

Assignment 2: American Values

Kelly Hyatt

Old Dominion University

Psychology 420: Cross Cultural

According to Robert Kohls, there are thirteen values that Americans live by. Some values Americans live by include change, time, individualism, informality, equality, and more. Of the thirteen values, I find that action and work orientation has made a significant impact on my life and mentality. Though I find that I agree with most, if not all, of the values proposed, action and work orientation stands higher than the others for myself. I considered discussing the value of equality but found myself going back to action and work orientation. The value of action and work orientation states that we routinely plan and schedule an active day and relaxation is limited and planned (Kohls). When we go on vacations, we plan them out months, sometimes years, ahead of time and work our schedules around our jobs and careers. Americans value moving around and getting things done and accomplished, and we value our work.

Americans tend to revolve their life around work and make their daily plans around it. To many, it may seem strange when we hear someone say that they do not have a job or do not work, as we highly value work and careers. Many may find that having a job or always participating in some sort of action makes our lives meaningful and gives us a purpose. Whenever we meet new people, we always ask what it is they do or what job they have. It is one of the first questions we ask a person, which emphasizes the value of action and work orientation in the typical American's life.

I find that action and work orientation has played a major role in my life, both physically and mentally. It applies to my family as well as myself. My parents divorced when I was about seven years old, and during that time, my father would have been considered a workaholic. He spent most days at work and often came home late. I find that the divorce did not affect me as much as it affects other children who come from split households. My mother was a stay-at-home mom, while my father was always working and sometimes travelling for business. I did

not find the divorce to be that hard on me as my dad was always at work and rarely seemed to be at home. I was used to him working and not being around, so I adjusted fairly easily to him not being at our house anymore.

Also, I find that the value of action and work orientation has made an impact on my work ethic. When I am on the clock at work, I find myself always doing something. It is regularly said at work that “there is always something to do.” When I am not actively doing something at work, I feel strange and as if I am forgetting something. The store I work at has cameras in certain places and I feel that I may get called out if I am not actively working when I am in front of the cameras. Many corporations and companies today want to see their employees always doing something and never standing still waiting for something to come up. Businesses value action and want to see their employees actively engaging in their work, but sometimes everything gets accomplished early and there is nothing to do but wait to close the store and complete closing requirements. I start to feel anxious when everything we need to complete for the day is finished and I am waiting to close the store. During this time, I tend to stay out of view of the cameras, so it does not appear as if an employee who is in charge is not actively doing anything, as I usually walk the floor of the store to make sure it remains clean. I also encourage my co-workers to be always moving when they are working the front registers since they are always in view of our cameras and may be watched by higher-ups in the company. I do not like seeing them standing and waiting for customers when they could be doing something productive. I feel as if I may get in trouble or take a phone call from a higher-up confronting me about what my co-workers are doing.

Another common trait of the action and work orientation value is planning and scheduling. Americans tend to plan out their days and weeks in advance to prepare themselves. I

include myself in this characteristic of the value. I make lists of goals I want to accomplish in one day and typically write them down in the order in which they will be completed. When I have a day off from work, I feel as if that is my day to get things done and I write down what it is I want to complete that day the night before. For example, I will start by jotting down my typical morning routine of exercising and getting dressed first. Then, any other activities I was hoping to do, usually a major assignment for school or chores around the house. On my list, I would have written goals such as laundry, vacuum, and finish paper for class. I find myself making lists frequently and I feel disappointed if a subject on my list does not get crossed off. I plan out my days off work so I can use that time to my advantage and accomplish as many goals as possible.

To anyone not from America, it may seem strange how much time we spend working and how we plan our days. To Americans, we revolve our life around our work, while other countries may not. We value our work and careers so highly that we often take work home with us, rather than leave it behind when we clock out. It is also not uncommon for us to take work calls or messages on our days off, rather than use that time for ourselves. For example, someone visiting from another country may stay with a host family, such as an exchange student or an au pair. Before they get used to the customs and values of Americans, they may notice how often we work and how likely it is that we will bring work home with us, displaying how much we value work orientation and action versus inaction. It is also common for Americans to work during their break in the workday, such as their lunch break. Rather than use that time for lunch or socializing, we use that time to get and stay ahead of our work to keep on track. In other countries, breaks are normalized and used for what they should be for, refueling and relaxing. Even schools in other countries allow their students to go home for their lunch break, which is

typically longer, and return afterwards, unlike in the United States where we often find students buried in a textbook or homework during their less than thirty-minute break between classes.

Anyone who comes to the United States from another culture will most likely find our work values strange and unconventional. It may not be understood how much emphasis we place on our work and careers, as other cultures may have a “being” orientation value versus an action and work orientation value. People from other cultures may value being in the moment instead of planning out your entire day as it revolves around our work schedules. With as much emphasis as we place on our work ethics and values, I think it would be interesting to visit another country or culture that values a “being” orientation. I would love to visit a country with a culture that lives in the moment and does not worry about making and following strict schedules. Americans value action over inaction, but other cultures may disagree with this value and face work in an entirely different way. I would love to visit a place with less emphasis on action, so I can discover new ways of spending my time and using it for myself rather than my work.

References

Kohls, L.R. (1984). The values Americans live by. Washington, DC: Meridian House  
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