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## **Is There Cultural Change In The National Cultures Of Indonesia?**

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### **Abstract**

Understanding of the national culture as well as the local culture can give people an advantage in understanding and developing inter-cultural knowledge and skills. It is also useful for achieving a successful life in this challenging global world. In order to understand a nation's people it is important to understand their values and culture. Indonesia consists of thousands of islands and people of various ethnicities, which consequently affect Indonesia's culture as a whole nation. This research was done at one of Indonesia's state-owned companies. It comprised 2025 respondents from various ethnic backgrounds such as: Balinese, Batak, Javanese, Minangkabau, Sundanese and others. The questionnaire used was developed on the basis of Hofstede's work on values. The study showed that respondents (the employees of Company XYZ) were high on Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Future Time Orientation, Individualism, and Masculinity. This findings is different from the stereotype of Indonesian people as well as from Hofstede's findings (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), which indicated that Indonesian people score higher on the Collectivist and Feminist dimensions, and lower on Uncertainty Avoidance. This raises the question of whether there has been a cultural change or whether the results reflect only the impact of organizational culture. Although this study consists of a large sample, the results cannot be generalized to all Indonesian people. In this regard, future research should be carried out in order to obtain an accurate profile of Indonesia, taking into account that Indonesia is very diverse country.

**Key Words:** Work Values, Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Future Time Orientation, Individualism, Collectivism, Masculinity and Femininity.

### **Background**

As is generally understood, the culture of a given society comprises the shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals learned from earlier generations, imposed by present members of a society, and passed onto succeeding generations. Consequently, culture (local culture, national culture) will also influence the organization, as well as the people in the organization. In relation to this, an accurate understanding of the local culture and local environment can give people an advantage in understanding and developing intercultural knowledge and skills, which at present has become most critical for a productive and successful life in this challenging global world. Indonesia, as a diverse country, consists of many islands as well as many ethnicities. This condition consequently will have an impact on the culture and on the people's behavior. In relation to culture and values, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), mention that there are five cultural dimensions (values) that play important roles in the society and individuals' behavior. According to the previous findings by Hofstede (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), Indonesian people are Collectivist, High on Power Distance, Low on Uncertainty Avoidance, and Feminine.

However, those findings were based on the scores of Indonesian employees who work for IBM, whose scores might be different from those of Indonesian people in general, particularly since Indonesia has so many ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. This raises the questions of whether those people have the same work value as other Indonesian people in general, and whether organizational culture might also have some impact on their work values, as defined by Hofstede (2005).

Based on this consideration, the research questions concern whether organizational culture has some impact on people's work values, and whether this consequently affects the culture in general. The objective of the study was to identify the profile of work values (using Hofstede's concept) among Indonesian employees, and compare the results of Indonesia's profile (based on Hofstede's research) with the results of the present research.

### **Individualism vs. Collectivism**

Individualism is a psychological state in which people see themselves first as individuals and believe their own interests and values are primary. Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose, everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or immediate family (Hofstede, 1993).

Collectivism is the state of mind where in the values and goals of the group, whether extended family, ethnic group, or company is primary (Hofstede, 1993). Collectivism pertains to societies in which, from birth onward, people are integrated into strong, cohesive in groups, which throughout people's lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

### **Power Distance**

Power Distance can be defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This dimension deals with society's orientation to authority. The extent to which people of different status, power or authority should behave toward each other as equals or un-equals is referred to as power distance (Achua & Lussier, 2010).

Hofstede's Power Distance Index measures the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), as defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders.

In high power-distance cultures, leaders and followers rarely interact as equals, while in low power-distance cultures, leaders and their members interact on several levels as equals. In an organization with a high power-distance culture, the leader is the primary decision maker while in a low power-distance culture, decision making is a group-oriented and participative activity (Van Dier Vegt, Van De Villert, Huang, 2005; Hack-et & Liang, 2007, as cited in Achua & Lussier, 2010).

### **Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty Avoidance can be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to humankind's search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture compels its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual.

High Uncertainty Avoidance cultures try to minimize the unstructured conditions and situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level, by a belief in absolute Truth; 'there can only be one Truth and we have it'.

