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Intention to Work in the Public Service Sector: Job Satisfaction of German and Japanese Private Sector Employees^{***}

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In this study, we investigate antecedents of job satisfaction of private sector employees in Germany and Japan who had an intention to switch to the public service sector. The individual working in the public service sector may be motivated by the desire to serve the public and bring benefits to society at large. Such a desire is referred to as Public Service Motivation (PSM). Others may be attracted to jobs in the public sector because of high job security along with a comparably lower stress level. This study found that PSM did not contribute to job satisfaction for people willing to switch to working in the public service sector. This was also true among employees who applied the values of public service in their current employment (*PSM-fit*). Instead, we found that work relations and the absence of work stress are important to employees in both countries. Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards only played a major role in Germany but not in Japan.

Keywords Job satisfaction, Public Service Motivation,
 Job switching disposition, Japan, Germany

1 Introduction

Why would an employee prefer a public service sector job over one in the private industry? Two seemingly contradicting arguments support this preference. One posits the attractiveness of public service sector engagement to contribute to society (Parola, Harari, Herst, and Pysmakova, 2019). Studies show that public workers volunteer more often than non-public workers (Piatak and Holt, 2020). However, the preference to work in a public service sector can

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also be driven by high self-interest as the public service sector generally offers good employment conditions, high job security, and reduced levels of individual performance controls (Jensen, Andersen, and Holten, 2019; Schott, Neumann, Baertschi, and Ritz, 2019; Weißmüller, De Waele, and Van Witteloostuijn, 2020). Lapuente et al. (2020) consider public service sector employees as either “goats or wolves”. This research investigated the motives of employees who would *like* to change from a position in a private enterprise to become a public service sector employee.

Despite the encouraging growth of international public service sector motivation research (Broekema Porth, Steen, and Torenvlied, 2019; Fischer and Schott, 2020), the majority of the studies focus predominantly on western settings (Europe and U.S.); over 80% of all articles were published in non-Asian contexts. International comparative studies mostly focus on contrasting Anglo-American and Western European settings (Jensen, Kjeldsen and Vestergaard, 2020). Mussagulova and van der Wal (2020), in their article “All quiet on the non-Western front?”, stated that they were surprised that Asian-driven research remained weak. Even when studies on Asian public service sector motivation receive increased attention, studies that include Japan are exceptions. To the best knowledge of the authors, researchers have yet to study and compare German and Japanese public service sectors employees, and to investigate antecedents of job satisfaction of these nationals.

Drawing on the above arguments, our study contributes to current research in three ways: 1) We investigated job satisfaction of private sector employees who professed an interest to work in the public service sector. Next, we proceeded to investigate antecedents of job satisfaction (Sameer and Priyadarshi, 2020) by answering the following question: Which of these antecedents, namely PSM, rewards, or working environments interrelate and contribute to German and Japanese private sector employees’ desire to switch to public service sector jobs to enjoy perceived job satisfaction? Hence, we did not limit our analysis to PSM exclusively, but we tried to capture all relevant factors that might spur public service sector motivation (intrinsic motivation); 2) We add to the research using structural equation modeling (SEM) in formative and reflective measurement models in order to determine a more nuanced analysis of the main contributors to job satisfaction. By employing an SEM approach, we were able to gauge the relative impact of each latent variable on job satisfaction, as well as the indicators’ contribution to forming each latent variable; 3) We add to the international PSM research strand by comparing employees from Germany and Japan, two countries of similar economic power, one in the west and the other in Asia.

2 Structure of the Public Service Sector

2.1 Public Service Sector employment in Germany

In Germany, employees in the public service sector are differentiated as public servants (*Angestellte*) or civil servants (*Beamte*). Major benefits of being a civil servant include enjoying a tenured position, special insurance, a competitive income, and the opportunity to make a career within the service (Jankowski, Prokop, and Tepe, 2020). Salaries, calculated according to public ordinance, are stable and higher than those of private sector employees (Frieze, Heimeshoff, and Klein, 2020). Promotions are based on the principle of merit, i. e., employees need to display the requisite skills to merit their promotion. Unlike civil servants, public servants have fixed contracts and an ordinary enforced insurance. Their income is more flexible than that of civil servants, and is tied to negotiations.

Frequent historical changes have resulted in the establishment of a stable administrative system which, until recently, has remained difficult to change (Broekema, Porth, Steen, and Torenvlied, 2019). However, this does not imply that there are no changes such as privatization of selected services in the public service sector (De Gennaro, 2019). In general, we can see that working in the public service sector as civil servants or as public servants seems an attractive alternative compared to working for a private enterprise.

