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Benchmarking national culture and decent work practice indicators in project-based industry: Lessons from United Arab Emirates

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# Benchmarking national culture and decent work practice indicators in project-based industry

## Lessons from United Arab Emirates

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to benchmark national culture in the context of decent work practices in project-based industry of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This should help in achieving successful short-term migration. The study also aims to validate the decent work practice indicators for Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani construction labourers working in the UAE.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study takes an ethnographic approach in its qualitative research methodology. The research involves observational methodology for its data collection during the execution of construction projects, semi-structured interviews to confirm the data collection during observational approach and a narrative methodology for the data collection within the labour camps, grassy fields and town streets. The qualitative data were expressed in quantitative terms to signify statistically the effect of the national culture in the context of decent work practices in this industry. Hence, the research involved triangulation in its data collection and analysis.

**Findings** – The study reveals that the national cultures of the migrant construction labourers in this context are not the same as identified by Geert Hofstede about four decades earlier. It was found that Indians were high in uncertainty avoidance, Pakistani construction labourers were high in masculinity, Bangladeshi construction labourers were low in long-term orientation (LTO) and individualism and Chinese labourers were found to have high individualism and LTO. This study verified decent work practice indicators for Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers and identified different decent work practice indicators for Chinese construction labourers in the UAE than Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study was limited to the construction labourers in the UAE. The data were collected during observation while execution construction projects and limited to visiting construction labour camps, grassy fields and town streets.

**Practical implications** – The differences in the national culture of the migrant construction labourers and the decent construction practices in the UAE have economic, social and environmental implications for construction labourers in the Arab world, for both migrant sending and receiving countries. Understanding and managing various national cultures and improving prevalent decent work practices would help to improve economic and social condition of the migrant construction labourers and help to arrest the advance of looming health problems.



**Originality/value** – The study identifies the national cultures of the migrant construction labourers in the context of decent work practices in the UAE. Improvement in the decent work practices of the migrant sending countries and the UAE and understanding of the culture of the migrants will help in preparing effective migration policy by both migrant sending and receiving countries. No study was found to have identified national cultures in the context of decent work practices and assessed the need for improvement in this regard.

**Keywords** Project management, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Construction industry, UAE, National culture, Expatriates, Decent work, Project-based industry, Temporary migrants

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Decent work is a new concept, introduced by the general secretary of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the International Labour Conference in 1999. Therefore no extensive literature is as yet available on decent work practices. Decent work is centred on four elements: employment, rights, social protection and dialogue (Thore and Tarverdyan, 2009). The ILO has made “decent work” the cornerstone of its recommended strategy for recovery from the global economic crisis (Bisom-Rapp *et al.*, 2011) and has provided a list of the ILO’s (2010) conventions and recommendations. Ghai (2003) says decent work includes all areas of the economy and covers all kind of work, for example, the formal economy, unregulated workers, self-employment and home workers. Thus decent work is an all-embracing concept. The research studies on decent work have focused on these conventions and recommendations and benchmarks the national culture of the migrant construction labourers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Anker *et al.* (2002) statistically measured the decent work indicators of employment, wages, child education and child labour, adequate and productive earnings, decent hours, social security, work-life balance, fair treatment in employment, safe work and social dialogue. The study suggests that decent and productive work are indicators of the quality of life and is one way to reduce poverty. Anker *et al.* (2003) further elaborated the statistical measurement of decent work indicators. China, for example, has been following a “go global” policy. However the need for decent work starts at home. Hannan’s (2008) study on decent work for rural to urban migrant workers in China emphasizes the need for decent wages to be paid on time and in full. Europe is considered to be the champion of human rights. For his part, Blanpain (2011) suggests that a solution for strikes against austerity measures in the wake of the present recession lies in the enforcement of decent work practices. The study maintains that the EU lacks the social core competencies to have a suitable social model for enforcing decent work outcomes throughout the Europe. The Europe Strategy 2020 launched by the European Council in 2010 provides the objectives of achieving decent work in Europe. Beyond Europe, Mohamed *et al.* (2009) studied safe work behaviour on the part of construction workers as part of decent work practice in Pakistan, considering Hofstede’s (1994) framework of national culture. Similarly, social security is an element of the decent work practices studied by Bisom-Rapp *et al.* (2011) in Australia, the UK and the USA. The study focuses on the vulnerability of older workers during the present economic recession. Adhikari *et al.* (2012) studied decent work and the quality of working life in Nepal. The study highlights the need for investment, better jobs and safety aspects in Nepal. ILO recommends only some common decent work indicators applicable to all member counties and therefore nothing specific to each nation. No study was found to have identified decent work practice indicators in the construction project-based industry (PBI) of the UAE; the gap between decent work

and the actual situation that people face, until Anker *et al.* (2003) and Khan (2013a) filled this gap. The construction project-based organizations either execute civil works and sub-contract the remaining works such as plumbing, electrical, air-conditioning to other specialized contractors or execute these works by their subsidiary companies. Most of the construction organizations have multiple projects at the same time. PBI is that an organization used to manage business activities both in intra-organization as well as inter-organization or network context. In other words; PBI is conglomerate of different industries (Sandhu, 2005).

In contrast to decent work practices, cultural constructs have already been extensively discussed in the literature. Geert Hofstede unpacked national culture in the work context for the first time in 1980 (Hofstede, 1980) by providing four national cultural dimension. He added the fifth dimension of long-term orientation (LTO) in 1991 (Hofstede, 1991) and later in 2010 added a sixth national cultural dimension of indulgence vs restraint (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). If culture of the people is known, it is claimed, their behaviour in different situations (Hofstede, 1981) or with different goals (Fontaine and Richardson, 2005) can be predicted. In the present study, it is the decent work situation under which the behaviour of the construction labourers is investigated. Hofstede's (1980, 1991) dimensions have been studied in different situations or cultural contexts and from 1987 to 1997 alone his work received 1,101 citations (Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001). However, Hofstede's framework is not free from criticism for its limitations (Steenkamp, 2001; Spector *et al.*, 2001), but it still keeps conceptual continuity (Blodgett *et al.*, 2008). Culture is a complex and interesting construct and therefore has attracted other scholars. Schwartz (1994b) builds ten individual and seven cultural dimensions in a similar way to Hofstede's and is therefore an improvement on the work of the latter. Similarly, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) include seven dimensions and a Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) study by Robert J. House *et al.*, (2004) provides nine national cultural dimensions. Loosemore and Mushmani (1999) emphasize the cultural sensitivity and behavioural differences at the work place in international construction projects. But no study was found to have identified the national culture of construction labourers in the context of decent work practices in the construction PBI of the UAE. This study therefore establishes link between the decent work practice indicators and national culture. Connell and Burgess (2011) tell us that the construction workers represent about 42.5 per cent of the total UAE workforce. This population is so far unrepresented by any cultural study.

The cultural studies available at recent mainly focus on predicting the behaviour of people in different situations. They tend to conclude that culture has contextual values. Khan (2013b) introduced the national culture of the UAE and a Chinese temporary migrant (expatriate) project management team and assessed the effect of culture on the performance of a project. The present study is an effort to establish a link between the decent work practices in PBI of the UAE, as identified by Khan (2013a), and the national culture of the migrant construction labourers in the context of decent work practice indicators. Very limited research work was found to have considered specific decent work practice indicators in certain contexts. Mohamed *et al.* (2009) studied national culture in the only one of the decent work practice indicator of safe work in construction industry of Pakistan. Proverbs *et al.* (1999) studied overwork aspect, Ailabouni *et al.* (2009) focused on labour wages and working conditions, Thomas (1992) found overwork as an important decent work practice indicator, Butcher and Sheehan (2010) studied health and safety aspect, Frost (2004) studied health and safety and salary aspect in the construction industry of Hong Kong, Torres *et al.* (2013) studied

health and safety and salary aspect in the construction industry of the USA, Lam *et al.* (2007) found social aspect as important in the construction industry and Chan and Chan (2004) also looked for performance of the construction projects beyond the iron triangle of time, cost and quality. The available literature shows there have been limited research on decent work practices in different context. However, no study was found to have covered all aspects of indigenous decent work practice indicators in the PBI in general and of the UAE in particular. The research question that this study will answer is asked from the perspective of construction labourers in the UAE is:

*RQ1.* What is the national culture of the migrant construction labourers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China in the context of the decent work practices in the UAE?

