SPEA UNDERGRADUATE HONORS THESIS

Impact of Long Working Hours on Employees and the Economy:

A Comparison between the United States and Norway

NicoleMarie Carter
Cheryl Hughes MBA
Indiana University
School of Public and Environmental Affairs
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NicoleMarie Carter
Human Resource Management
Senior

Cheryl Hughes MBA
Lecturer
School of Public and Environmental Affairs
Faculty Mentor

Long working hours can at times impact an employee's performance, productivity, health, safety and motivation. This thesis will expand on these impacts while farther evaluating what effects this has on a company and a county's economy. The two countries that will be evaluated are the United States and Norway. This study will take into consideration multiple factors such as: salary, GDP per capita, quality of life, culture, cost of living and standard of living. Then this information will be used to propose a solution that can best benefit both employees and companies in the United States.

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Introduction

The United States (U.S.) is classified as being highly diversified, world leading innovator producing the second largest industrial output in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Private sector organizations strive to outperform their competition locally, nationally, and internationally. There is one question that this thesis is interested in though: how does the U.S.'s economy compare to other countries'. The CIA has stated the most useful statistic to compare the economic strength and well-being between countries is the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita; yet the U.S is not one of the highest ranking counties in this category (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

The next question this thesis addresses is: what potential factor could be causing this downfall. Surveys report 39% of full-time employees work an average of 50 hours or more in a week (Saad, 2014). Can working long hours effect this issue, and if so, can adjusting the number of hours worked allow companies to more effectively utilize their maximum capacity for success?

Before stating, it is essential to know establishing evidence of a direct relationship between hours worked and productivity is not possible. This is due to the multiple factors that affect this relationship. This thesis will instead evaluate what association long working hours can have on an employee, company, and country. This research can then be used to strategically design a work-life balance business policy that benefits an organization.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis, I will use the following terms and definitions:

- Overtime will be defined as hours worked over 40 in a workweek. This definition will be used in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act definition of overtime (United States Department of Labor, 2016).
- Productivity will be defined as the quantity index of value added divided by quantity index of labor input. This definition is used based on the Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) productivity manual. The OECD states the purpose of this method of measuring productivity is to provide an "analysis of micro-macro links, such as the industry contribution to economy-wide labor productivity and economic growth" (OECD, 2001, p. 15).

Why it Matters

Productive employees are at the heart of prosperous companies. A company must understand how to create a strong workforce in order to succeed. Managers, supervisors, CEOs and human resource professionals require strategic knowledge on how to provide an environment that allows employees to be productive. Understanding how working long hours affects employees can be an important skill while strategically planning policies aimed towards a company's maximum productivity.

Hours Worked per Week

The Bureau of Labor Statistics report Americans work an average of 42 hours a week (United States Department of Labor, 2017). However, this statistical data includes both full-time and part-time employees. This measurement skews the overtime data. Once these two employee types are separated, surveys show full-time employees actually work an average of 47 hours a week (Saad, 2014) (Wilki, 2017). This survey indicates 18% of full-time employees work in

excess of 60 hours a week (Saad, 2014). That can mean an average work day of over nine hours with an average work week of five days. The typical idea behind working long hours is that employees are completing more work. However, this is not always the case.

Study of Unproductive Time

Surveys of full-time employees show a median of one hour spent daily being unproductive while "on the clock" (Carroll, 2007) (Gouveia, 2014). If a company has twenty employees who receive the minimum wage of $7.25 an hour, this can add up to over $36,000 a year. Employees admit to using this unproductive time for social media usage (Gouveia, 2014). While this can be a negative aspect of social media, the answer is not to remove these tools from the workplace. Instead, companies should work to create an environment that fosters productivity. Looking at adjusting the hours worked can be a place to evaluate while designing this work environment.