2.2 Public Service Sector employment in Japan

Just like the public service sector in Germany, this sector in Japan has recently undergone changes to shrink governmental involvement. Many years back, the Japanese railway was privatized and national universities assigned a new status, somewhere in the middle between the public and private sector. The salary structure in the Japanese public service sector differs from that of the private sector in several instances. First, the public service sector seniority system is more developed, i. e., the age-wage relation is rather steep (Morikawa, 2016). Furthermore, like their counterparts in Germany, Japanese employees in the public service sector enjoy higher wages than employees in the private sector. The Japanese public service sector is generally attractive and shares some similarities with the German public service sector. Asriani and Riyanto (2020) find also that job satisfaction is highest for Japanese who are tenured in the public service sector. In a review, Farazmand and Balilaj (2015) reason that remaining influences of Confucianism and Buddhism shape the Japanese bureaucratic system even today.

3 Research hypothesis and model

Public service sectors in Germany and Japan share several similarities. The governments of both countries encourage selected firms to privatize. In contrast to governmental efforts, employees themselves feel attracted to work—or to switch—to the public service sector.

In our study, we sought to develop a theoretical model and corresponding hypotheses related to antecedents of job satisfaction of private sector employees who had intentions of switching to the public service sector. Job satisfaction, in contrast to commitment or involvement, is one of the most intensively studied variables in organizational research (Khaskheli et al., 2020). It is of utmost importance to understand whether the desire to help others is reflected in job satisfaction of private sector employees with changing ambitions. We, therefore, drew upon the following established antecedents of job satisfaction: 1) public service motivation (PSM), 2) reward system, and 3) general work environment.

3.1 Public service motivation (PSM)

One of the most cited definitions of public service motivation (PSM) is by Perry & Wise (1990); PSM is defined as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (p. 368). During its academic evolution, another definition narrowed PSM down to “a desire to help others and to be useful to society” (Lewis & Frank, 2002)—this is the definition used in the present study. Researchers make a distinction between PSM and *PSM-fit*; the former reflects the general level of public service motivation whereas the latter gauges how well the current job allows the individual to, de facto, apply these values.

Findings in Asia (e. g., Park and Lee, 2020) showed that public service sector workers in Korea with higher PSM also displayed higher levels of organizational performance. There are mixed findings about the direct effect of employment in the public service sector on job satisfaction. Piatak and Holt (2020) found that such workers displayed a higher degree of altruism compared to private sector employees. In this study, German and Japanese employees in the public service sector were assumed to have high PSM levels. Employees in the private sector who were inclined to switch to working in the public service sector were thus also assumed to have an inherently high level of PSM. Moreover, Japan is known for being a society in which individuals care about the interests of others. We assume that this also impacts job satisfaction. Since the core definition of PSM is the idea of helping others and contributing to society, the

importance of PSM should apply equally to both Japanese and German employees. We thus state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: PSM leads to higher job satisfaction for Japanese and Germans willing to work in the public service sector.

Hypothesis 2: PSM-fit leads to higher job satisfaction for Japanese and Germans willing to work in the public service sector.

3.2 Rewards system

There are different types of rewards that have been shown to positively shape an employee's attitude towards his/her work and contribute to job satisfaction; differences can be extrinsic or intrinsic.

Extrinsic rewards are benefits that an employee receives from his or her employer, such as pay increases or other financial benefits. Extrinsic rewards can also take the form of performance recognition, e. g., job promotion. In contrast, *intrinsic rewards* are related to a positive self-appraisal of one's work, and the feeling of having an interesting job or the opportunity to leverage one's own skills. The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards is important as research has highlighted the risks that could arise from mistakenly addressing extrinsic rewards when a person is genuinely, intrinsically motivated – and vice versa (Asseburg, Hattke, Hensel, Homberg, and Vogel, 2020). Recent research on extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in the public service sector indicates that both aspects are equally important (Asseburg, Hattke, Hensel, Homberg, and Vogel, 2020).