### **Masculinity vs. Femininity**

A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct; men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

### **Long Term vs. Short Term Time Orientation**

Long Term Orientation (LTO) stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular, perseverance and thrift. Short Term Orientation (STO) stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face" and fulfilling social obligation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

## Characteristics of Indonesian People

Indonesia consists of some of the world's largest islands – Sumatra, Java, most of Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi (Celebes), Halmahera, and the west half of New Guinea (Papua) – and numerous smaller islands, of which Bali (just east of Java) is best known. The cultures of the inner islands are more homogeneous, with only four major cultural groups: the Sundanese (in West Java), the Javanese (in Central and East Java), the Madurese (on Madura and in East Java), and the Balinese (in Bali).

In Indonesia, most islands can be considered as multiethnic, with large and small groups forming geographical enclaves. In multiethnic areas, disputes between members of different ethnic groups may be settled by leaders of either or both groups, by a court, or by feud. In many regions with settled populations, a customary settlement is honored over a court one, and many rural areas are peaceful havens.

Many of Indonesia's ethnic groups have strong kinship groupings based upon patrilineal, matrilineal, or bilateral descent (Collectivist). In Indonesia, seniority and elder status plays an important role in the society and community; people usually respect the elderly as well as value their social status in the community (High Power Distance). Moreover, Indonesian people in general are also more comfortable with stable and predictable conditions. For example, they prefer to become civil servants rather than to become entrepreneurs (High Uncertainty Avoidance), although in some cases they prefer to leave everything to Allah (God), for the situations that they cannot control and manipulate anymore. In general, although there are traditional roles for women and men in the society these roles sometimes overlap. In addition, Indonesian people are very much characterized by many ritual activities, both in relation to culture and religion, but not by thinking about the future (for example future planning with insurance is not yet popular: Short Term Orientation).

Based on these characteristics, the people of Indonesia can be regarded as follows:

1. Having high value of the group (Collectivism)
2. Placing high importance on seniority (high Power Distance)
3. Preferring stable conditions and situations, not liking ambiguous conditions (high Uncertainty Avoidance)
4. Having a clear cut between gender roles, that nevertheless do sometimes overlap (Masculinity/Femininity)
5. Having a time orientation that is more about the past and present (Short Term Orientation).

### Javanese

The nuclear family relationships in Javanese people are mainly the primary relatives like, father, mother and children (Suseno, 2003). Their primary obligations and family duties are to take care of people in the family rather than other people outside the family. Koentjaraningrat (in Suseno, 2003) claims that people who resist or forget their primary obligation to look after the welfare of their families may be considered as having a bad attitude. In contrast, not being able to look after the welfare of people outside the family does not receive severe social sanctions (Suseno, 2003). Basically, the Javanese people are neo-locality, which means that their main purpose is to build and develop their own family welfare and it is assumed that family are the important resource for developing the social identities of children.

Koentjaraningrat (as cited in Mulder, 1996) mentioned that basically all nuclear families take care of their own welfare. Financially, Javanese people are more independent and don't have any obligation to finance other family within the range of the extended family. They have their own home, and families, and economically they are independent. This reality indicates that the Javanese people tend to be more individualistic. However, extended families support them morally and emotionally in several rituals and/or life crises. Javanese people who live in the villages are usually oriented more collaterally (Sardjono, 1995). They believe that people are not alone in the world, and there are always other people who will help them when they are in need, especially close relatives. As relatives they also look after each other and are very careful not to mingle with other people's problems or step too far in other people's business if they are not asked to help. They also try to take care of others' feelings and well being. This is called *tepa selira* (Sardjono, 1995, Hardjowirogo, 1984), which reflects a Collectivist orientation).