Study of Productivity Application

Data collected by a company named Draugiem Group gives more insight on how adjusting working time can increase productivity. The tool used to track productivity in this study is called DeskTime. This internal application has grown into an app used by 93,000 users with a total of 16,000 companies (DeskTime, 2017). The findings of this app indicate the 10% most productive employees have one thing in common: consistent, effective breaks (Gifford, 2014). This break consists of 52 of intense focus followed by a 17 minute break from all work related activities. Their findings also state these employees typically do not work eight hours a day. The idea behind this method is described as working smarter, not longer. Draugiem Group explains these employees treat their work time as sprints. They work intensely and purposefully for 52 minutes and then take a break to recharge before starting fresh 17 minutes later.

Overtime

This data leads into the next factor to consider: overtime. The majority of American employees report working overtime on a weekly basis. Overtime can be beneficial in many cases, however, it may be misused more often than we think. Employee burnout, excessive turnover, and reduction in employee engagement have been associated with the misuse of overtime (SHRM, 2015). A survey consisting of 614 U.S. human resource professionals indicated 95% beleived employee burnout was an issue of concern with 32% stating the culprit was "too much overtime or after-hours work" (Wilki, 2017). If this misuse of overtime is prolonged, it may also "create an overtime-dependent workforce, higher absenteeism and lower productivity" (SHRM, 2015). While overtime can be tolerable for short durations, using this practice long-term may be harmful (SHRM, 2015). To alleviate these issues, it is necessary for companies to re-evaluate their workweek schedules.

Comparison

This thesis is going to evaluate what impact the issues previously discussed have on the U.S.'s economy. In order to touch the surface of this evaluation, one country will be used as a comparison tool: Norway. Norway was chosen because it is known for having one of the shortest workweeks. It is important to note that no two countries can be equal enough to evenly compare but this thesis will make an attempt to do so. Comparing the U.S. to Norway can help evaluate what differences the number of hours worked may have on an economy.

Comparison Chart

The chart below shows some basic background using statistical data to compare Norway and the United States. Included are some factors that may be impacted by working long hours.

Figure 1: Comparison Chart between Norway & the United States

Comparison: Norway & the United States		
	Norway	U.S.
Population	5,258,317	325,773,206
Hours worked by full-time employees	39	47
Salaries: In 2015 constant prices at 2015 USD PPPS	$ 50,908.00	$ 58,714.00
Work-life balance rating	8.7	6.2
Happiness Index	7.498	7.104
GDP per capita & productivity: GDP per hour worked in USD	82.365441	68.34031
Prosperity Index	78.66	73.51
Accidents	24,000	2,900,000

Sources: Data for population (Dybendal, 2017) (Worldometers, 2017) , data for hours worked (Eurostat, 2016) (Saad, 2014), data for salaries (OECD, 2017), data for work-life balance (OECD, 2016), data for happiness index (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, World Happiness Report 2016, Update, 2016), data for GDP per capita & productivity (OECD, 2016), data for Prosperity Index (Legatum Prosperity, 2016), data for accidents (Wettergreen, 2016) (BLS, 2016).

Chart Evaluation

Population

To get a general sense of the capacity for the two countries, the population is compared. Norway is substantially smaller than the U.S. This was taken into consideration while choosing which data would be most appropriate to compare. You can see this when looking at the salaries and GDP per capita statistics. This information may not directly relate to the comparison of economies but it can play a significant role.

Hours worked

The next comparison is hours worked. Hours worked is the main statistics this thesis focuses on. Reports calculate full-time Norwegian employees work an average of 39 hours a week (Eurostat, 2016). U.S. employees are reported to work an average of 47 hours a week (Saad, 2014). This is almost an eight hour difference every week, 32 hours every month, and roughly an extra 400 hours every year. Add this all together and it equals up to around 16 days out of an employee's life purely filled by work.