Studies on the drivers of public service sector workers' job satisfaction in Germany find that intrinsic motivation is especially important and plays a more prominent role than extrinsic motivation (e. g., Kaiser, 2014). To the best of the authors' knowledge, there is no study in Japan that compares the relationship between intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction of employees who are inclined to switch to the public service sector. Drawing from other research, Huang and Van De Vliert (2003) found that the correlation between intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction was lower for employees in countries with a higher power distance and in collectivistic countries. According to Hofstede et al. (2005), Japan is characterized as a rather collectivistic country with a higher power distance than Germany. Drawing from this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Intrinsic rewards lead to higher job satisfaction for Germans willing to work in the public service sector than for Japanese.

In both Germany and Japan, extrinsic rewards for public service sector employees are primarily accorded based on seniority. In contrast, in the private sector a performance-based reward system is commonplace. In that sense, the public service sector in Germany is somewhat similar to the traditional Japanese public service sector work environment, i. e., compensation and work role are primarily functions of age and belongingness to the organizations. Nevertheless, regardless of the sector of interest, extrinsic rewards (e. g., pay and job promotion) are important and should also be applicable to people with a disposition to join the public service sector. Therefore, we do not expect any difference between employees from both countries:

Hypothesis 4: Extrinsic rewards are important for job satisfaction of employees in Germany and in Japan.

3.3 General work environment

Work environments differ in Germany and Japan. While the latter is known to be more of a collectivistic country, the former encourages employees to be individualistically driven (Hofstede et al., 2005). However, since the hierarchical system in both Japan and Germany is advanced, interwoven, and relationship-oriented, we thus hypothesize the following:

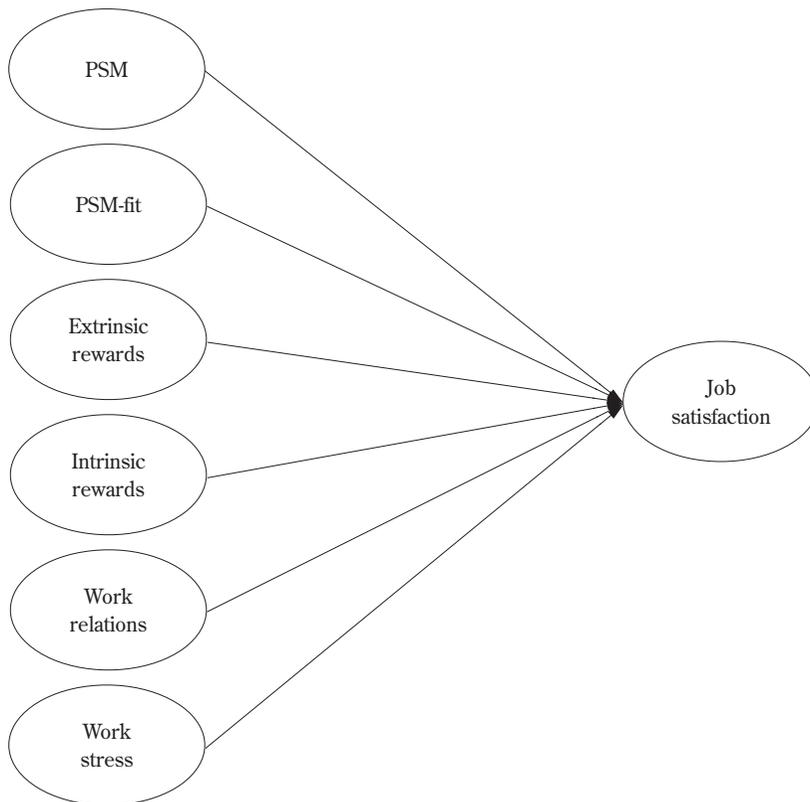
Hypothesis 5: Good work relationships lead to higher job satisfaction of both Japanese and Germans willing to join the public service sector.

The presence of work stress, including work-family-conflict in the working environment, has been shown to correlate negatively to job satisfaction (Vickovic and Morrow, 2020). Drivers of work stress (e. g., role ambiguity, work load) above a certain threshold thus correlate to job (dis)satisfaction. The Japanese work environment in the private sector is known to be harsher than that in Germany. Employees in Japanese private enterprises work longer hours and thus have less time for their families (Iwasaki et al., 2006). Therefore, we believe work stress affects job satisfaction in Japan more than in Germany:

Hypothesis 6: Work stress leads to lower job satisfaction for Japanese than Germans willing to join the public service sector.

Drawing on hypotheses 1 through 6, we define our research model as depicted in Figure 1. In building our model, we relied on established and tested antecedents of job satisfaction (Sameer and Priyadarshi, 2020).

