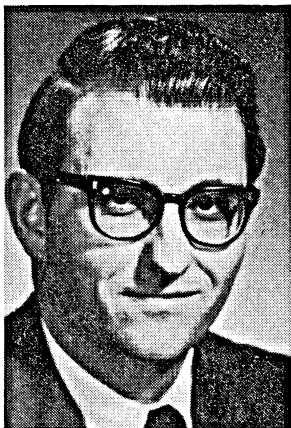


WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN MANAGERS: HOW DIFFERENT ARE THEY?*



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The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a comparative investigation of the similarities and differences of executive attitudes of a group of White South African managers within the Republic of South Africa with the attitudes of executives from a variety of European countries and the United States.

The basic proposition underlying this program of research is that:

"Since the culture within which a man is socialised and educated presumably exerts a significant influence on his basic attitudes and dispositions, we might expect to find differences in certain psychological characteristics among...executives from various countries ... and within countries with diverse cultural traditions." (Cummings, Harnett and Stevens, 1971, 286).

Hierdie artikel doen verslag oor die bevindings van 'n houdingsontleding van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse bestuurders. Dit vergelyk die opvattinge van Engels- en Afrikaanssprekende bestuurders met vyf streeksgroepe (Griekeland, Spanje, Sentraal-Europa, Skandinawië en die V.S.A.) t.o.v. vier basiese dimensies (konsilliasie; risiko; selfbepaling; en vertroue) soos vervat in 'n studie deur Cummings, Harnett, en Stevens (1971). Daar is bevind dat Suid-Afrikaanse bestuurders strydvlustiger is as hulle teenhangers in Griekeland, Spanje, Sentraal-Europa, Skandinawië, en die V.S.A.. Hoewel die verskille t.o.v. die ander drie houdings kleiner is, is die Suid-Afrikaanse bestuurder geneig om effens agterdogtiger te wees, glo minder in selfbepaling en is effens meer risiko-geneigd.

In teenstelling met die hipoteses, is geen statisties-beduidende verskille (Cummings, Schmiki en Blackburn, 1976) gevind tussen Engels- en Afrikaanssprekende taalgroepe t.o.v. enigeen van die vier houdings wat gemeet is nie volgens 'n aangepaste Shure-Meeker Persoonlikheids-/Houdings-skedule (1967).

Die navorsingsresultate word geïnterpreteer binne 'n breë raamwerk van moontlike oorsake.

Although this study has contributed to the growing stream of research investigating differences among managers of several countries, we do not claim that the sample size studied is representative of all businessmen in their respective countries or language groups (as in South Africa).

While it is a fact of managerial life that the business world is becoming increasingly interdependent, it is only in recent years that researchers began investigating those factors which might impact on international business operations. Attitudinal differences between employees and managers from different countries are among those factors and these differences and similarities have been receiving increased attention since Haire, Ghiselli and Porter (1966) published their seminal work on the subject. The earlier work by Haire, et al. was extended by Cummings and Schmidt (1972) to a Greek sample and examined the impact of cultural background and degree of industrialisation on executive attitudes. Cummings, Harnett and Stevens (1971) also looked at four specific attitudes (risk, self-determination, conciliation, and suspiciousness) of executives in 11

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countries. Clark and McCabe (1970) examined the attitudes of Australian managers toward leadership. Reitz and Groff (1974) analysed the attitudes of workers in Japan, Mexico, Thailand, and the United States with particular focus on differences in beliefs about self-determination versus fate on controlling influences in one's life.

Whilst there is a great need for more comparative data on executive attitudes among countries, it is becoming increasingly apparent that major differences exist among cultural groupings within a single country. Spain represents a currently attended example while Canada and Belgium have posed particularly salient examples throughout the last twenty-five years.¹ One of the most striking examples of *assumed* contrast and even conflict of attitudes within a single country is the white population within South Africa. While the world press and the United Nations focus on numerous racial issues within Southern Africa, the differences in cultural, religious, and educational heritages within the white population have received much less attention. These differences are thought to play an important part in both business and political relations between the Republic of South Africa and the outside world. Furthermore, it is generally assumed that these cultural differences are reflected in attitudes that exert a direct impact on interpersonal relations.

ASSUMPTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

It has been hypothesised that South African executives tend to be socialised in two distinct cultures which are different in many respects, i.e. the English and the Afrikaans cultural groups which have their roots from the historic development of the country. It is generally recognised that the English culture within South Africa has emphasised entrepreneurship, some risk taking, and political liberalism more than has the Afrikaans culture.

These differences are generally thought to be reflected in most dimensions of white South African society; e.g., economic, educational, and religious. On the other hand, there exists very little empirical evidence on specific personality and attitudinal characteristics to support these generally assumed macro differences.

Thus, the *within-country* portion of the study was guided by the following hypotheses:

English speaking (first language) executives will tend to be significantly

1. more conciliatory
2. more risk prone
3. more oriented toward belief in self-control and selfdetermination. and
4. more trusting toward others

than the Afrikaans-speaking (first language) executives.

Given the whole current political and social posture of South Africa and the general self image generated

among many white South Africans by the criticism and pressures applied by much of the outside world, the following *between-country* hypotheses guided this study:

White South African executives will express

5. more belligerent attitudes
6. more risk aversion
7. a greater belief in external control or external determination, and
8. more suspiciousness

than is typical of most of the Greek, Spanish, Central European, Scandinavian, and American (United States) executives as reported in Cummings, Harnett, and Stevens (1971).

SAMPLE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Each of the managers included in this study was attending a post-graduate course working towards a Masters of Business Leadership at the University of South Africa. The data was gathered by means of a 58-item questionnaire — an adaptation by Cummings, Harnett, and Schmidt (1972, 1973) of the Shure-Meeker (1967) Personality-Attitude Schedule (PAS). This questionnaire measures four attitudinal dimensions which have been found to possess factor stability across language groupings and private versus public employment samples (Cummings, Harnett, and Schmidt, 1972, 1973). The four dimensions are listed below and have been defined in Shure and Meeker (1967) and Cummings, Harnett, and Stevens (1971):

1. Conciliation vs. belligerence in interpersonal relations
2. Risk taking vs. risk avoidance
3. External vs. internal control of an individual's destiny, i.e. belief in fate (external control of events) or self-determination (internal control)
4. Suspiciousness vs. trust

The PAS was translated from English into Afrikaans, both of which are official languages in South Africa. Each portion of the sample completed the version of the questionnaire written in his first language (either English or Afrikaans). The English language version was first translated into Afrikaans by a completely bilingual white South African of similar age to the executive subjects. This translated version was retranslated to English by another independent translator (again, a bilingual South African). Differences in wording were discussed until agreement was reached on necessary changes or elimination of a question.

The sample consisted predominantly of middle and top-level managers in private business enterprise. Approximately five percent of the respondents were from service organisations. Demographic characteristics and sample sizes are presented in Table 1.

¹ For data documenting attitudinal differences among Spanish executives, by region and subculture, see Cummings, Harnett and Stevens, 1971, 298-300.

Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH AFRICAN EXECUTIVES *

	Afrikaans Sample	English Sample	Total Sample
Sample Size	179	85	264
Average Age in Years	30,8	32,0	31,2
Years of Business Experience	8,6	9,5	8,9
Years in Present Position	4,4	5,2	4,6

Table 2

WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN COMPARISON

Attitudes		Scale			
		Means			
High Scale Scores	Low Scale Scores	Midpoint Scale	English Sample	Afrikaans Sample	Total Sample
Conciliatory-Belligerent		28	46.9	44.2	45.1
Risk Aversion-Risk Taking		32	34,0	34,0	34,0
External Control-Internal Control		0	- .86	- .79	- .81
Suspiciousness-Trust		32	37.8	38.0	37.9

The demographic characteristics between South Africa and other countries is reflected in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH AFRICAN SAMPLE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES SAMPLES

Region	Number	Mean age	Mean No. of Years of Business Experience
Central Europe	192	39,8	17,0
Greece	28	41,4	15,0
Scandinavia	84	39,4	15,9
Spain	124	35,0	11,1
U.S.A.	23	42,3	16,8
South Africa	264	31,2	8,9

* The findings reported here should not be interpreted as favourable or unfavourable toward any particular cultural group. This study is merely an empirical description of selected attitudes among the executives studied.