The purpose of such question is that it will help the temporary migrant construction labourers, their families, the construction project managers, the migrant sending and receiving countries and in establishing a viable policy for the successful temporary migration to the UAE. Similarly, improving the decent work practices should help to reduce poverty, because economic growth, different economic structures, conditions of employment and social policies will lead to a faster alleviation of poverty (Anker *et al.*, 2002). It should be clear that the implementation of the decent work practices will become more effective when the culture of the migrant labourers is known.

In the following Section 2 decent work practice indicators are discussed, followed by an outline of the national culture study by Hofstede in Section 3 and some other prominent scholars national cultures frameworks are highlighted in Section 4 and Section 5 develops the missing link between decent work practice and national culture. After these sections of the literature review, the research methodology is elaborated in Section 6 before analysis of the data in Section 7. The conclusion containing some recommendations is discussed in Section 8.

## 2. Decent work practice indicators

Defining labour standards has always been difficult and for this reason universal agreement on a common list of labour standards has not been reached (Bakshi and Kerr, 2008). The only frame of reference for the definition of decent work is the ILO general secretary's definition of decent work as "opportunities for women and men to obtain decent work and productive work within conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity" (Anker *et al.*, 2002). In simple terms, this means "work for which the able bodied members of a family work decent hours and earn sufficient to live a decent life, able to provide education for their children and save appropriate amount for the future" (Khan, 2013a). The word "decent" refers to the need for workers to have "acceptable" or "adequate" work and working conditions (Anker *et al.*, 2003). The ILO has established a decent work programme under the Decent Work Country Programme. Thore and Tarverdyan (2009) study national performance in implementing decent work objectives, but their research did not include the performances of India, Bangladesh or China. Renwick (2011) says that employment and access to decent work is vital for reducing hunger and poverty, now that world poverty is forecast to reach 15 per cent by 2015. Proverbs *et al.* (1999) studied impact of overwork in shifts of longer than ten hours on the performance of the construction labourers. Similarly Ailabouni *et al.* (2009) contend that, besides supervision, labour wages, social factors and harsh weather affect performance of the construction labourers. Thomas (1992) has studied the impact of overwork on the performance of construction labourers in the USA.

Butcher and Sheehan (2010) consider health, safety and environmental care as indicators, since site accidents result in economic losses and social damage. Frost (2004) has studied decent work practices in the construction industry of Hong Kong. The study reveals harsh working conditions, poor wages and in some cases non-payment of wages to these Nepalese construction labourers. Torres *et al.* (2013) conducted study in a Western context. This study reveals that in Austin, a city in Texas, USA, which was named “the town of cranes” in 2008, wages were low; construction labourers were not paid overtime or the minimum wage set out by the regulations; and were denied mandatory breaks during work. Considering impact of decent work practices, Lam *et al.* (2007) recommend looking into the social aspects of a project, besides its economic and technological performance. Similarly Chan and Chan (2004) suggest that performance measurement of construction projects is there beyond the iron triangle of time, cost and quality. Decent work was a vague construct however due to the recession and adaptation of deceleration on social justice for a fair globalization by the ILO in 2008, decent work has gained conceptual clarity (Bisom-Rapp *et al.*, 2011), but it still lacks the authority which would enforce it.

The ILO has none of the enforcement mechanism possessed by the World Trade Organization and other trade agreements (Bakhshi and Kerr, 2008), but various international laws and conventions have brought a sense of moral responsibility for the agreements reached between the member countries and the ILO. Prominent among these conventions and laws are the Labour Inspection Convention 1947, No. 81, the ILO Convention on Migration for Employment 1949, No. 97, the Convention on Migrant Workers, 1975, No. 143, the Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organize 1948, No. 87, the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949, No. 98 and the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All the Migrant Workers and their Families, 1990.

Labour standards unfortunately have no binding mechanism. This is because these labour standards are conditioned by national circumstances, such as the level of development, political ideology, social conditions and cultural norms (Bakhshi and Kerr, 2008). The UAE, however, has ratified the Labour Inspection Convention 1947, No. 81. China has only shown interest in the convention (ILO, 2010). The UAE has not ratified the ILO Convention on Migration for Employment 1949, No. 97, nor those on Migrant Workers 1975, No. 143, the Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of Right to Organize 1948, No. 87 and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949, No. 98 or the International Convention for the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Their Families 1990. The home countries of some migrant workers – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China – have ratified neither the ILO Convention on Migration for Employment 1949, No. 97 nor that on Migrant Workers 1975, No. 143 (ILO, 2010). Blanpain (2011) says that since 2000, the European Union has started to encourage decent work conditions and in this regard many documents have been prepared. Mohamed *et al.* (2009) studied the decent work practice indicator of safe work in the construction industry of Pakistan. The study reveals that the workers are well aware of the risks associated with their jobs and therefore an environment of high uncertainty avoidance prevails. Moreover, the workers’ behaviour was more collectivistic and feministic, which encourages positive safety behaviour. Hannan (2008) discovered the need to provide full wages on time to migrant rural workers in Chinese cities. The study suggests improving the wages and working conditions of migrant workers in China.

In the UAE, the “Abu Dhabi Dialogue (2008)” was held on 21 and 22 January 2008. The theme of this consultation was “Contractual labour mobility in Asia: Key partnerships for development between the countries of origin and destination”. It was represented by the

Gulf Cooperation Countries, Yemen, Malaysia and Singapore. The consultation suggests the need to protect migrant workers during the whole process of migration, including rehabilitation to go back to the country of origin. At the United Nations General Assembly (2010), 2008-2017 was declared as the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017): activities and collaborative initiatives". Employment and decent work conditions have been considered one route to poverty eradication in the wake of the present economic recession. There has been increased awareness of decent work and its role in removing global poverty. Protecting the rights of labourers helps to secure human dignity (Bisom-Rapp *et al.*, 2011). But this is effectively achieved partly through identifying the culture of the labourers. Khan (2013a) identifies some decent work practice indicators specific to the culture of the migrant construction labourers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These decent work practice indicators include migration debt, extended family, overwork, no religious rights, homesickness, no entertainment, abuse at work, no proper food, absenteeism, injury at work, no social security and family issues at home.

The need for cultural work values establishes a link between decent work practices and the national culture of the labourers. A global work demand highlights the value of decent work practices according to the culture of the workers. The study of culture in the setting of decent work practices is important because of the difference in cultural values when not practised. Schwartz (1999) says "Work related values refer to the goals or rewards people seek through their work and they are expressions of more general human values in the context of the work setting". In this regard, Fontaine and Richardson (2005) study the shared cultural work values of Chinese, Malays and Indian workers in the context of multicultural Malaysia, while the present study concerns the decent work practices in the construction PBI of the UAE. The following section discusses the question of national culture, which would lead to comparative studies of it.

### 3. Geert Hofstede's national cultural perspective

The national culture study by Hofstede has extensively been used in research work. The present study is based on this study. Culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Ralston *et al.* (1993) define culture as those beliefs and values that are widely shared in a specific society at a particular point in time. This definition adds not only context, but also a time line to cultural study. Rosenblatt (2011) says that culture is seen in interpretative schemes or codified patterns of meaning, which inform or constrain behaviour. Schwartz (1994a) defines values as beliefs and desirable goals transcending specifications and serving as standards to guide the selection and exclusion of behaviour, people and events and Hofstede (1981) defines values a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others. These are all invisible parts of the culture manifested through cultural practices (Hofstede, 2001). Triandis *et al.* (1986) speak of culture "as a fuzzy, difficult to define construct". Culture has traditionally been a difficult concept. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identify over 300 definitions of culture, as Macnamara (2004) cites. This complexity of culture at the national level was first examined by Geert Hofstede.

