part in management’s decision making* and *open relationship with higher management* (thanks to factor analysis).

a) *Taking part in management's decision making:*

Employee involvement in work-related decisions has been proved to be positively associated with labor productivity. However, cultural values, particularly power distance might highly influence the degree of employee involvement in work-related decisions (Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007). Accordingly, this might complicate the direct feedback between Western higher managers and Vietnamese employees as they own two opposite views on decision-making process (Bjorkman & Lu, 1999). In Vietnamese culture, most people highlight a “we” identity and employees might rarely speak out their own voice in the process of higher management’ decision-making even if they are requested to do so (Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007; Qingxue, 2013; Wang, Wang, Ruona & Rojewski, 2007). In contrast, Western individualistic culture accentuates an individual’s thoughts and opinions, initiative and achievement and individual decision-making (Wang, Wang, Ruona & Rojewski, 2007)

b) *Open relationship with higher managers*

This value is directed by the degree of power distance the employees perceive towards their higher managers. The more power from the employers the employees discern, the more distance they make. According to Diem (2013), Hieu (2013), Liu & He (2010) and Wang (2009), in low power distance countries, the distribution of authority is exercised and the emotional distance between employers and employees is quite small. However, in high power distance country like Vietnam, a great distance in relationship between employers and employees is frequently acknowledged. Accordingly, countries with higher power distance scores would demonstrate more formal employer-employee relationships than compared to lower power distance countries (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Sagie & Aycan, 2003).

3. Low versus high context cultural orientation

a) *High-context society*

In order to define a high-context society, it is vital to define a high-context communication or message. A high-context communication is characterized as a message with very little coded, explicit or transmitted part of the message. The message itself can usually lie in either the physical context or is internalized in the person. For this reason, when people in high-context societies are in interactions, they crack messages by using the interactants’ roles, physical, sociorelational and perceptual environment. Despite the fact that “words and sentences may be collapsed and shortened”, conversations are still going on and interlocutors remain well-informed. Furthermore, in this culture, the frequency of silence and non-verbal behaviors used is significantly high if the social status of the speakers is taken into consideration (Sanchez-Burks & Barak, 2005; Sage, 2005; Shoji, Nevgi & Tella, 2012).

b) *Low-context society*

Pertaining a different perspective, messages and information in low-context cultures are explicitly coded or we can call “elaborated codes”. People heavily rely on “verbal code system” for creating and interpreting meaning. Although those interlocutors can recognize non-verbal context, they favor and

tend to focus more on the verbal context. Because of these features, communicants in those societies feel a need to talk and uncomfortable with silence or non-verbal communication (Sanchez-Burks & Barak, 2005; Sage, 2005; Shoji, Nevgi & Tella, 2012)

According to Hall (2000), many collectivistic cultures have high-context tendencies including China, Japan, North and South Korea, Vietnam, and many Arab and African cultures while many individualistic cultures constitute low-context tendencies, comprising of Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia, Newzealand, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United States, France and the United Kingdom, etc. When people in the high-context cultures are in interactions with nationals from the low-context cultures, they communicate differently and vagueness usually happens; thus this predisposes people to communication breakdowns.

In this study, low versus high-context cultural orientation was addressed in terms of *face-concern* which is one's consideration and threat of losing their face in either personal or social circumstances.

c) *Face-concern*

Jariya (2012) and Pham (2014) defined “face-saving” as people’s realization of face protection to prevent social disapproval or criticism not only on themselves but also the community they belong to. Scholars have consistently pointed out that concern for face is of utmost importance in most Eastern cultures (Kim & Nam, 1998). This means that great emphasis is placed on reaching a consensus within organizations in order to save mutual face and maintain harmony. Because of this, the Eastern Vietnamese employees tend to beat around the bush when it comes to negative issues. The listeners always have to read between the lines what the real meaning is (Bjorkman & Lu, 1999). In contrast, face concern in Western culture implies the individual’s want to be approved of and the individual’s want to be free from imposition (Pham, 2014). In fact, in Vietnamese culture, face is determined by hierarchical social status and harmonious relationship with other people whereas in Western culture, face is determined by the individual’s internal attributes such as competence. Accordingly, the Vietnamese employees tend to use more indirect communication in social context for the sake of face concern which might cause a lot of ambiguity and misunderstandings to Western professionals.