In addition to the number of hours worked, there is a difference in the number of days worked. By law, U.S. private employers are not required to provide paid time off. The Department of Labor states "the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) does not require payment for time not worked, such as vacations, sick leave or holidays (Federal or otherwise)" (Department of Labor, n.d., p. 1). Norway has a different method for addressing paid time off. Norwegian private employers are required by law to allow a minimum of 25 annual paid leave days. Norway is not only working shorter hours a week, but they are also working less days in a year. For reference, Figure 2 below represents the paid annual leave and paid holidays in the private sector for OECD countries using only working days. This displays how the U.S. functions differently in regards to paid time off in the private sector when compared to other countries. Do these extra days worked significantly increase the productivity or success of the U.S., or do these extra days have a lower impact than employers would like to believe? This question will be further investigated by also considering the GDP per capita (PPP) later on in this thesis.

Figure 2: Paid Annual Leave and Paid Holidays

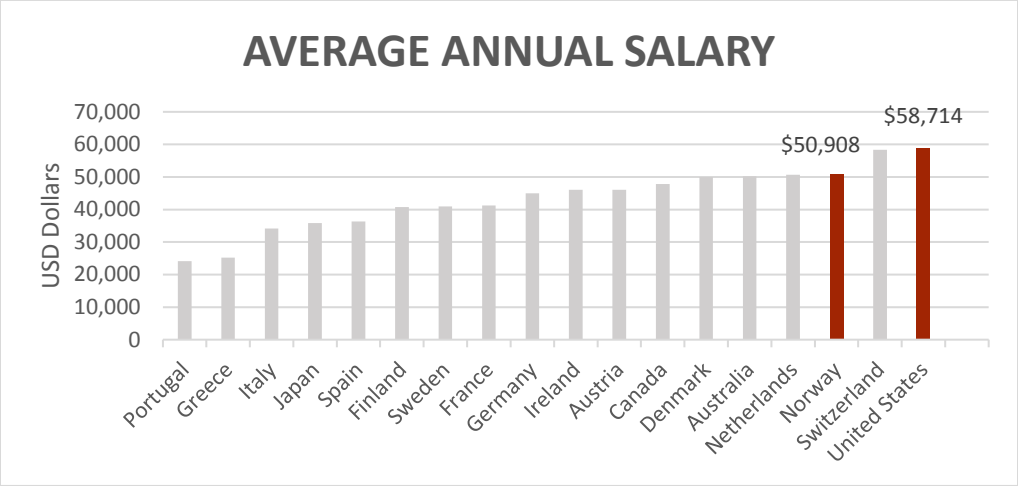


Source: Data from (Ray & Schmitt, 2007).

Salaries

After seeing this data, one question people may have is how these shorter work weeks interfere with employees' salaries. According to data found by the OECD, employees in Norway, on average, make less than U.S. employees. The purchasing power parity (PPP) is used to measure this data. This allows for a more accurate comparison of economies between two countries. This measurement takes into consideration currency discrepancies. The difference between Norway's average salary and the U.S.'s average salary is almost $8,000. This can be a significant difference when evaluating this data singly. However, when comparing the average annual salaries of multiple countries, Norway falls on the higher end of the scale. This is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Average Annual Salary by Country



Source: Data for graph (OECD, 2017).

In addition to this, comparing the number of hours worked to the salary of an employee can provide a different lens to use. Norwegian employees tend to work roughly eight hours less a week. When taking this into consideration, the average Norwegian employees makes $25 ($50,908/ (39 hours x 52 weeks)) an hour. The average U.S. employee makes $24 (58,714.00/ (47 hours x 52 weeks a year)) an hour. This calculation does not take into consideration holidays, paid time off or unpaid time off. It is also a rough estimate. However, it can be a starting point when comparing salaries.

