"The Good Employee": A Cross-National Media Analysis

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In order to examine definitions of a "good employee" across national boundaries, advertisements for employees were compared across 20 countries. In each of the 20 countries, newspapers in the local language were accessed for advertisements of local employment opportunities. Data consisted of adjectives used to describe the desired type of employee (e.g. "hard working" or "people oriented") and were collected over a three week period of time. All descriptors were translated into English and a thematic analysis was carried out by a group of seven individuals with backgrounds in industrial/organizational psychology. The descriptors fell into three main categories – people oriented, task oriented, and leadership oriented. Drawing upon McClelland's (1961) need motivation theory, the descriptors were then sorted according to whether or not the adjective describing the desired employee characteristics represented a motivation for affiliation, achievement, or power. Within each country, the proportion of descriptors falling into each category was determined. A hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using Ward's linkage, resulting in the formation of two groups. A t-test indicated that these groups differed significantly on the extent to which affiliated motivation was emphasized in the employment advertisements. Implications and further findings are discussed.