4. Work-related values

In this study, work-related values are addressed in two sub-dimensions: *accountability* and *work-performance versus autocratic orientation* which are the two prominent different characteristics to measure individuals’ work effectiveness between Vietnamese and Western cultures (Gelfand, Lim & Raver, 2005; Mai & Hoang, 2015; Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007).

a) *Accountability*

Gelfand, Lim & Raver (2004) defined accountability as “the perception of being answerable for actions or decisions, in accordance with interpersonal, social, and structural contingencies, all of which are embedded in particular sociocultural contexts” (Gelfand, Lim & Raver, 2004, p. 137). This concept emphasized the characteristic of cultural specificity in which individuals in different cultures are educated to understand the unique expectations of accountability. In individualistic culture, accountability normally rests with specific individuals, both for individual and organizational

successes or failures, whereas in collectivistic culture, individuals are usually not hold accountable for the group's successes or failures. The Vietnamese culture bears this specific trait of collective responsibility in which people identifying themselves as part of a specific group, team or unit and individual accountability is not clearly defined (Bjorkman & Lu, 1999; Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007).

b) Work-performance versus autocratic orientation

Being influenced by Confucianism, autocratic leadership is commonly seen in Vietnamese organizational culture (Hoang, 2015; Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007). In this kind of leadership, the management usually generate strong dominance over their employees and govern all the actions and decisions in their offices. In addition, communication with employees is formal and written forms are fundamentally prioritized.

In contrast, work-performance orientation leadership facilitates employees' advancement, idea generation, creativity and innovativeness. Work-performance orientation can be defined as "the degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence" (House, 2001). In Western culture as in individualistic culture, autonomy and individual initiative are encouraged and the employees have greater chances to take their own actions in their workplace context (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007; Weng, 2015).

2.2.3 Aim of the current study

The current study aimed at providing insights into differences between employers and employees from different cultural backgrounds. More specifically, differences between employees and employers of Vietnamese and Western companies were examined in terms of their work-related values. We aimed to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do Vietnamese employees and Western employers differ with respect to their work-related values?

We also generated the following three research questions to investigate how the other groups differed from the first two groups in order to grasp the complete picture of the divergence between the two cultures in the Vietnamese workplace context.

- To what extent do Vietnamese and Western employers differ with respect to their work-related values?
- To what extent do Vietnamese employers and employees differ with respect to attitudes towards work-related values?
- To what extent do Vietnamese employees working in Western companies and in Vietnamese companies differ with respect to attitudes towards work-related values?

2.3 Methods

2.3.1 Participants

In total, 94 Western and Vietnamese companies in two areas in the South of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta) participated. We searched for the companies' information on the Internet, using reports on the Global Trade in Customer Language website (<http://eu.ecizi.com>). We also searched for companies using the researchers' networks. We collected the companies' information;

then we sent emails, phoned or visited the companies in person to ask for their permission to carry out our research at those companies. We visited 128 companies, and 94 of them agreed to participate. Of these 94 companies, 47 were foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures and 47 were Vietnamese private and state companies. In the 47 foreign companies, 33 higher managers (all Westerners including Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, and Europeans) and 360 Vietnamese employees participated. In the 47 Vietnamese companies, 43 Vietnamese higher managers and 403 Vietnamese employees participated. We provide background information on the participants in Table 2.1.

2.3.2 Data collection

Development of the questionnaire

Data were collected using a questionnaire with separate versions for the employers and the employees (see Appendix 1). The items of the questionnaires were based on the literature on cultural distance between Western and Vietnamese culture and aimed at measuring professionals' attitudes towards work-related values. Both questionnaires were divided into two parts: the "preference" part and the "importance" part. The "preference" part asked the participants to indicate their preferences regarding the items while the "importance" part asked the participants to indicate how important the items were. We had the preference and importance part because we would like to make a distinction between (1) what the employers expect from their employees and vice versa and (2) how important the issues (policies in the company) are for both the employers and employees. By doing this way, we can examine whether there are clashes in their ideas in certain values in both their expectations from the counterpart's actions (preference) and their thoughts about some policies in the companies (importance). The five-point Slider scale was used in both parts of the questionnaire. Both questionnaires were designed in English and then translated into Vietnamese. We employed a back translation to ensure the validity of the translation. The questionnaire was piloted with one foreign and one Vietnamese company. During the piloting phase, the questionnaires' scales were modified from Slider scales to Likert scales because the Vietnamese participants were hesitant to answer using scale points without wording. The employees' questionnaire had 59 items and the employers' 61 items. All items were scored on five-point Likert-type scales with the equivalent to "1 = not at all", "2 = not really", "3 = somewhat", "4 = quite a lot", "5 = very much".