To view salaries from another point of view it can also be beneficial to evaluate employees' household net adjusted disposable income. This is found by taking the average amount of household salary after taxes. The OECD found Norwegian citizens to have a lower disposable income. Their survey shows Norwegians have an average disposable income of $33,393 USD and Americans have an average disposable income of $41,017 USD (OECD, 2016). Out of the

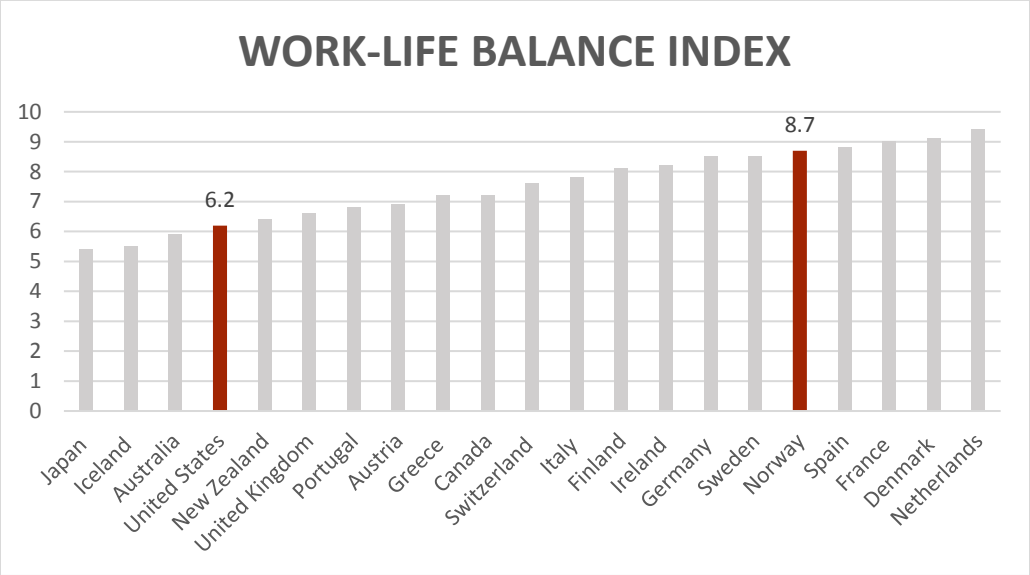
38 countries surveyed, the U.S. ranks as number one for the highest disposable income. Norway is not far behind ranking in at number 4. In the bigger picture, this is not a significant difference.

Work-life Balance

The next comparison is work-life balance satisfaction. Measuring work-life balance for a country is subjective. Nevertheless, for the past six years the OECD has conducted a self-reported Better Life Index. This index measures how satisfied employees are in 11 categories: housing, jobs, education, civic engagement, life satisfaction, work-life balance, income, community, environment, health and safety. The category of interest for this thesis is work-life balance.

According to the OECD Better Life Index, Norway has a higher satisfaction rate with their work-life balance when compared to the United States. Norway has a rating of 8.7 (OECD, 2016). The U.S. has a significantly lower rating of 6.2 (OECD, 2016). This may indicate U.S. employees have a high value placed on the work-life balance which they are not receiving. You can view this difference in Figure 3 below. The criterion used by the OECD to create this statistic are the time devoted to leisure/personal care compared to how often employees report working long hours. Based on the data presented, employees may be trying to express that they are unhappy with the amount of time they spend on work.