Table 4

COMPARISON OF THE ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES ACROSS SIX COUNTRIES

COUNTRIES	CON-BEL	RISK	CONTROL	SUSP-TRUST
SPAIN	58,0	33,4	— 0,44	37,1
GREECE	57,5	35,6	— 1,30	42,6
CENTRAL EUROPE	53,6	35,8	— 0,80	36,0
SCANDINAVIA	51,9	35,7	— 0,94	34,8
U S A	48,1	31,9	— 1,48	29,7
SOUTH AFRICA	45,1	34,0	— 0,81	37,9

While none of the differences are substantial, their direction is consistent with hypotheses 2, 3 and 4. The English sample is more conciliatory, expresses greater belief in internal control (self determination) and is more trusting. There is no difference in the risk proneness of the two samples. From a statistical point of view, we must conclude that the two samples do not differ.

On the four measures, both cultures were found to be above the midpoint on all of the scales except the one measuring locus of control. In particular South African executives of both cultural backgrounds tend to be conciliatory, risk-averse, believers in self-determination, and somewhat suspicious of others. These results become more meaningful when examined relative to similar results reported in the literature. The most appropriate comparison would be with the results reported in Cummings, Harnett, and Stevens (1971). Such a comparison is meaningful, since samples were demographically similar and test procedures and instruments were nearly identical in both studies.

The between country comparisons are presented on scales in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

ATTITUDES AND NATIONALITY DIFFERENCES

The mean scores for the regional groups of managers on the conciliation-belligerence scale are shown in Figure 1.

The results on the conciliation-belligerence scale indicate that the South African samples are the most belligerent of all samples that have been studied. To the South African manager, this belligerence may be a personal value. One could hypothesise that both the historic development of South Africa and the current complex political environment lures out and contributes to this behavioural characteristic. The explanation for this could be two-fold.

First, a fair percentage of individuals in South Africa often appear to experience a lack of recognition for achievement within their own organisations and society (or social group with whom they interact). This situation occurs frequently in both major language groups, i.e., English and Afrikaans. Sacrifices and lowered individual achievement are requested for the good of the "national" order.

Second, the unique political situation in Southern Africa may thus offer a partial explanation. South Africa is in a very delicate international situation and has endured, because of its complex racial problems, much criticism, both justifiable and unjustifiable. Perhaps belligerence is a reaction to the perception that the country's problems and accomplishments are not accurately portrayed and interpreted by outsiders. That is, white South Africans might adopt the attitude, "If that is the way they want to treat us, then we will show them"