Procedure

One of the researchers visited each company in person to deliver the paper questionnaires and elaborate on the instructions for the questionnaires. Some companies completed the questionnaires with the researcher's instructions; others, due to time constraints, used an instructional guideline distributed to the companies' secretaries, receptionists, or personnel department's secretaries to do the questionnaires. However, all those agents received careful instructions for questionnaire response from the visiting researcher. Statements of participants' implied consent were included in the instrument. Vietnamese employers and employees received a Vietnamese version of the questionnaire, whereas Western employers were administered with an English version.

Table 2.1
Participants

Background Information	Vietnamese companies		Western companies	
	Employees	Employers	Employees	Employers
1. Age				
<18	0	0	0	0
18-29	158	8	125	3
30-39	127	25	119	17
40-49	22	8	17	13
50 or older	4	2	1	0
2. Sex				
Male	95	19	77	30
Female	216	23	183	3
3. Job status				
CEO		3		9
Deputy CEO		0		4
Senior manager		6		4
Middle manager		3		8
First-line manager		17		6
Supervisor		14		1
4. Years of working in Vietnam				
1-2 years	35	1	23	4
3-5 years	91	0	73	13
More than 5 years	71	11	55	10
10 years	28	4	46	2
More than 10 years	69	21	61	4
More than 20 years	17	6	5	0
5. Years of working with Non-Vietnamese				
1-2 years	88		86	
3-5 years	64		80	
More than 5 years	28		71	
10 years	2		8	
More than 10 years	9		9	
More than 20 years	2		1	
6. Highest degree				
Elementary	0	0	0	0
Secondary	1	0	0	0
High school	5	0	0	0
Vocational	10	0	17	0
College/University	273	35	228	26
Other	22	8	15	7
7. How large is the organization?				
Micro (<10 employees)		5		1
Small (<50 employees)		9		14
Medium-sized (<250 employees)		13		11
Large (>250 employees)		11		6

Professionals' work-related values

The questionnaire items meant to measure the employers' and employees' work-related values. In order to explore underlying dimensions, we performed an exploratory factor analysis on the employees' questionnaire data (using Principle component analysis and Varimax rotation) separately on the preference and importance part of the questionnaire. We decided for four factors for the preference part, based on the elbow criterion, explaining 48% of the variance between employees. Items with factor loadings $>.4$ on one factor and $<.4$ on the other factors were included; all other items were excluded.

Table 2.2

Two example items for seven factors

<i>Measures</i>	<i>Example items</i>	
	<i>Employees' questionnaire</i>	<i>Employers' questionnaire</i>
1. Being on time in a direct way	32. Being late for meetings at work.	1. I expect that my employees keep a deadline to finish their assigned work.
2. Being on time with a condition	40. Asking for a deadline extension if I have good reasons	4. I allow my employees to leave the office earlier than the appointed time if they have good reasons.
3. Taking part in decision-making	4. Being consulted before the employers/higher managers' decisions are made.	12. I expect of employees that they take part in the decision-making process of higher management
4. Open relationship with employers	13. Talking freely to higher managers	9. I expect that my employees talk freely to employers/higher managers
5. Accountability	31. Being kept responsible for the quality of the work that I produce	8. I expect that my employees do assigned tasks out of their job functions if necessary.
6. Face concern	23. Withdrawing my point of view instead of encountering my employers/higher managers.	35. I expect that my employees withdraw their point of view instead of encountering with their employers/higher managers.
7. Work performance versus autocratic orientation	Promotion on the basis of my actual contribution (item 51 for employees' questionnaire and 53 for employers' questionnaire) Adequate time to explore and develop new ideas (item 55 for employees' questionnaire and 57 for employers' questionnaire) (The items for this dimension are the same for the employees' and employers' questionnaire)	