On the other hand, with the Concept of Harmony (*Kerukunan*), all types of interaction among Javanese people should aim to avoid conflict; in this regard an open conflict should not occur in any conflict situation. Having enemies is something Javanese people try to avoid. Togetherness is very important for them (Collectivist). This is consistent with the notion that the people have their own nuclear family to take care of, but still feel obliged to help other people in the range of their extended families, and always welcome other families visiting their home (Greetz, 1961 in Suseno, 2003). The other principle upheld by Javanese people is to maintain a healthy relationship with others or honoring other people. This principle is important for Javanese people in order to maintain interactions and show respect, especially to the elderly people (Suseno, 2003). Javanese people also value social hierarchy; this is reflected at the level of Javanese language. In this regard, they are very much aware of their social status in the society (High Power Distance). Javanese people are also more comfortable with stable and predictable conditions; they prefer to stick together in the neighborhood rather than move elsewhere looking for better conditions and a better future (High Uncertainty Avoidance). In their day-to-day lives, Javanese people's activities are also very much based on the ritual activities (Short Term Orientation).

In conclusion, Javanese people can be categorized as follows: (1) They are considered as an individualistic but also collectivist culture, (2) The family structure in the Javanese society is more like the nuclear family system which consists of a father, mother and children, (3) They have certain principles in their interaction with other people that consist of value of harmony and respect, (4) The Javanese people are fully aware of their individual rights and belongings, and (5) Javanese people appreciate other people's autonomy, and try not to interfere in other people's matters unless asked. From the discussion above, Javanese people can be regarded as Collectivist, high on Power Distance, high on Uncertainty Avoidance, have a Masculine-Feminine orientation, and Short Term Orientation.

### **Sundanese**

The Sundanese are similar to Javanese people, as they also respect the elderly, value extended family, and the convenience of stable and predictable situations. On the other hand, they are somewhat different from Javanese people, particularly in terms of religious activities, as they are more overtly Islamic. Moreover, although they respect the elderly and the status hierarchy, they have a much less rigid system of social hierarchy compared with Javanese society. Based on the consideration of the major similarities between Sundanese and Javanese people, Sundanese people can be regarded as Collectivist, high on Power Distance, high on Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculine-Feminine in orientation, and have a Short Term Orientation.

### **Minangkabau**

Minangkabau people are characterized with Matriarchate, which means that women are the ones who play an important role in the family (Mas/Fem). Men usually leave the town after they graduate from the University or High School, in order to earn a better living outside their village. In this regard, they usually act as entrepreneurs (Long Term Orientation). However, they never forget their family (or as we call it, their Big Family), as family and Big family, as well as key persons in the culture, play an important role in their life (Collectivist). Minangkabau people also perceive the environment as unstable and want to adjust to the environment (Low Uncertainty Avoidance). The elderly or so called Mamak are very important and play a major role in people's lives, and Minangkabau people very much respect to the elderly and seniority (Amir, 1983). In conclusion, it can be said that Minangkabau people are Collectivist, high on Power Distance, Feminine, low on Uncertainty Avoidance, and have a Long Term Orientation.

### **Balinese**

Balinese people are characterized by ritual and religious activities. Based on Hindu religion, Balinese people live in Kasta (degree in society) namely: Brahma, Indra, Waisya, and Sudra. This consequently affects work values, with High Power Distance. The custom and regulation of irrigation of Subak in Balinese communities also represents the Collectivist culture of Balinese communities. It appears that there are no clear cut of roles between men and women, as even women have to earn money for the family (which can also be regarded

as Feminine). Their time orientation is also more Short term as their central activities are the ritual and religious activities, and they are quite tolerant with ambiguous conditions (Low Uncertainty Avoidance). Based on the discussion above, it can be said that Balinese people are Collectivist, high on Power Distance, low on Uncertainty Avoidance, Feminine and have a Short Term Orientation.

### Batak

Batak people, on the other hand, are characterized with a Patriarchal type of culture. Men play the important role in the family. Families should have at least one son to carry on the family names, and family as well as big families and key persons in the society play an important role in a person's life. Batak men also usually leave their hometown to get a better life in the city but always remember their big families. In this regard, they can be regarded as Collectivist, high on Power Distance, Masculine, low on Uncertainty Avoidance, and have both a Short term orientation (as they still believe and celebrate their tradition), as well as a Long term orientation (as they are willing to leave their hometown to seek a better life).

Based on the above discussion, Table 2 summarizes the perceived (stereotypical) values and culture of each ethnicity.