Hofstede pioneered national cultural studies by conducting an employee attitude survey of IBM employees from 1967 to 1973, which he included in his first book *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*. These national cultural dimensions include individualism (IND), masculinity (MAS), power distance index (PDI) and uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). About a decade later, the collaboration of Michael Bond and Hofstede (1991) resulted in a fifth dimension, LTO in 1991, which was included

in *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. The data were collected on the basis of the Chinese value survey (CVS), whose questionnaire was prepared by Chinese and Taiwanese and was administrated in 23 countries to 50 men and 50 women (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). The latest in the list of the national cultural dimensions is indulgence vs restraint, a result of collaboration between Hofstede *et al.* (2010) which is included in the third edition of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*.

These studies by Hofstede have been used extensively in the research literature and for referencing purposes and his IBM study and subsequent work is undeniably the most prominent among cultural studies (Scheffknecht, 2011). Eskildsen *et al.* (2010) studied job satisfaction using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as their base theory, which helped them to highlight the impact of national culture in the context of job satisfaction. The study revealed that MAS and UAI play significant roles in job satisfaction in some individual countries. Therefore the effect of cultural difference is so profound that managers in a high power distance culture may not be successful at all in a low power distance culture (Jacob, 2005). Ng *et al.* (2007) state that Hofstede (1983) replicated and extended his study to include a total of 50 nations, finding the same dimensions. Ralston *et al.* (1997) discuss the basis of Hofstede's LTO, which uses Buddhism and Taoism in surveying Eastern culture and the Judeo-Christian religion in the West, claiming that Western culture focuses on the good of the individual, as opposed to Eastern, which calls for the good of the group.

Migliore (2011) establishes a relationship between the personality traits of the USA and Indians and Hofstede's national cultural dimensions for work values, in order to find the differences between the USA and Indian cultures. The study shows differences in scores between the USA and India, when compared to Hofstede's (1980) IBM and online panel data. In this study, the IND score for India increased from 48 to 76 and the score for PDI decreased from 77 to 26, while for UAI it increased from 40 to 63 and for decrease in LTO from 61 to 31. The study shows change in the cultural values of the nations in the period of over three decades. From Hofstede's original findings, the study attributes the large decline in power distance for the USA and Indian business professionals to the rapid changes in information and communication technologies via the internet. The negative change in LTO was attributed to the economic development in India and the willingness of the employees to accept the late gratification of their material, social and emotional needs. The online panel data did not result from a longitudinal study, but the present study involves a longitudinal ethnographic study for a period of over one year.

Hofstede (1993) provided national cultural dimensions for China. The study shows high LTO (118 score), high PDI (80 score), medium UAI (60 score), medium masculinity (50 score) and low IND (20 score). Ralston *et al.* (2012) conclude that Arabic Islamic nations (the UAE, Algeria, Egypt) are more collectivistic than non-Arab Islamic nations (Pakistan, Turkey). However, Hofstede's (1991) study reveals Pakistan as more collectivistic than Arab states. Geert Hofstede used the simple method of the mean of the score to quantify the national cultural dimensions (Pheng and Yuquan, 2002).

Most of the organizational and business research is in the context of Western cultural settings. Its theories and paradigms represent this specific cultural context. It can therefore be questioned if Western cultural management theories are applicable also to Eastern countries. Knowing this limitation, Hofstede considered a CVS with the help of Michael Bond for his LTO dimension. Isenhour *et al.* (2012) say that processes and practices used in organizations are based on Western ideologies, which may not be as effective in Chinese organizations as they are in the Western context. It is pointless to transfer Western models of management to non-Western contexts.



Garg and Ma (2005) suggest that effective management requires management flexibility and cultural adaptability on the part of the Western expatriates or Western trained managers who work in Chinese organizations. Therefore Jacob (2005) suggests that national cultures must be observed and studied first-hand before appropriate management approaches can be recommended. The basis of IND, Jacob (2005) comments, is Hofstede's Protestant background, with its history of individualistic rebellion against collective institutions such as the Catholic Church. Ng *et al.* (2007) maintain that the basis of Hofstede's study was an earlier study by Kluckhohn (1951). But it should be remembered that culture is also subject to change. China, even more certainly than Russia, is in an apparent transition to capitalism, as Ralston *et al.* (1997) note, citing Youzhou *et al.* (1996). China is the latest subject of the topical discussions on cultural norms in its ongoing economic development.

Huang's (2009) study of Chinese culture takes the perspective of its complexity and chaos: *guanxi* as social capital helps firms to gain access to valuable resources and information outside the firm (Hitt *et al.*, 2002). Wright *et al.* (2008) say that China is a highly complex society and Chinese cultural values are not necessarily a uniform concept. Chinese people believe in harmony but they constantly compete in practice. Chinese work places reflect a high level of uncertainty avoidance behaviour, while Chinese workers are proud of their team's achievements (Wright *et al.*, 2008). Dong and Liu (2010) say that attitudes and strategies are influenced by culture and that cultural values play a significant role in shaping the customs and practices which occur within organizations. Chinese culture is traditionally influenced by the principles of confucianism, which emphasizes hierarchical relationships and harmony. More recently it has been the political philosophy of socialism and communism, which calls for strictly following the nation's leaders. The difference in the national culture is a competitive advantage, if it is managed properly. Hofstede (2001) suggests that low-UAI countries can benefit from high UAI countries and this is how cultural differences should be harnessed and managed.

But Hofstede's work has attracted some criticism. Blodgett *et al.* (2008) cite Kagitcibasi (1994) who find limitations in Hofstede's (1980) research framework since it is not applicable at the individual level. Harvey (1997) says that Hofstede's study is a good indicator of cultural values and representation but not of practice. Ng *et al.* (2007) find that, because of this difference, the results of Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994a) were not congruent. Finding these limitations in Hofstede's work and making it the subject of interest, other commentators started to present their own national cultural frameworks. These frameworks along with their national cultural dimensions, in comparison to Hofstede dimensions are briefly discussed in the following section.

#### 4. Other comparative national cultural frameworks

This section elaborates other national cultural dimensions besides Hofstede. It helps in understanding national cultural dimensions in comparison with other cultural frameworks. The authors also highlights basis of the dimensions presented in this study as a part of literature review.

Although the present study is based on Hofstede's studies of national culture, other comparable studies Migliore (2011) says include Kluckhohn and Strodbeck (1961), Hall and Hall (1990), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), Schwartz (1992) and Javidan *et al.* (2006). Scheffknecht (2011), however, includes a GLOBE study by Robert J. House as one of the important studies of national culture. These important and relevant frameworks are discussed below.

However, our study focuses on latest national culture comparative studies relevant to our studies by Schwartz (1994a), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and Robert J. House *et al.* (2004).

#### 4.1 Schwartz (1994a)

Schwartz's (1994b) model is based on the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) of 44,000 respondents from the 1980s, which includes both students and teachers, unlike Hofstede's (1980) model which includes only IBM employees. The dimensions are divided at the individual level, comprising the ten values of power, achievement, hedonism, stimulating, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security; and also at the cultural level, comprising the seven values of conservatism (which Fontaine and Richardson, 2005 label embeddedness), hierarchy, mastery, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, egalitarianism and harmony. Schwartz centres his work on human values and is broader than Hofstede's, on work-related areas (Steenkamp, 2001). The author speaks of the limitations in Hofstede's work and questions whether the meaning of all the dimensions is same in all cultures and also if these dimensions adequately describe the national culture of less-developed countries. It would be helpful to see whether the coding of cultures in the present study reflects the actual meanings attributed to national cultural dimensions. This becomes important due to the different understandings of the meaning of "individualism" and "collectivism" on the part of Hofstede and Schwartz. Steenkamp (2001) questions if the data collected during 1967-1973 are still valid when the time perspective of the culture is missing. Similarly, Fontaine and Richardson (2005) also cite Spector *et al.* (2001), but contend that Hofstede's (1980) work has some limitations of validity and reliability.