Figure 1. Antecedents of Job Satisfaction



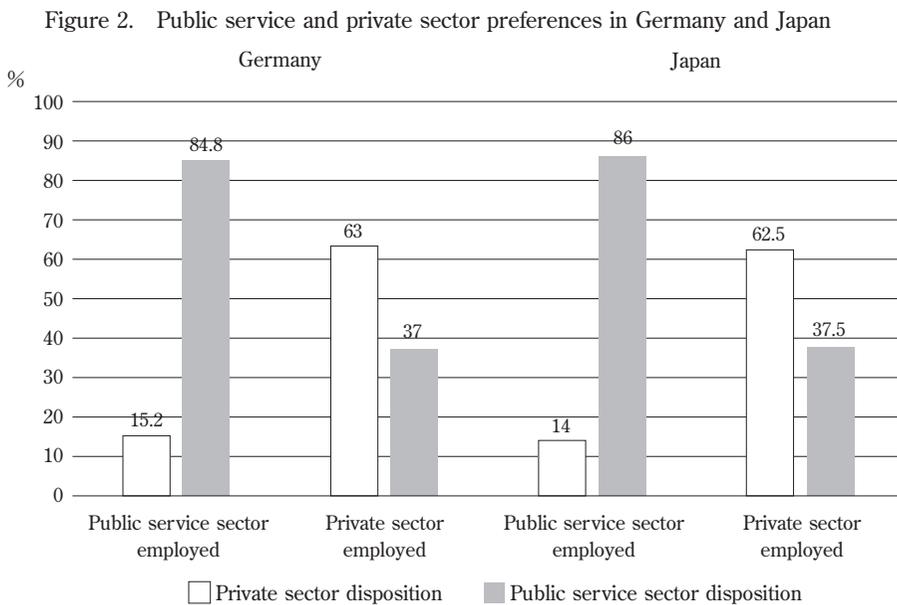
4 Methods

4.1 Sample and procedure

As for the sample, we applied the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), a survey module on 'work orientations III' that covers over 30 countries worldwide. The study examined work attitudes of employees from various countries and cultures. The questions were translated into various vernaculars by experts to assure high comparability of the studies among

countries. For the present study, we chose employees from Germany and Japan based on the criteria of prior studies which employed the ISSP data set to analyze job outcomes (Andrade and Westover, 2020). Hence, we excluded retired people, housewives, and students, focusing only on currently full or part-time employees; we were left with $N=165$ employees for Germany and $N=105$ for Japan. Drawing on Lewis and Frank (2002), we collected our sample based on one question: “Would you choose working in a private business, or working for the government/public service sector?”

Figure 2 displays the total distribution of sector dispositions drawn from the 2005 ISSP data set for Germany and Japan. Public service sector employees in Germany and Japan alike wanted to keep working in the public service sector (84.8 and 86%). To the contrary, in both countries over one third (37% and 37.5%) of the private firm employees expressed interest in switching to the public service sector.



Note: Data is based on the International Social Survey Program (2005) dataset; In total, $N=165$ public sector employed workers in Germany; $N=43$ in Japan; Private sector employees $N=430$ in Germany, $N=280$ in Japan; undecided persons or missing values were excluded; Employees were asked “Would you choose working in a private business, or working for the government or public service sector?”

There are other studies pointing out that countries differ in respect to people's willingness to work in the public service sector (Fischer and Schott, 2020). In that regard, Germany and Japan appear to be on an equal footing which, to some extent, may help control for bias.

4.2 Measures

Using secondary data, all variables of interest were constructed as indicators that were provided by the dataset. A strength of the ISSP questionnaire was that it had been rigorously planned and employed in a variety of research contexts. In the following paragraphs, we shall discuss the operationalization of the latent variables' mode of measurement. Job satisfaction can be measured with a single-item. Drawing on previous empirical support, we also measured job satisfaction with a single-item-question: "How satisfied are you in your (main) job?"

We measured public service sector motivation with two items operationalized on a five-point Likert scale with the questions "How important is a job that is useful to society?" and "How important is a job that allows someone to help other people?" As a direct counterpart of one's job expectations, we operationalized *PSM-fit* as two items measured on a five-point Likert scale with the questions "My job is useful to society" and "In my job I can help other people" (Mikkelsen, Schuster, and Meyer-Sahling, 2020). We measured PSM and *PSM-fit* reflectively. The choice of reflective measurement arose from the fact that both indicators had a high degree of domain overlap, i. e., a person who helps other people also does something good and useful to society, and vice versa.