Figure 3: Work-life Balance Index

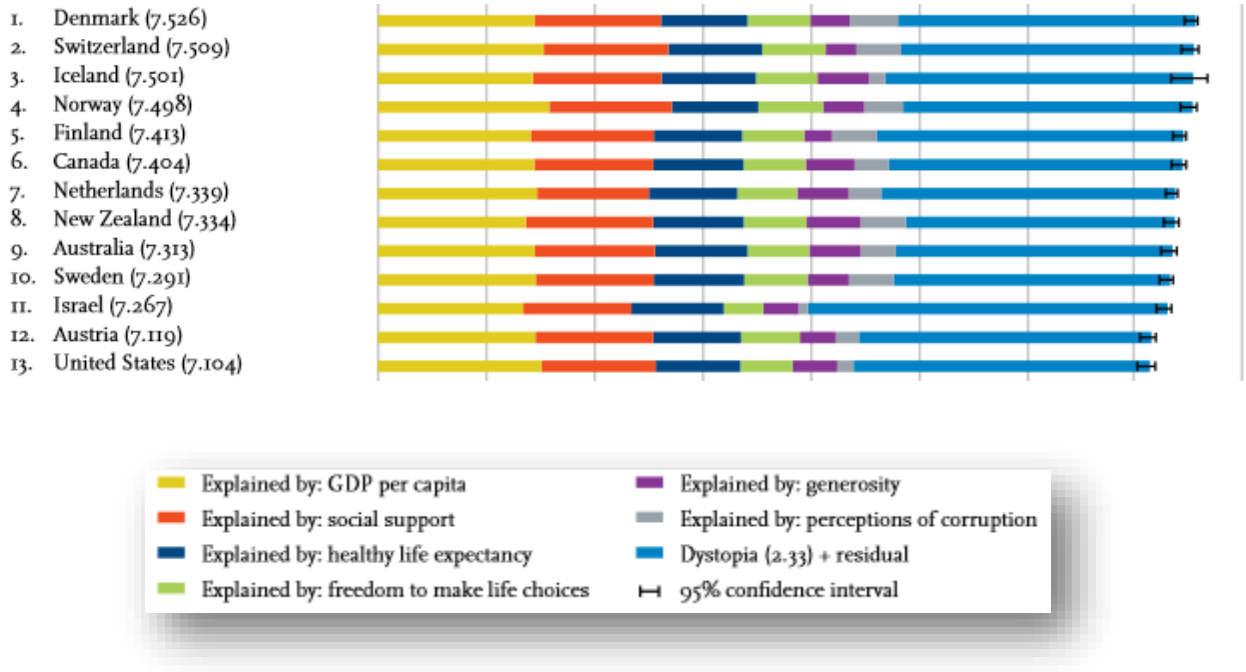


Source: Data from (OECD, 2016)

Happiness

This leads into the next comparison: the happiness index. Happiness is another measurement that is subjective to an individual. Nevertheless, the World Happiness Report is a self-reported survey conducted to estimate the degree to which individuals in countries rate the overall quality of their life. Norway is ranked as the fourth happiest country out of 157 with a score of 7.498 (the highest score being Denmark with a 7.526) (Helliwell, Huang, & Wang, Chapter 2: The Distribution of World Happiness, 2016) . The U.S. is ranked as the thirteenth happiest country with a score of 7.104 (Helliwell, Huang, & Wang, Chapter 2: The Distribution of World Happiness, 2016). Figure 5 below visually depicts how these ratings were given and what factors they consist of.

Figure 5: Happiness Index Comparison by Country



Source: Graph from (Helliwell, Huang, & Wang, Chapter 2: The Distribution of World Happiness, 2016).

GDP

The next comparison is the GDP. The GDP of a country can be broken up into three categories: agriculture, industries, and services. This thesis mostly pertains to the industires sector of GDP but can also address certain services. In Norway and the U.S., these two sectors account for about 98% of the country's GDP (CIA, 2016). There are different ways GDP is measured in a country. The two that will be discussed in this thesis are the GDP per capita per hour and the GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP).

The GDP per capita per hours worked can be used as a tool to compare the success of the Norwegian and U.S. economies. Norway has a higher GDP per capita per hours worked than the U.S. by 14 dollars (OECD, 2016). This equates out to Norway being 17% (1-(68.34031/82.365441)) more productive with every hour worked.