We repeated this analysis procedure for the items of the importance part of the questionnaire, which resulted in one underlying factor, explaining 52,3% of the total variance. We then performed reliability analyses on these five factors and subdivided the "sense of time" factor into two sub-factors named

“being on time in a direct way” and “being on time with a condition”. Similarly, the “power distance” factor was split into two sub-factors labelled “taking part in decision-making” and “open relationship with higher managers”. This procedure resulted in seven factors (in Table 2.2, we included two example items for each factor). In this way, we had four reliable scales for *sense of time* and *power distance* respectively:

- 1) *Being on time in a direct way* refers to the extent to which employers and employees evaluate the degree of punctuality in daily work situations.
- 2) *Being on time with a condition* also denotes the extent of punctuality the employers and employees evaluate in daily work situations, but with a condition added.
- 3) *Taking part in decision-making* refers to the extent to which decision-making between higher managers and employees in daily work situations is shared.
- 4) *Open relationship with higher managers* refers to the degree of intimacy or closeness in daily communication in the workplace between employers and employees.
- 5) *Face concern* refers to the extent to which employees save their face in order to keep their own and others’ prestige in daily work situations.
- 6) *Accountability* refers to the extent to which self-accountability in their daily work situations is performed by the employees and employers evaluate and control their employees’ accountability in these situations.
- 7) *Autocratic versus work-performance orientation* refers to the extent to which how employees’ work-performance is controlled and evaluated by their higher managers.

Table 2.3
Summary of the Questionnaire

Measures	Number of Items		Cronbach Alpha		
	Employees’ questionnaire	Employers’ questionnaire	Vietnamese employees	Western employers	Vietnamese employers
1. <i>Being on time in a direct way</i>	4	4	.68	.65	.83
2. <i>Being on time with a condition</i>	3	3	.79	.81	.80
3. <i>Taking part in decision-making</i>	3	5	.86	.63	.74
4. <i>Open relationship with employers</i>	9	8	.85	.60	.834
5. <i>Accountability</i>	4	4	.69	.61	.80
6. <i>Face concern</i>	4	3	.75	.77	.86
7. <i>Work performance versus autocratic orientation</i>	9	9	.85	.67	.848

After establishing the seven factors of work-related values for Vietnamese employees, we employed this structure on the employers' data. In Table 2.3, we included for each factor the number of items and the reliability in terms of Cronbach's alpha.

2.4 Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, multivariate analyses of variance were performed with two groups of participants as factor and the seven work-related values as dependent variables.

2.5 Results

In general, correlation between the seven work-related values shown in Table 2.4 are low to moderate as might be expected after factor analyses with varimax rotation. For employees, *Taking part in decision-making* and *Open relationship with employers/managers* ($r= 0.584$), *Being on time in a direct way* and *Being on time with a condition* ($r= 0.412$), and *Open relationship with employers/managers* and *Work-performance orientation vs. autocratic orientation* ($R= 0.402$) are positively correlated. For employers, we found more moderate positive correlations, which refer to different associations than in the employee sample.

Table 2.4

Correlations between the seven scales referring to work-related values.

Below the diagonal for employers, above the diagonal for employees (1 = *Being on time in a direct way*; 2 = *Being on time with a condition*; 3 = *Taking part in decision-making*; 4 = *Open relationship with employers/managers*; 5 = *Accountability*; 6 = *Face concern* and 7 = *Work-performance orientation vs autocratic orientation*).

Employees							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1		0.412***	-0.141***	-0.090*	-0.034	0.080*	-0.069
2	0.269*		-0.256***	-0.241***	-0.237***	0.050	-0.145***
3	-0.006	0.248*		0.584***	0.025	0.228***	0.321***
4	0.504***	-0.039	0.211		0.144***	0.266***	0.402***
5	0.585***	-0.007	-0.121	0.511***		-0.207***	0.014
6	0.422***	0.656***	0.378***	0.183	0.171		0.197***
7	0.334**	-0.10	0.142	0.337**	0.283*	0.155	
Employers							

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p = 0.01$; * $p = 0.05$ $N_{\text{employees}}$ varies between 742 and 744; $N_{\text{employers}} = 70$.

In Table 2.5, the means and standard deviations are presented for each of the four groups of participants on the seven cultural dimensions.