Ralston *et al.* (2012) say that universalistic values include both collectivistic and individualistic values. Steenkamp (2001) studied the national cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994a) and found the following four dimensions: autonomy vs collectivism, egalitarianism vs hierarchy, mastery vs nurturance and uncertainty avoidance. The only new dimension of egalitarianism vs hierarchy, found by Schwartz (1994a) differs from Hofstede's dimensions (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Ng *et al.* (2007) concludes that although the two frameworks resemble those of Hofstede and Schwartz dimensions, for export and import studies they were not congruent.

Drogendijk and Slangen (2006) cite Schwartz (1994a) in raising questions on Hofstede's (1980) study as being neither exhaustive nor relevant, since it was not aimed at finding cultural dimensions and its data are outdated, having been collected between 1967 and 1973. However Drogendijk and Slangen (2006) conclude that it is premature to dismiss Hofstede's work as outdated or unrepresentative of national cultures and to extol Schwartz's framework as superior.

#### 4.2 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998)

The framework of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) defines universalism vs particularism, sequence vs synchronization, specificity vs diffusion, individualism vs communitarianism, inner directed vs outer directed, achieved status vs ascribed status and neutral vs affective as national cultural dimensions. Jacob (2005) refers to Trompenaars' (1993) work as based on the leadership style of short-term and long-term time horizons, but the author clarifies that Trompenaars' long-time horizon is not identical to the LTO of Hofstede (1980). However, he finds conflict among Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), in particular in the case of Pakistan where its score was the lowest in the LTO and in long term it scored the highest. Fiedler's task-oriented and people-oriented leadership styles sprang from the

context of the US army in the 1950s and may not be applicable to an Eastern culture outside a military setting. Jackson (2004), cited in Jacob (2005), discusses the limitations of Trompenaars' (1993) research method, on the basis of one questionnaire item where managers are asked to choose between orientations. In the latest work by Minkov and Hofstede (2011), the GLOBE study of House *et al.* (2004) is discussed in detail, as outlined below.

#### 4.3 GLOBE project

The Globe project presented nine national cultural dimensions, namely, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, societal collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation and humane orientation (House *et al.*, 2004). The detailed comparative account of the GLOBE study is given in Javidan *et al.* (2006), which is in response to Hofstede (2006). Hofstede (2006) was in turn responding to House *et al.* (2004). The research included both good measurement and theory, as advised by Hofstede (2001). Javidan *et al.* (2006) explain the difference between value and practice. They say that people may hold views which should be based on what they observe in action, not that people behave in a certain way owing to a particular view of how things should be. The views of construction labourers on decent work practices were ascertained in the course of their work on construction projects. The GLOBE project recommends additional study to find why values and practices are different (House *et al.*, 2004) and the present study is an effort to understand the behaviour of construction labourers in the context of decent work practices. Javidan *et al.* (2006) say that none of the Hofstede (1991) factors resembled those in the study by House *et al.* (2004). These authors suggest that when two cultures come into contact it is important to know which cultural dimensions are more important in the relationship. In the present study the key relationship is the one between work practices and Hofstede's national cultural dimensions. The comparative national cultural dimensions discussed above are presented in Table I.

### 5. Developing the missing link between decent work practice and national culture

The framework presented in Figure 1 establishes link between the decent work practices indicators and the national culture of the construction labourers in PBI of the UAE, which is an existing gap in the literature. Therefore the missing link is the development of a

Hofstede (1980/1991)	Schwartz (1994b)	Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998)	GLOBE (House <i>et al.</i> , 2004)
1. Individualism (IND)	1. Conservatism	1. Universalism vs particularism	1. Uncertainty avoidance
2. Masculinity (MAS)	2. Hierarchy	2. Sequence vs synchronization	2. Power distance
3. Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)	3. Mastery	3. Specificity vs diffusion	3. Societal collectivism
4. Power distance index (PDI)	4. Affective autonomy	4. Individualism vs communitarianism	4. In-group collectivism
5. Long-term orientation (LTO)	5. Intellectual autonomy	5. Inner directed vs outer directed	5. Gender egalitarianism
	6. Egalitarianism	6. Achieved status vs ascribed status	6. Assertiveness
	7. Harmony	7. Neutral vs affective	7. Future orientation
			8. Performance orientation
			9. Human orientation

**Table I.**  
List of studies on national culture

relationship between decent work practice indicators and the national culture of the migrant construction labourers.

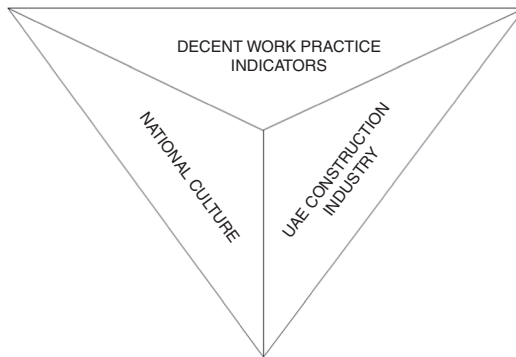
The framework acts as a lens through which we can find the national culture of the migrant construction labourers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China in the context of the decent work practices in the UAE. Our study, therefore, investigates national culture of the labourers through the theoretical lens of Hofstede (1980, 1991) studies, which cover the national cultural dimensions of IND, MAS, UAI, LTO and PDI, while practising the decent work practice indicators identified by Khan (2013a) in project-based construction industry. Figure 2 presents the operational framework for figure which includes three links A, B and C.

Link A: the research framework helped in identification of decent work practice indicators for Chinese construction workers in the UAE.

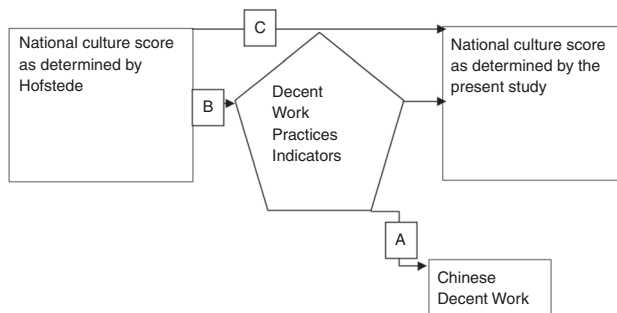
Link B: identification of the national culture of the construction labourers in the context of decent work practices in the construction PBI of the UAE.

Link C: comparison of the national culture as identified by Hofstede and the culture of construction labourers in the context of decent work practices in the UAE.

Understanding of the above links will help in successful completion of the projects. Management of the cultural differences of the construction labourers could be a source of strength for the project than the conventional thinking of its weakness. But this is only possible after the culture of the labourers is known while practising decent work indicators. Effective Improvement in decent work practice indicators is possible after understanding of the culture of the migrant construction labourers in that context.



**Figure 1.** Decent work practice indicators and the national culture in the context of the construction project-based industry of the UAE



**Figure 2.** Operational aspect of the decent work practices and the national culture

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The differences between the national culture of the migrant construction labourers and decent work practices in the UAE should help to prepare policies of migration beneficial to the migrants, their home country and their host country.