**Table 1**

*Perceived Indonesian and Ethnic values*

Work Values	Indonesia	Javanese	Sundanese	Balinese	Minang	Batak
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Collectivist	Collectivist	Collectivist	Collectivist	Collectivist	Collectivist
Uncertainty Avoidance	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Power Distance	High	High	High	High	High	High
Masculinity vs. Femininity	Feminine	Feminine	Feminine	Mas/Fem	Feminine	Masculine
Short Term Orientation vs. Long Term Orientation	STO	STO	STO	STO	STO-LTO	STO-LTO

As the objective of this study is to identify and compare of the Work Values with Hofstede's findings, Table 2, will show the score and Hofstede's analysis of Indonesia's work values. According to Hofstede's study, Indonesia can be regarded as Collectivist, high on Power Distance, low on Uncertainty Avoidance, and Feminine (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

**Table 2**

*Work Values for Indonesians, using Hofstede's results\**

Dimensions	Score	Category
Individualism vs. Collectivism	14	Collectivist
Power Distance (Low vs. High)	78	High Power Distance
Uncertainty Avoidance (Low vs. High)	48	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
Masculine vs. Feminine	46	Feminine
Short Term vs. Long Term Orientation	-	No Result Yet

*Note:* \* According to Hofstede's studies (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).



## Method

### Respondents

This study was done at one of Indonesia's State owned companies, and comprised of 2025 respondents of various ages, educational backgrounds and years of service with the company. The profile of respondents is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Profile of respondents*

Variable	N	%
Education		
Doctorate Degree	1	0.0
Master's Degree	82	4.0
Bachelor Degree	680	33.6
Diploma	294	14.5
Senior High School	941	46.5
Junior High School	27	1.4
Age		
Below 25 years old	27	1.3
25 – 30 years old	103	5.1
31 – 44 years old	646	31.9
Over 44 years old	1249	61.7
Sex		
Male	1662	82.1
Female	363	17.9
Tenure		
< 2 years – 2 years	76	3.8
> 2 – 6 years	47	2.3
> 6 – 10 years	10	0.5
>10 – 12 years	193	9.5
>12 – 18 years	289	14.3
>18 years	1410	69.5
Ethnicity		
Javanese	856	42.3
Sundanese	98	4.8
Minangkabau	102	5.0
Batak	135	6.7
Balinese	40	2.0
Malay	131	6.5
Ambonese	88	4.3
Others	143	7.1
(Indonesian)	432	21.3

From the table above, it can be seen that the majority of the employees (respondents) are Javanese people (42.3%), who had worked more than 18 years in the company (69.5%), were male (82.1%), over 44 years old (61.7%), and had graduated from Senior High School (98.6%).

### Materials

The questionnaire of Work Values was developed and modified from Hofstede's version (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Its validity was checked with Factor Analysis and reliability with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Responses were made on a 6 point scale, and total scores were converted to a value from 1-100 in order to match with the score categorization of work values done by Hofstede (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The results of the reliability analysis are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*The Results of Reliability*

Work Values	Cronbach Alpha
Individualism – Collectivism	.723
Power Distance	.720
Uncertainty Avoidance	.733
Masculinity vs. Femininity	.761
Time Orientation	.774