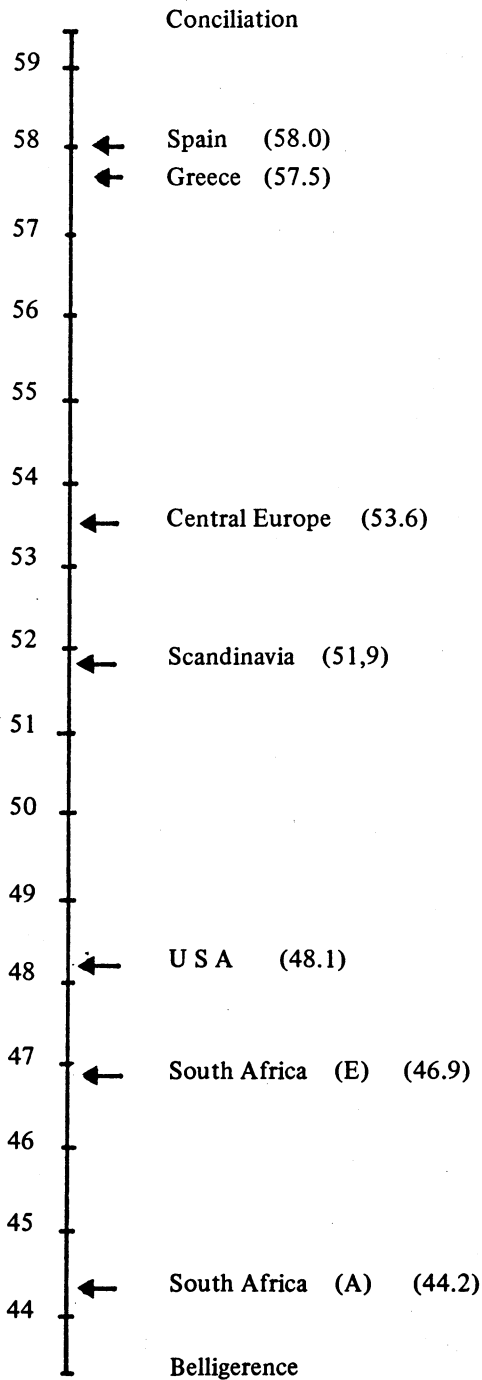
Figure 2 reflects the average scores for the risk-aversion, risk-taking dimension. The U.S.A. exhibit the highest tendency toward risk-taking whereas the Central European executive (Cummings et al), as a group, appear to be the most risk-averse.

The South African managers tend to cluster with Spanish managers, and appear to be more risk tending than managers in Greece, Scandinavia, and Central Europe but less so than managers in the United States. The important finding here is that the two South African samples did not differ.

The tendency towards some risk-taking could possibly be ascribed to both the country's political and economic climate. South Africa has vast resources and, if pushed to it, could become almost totally independent of the western nations. Increased outside pressures could hasten this process. Although a normal evolutionary process provides stability and has inherent in it slow changes, outside pressures and