## 6. Methodology for data collection and analysis

The methodology for data collection and analysis focuses on decent work practices in the construction PBI and the culture of the migrant construction labourers who experience these decent work practices. In ethnographic research, data collection and their analysis is a continuous and overlapping process. In order to avoid bias in the data collection of the present study, an effort was made to get as close to the sources of data as possible. Therefore it involved both emotional involvement and objective detachment (Tedlock, 2000). Hofstede (1981) suggests that one can predict more accurately the behaviour of a person if the situation in which the culture is being operated (the culture-situation behaviour) is known. Fontaine and Richardson (2005) see this situation as the goal in predicting behaviour (culture-goal-behaviour) and was focused on the cultural values of Chinese, Malays and Indians in Malaysia Fontaine and Richardson (2005) analysed the data empirically using analysis of covariance approach. Similarly Migliore (2011) studied empirically relationship between big five personality traits and Hofstede's cultural dimensions at work place in the USA and India. Ng *et al.* (2007) also studied similarity between Hofstede and Schwartz national cultural dimensions. Chinese cultural values in China and the impact of western cultural values on Chinese working in Australia were studied by Jaw *et al.* (2007) using structural equation modelling. Frost (2004) studied construction industry of Hong Kong for the decent work practices and Torres *et al.* (2013) studied construction industry in the city of Austin in the USA. In the present study, the situation is that of decent work practices. An attempt was made to predict more accurately the behaviour of the construction labourers in the UAE (culture-decent work-cultural behaviour in the construction PBI). Our research is also in line with the most of anthropologists and ethnographers like Schein (1984) that culture is subconscious shared values and beliefs and it cannot be studied only by asking conscious questions by means of survey. Therefore our methodology of observations, narratives and semi-structured interviews is an appropriate.

The researcher was a direct observer of the culture of the construction labourers owing to his role in a construction project. This observation of the behaviour of the construction labourers continued for a period of over a year, covering longitudinal observation for an ethnographic study. Minkov and Hofstede (2011) say that the study of social science should be oriented towards practice: its models should lead to valid predictions. Observation both involves emotional involvement and requires objective detachment (Tedlock, 2000). Observation is the method of ethnographic studies which goes into the field for its data collection. In the observation method of research, the researcher enters the organization or the research setting and becomes a part of the work team (Sekaran, 2003). Harvey (1997) uses ethnographic and participant observation methods for data collection. The study used case study approach in King County, Washington, USA and Kreis (County) Osnabruck, Lower-Saxony, Germany. The author cites Onsrud *et al.* (1992), who suggest the use of an ethnographic research design for detailed insight into the distinct cultural and institutional context of a geographic information system. In the present study, also, interviews were conducted to get better insight into the data from the observations. Similarly, the present study conducted semi-structured interviews to enrich the data collected. The use of survey

methodology is seen by many current scholars of culture as being too much the product of the social scientists point of view rather than that of the participants and thus inappropriate as a method for measuring culture (Hofstede, 1998, citing Ouchi and Alan, 1988). Moreover, using survey methods alone for research on Chinese organizations provides neither an authentic world picture nor a comprehensive snapshot of the situation (Wright *et al.*, 2008). Mo and Berrell (2004), cited in Wright *et al.* (2008) say that, because the range of feelings experienced by Chinese workers is so extensive that their behaviour in particular settings may be contradictory. Yin (2009) defines case study approach “an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth, within real life”. Wei (2007) also used a case study approach, including a questionnaire and interviews as his data collection methods. Although the data collection during the observation study was performed during a construction project, the methodology adopted was considered as observational.

The researcher spoke Urdu and Hindi with the construction labourers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but the Chinese construction labourers, whose cultural values were observed during the project, were interviewed to re-confirm their cultural values and to get more insight with the help of a trusted Chinese engineer. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with pairs of people from two different Chinese construction teams. This recalls how Mohamed *et al.* (2009) used an interview-based questionnaire survey focusing on the behaviour, perceptions and attitude of the construction workers in Pakistan.

The researcher also visited different states of the UAE to obtain more representative data. The target of the data collection for this purpose was the construction labour camps. Friday is a public holiday in the UAE and groups of construction labourers could be observed on Fridays relaxing and talking outside their labour camp buildings, streets and in the fields. Therefore, for a rich and in-depth data collection, Friday evenings was considered the most appropriate time. A total of 18 groups of Indian labourers or individuals, 12 Pakistani groups or individuals and 11 Bangladeshi groups or individuals were contacted for their narratives. Composing narratives is seen as one of the typical ways for people to understand their experiences and at the same time is a typical way of giving information (Kuusipalo, 2008).

During this relaxing time for the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers, the researcher entered into their discussion by introducing himself as a construction employee. Although it was difficult for the migrant labourers to start up their own open narratives at first, after getting to know that the researcher was not an outsider but from the same industry as theirs, the construction labourers started to relate their life stories and experiences at work in the UAE. The narratives help construction labourers define themselves and find meaning in their actions (Kuusipalo, 2008). Encouraging narrative, as a research methodology, is more suitable for data collection in this situation. The present study includes triangulation in the data collection, involving the participant observation method, semi-structured interviews and the narrative method used in the data collection.

The data collection was recorded in a research diary. National cultural data were collected against each of the identified decent work practice indicators, for example, what the behaviour of the construction labourers was in terms of MAS, UAI, IND, LTO and PDI in the situation of decent work practice indicators of “migration debt”. Table II provides as an example of how the data were collected for national cultural dimensions while practising one of the decent work practice indicators of migration debt. The data were collected through observations, while executing a construction project, through

	India	Pakistan	Migration debt Bangladesh	China
LTO	Collected loan of about rupees 70,000-100,000 (AED 6,600) in India as visa and travel fees to come to the UAE for a better future. This is a long-term focus. However, in the UAE the salary paid is about AED 800, so the recovery of migration debt in two years of the visa term is not possible. Therefore the national culture dimension of LTO against the local decent work indicator of migration debt is low in the UAE, though it was high in India	Pakistani labourers also paid about rupees 150,000 (AED 6,000). However, while in UAE their salary was higher than their Indian counterparts' (AED 800-2,000) and the currency exchange rate was also favourable. However higher prices for the basic commodities made it difficult to save much. LTO was therefore low to medium	In Bangladesh, getting a loan for work in "Dubai" is easier than getting loans for business in their country, according to a construction labourer. Paid about Takka 200,000-250,000 (AED 11,000) as migration fees. The low salary of about AED 600 has forced the construction workers to work for the illegal short-term activities of selling pirated DVDs, mobile phone cards, tobacco items such as "paan" (betel leaf containing tobacco) and "gutka" areca nut with tobacco) and arranging for gambling games. Therefore the national cultural dimension of LTO against the decent work indicator of migration debt is low	Chinese construction labourers narrated through a trusted translator that they did not pay anything for their visa and travel. However, they paid AED 3,500 as a security amount refundable in two years' time. Therefore the LTO was high before their entry into the UAE and remained high in the UAE since the amount was returned and the salary is AED 3,000 per month
IND	Collectivist: loan is paid by the whole family which includes core family (husband, wife and children), parents, brothers/sisters and other relatives. Therefore the national culture dimension of IND against the decent work practice indicator of migration debt is low	Collectivist: loan is paid by the core family, parents, brothers/sisters and other relatives. The national cultural dimension of collectivism was narrated in the context of migration debt	Collectivist: loan is paid by the core family, parents, brothers/sisters and other relatives. Therefore a collectivist national cultural dimension is shown against the decent work practice indicator of migration debt	Chinese do not have a family culture as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh do, where a family comprises core family. In China the family includes the core family only. Therefore if a loan is required it would be paid by the core family only. Therefore individualism is high
MAS	In India women are allowed to work outside their home and this helps to encourage/allowed to work outside home. The impact of the migration	In Pakistan women are not encouraged/allowed to work outside home. The impact of the migration	Women are allowed to work outside home in Bangladesh and therefore national culture of Chinese	In China woman is allowed to work outside the home. Therefore the national culture of Chinese

*(continued)*

Table II.