### Results

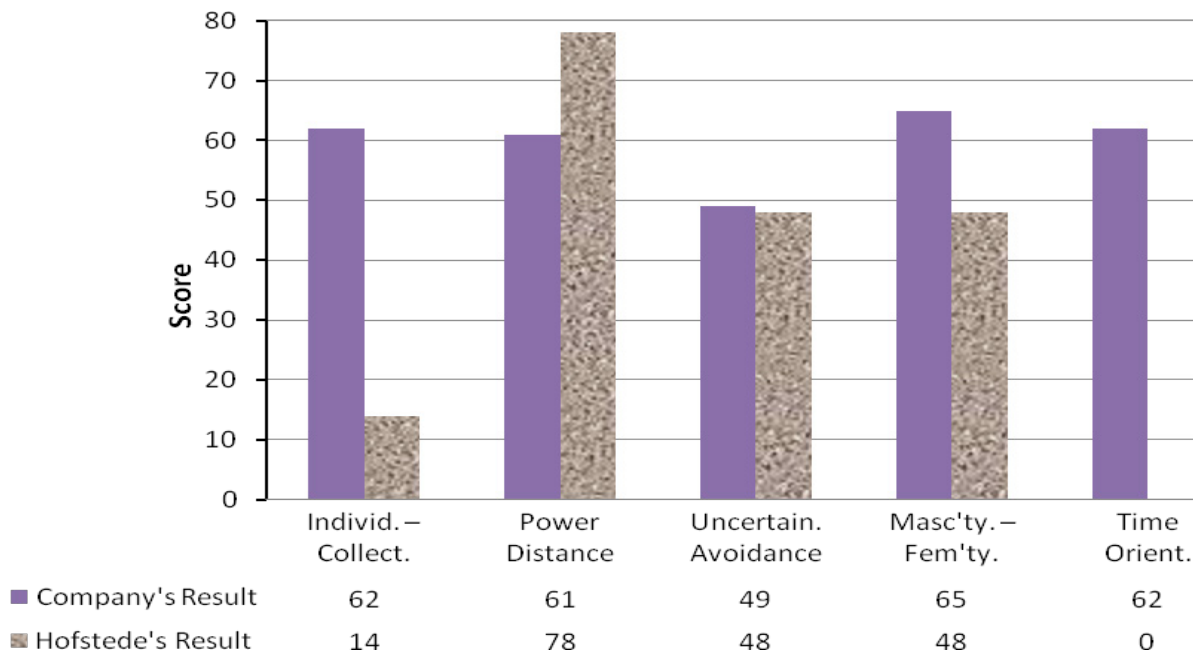
The results show a different profile from both Hofstede's results and the perceived values (stereotype). Table 5 and Figure 1 show the results in detail.

**Table 5**

*Work Values of the Company*

No	Work Values	Score	Category
1	Individualism - Collectivism	62	Individualism
2	Power Distance	61	High Power Distance
3	Uncertainty Avoidance	49	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
4	Masculinity – Femininity	65	Masculinity
5	Time Orientation	62	Future Orientation