Figure 1

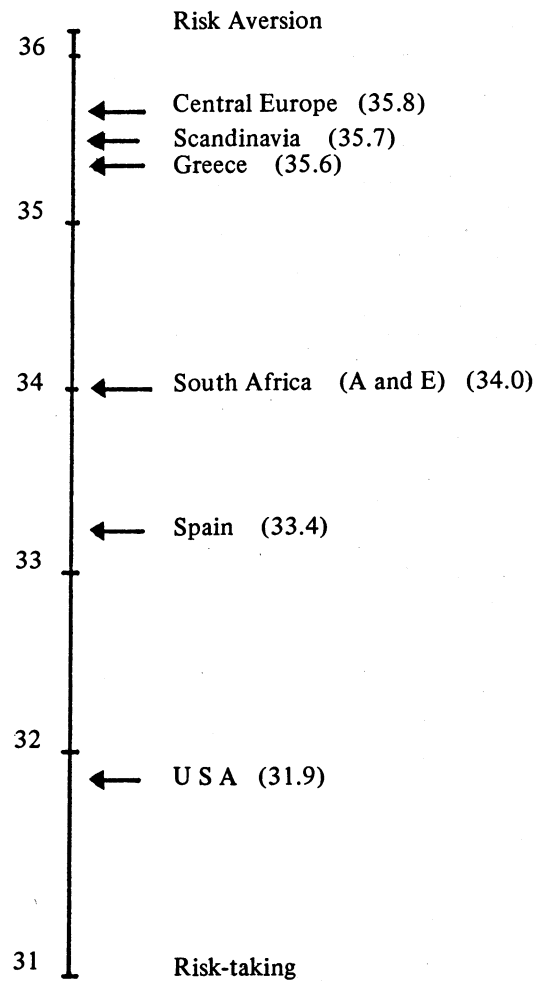
Conciliation-Belligerence Scale*



*Possible range of scores is from -23 to 79

Figure 2

Risk-Aversion/Risk-Taking*



*Possible range of scores is from 16 to 48

Figure 3

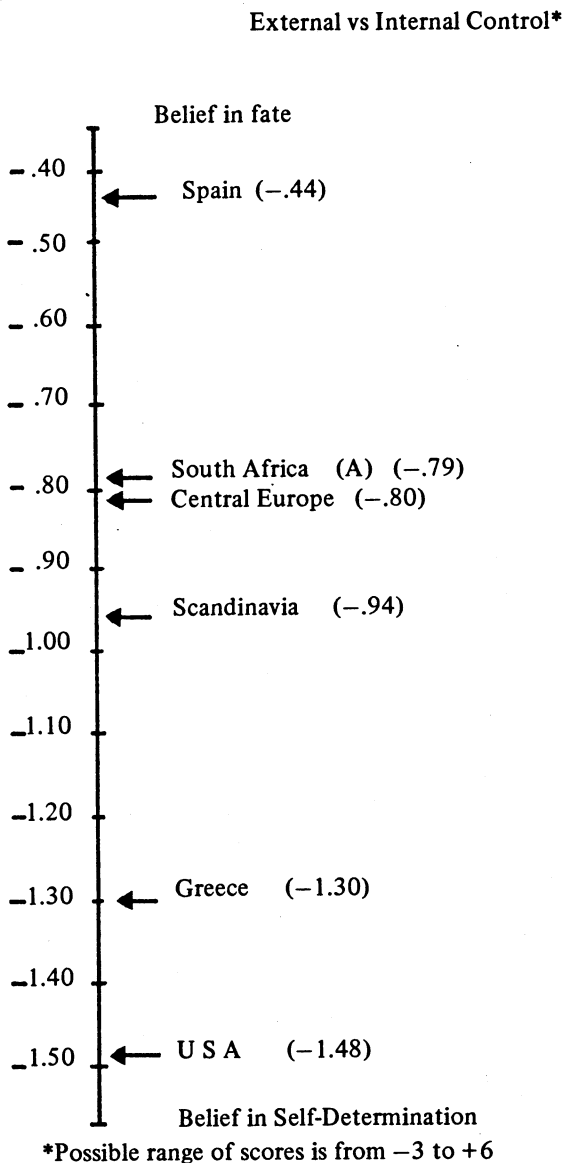
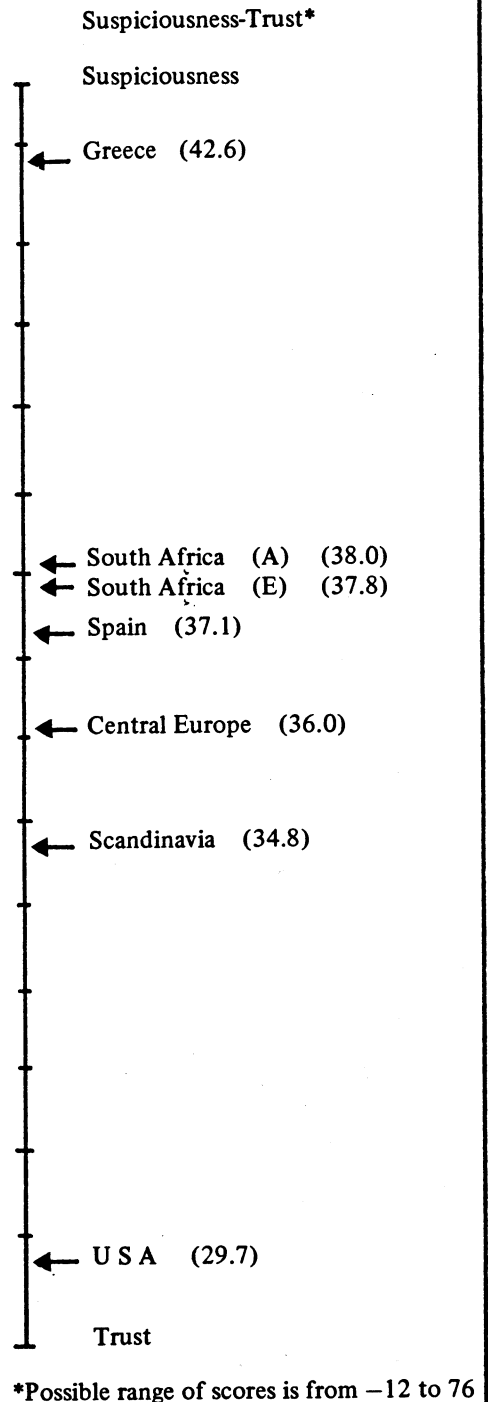