	India	Pakistan	Migration debt Bangladesh	China
	reduce the impact of migration debt. MAS is therefore low	debt is high. Therefore the national cultural dimension of MAS is high against the decent work practice indicator of migration debt	the migration debt impact can be reduced. MAS is low	construction labourer against the decent work indicator of migration debt is low
UAI	Most of the UAE construction labourers come from India. The newly arrived construction labourer is better aware of the decent working practices in the UAE and therefore the UAI is medium to high	The population of Pakistani construction labourers in the UAE is lower than that of either Indians or Bangladeshis. The construction labourers admitted that they had become aware of the salary and possible expenditure only when they reached the UAE. Therefore they were not aware of UAE practices. It is therefore an uncertain situation for them in the UAE and the UAI is low against the decent work practice of migration debt	Migrants were described as being aware of decent work practice in the UAE; however because of the need for food, they were forced to get loans from their relatives to come to UAE and "try their luck". The UAI against migration debt indicator of decent work is medium to high	The Chinese construction team narrated that they were not aware of the decent work conditions in the UAE; however they were aware that they would be working in a Chinese construction company, under Chinese laws of decent work besides the UAE labour laws. Therefore the UAI was high
PDI	Indian construction labourers recalled they could talk to their parents about going to the UAE and the parents would not stop them. PDI is low	Pakistani labourers also recalled that they could talk to their parents about coming to the UAE. The parents would not stop them. PDI is low	Bangladeshi labourers recalled that they could talk to their parents about coming to the UAE. PDI is low	Most of the labourers mentioned that they would get permission from their parents; one said that he would simply inform his parents and one even said that he did not inform his parents. PDI is low



narratives of the construction labourers in their labour camps, within grassy fields and in town streets, and through semi-structured interviews to confirm if the cultural data collected through observations was through cultural frame of the construction labourers.

Detailed discussion of the research data collection is given in the “Data Analysis” section. It was observed during the data collection that the labourers belonged to different parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China, but the cultural values reflected in their behaviour showed the uniformity of their national culture in a new host country. Following questions were asked to Chinese construction labourers for the confirmation of the data collected during observation method. Did you pay for the migration fee? Are you paid for the overtime? Did you confirm to your parents before coming to the UAE? Do you have insurance cover in the UAE? Have you been abused at the work place? What was the objective of coming to the UAE?

Harvey (1997) excludes MAS and IND from his research because of its low relevance or importance to the USA and German cultures in the context of his study. Similarly, Eskildsen *et al.* (2010) say that the masculinity and uncertainty avoidance dimensions are the most influential dimensions when it comes to the evaluation of job-related aspects at the national level. The study used empirical data from European Employee Index with regression analysis. In the present study, PDI is shown to be influenced by the LTO ambition of continued earning in the UAE. A discussion of these findings is presented in the following sections.

## 7. Data analysis

The data, having been collected and coded, are presented below in tabular form. Against each of the decent work indicators, the national cultural dimensions of IND, MAS, UAI, LTO and PDI are listed for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China. Measure of the data collection, against each of the indicator, is presented in Table III of the paper. Observations and narratives of the construction labourers have been included in Sections 7.1 and 7.2. The data were collected on a three-point scale registering high, medium and low. The purpose of selecting this score criterion was its simplicity for the construction labourers to relate and its subsequent measurement. Moreover, Hofstede (1993) used scale of low, medium, high to categorize the national cultural data collected. Table III presents the statistics of the data collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews and narratives.

Kogut and Singh (1988) provide a formula to measure cultural distance. Ralston *et al.* (2012) conducted empirical research on data collected using the SVS of 56 items on a nine-point scale. In the present study a simpler approach has been used for the data collection and its cross-cultural analysis.

The following sections discuss Link A, Link B and Link C of the research framework given in Figure 2.

### 7.1 Validating decent work practice indicators (Link A)

Table III shows that the Chinese scored highest in migration debt, abuse at work, no proper food, absenteeism and family issues at home. In the following sections each of these decent work practice indicators is discussed, to see from the cultural standpoint of the Chinese construction labourers if these indicators are valid for them as well.

Chinese labourers do not pay for their visa or their journey. They mentioned, however, that they paid about AED 3,500 as security, which was refundable at the end of two years’ work for the company in the UAE. The Chinese family system is different from that of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They live only as a core family

**Table III.**  
Score of national  
culture in the  
context of decent  
work practices  
in the UAE

	India			Pakistan			Bangladesh			China					
	LTO	IND	MAS	UAI	PDI	LTO	IND	MAS	UAI	PDI	LTO	IND	MAS	UAI	PDI
Migration debt	1	1	6.5	2.5	1	1.5	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
Extended family	2	2	8.5	1.5	1	3	1	11.5	2.5	2	3	1	2	3	7
Overwork	1	3	10	2	1	1	3	8	1	1	1	2	3	2	10
No religious rights	3	2	9	1	1	3	1	11	3	1	1	1	3	2	8
Homesickness	2	1	11.5	3	3	2	1	12	3	3	1	1	2	1	8
No entertainment	3	2.5	12.5	3	2	3	2	13	3	2	3	1	10	3	11
Abuse at work	3	3	11	3	1	2	3	10	2	1	1	3	10	2	11
No proper food	1	1	7	3	1	1	1	7	3	1	1	3	7	1	8
Absenteeism	1.5	3	11.5	2.5	2	1.5	3	10.5	2.5	1	1	1	7	1	11.5
Injury at work	3	3	13	3	1	3	3	12.5	3	1	1	3	11.5	2	11
No social security	1	2	7	1	1	2	1	9	1	2	1	1	6	2	8.5
Family issue at home	3	1	9	3	1	1.5	1	7.5	1	1	3	1	9	1	12
	24.5	24.5	22	28.5	17	24.5	21	31	26	17	18	17	23.5	26.5	15.5
				(1.4)				(1.4)					(1.75)		(1.54)

(husband, wife and children) and not with their parents and other relatives. “There will be no uncles in China”, narrated a construction labourer, because there are no brothers. In China women are encouraged to work and earn money for their family and this adds to its savings, informed construction labourers. Pakistani construction labourers, in contrast, said that they would not prefer their women to work outside the home and that arranging to pay large sums for migration was a burden on these construction labourers, in particular in a situation where other male members of the family cannot find a job or do not work. For the Chinese, UAI was high because they were certain before they left China that they would be given a job in a Chinese construction company in the UAE and they mentioned that they were happy because they could deal with their own people. In the cases of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the construction labourers complained that they had paid huge sums in migration fees and did not know who their employer in the UAE would be, except in some cases where they were hired directly by the company staff through a reference. From the data gathered, migration debt does not appear to be a problem for Chinese construction labourers and therefore migration debt is not a decent work practice indicator for them. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers testified that they came to the UAE with their parents’ agreement. Most, but not all, Chinese construction labourers also said that they came to the UAE after permission from their parents.

Chinese construction labourers mentioned that they were not abused at the work place, but if they did not work properly, they were fined. A labourer made clear that if the work was not performed as per the project requirements, the main contractor would fine the subcontractor and the cost of this would be borne by the labourers responsible. More importantly, in the course of the data collection from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers, they did not speak of abuses in the work place. Indeed, Bangladeshi and Pakistani construction labourers avowed that if they were to be abused, they would respond in kind. But Bangladeshi construction labourers also said that in cases of huge migration debt, the workers would try to ignore abuse at work as they had to pay the debt back before they could return to their home country.

Chinese construction labourers showed individualistic behaviour in the work place and if any was fined, he would try to protect himself as an individual rather than looking to the whole group. However, if abusive language is directed at an individual, the Chinese labourers promised that they would talk to the boss, but not in the presence of others. Thus abuse in the work place is not a decent work practice indicators for Chinese construction labourers.