Table 2.5*The means and standard deviations on the seven cultural factors*

Measures	Western companies		Vietnamese companies	
	<i>Western employers</i> (n = 47)	<i>Vietnamese employees</i> (n = 47)	<i>Vietnamese employers</i> (n = 38)	<i>Vietnamese employees</i> (n = 32)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
1. <i>Being on time in a direct way</i>	4.59 (0.31)	3.50 (0.28)	4.30 (0.36)	3.55 (0.26)
2. <i>Being on time with a condition</i>	3.48 (0.54)	2.96 (0.28)	2.93 (0.47)	2.99 (0.40)
3. <i>Taking part in decision-making</i>	4.06 (0.28)	3.40 (0.46)	3.93 (0.36)	3.25 (0.46)
4. <i>Open relationship with employers/manager</i>	4.20 (0.21)	3.74 (0.27)	4.12 (0.29)	3.71 (0.29)
5. <i>Accountability</i>	4.11 (0.43)	3.35 (0.30)	4.04 (0.47)	3.37 (0.35)
6. <i>Face concern</i>	3.91 (0.49)	2.99 (0.35)	3.15 (0.49)	2.88 (0.22)
7. <i>Work-performance orientation versus Autocratic orientation</i>	4.22 (0.29)	3.87 (0.32)	4.19 (0.35)	3.76 (0.37)

2.5.1 Western employers and Vietnamese employees

From the multivariate analyses of variance, we see that Western employers showed higher scores on work-related values (Wilks' λ (7,56)= 57.885; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.879$), compared to Vietnamese employees. The test of between-subjects effects indicated that both groups differed significantly on all seven work-related values with higher scores for Western employers on *Being on time in a direct way* ($F(1,63) = 212.712$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.774$), *Being on time with a condition* ($F(1,63) = 20.788$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.251$), *Taking part in decision-making* ($F(1,63) = 44.724$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.419$), *Open relationship with employers/managers* ($F(1,63) = 54.647$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.468$), *Accountability* ($F(1,63) = 72.799$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.540$), *Face concern* ($F(1,63) = 70.608$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.532$) and *Work-performance orientation vs. autocratic orientation* ($F(1,63) = 28.087$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.312$). All difference can be seen a large difference with a proportion of explained variance of at least 25 (Cohen, 1988). The largest differences are seen for the work-related value of *Being on time in a direct way* ($\eta^2 = 0.774$).

2.5.2 Western and Vietnamese employers

From the multivariate analyses of variance, we see that Western employers showed higher scores on work-related values (Wilks' λ (7,62)= 6.657; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.429$), compared to Vietnamese employers. The test of between-subjects effects indicated that both groups differed significantly on three-related values with higher scores for Western employers on *Being on time in a direct way* ($F(1,69) = 12.467$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.155$), *Being on time with a condition* ($F(1,69) = 20.606$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.233$), and *Face concern* ($F(1,69) = 40.256$; $p \leq 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.372$). All difference can be seen a

large difference with a proportion of explained variance of at least 26 (Cohen, 1988), although considerably smaller than with the difference between Western employers and Vietnamese employees. The largest differences are seen for the work-related value of *Face concern* ($\eta^2= 0.372$).

2.5.3 Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees

From the multivariate analyses of variance, we see that Vietnamese employers showed higher scores on work-related values (Wilks' λ (7,68)= 31.546; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.763$), compared to Vietnamese employees. The test of between-subjects effects indicated that both groups differed significantly on six out of the seven work-related values with higher scores for Vietnamese employers on *Being on time in a direct way* ($F(1,75)= 110.665$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.599$), *Taking part in decision-making* ($F(1,75)= 60.941$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.452$), *Open relationship with employers/managers* ($F(1,75)= 37.628$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.337$), *Accountability* ($F(1,75)= 58.123$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.442$), *Face concern* ($F(1,75)= 9.821$; $p=0.002$; $\eta^2= 0.117$) and *Work-performance orientation vs. autocratic orientation* ($F(1,75)= 32.241$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.305$). All difference except one can be seen a large difference with a proportion of explained variance of at least 25 (Cohen, 1988). The largest differences are seen for the work-related value of *Being on time in a direct way* ($\eta^2= 0.599$). The smallest, but still significant, differences can be seen for *Face concern* ($\eta^2= 0.117$. moderate). No significant differences were found for *Being on time with a condition* ($F(1,75)= 0.406$; $p= 0.526$).