Figure 4



threats contain inherent risk which might force decisions to move towards economic independence more quickly. Too rapid change also holds other strategic implications and the greatest threat of all, uncertainty.

Figure 3 reflects the scores on generalised belief in fate or environmental determination vs self-determination of events. The managers from South Africa tend to cluster with executives from Central Europe

and Scandinavia on the measure of internal-external control. Although there is a tendency toward self-determination apparent in each of the samples, such a belief among the South Africans is not as strong as that found among Greek and American managers. The physical isolation, economic dependency, and externally imposed political pressure may exert some effect toward belief in external causation.

Table 5 reflects some statistics on religious affiliation.

Table 5

STATISTICS ON RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

POPULATION

Religion

	Church Affiliation	Total Population	Whites
Group 1	Nederduitse Gereformeerde		1 487 080
	Gereformeerde	3 329 710	113 620
	Nederduitse Hervormde		224 400
Group 1	Presbyterian	454 460	117 250
	Congregational	349 790	19 640
	Methodist	2 151 840	357 410
Group 2	Church of England in South Africa	1 676 800	399 950
	Church of England — so stated		
	Anglican — so stated		
	Roman Catholic	1 844 270	304 840

(Adapted from Buro for Statistics, 1972, pA-37)

Group one reflects a total of 5,821,540 people belonging to churches having strong roots in Protestantism. As the aspect of self-determination is an underlying principle of Protestantism one would have expected the results of this study to be positive towards self-determination. The above hypotheses might thus be supported by the result obtained.

The scores of the managers on the suspiciousness-trust scale are shown in Figure 4.

South African executives tend to cluster with managers from Spain, Central Europe, and Scandinavia on the suspiciousness-trust measure. They are less suspicious than Greek executives but more suspicious than American executives. With the exception of the Greeks, they express the greatest suspiciousness of the samples. As mentioned above, such clustering might be the result of common religious backgrounds, particularly the emphasis on Protestantism shared with Central Europe and Scandinavia. The tendency toward suspiciousness can be ascribed to religious affiliation, and possibly the current political situation, and the history of the country amongst other, the Anglo-Boer War which even today reveals sensitive feeling between the two language groups.

In general, while none of the between country differences are dramatic, support for hypotheses 5, 7, and 8

are found. The South Africans are more belligerent, slightly more oriented toward belief in external control and more suspicious than most of the other executives studied.

Shifting our focus to the within sample findings, what explanations might be offered for the generally small differences between the Afrikaans and English South African samples? At least three possible reasons should be considered. First, all of the executives studied were involved in an educational program which emphasises their similarities as managers and provides an intentional international perspective. This focus on the general managerial role and extra Southern Africa events and developments may tend to minimise within country differences.

Second, the two samples probably are not representative of the larger populations of white South African executives. The fact that they are pursuing post-graduate degrees indicates that they already have passed through motivation and ability filters that may homogenise initial differences based in their traditional and earlier cultures.

Third, cultural, religious and language differences may not predominantly impact this particular set of attitudes. There seems to be an increasing awareness among the whites in South Africa that reconciling, or

at least masking, their historic differences is an important ingredient for peace within, and even survival of, the present system in South Africa.

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