Chinese construction labourers mentioned that they were provided with good quality food in their labour camps. The food was free and a Chinese engineer explained that the cost of food was shared between the main contractor under whose name the work was being done and the subcontractor responsible for hiring and engaging the migrants. “The taste of food in the UAE is the same as at home”, said one Chinese construction labourer. Therefore the decent work practice indicator of proper food is not a decent work indicator requirement for Chinese construction labourers. Yet Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourer testified that food was not provided for them or if it was, it was not of good quality. Instead they received a food allowance. One construction labourer mentioned that they did not like cooking food in their labour camps because they were already tired from the day’s work. Pakistani construction labourers complained that cooking the food was a woman’s job and for this reason they did not have to do it for themselves.

The Chinese construction labourers mentioned that they were happy with the company and therefore would not leave it, even for a higher wage. Chinese labourers receive a two to three hour lunch-break in both winter and summer. Summer working in the UAE was difficult for them. These construction labourers could be observed protecting themselves against the heat by drinking large leaf Chinese green tea and they often removed their shirts and put on yellow jackets as part of their personal protective equipment. The researcher noticed that if a Chinese construction team returns to China after completing a year's work in the UAE, most of the workers cancel their visas and do not go back. On investigation, it was revealed that the construction labourers did not like working in the UAE because of its hot weather and because there were better employment opportunities in China. The Chinese construction labourers mentioned that it was not possible to leave the project area without the permission of the boss. This shows relatively high PDI.

They also mentioned that they did not have family issues back in China. There was no security problem and women were encouraged to work and take part in everyday economic life. Pakistani construction labourers, in contrast, said that they were worried about their families back home because of security concerns and because women are not encouraged to work outside the home or to resolve issues alone without being accompanied by male. In the UAE, therefore, for Chinese construction labourers, family issues back home are not a decent work indicator, but they are for Pakistani construction labourers.

In the following section, Link B of the research framework given in Figure 2 is discussed.

### *7.2 National culture in the context decent work practices (Link B)*

Under this section of the analysis, we discuss significant scores for the national culture and the corresponding decent work indicators, as given in Table III.

Bangladeshi construction labourers scored the lowest, 18, on LTO. This low score is due to the low score from having no religious rights, abuse at work, absenteeism and injury at work. Bangladeshi construction labourers paid the highest migration fees of all four groups and were paid the lowest wages. This gives them the impression of having comparatively low-LTO achievement in the UAE.

Some Bangladeshi construction labourers said in their narrative that on a few Fridays they were asked to work against their will, which contravened their religious rights. They resorted to escaping from the company and working elsewhere to earn more money, which was also illegal. This was an action showing low LTO, because it was done to get money as fast as possible without following the legal procedure. In contrast, as another group of construction labourers narrated, they had approached the courts as a legal procedure to make a claim against their company for not paying overtime. However, the construction labourers mentioned that this was risky, because after the court verdict they could be dismissed from the company jobs and forced to return home without fully recovering their migration fees. One construction labourer mentioned that they were not worried about losing the job. These labourers claimed that they had once gone to their company boss (who spoke no Urdu, Hindi nor English) seeking their overtime pay, but their boss refused to recognize them as employees of his branch of the company. This forced them to go to court without further reconciliation. However, according to a construction worker, the agreement was reached without the need of a court decision.

Bangladeshi construction labourers also scored low in LTO in the context of abuse at work; this was because they said that if they had been abused on the site, they would respond in kind. The construction labourers also admitted that they must sometimes

bear the abuse for the same of recovering their migration fees. However the labourers mentioned no specific physical or verbal abuse in their experience at the work place.

Income from working outside the company is higher than within it, according to these construction labourers. They could be seen washing cars outside shopping malls or selling pirated CDs and tobacco items such as “*paan*” and “*gutka*”. The construction labourers also revealed that, during the recession the companies had no work to offer and the labourers were asked to work outside the company, in relatively smaller companies who use exorbitant high visa renewal fees as a source of revenue. These temporary migrant labourers explained that the reason for such high migration fees was the unauthorized sale of visas; if a company required an employee; the company representatives would sell the visa from one broker to another and the last buyer had to pay a huge amount to get a visa for entering the UAE.

Another group of Bangladeshi construction labourers mentioned that they went to the court to claim for an injury; someone had been injured on the site without any treatment being provided. When they took it to court, they were aware of the compensation rates for an injured finger or a broken hand. These accounts reflect that Bangladeshi construction labourers preferred to follow legal procedures for a claim. The construction labourers testified that if the workers had followed the site safety requirements, there would not have been an injury and subsequently they would not have lost money. This shows their low-LTO behaviour at the work place.

Bangladeshi construction labourers also scored low on IND, suggesting that they adopt collectivistic behaviour in the UAE. They mentioned that each time they went to court, it was through a group. Moreover, the sight of Bangladeshi construction labourers assembling in the town in large numbers and chatting even after work is very common in times of leisure. This suggests that Bangladeshi construction labourers prefer to act as a collective in the UAE.

They showed a higher PDI than did the Indian, Pakistani and Chinese labourers. The reason for this higher PDI was their need to recover their exceptionally high migration debt. This shows that the PDI dimension of national culture is dependent on the LTO dimension of national culture.

Pakistani construction labourers scored highest in MAS. This is due to the migration debt, no entertainment, abuse at work and family issues at home when compared to scores by Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi construction labourers.

Despite their migration debt, Pakistani construction labourers insisted that they would not prefer their women to work outside the home. Since women do not share the burden and in some cases not all the male partners of the extended family work, the migration debt increases, in the view of one a construction labourer.

In the absence of other entertainment, Pakistani construction labourers play a local game called “*kabaddi*” (holding hands). This game requires agility and strength, demonstrating masculinity. However, a large number of the Pakistani construction labourers were seen as drivers and operators, which a construction labourer said were the highly paid positions in the construction PBI. But not all Pakistani construction labourers can be operators or drivers because of the heavier migration debt (AED 6,000) and the added expenditure to secure a driving license in the UAE.

Pakistani construction labourers narrated that they were not abused on site, but if they had been, they would have responded likewise. This demonstrates high MAS behaviour.

Pakistani construction labourers revealed that their parents control all the family affairs and they can interfere in all family issues. Pakistani construction labourers also complained that if they asked for leave or for higher wages, they could be asked to

leave the company. A construction labourer described how he left one company because he was paid nothing for five months. Having joined another, he would not ask for leave after one year, because it might cause him to be asked to be dismissed, although he wanted to go on holiday and the UAE labour law would allow him to go home after a year of work. In this situation PDI is influenced by LTO, as the construction labourer would like to keep his job in order to continue earning.

Indian construction labourers scored higher in UAI. This increase in UAI score is due to the greater score on abuse at work, no proper food, injury at work and family issues back home than is registered for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese labourers.

Regarding overwork, the migrant construction labourers stated that they were aware of the probability of being overworked in the UAE. However, they had taken a job in the UAE because they were impressed by the glamorous clothes of the migrant construction workers on their visits home.

Asked about abuse at work, the construction labourers narrated that if they worked properly, they would not be abused. They were certain about this consequence and therefore UAI was high. In case of family issues back home, the construction labourers declared that because there was peace in their areas, they were not worried about their families in India. In contrast, Pakistani construction labourers stated that they were worried about their families in Pakistan because of the unsatisfactory law and order situation in their areas.

This study reveals that the Chinese construction labourers exhibit individualist behaviour at the work place. They would not help or talk of helping other fellow construction labourers. They would do their own work only and are not interested in that done by others. However, the researcher observed that the construction labourers could do all the jobs that the project required and that the construction labourers would call the work of their fellow labourers the work of another company. They had no interest in the work of others.