2.5.4 Vietnamese employees from Western companies and Vietnamese companies

From the multivariate analyses of variance, we see that employees of Western companies showed higher scores on work-related values (Wilks' λ (7,566)= 3.456; $p= 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.040$), compared to employees of Vietnamese companies. The test of between-subjects effects indicated that both groups differed significantly on three work-related values with higher scores for employees of Western companies on *Taking part in decision-making* ($F(1,573)= 9.311$; $p\leq 0.002$; $\eta^2= 0.016$), *Open relationship with employers/managers* ($F(1,573)= 6.784$; $p\leq 0.010$; $\eta^2= 0.012$), and *Face concern* ($F(1,573)= 14.991$; $p\leq 0.001$; $\eta^2= 0.026$). The test of between-subjects effects indicated that both groups differed significantly on one other work-related values with higher scores for employees of Vietnamese companies on *Being on time with a condition* ($F(1,573)= 4.071$; $p\leq 0.044$; $\eta^2= 0.007$). All difference can be seen a small or negligible difference with a largest proportion of explained variance of at least 3 (Cohen, 1988). No significance differences were found for *Being on time in a direct way* ($F(1,573)= 1.110$; $p= 0.293$), *Accountability* ($F(1,573)= 0.197$; $p= 0.657$), and *Work-performance orientation vs. autocratic orientation* ($F(1,573)= 2.699$; $p=0.101$).

2.6 Discussion and conclusion

In this study, cultural differences were examined between employees and employers in Western and Vietnamese companies in Vietnam. The findings showed that Western employers exhibited higher mean scores than Vietnamese employees in all seven work-related values. Significant differences were also found between Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees, with higher scores for Vietnamese employers in six work-related values, except for the value: *being on time with a condition*. However, these differences between Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees were smaller compared with the differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees. Additionally, we found three significant differences between Western and Vietnamese employers: *Being on time in*

a direct way, *Being on time with a condition* and *Face-concern*, with higher scores for Western employers. The fact that *Being on time with a condition* disappeared and *Face concern* is small in the multivariate analyses of variance between Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees (2.5.3), compared with the findings from 2.5.1 means that the cultural differences are the largest in these two values. In the multivariate analyses of variance for the Vietnamese employees from Western and Vietnamese companies, we found very small differences between the employees from two types of companies in three work-related values: *taking part in decision-making*, *open relationship with employers/managers* and *face-concern*, with higher scores for the Vietnamese employees working in Western companies. In conclusion, the differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees seem to be caused partly by cultural aspects and partly by status differences between employers and employees. We go into more detail below on two cultural dimensions: *sense of time* (including *being on time in a direct way* and *being on time with a condition*) and *face-concern*, since the largest differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees and between Western and Vietnamese employers were found in these dimensions, which indicates that these are two significant differences between Western and Vietnamese professionals.

2.6.1 Sense of time

Consistent with pertinent literature, this cultural dimension showed the largest difference between Western employers and Vietnamese employees and employers. The findings could be explained in part by *time perception* theory (Arman & Adair, 2012; Kathryn, 2006; Kawar, 2012; Kvassov, 2003; Smith & Pham, 1996; Venter, 2006) in which the Westerners are always skillful in time management and hold an exact time clock. Their plans and schedules are clearly set to ensure that they never fall behind on their deadlines. By contrast, Vietnamese professionals following Confucianism are not always on time and do not stick to exact deadlines. Time extension at workplaces is quite common in Vietnam and people in organizations understand the situation and feel at ease with the stretching of time. This explains why they scored quite low in the questionnaire, and it is the reason for *sense of time* being the most significant distinction between Western and Vietnamese professionals.