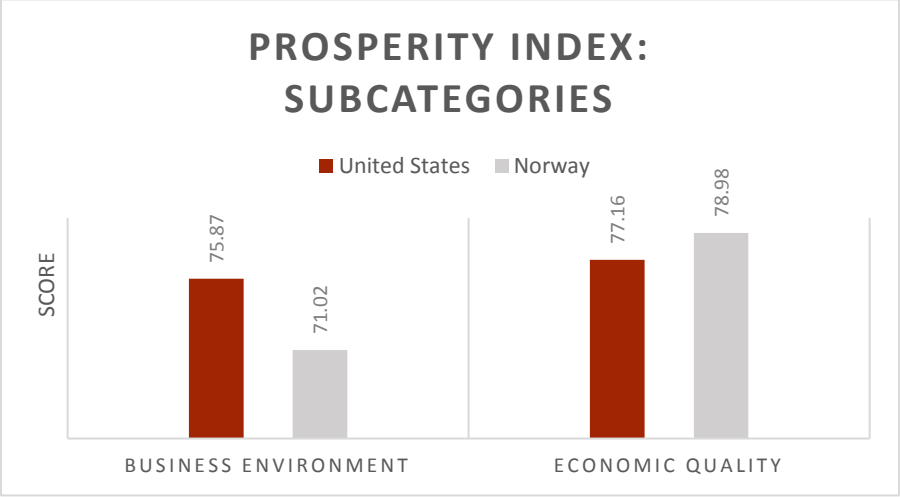
Another option is to evaluate the GDP per capita (PPP). The CIA defines the GDP per capita (PPP) as a nation's "sum value of all goods and services produced in the country valued at prices prevailing in the United States in the year noted" (CIA, 2017, p. 1). They also indicate the GDP per capita (PPP) is a reliable tool to compare developed countries' economic well-being (CIA, 2017). In 2016, Norway's GDP per capita (PPP) was $69,300 (CIA, 2016). The United States' GDP per capita (PPP) was slightly lower at $57,300 (CIA, 2016). For the past three years Norway has produced a higher GDP per capita (PPP). This may indicate working less hours will not decrease the economic status of a country but could in fact do the opposite.

Prosperity Index

The next comparison is the prosperity index. The Prosperity Index is used as a tool to measure the potential of a country. The subcategories that make up this measurement consist of: business environment, economic quality, education, governance, health, natural environment, personal freedom, safety and security, and social capital. This thesis will focus on the business environment and economic quality. The overall score for Norway according to the Prosperity Index is 78.66 (Legatum Prosperity, 2016). The U.S has a score of 73.51 (Legatum Prosperity, 2016). However, the U.S. has a higher score in regards to business environment while Norway has a higher score in economic quality. Business environment is defined as a measurement of a "country's entrepreneurial environment, business infrastructure, barriers to innovation, and labor market flexibility" (Legatum Prosperity, 2016, p. 1). The U.S. exceeds Norway in this category. The economic quality is defined as a measurement that "ranks countries on the openness of their economy, macroeconomic indicators, foundation for growth, economic opportunity, and financial sector efficiency" (Legatum Prosperity, 2016, p. 1). This data can be seen in Figure 6

below. Based on the overall prosperity index ratings, it can suggest Norway has a greater foundation for growth and more future opportunities.

Figure 6: Prosperity Index: Business Environment & Economic Quality



Source: Data from (Legatum Prosperity, 2016).

Accidents

The next comparison is the accident rate. Accidents are another possible impact of long working hours. Norway has roughly half the number of accidents as the U.S. Some studies suggest long working hours may increase the likelihood of health or safety issues for some employees (J. Kodz et al, 2003). This could be a factor that has led to the U.S. having more work related accidents when compared to Norway. Side effects employees have reported from long working hours are mental exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, stress, and chronic headaches (J. Kodz et al, 2003). Falling reported as the most common work accident (Wettergreen, 2016). The side effects listed may cause the number of falls reported while at work in the U.S. to increase.

Additional Factors

Two additional factors that can be used to evaluate the relationship between hours worked and the economic success of a country are performance and turnover rate. These two factors are difficult to attach a number to but research has been conducted to evaluate how they are influenced.