Chinese construction labourers, however, wanted to establish relationships. They wanted to complete their works and would ask for extra leave to China only in cases of a death in the family, believing that the work was more important. This shows their high LTO in the construction sector. For example, many of the Chinese construction labourers invited the researcher to visit China. One Chinese labourer related that they would not tell their foreman that he was wrong in the presence of others. The construction labourers used to say the “boss is boss”.

For Chinese labourers, the work was more important than having annual leave, but leaves can only be deferred for a maximum of three months, informed construction labourers. If there was work to be done, they would work overtime without economic benefit; these construction labourers claimed that if a boss told them to work on May Day or the Chinese New Year holidays, they would obey – but they knew that the boss would not ask this. If they had no proper food or an injury at work, they would talk to the management and in this situation PDI was low. This shows that the national cultural dimension of PDI is influenced by the national cultural dimension of LTO.

After identifying the national culture score against each of the decent work practice indicators, Link C of the research framework is discussed in the following section.

### *7.3 Comparing national culture with Hofstede's framework (Link C)*

After finding national culture of the construction labourers while practising the decent work indicators in the context of construction industry of the UAE, finally the present

study is compared with the cultural dimensions as identified by Hofstede for Indian, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Chinese nationalities (Table IV).

The above table shows that Pakistan was high in UAI in Hofstede's study, but in the present comparative study it can be seen that Indian construction labourers are high in UAI. This is because of the prevalent security in India, awareness of decent work practices in the construction PBI among the migrant construction labourers and the acceptance of these decent work practices by the Indian labourers.

Similarly, Indian construction labourers were high in MAS in Hofstede's study, whereas in this study a low MAS score is revealed compared to that of Pakistani construction labourers. This lower score now than the earlier one could be because of the change in Indian cultural values and because of a change in the behaviour of migrant construction labourers in the UAE. Pakistani construction labourers explained that since mosques were available not far from their labour camps, praying give them more energy. Indian construction labourers (mostly non-Muslim) related that they did not have a temple in the labour camp, and must therefore pray in their rooms. At weekends, the researcher observed in labour camps a group of Indian construction labourers singing religious songs in their rooms.

In Hofstede's (1980, 1991) study, Indians scored high in IND compared to Pakistanis. In this study, Indian construction labourers also revealed high IND behaviour in the situation of migration debt, homesickness, no proper food and family issues back home. However, when compared to the Chinese construction labourers, the Chinese construction labourers scored even higher in IND. Pakistani construction labourers showed collectivistic behaviour, while Bangladeshi construction labourers revealed the lowest IND score. Chinese labourers continue to retain traditionally high LTO behaviour, but showed the highest individualism in the construction PBI, which contradicts the earlier study by Hofstede. Bangladeshi construction labourers re-confirmed their low LTO and low IND and high MAS behaviour at the work place in the UAE.

The study shows managerial implications for the project managers involved in the construction industry. The match of the decent work practices and the national culture of the construction labourers would help in successful completion of the projects. Muller and Turner (2007) suggest requirement of training for project managers in the host country and this affects both the success criteria and achievement of success for the project. Similarly Dong and Liu (2010) warn that inter-cultural conflict poses the greatest challenge to international business. This study reveals that projects carried out in the home country are more successful than carried out in the host country and that this is due to cultural understanding. Kyriakidou and Gore (2005) mention that an

	India		Pakistan		Bangladesh		China		UAE (Arab countries)
	Hofstede	Present authors	Hofstede	Present authors	Hofstede <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Present authors	Hofstede (1993) <sup>a</sup>	Present authors	Hofstede <i>et al.</i> (2010)
LTO	61	24.5	50	24.5	47	18	118	29.5	36 (KSA) <sup>b</sup>
IND	48	24.5	14	21	20	17	20	27	38
MAS	56	22	50	31	55	23.5	50	15.5	53
UAI	40	28.5	70	26	60	26.5	60	28	68
PDI	77	17	55	17	80	21	80	17	80

**Notes:** Hofstede *et al.* (2010) mention China score of 87, 20, 66, 30 and 80 for LTO, IND, MAS, UAI and PDI, respectively. <sup>a</sup>Estimated; <sup>b</sup>Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Table IV.**  
Comparison of  
Hofstede's (1991)  
findings and those  
of the present study

organization's culture affects its performance. Effective Improvement in decent work practice indicators is possible after understanding of the culture of the migrant construction labourers in that context. This is beneficial to the migrant construction labourers, the migrant send and migrant receiving countries. Determination of national culture under the decent work practices is important for the policy makers from migrant sending and migrant receiving countries. The difference in cultures is not a weakness, but strength if managed properly. The MAS behaviour of the Pakistani construction labourers can be used for high productive and safe work. Similarly low IND of the Bangladeshi construction labourers could be used for a safe work. High LTO behaviour of Chinese construction labourers could be helpful for a high commitment work. UAI of Indian construction labourers once managed effectively could result into a working practice as per the laws of the UAE. This shows that the difference of national cultures, if investigated and managed properly, could result into an effective temporary migration of the construction labourers.

The decent work practice indicator of migration debt has impact on the other decent work practice indicators. Improvement in the decent work practice indicator through non-payment of the exorbitant migration fee and guidance to the construction labourers about the laws of the UAE, will help migrant labourers protect their rights from the migrant sending country to the migrant receiving country. In the situation of high migration fee, the construction labourers undergo stress for the recovery of their high migration fee by involving in illegal activities in the UAE. This may result into imprisonment of the construction labourer, fine and/or deportation back home. This may create economic and social problems for the construction labourer and his family. The illegal practices by the construction labourers in the UAE could affect the migrant sending and receiving countries for social and health problems.

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

The study reveals difference between the national culture, as identified by Hofstede about three decades ago, and the national culture, as identified by the present study. This difference in the national culture could be because of the differences in the context, situation or goal of the construction labourers in the UAE. Moreover, Hofstede's study focused on the employees of IBM, a computer manufacturing company, in their respective countries and the present study focused on the construction labourers in the UAE in the migrant country.

The present study also reveals that the decent work practice indicators for Chinese labourers are not the same as were earlier identified for Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshi construction labourers in the UAE. This reinforces the validity and reliability of the earlier study by Khan (2013a) for identifying the decent work practice indicators specific to the culture of the labourers.

The identification of the national culture in the situation of decent work practices helps in the development of policies and training/awareness programmes for migrant construction labourers which will help them to adjust to the prevalent and improved culture of decent work practices in the UAE.

The study also highlights the desire of the construction labourers for change and improvement in the decent work practices both at home and in the migrant receiving country. It is therefore a two-way traffic. On one side, only authorized companies should be allowed to recruit migrant construction labourers so that the impact of migration debt could be reduced. At the same time, the construction labourers should be trained/guided about the prevalent practices in the construction PBI of the UAE and about the UAE laws.



Because international projects involve teams from different nationalities, the management of cultural differences becomes important. The individualistic culture of Chinese, the masculine culture of Pakistani labourers, the collectivistic behaviour of Bangladeshi construction labourers and high uncertainty avoidance culture of Indian construction labourers could be managed properly for the social and economic benefit of the labourers themselves and the economic and social benefit of the home and host countries.

Migrant sending countries must consider their own decent work practice indicators before the migrant reaches the host country. Migration debt and extended family and family issues back home are the decent work practices indicators which impact upon the migrant construction workers in the UAE. With a huge migration debt, the extended family back home without work and the relatively low salary in the UAE not only affects the economic and social life of the migrant labourers, but also invites health problems for them. Their stressful situation leads them into activities which are both beyond their contractual obligations and illegal. The government of the UAE has, however, made appreciable efforts to secure the labour rights for their effective migration. Moreover, joint action by the migrant sending countries, migrant receiving countries and the concerned international organizations should be initiated as a priority for effective and successful international temporary migration.

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#### **Further reading**

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