2.6.2 Face concern

Face concern was found to be significantly different in the two groups too (Western employers versus Vietnamese employees and Western versus Vietnamese employers). Among three groups, Western employers, Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees, the Western employers scored the highest, the Vietnamese employees the lowest, and the Vietnamese employers in the middle (the higher the score, the less the participants' concern about face). However, the Vietnamese employers' scores were closer to those of the Vietnamese employees' than those of the Western employers', which indicated that the Vietnamese employers scored much lower than the Western employers. There might be two reasons for the differences in these groups. Firstly, title, status, and formality are very important in Vietnamese society as indicated in its high power distance score (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). In organizations, there is a clear subordinate-superior relationship (Vuong, 2002). When Westerners hold the position of superiors and Vietnamese professionals, the post of subordinates, the latter would suppress their points of view in order to behave ethically to senior people. Secondly, in accordance with previous findings (Pham, 2012, 2014; Merkin, 2006), Vietnamese professionals who are interdependent people and depend on public recognition might withdraw their egos and benefits in order to save their own as well as others' face. Strictly speaking, in Vietnamese culture, face

maintenance for both sides is more important than achievements (Pham, 2014). The conclusion can be drawn that saving face is significant for Vietnamese employers and employees. However, the Vietnamese employees working in Western companies performed higher scores on this value than those of the Vietnamese employees in Vietnamese companies, which revealed that after some time working with the Western employers/managers, these Vietnamese employees somehow adapted and slightly adjusted their attitudes as Sam & Berry (2010) found that individuals might have large variations in psychological well-being and sociocultural competence in the process of acculturation.

2.7 Limitations

The first limitation is that the Western employers who participated in the current study had various cultural backgrounds and various nationalities. They were grouped to make a comparison with Vietnamese employers and employees possible. Different categories of employers might score differently on the seven factors of work-related values. However, the standard deviations of the scores of the Western participants were similar to the standard deviations of the scores of the Vietnamese groups of participants.

The second limitation of this study is the lack of a Western employee sample working in the same companies as the Vietnamese employees. As the Western employers both represent people from different cultures and hold the position of management, the results might be affected by two conditions. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether the differences were due to cultural distance or position distance. Therefore, we tested differences for both pairs of participants (Western employers versus Vietnamese employees and Vietnamese employers versus Vietnamese employees). However, in the future, when there are more Westerners working as employees in Vietnam, this research can be validated by comparing employees from these two cultures in the same companies.

2.8 Implications

Based on the findings, we formulate four implications for work-related interaction between Western employers and Vietnamese employees.

First, in Vietnamese culture, face loss is considered a vulnerable situation which might cause an emotional barrier between two parties, Western employers and Vietnamese employees. Accordingly, it is suggested that both direct and indirect facework strategies should be exercised simultaneously in order “to lessen the blow of the direct communication that needs to be used to get points across” (Merkin, 2006, p.155). This means that in order to coax the employees’ appreciation, the Western employers might play the role of both a quietly powerful but considerate boss. Then, the Vietnamese employees might feel more at ease to reduce the distance, talk openly and voice their opinions to the higher managers.

Second, since the concept of time is quite stretched in Vietnam, the Westerners must understand that the Vietnamese employees take time to do their work because they desire to do it in a rigorous and effective way. Hence, strict measures to discipline employees’ time and deadlines at workplaces such as finger sensor scanning for timework or salary reduction might lead to adverse effects. The employees might be on time and stick to the deadlines. Yet, they might be annoyed and try to avoid the punishment by completing the tasks without fully devoting their energy to the company’s benefits, with as a result that the quality of their work might be affected. Thus, both sides should moderate their time management in order to accomplish a deal satisfying the company’s needs.

Third, the condition provided in “being on time with a condition” factor might shorten both the cultural and position distance. It might be advisable that employers examine the reasons for lateness of their employees in order to improve mutual understanding. Additionally, the employees might be more explicit about why tardiness occurs so that the employers discern their employees’ difficulties in order to draw out effective solutions. In many cases, the communication might be much improved when the reasons are worked out.

Fourth, for a better workplace environment, training should be given to both expatriates and locals so that cultural distance can be understood and appreciated (Fabian, Peltokorpi & Kyung, 2012). Consequently, both parties might be more sympathetic and tolerant to cultural differences to interact effectively in a multicultural workplace.

2.9 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the current study was carried out for the purpose of designing training courses for future graduates in Vietnam who are prospective employees in those foreign subsidiaries and have interactions on a daily basis with Western employers. The findings provide insight into what differences are the greatest between the two cultures and what future graduates who are going to work with Western professionals should work on most. The findings also suggest that solely teaching the language is not sufficient for effective communication and the importance of culture instruction along with language instruction in higher education.