Performance

Performance is an important measurement in the workforce. Many companies conduct performance reviews on a regular basis. Performance scores may determine your fate at a company. Will you move up the chain, will you receive a higher salary, or will you be let go? If you are showing negative side effects of long working hours, your future look more like the later option. One negative side effect reported by employees who worked long hours is sleep deprivation. This symptom's effect on performance has been studied by multiple researchers. Their findings have shown performance may decrease if sleep deprivation is present (J. Kodz et al, 2003). Two factors considered for some of these studies have been the ability to retain information and recall information (J. Kodz et al, 2003). Without this ability, employees are more likely to have lower performance levels.

Turnover Rate & Absenteeism

Turnover rate may also be an indirect result of working long hours. The Work Employment Relations Survey has been one tool used to study the relationship between high working hours and high turnover rate. This study found the correlation has a statistically significant relationship (J. Kodz et al, 2003). When the number of hours worked is 48 or more, the level of turnover for a company may be higher than typical (J. Kodz et al, 2003). However, the results of this research

are effected by multiple factors. This enables studies to create a direct link to these findings. These results are only found when conducting self-reporting surveys. This information can be considered as a starting point when issues arise in regards to high turnover rate.

Summary of Chart & Additional Factors

After evaluating all of the factors that have been listed, it can appear that working less can have the potential to create a positive relationship with the economy and success of a company. Norway has a short work week which may be what allows them to achieve a better work-life balance satisfaction rate, a higher happiness rating, a higher GDP per capita, a higher prosperity index score and lastly lower accident ratings. In addition to this, they are able to maintain a competitive average salary when compared to other developed countries. If this work structure is effective in Norway, could it also be effective in the U.S.? There are many factors that would affect this scenario. However, this thesis will focus on the culture of the U.S. and the culture of Norway to evaluate if this work method may be applied effectively in the U.S. in regards to cultural tendencies.

Culture Comparison

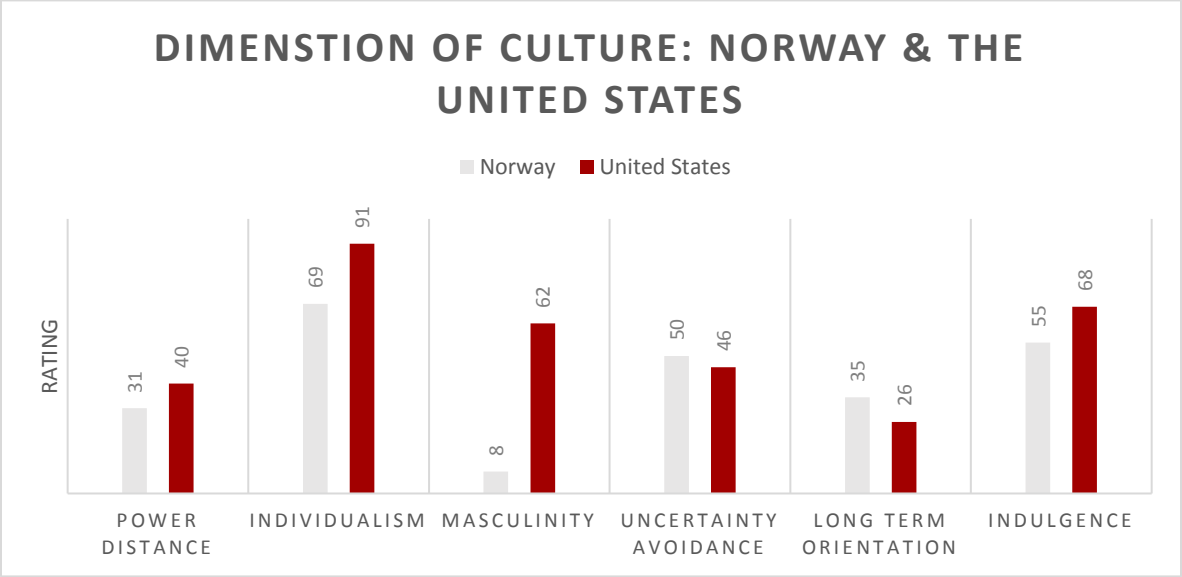
Cultural differences are important when comparing countries. Culture is what influences one's way of life. This includes one's work life. If U.S. citizens are accustomed to working long hours, could their culture be at blame for this. In order to grasp the different dimensions of culture, this thesis will use Geert Hofstede's research as a lens. Hofstede includes six different cultural indicators in his research:

- Power distance: extent to which power is distributed equally

- Individualism: extent to which one's self image is "defined is terms of 'We' or 'I'" (Hofstede Centre, n.d.)
- Masculinity: degree to which values like competitiveness and success are valued over caring for others and quality of life
- Uncertainty avoidance: degree to which society tolerates the future is unknown
- Long term orientation: degree to which society focuses on the long term or short term future
- Indulgence: extent to which society is able to control their impulses

Figure 7 compares Norway and the U.S. in each of these categories.

Figure 7: Geert Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture



Source: Data from (Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

The category that differs the most in this comparison is the masculinity rating. Norway is considered a feminine country as its rating is an eight (Hofstede Centre, n.d.). The U.S. is on the other side of the spectrum with a rating of 62 indicating it is a masculine country (Hofstede

Centre, n.d.). This difference may have an influence in the number of hours worked in each country. Long working hours has been as a characteristic in masculine countries more often than 'feminine' countries. The reasoning behind this can be traced back to the level of competitiveness associated with 'masculine' countries. This drive for success and wealth supports the long workweek culture present in the U.S.

Should the U.S. work to change their culture to mirror Norway's way of living? The answer is no. A culture is what makes a country unique. It identifies the true values of citizens. Changing this is not the purpose of this thesis. This being said, it may be beneficial to incorporate more 'feminine' values in U.S. companies. As stated previously in this thesis, studies have found taking more breaks can be highly beneficial to one's productivity. If a company is lagging in this area, long working hours may be one of the causes. For this reason, changing the U.S. workweek may be a valuable option to consider.

Solution

This leads into the last portion of this thesis, the solution. It is necessary to understand the needs and wants of your workforce before creating any new policies. Since working long hours has been a common criticism in the U.S., it can be a starting point. There are multiple options to consider while working to maximize productivity. Based on the research presented in this thesis, there is one solution I propose: mandate work-life balance policies.

In order to do this, organizations must first understand what work-life balance is. Work-life balance is having the opportunity to split one's time between their work and their life. A common technique to combat this policy is to provide on-site perks for employees. Let's use Google as an example of the work side of this equation. Google provides various perks to their

employees such as gourmet food, gyms, daycares, and dry cleaning (illian D'Onfro, 2014). Employees have everything they need at the tip of their fingers. However, we must ask ourselves one question: does this allow employees to spend more time at home or does it allow employees to spend more time working. Typically it ends up being the later.

Luckily there is still the life side of this equations. The life side of the equation may include spending time with family, going out with friends, or enjoying a hobby. However, employees have reported it turning into checking work emails, answering work calls, and giving their free time to work related activities. Recently Americans have been finding that the life part of the equation is missing which is hindering the U.S's ability to progress. For this reason, work-life balance policies no longer need to be encouraged but instead need to be enforced. There must be limits placed on not only the amount of time spent at the office but also the amount of time spent working outside of the office.

Summary

In summary, the solution proposed can ensure employees are able to produce the productivity levels organizations are asking for. These work-life balance policies must encourage employees to take proper breaks and allow them to have more time away from work. In other words, organizations must start considering how working less may allow employees to perform their best.

If I were to prolong this thesis, I would be inclined to do more research to include the data from all developed countries. This would allow for a more thorough, true comparison between the number of hours worked and the productivity of a country. This research would also include a multitude of factors to be taken into consideration.

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