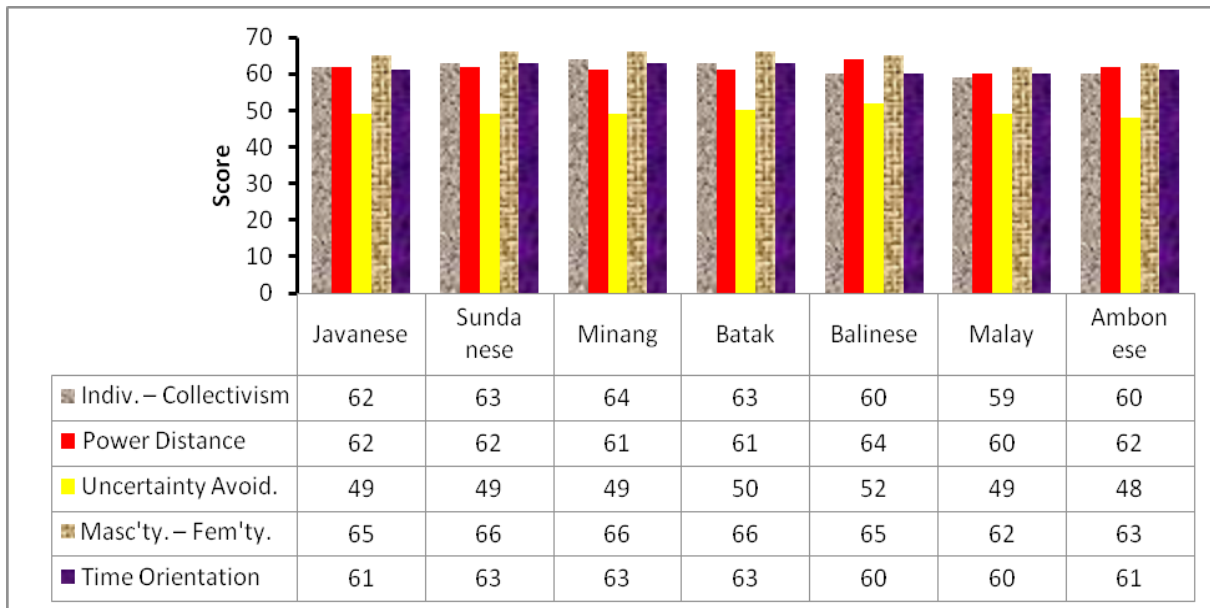


**Figure 1:** Comparison of Company's work values and Hofstede's result.

From the results above, it can be seen that the company's work values are Individualist, High Power Distance, Low Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculine, and have a Long Term Orientation. In order to identify whether results vary with ethnicity, *t* tests were conducted. These showed no significant differences between the company and ethnic results nor between the various ethnicities.

**Table 6**  
*Work Values by Ethnicity*

No	Work Values	Javanese	Sundanese	Minang	Batak	Balinese	Ma-lay	Ambonese
1	Indiv. – Collect.	62 (Indiv)	63 (Indiv)	64 (Indiv)	63 (Indiv)	60 (Indiv)	59 (Indiv)	60 (Indiv)
2	Power Distance	62 (High)	62 (High)	61 (High)	61 (High)	64 (High)	60 (High)	62 (High)
3	Uncertainty Avoidance	49 (Low)	49 (Low)	49 (Low)	50 (Med)	52 (High)	49 (Low)	48 (Low)
4	Masculinity – Femininity	65 (Mas)	66 (Mas)	66 (Mas)	66 (Mas)	65 (Mas)	62 (Mas)	63 (Mas)
5	Time Orientation	61 (LTO)	63 (LTO)	63 (LTO)	63 (LTO)	60 (LTO)	60 (LTO)	61 (LTO)



**Figure 2:** Comparison of Work Values by Ethnicity

From the results above, it can be seen that the work values that have been changed both at the Company level and at the Individual/Group (Ethnic) level are as follows: the shift from Collectivist to Individualist work values, and Feminine to Masculine. A Long Term Orientation was also observed.

### Discussion

The study showed different results from Hofstadter's findings as well as perceived values. The present results indicated a shift in work values from Collectivist to Individualist, and Feminine to Masculine. In addition they identified a LTO. In comparison, Hofstede's findings (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) indicated that Indonesian people are Collectivist, and Feminine. The question arising from this is whether this result is an expression of a shift in culture from Collectivist to Individualist, and from Feminine to Masculine, or whether it reflects the impact of organizational culture on the employee. In this regard, my previous research on banking industries has identified similar results with work values shifting from Collectivist to Individualist. Shifting work values from Collectivist to Individualist can also happen due to the challenge and demand of the tight competition, and as a result, people tend to focus and think about themselves first rather than thinking about the group or communities. In this regard, future research should be done in order to test the findings.

From the results, it can also be concluded that people's work values are different from the perceived values (stereotyping of people based on ethnicity). In this regard, future research in various organizations should be conducted.

The results also suggest that socio-cultural factors (social, economic, historical, ideological) can shape and influence human behavior. It is an interesting, important and difficult area to research. No society or culture is homogeneous. Cultures are dynamic, inconsistent and multifaceted. They are therefore difficult to categorize and compare. Furthermore, the processes by which culture influences an individual's or group's behaviors are far from clear (Furnham, 2006).

Although this study can boast a large sample, the results cannot be generalized to all Indonesian people and several other limitations should be pointed out. Firstly, this study is based on cross-sectional data and, thus, no causal relationship should be inferred. More longitudinal studies across organizations are needed. Secondly, the data in this study was collected through self-reports, which creates the potential for common-method bias. The data should be collected, in future studies, at different times in order to reduce the potential for bias. Thirdly, this study was only conducted at the stated owned enterprises, which might limit generalization to different types of organizations. Finally, care should also be taken into consideration when categorizing people's

ethnicity. Although criteria of ethnicity have been developed, however, potential biases can occur due to the perceived culture/ethnicity of the people.

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