We measured extrinsic rewards with three items (Table 1), viz. opportunities for job advancement, job security, and income. Intrinsic rewards were measured with three indicators, viz. opportunities for skill improvement and working independently, as well as interesting work ("My job is interesting."). We measured both constructs formatively since the items were all direct contributors.

We distinguished between peoples' relations at work, i. e., relationships with colleagues and with the management ("In general, how would you describe your relationship at the workplace – between workmates/colleagues?"). Both items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Work stress was also measured on a five-point Likert scale with three items which asked about the presence of work stress, whether it interfered with family life and caused stress and exhaustion (e. g., "Do you find your work stressful?").

5 Results

In applying partial least squares structural equation modeling, our equations were used without any additional tools (Sarstedt et al., 2020 b). The first step in the evaluation of a PLS model was to take a closer look at the quality of the measurement model. The corresponding results are displayed in Table 2, separately for Germany and Japan. According to the reflective measurement models in Table 2—PSM and PSM-*fit*, all the indicator loadings were well above the threshold of .7 and were, therefore, significant, except indicator PSM2 for Germany (.639). The average variance extracted (AVE) measures the average explanatory power of a reflective construct with regard to its indicators. Both PSM (AVE = .70) and PSM-*fit* (AVE = .71) for Germany, and PSM (AVE = .88) and PSM-*fit* (AVE = .79) for Japan showed an AVE above the recommended lower boundary of .5. The Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)—which measures whether theoretically distinct constructs are also empirically distinct—was satisfied since the AVE of all reflectively measured latent variables was larger than the squared correlation with other latent variables.

We also applied the newly introduced Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion to test for discriminant validity (Sarstedt et al., 2020 a). The HTMT is an estimation of the construct correlation. While different recommendations exist, the most conservative version requires that the HTMT value for two latent variables should not exceed .85. In our study, the HTMT criterion was well below .6 in all cases. We thus established discriminant validity for our model. With regard to the analysis of the formative measurement models (Table 3), we found that all but two weights (EXR1 = -.051, WKE2 = .149) were relevant in the German sample, displaying values well above .15. Of these weights, 8 out of 11 were also significant. However, only 4 out of 11 indicators were significant for Japan, but exhibited high relevance (WKE2 = .964; “Do you find your work stressful?”). No significant nor relevant indicators for Japan were, among others, exhaustion (WKE3 = .024), relationship with colleagues (WKR1 = -.10), and independent work (ITR2 = -.10). The common recommendation is to drop formative indicators if 1) the weights are non-significant, not relevant and if, moreover, 2) the outer loadings are below .7. Although this was the case for selected indicators, we still decided to retain them since there was context-related relevance (i. e., the indicators were necessary for comparing German and Japanese employees). The variance inflation factor (VIF) was below 5 for all constructs, indicating that multicollinearity presented no issue. Drawing from the above analysis, apart from minor deviations in some cases, most of the quality criteria were satisfied such that the quality of the measure-

ment was deemed satisfactory. Thus, we proceeded with the analysis of the structural model (Table 4).

The first observation was that, contrary to hypotheses 1 and 2, we did not find a significant relationship of PSM, nor *PSM-fit*, with job satisfaction in either of the countries. In the group of German private sector employees who were willing to work in the public service sector (Table 4), we found that work relationship (.35) was the strongest driver of job satisfaction, followed by intrinsic rewards (.31), work stress (-.19) and extrinsic rewards (.16), all of which were significantly associated with job satisfaction. In Japan, the strongest drivers for job satisfaction were work relationship (.46) and work stress (-.27). Both extrinsic rewards (.12) intrinsic rewards (.09) were neither significant nor relevant predictors of job satisfaction in Japan. Drawing from these results, we found preliminary support for hypotheses 4 and 5. Following the evaluation of both models, we additionally performed a PLS related multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA) in order to unveil significant group differences. The results are summarized in Table 5. We found significant group differences with regard to the importance of intrinsic rewards (.22), thus lending support to hypothesis 3.

6 Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we compared job satisfaction of private sector employees who displayed their willingness to work in the public service sector in two major economies, viz. Germany and Japan.

Our study has implications for the development of a PSM theory. PSM and *PSM-fit* did not appear to be drivers of job-satisfaction for private sector employees with sector switching disposition. We also tested whether an individual's gap (i. e., distance) between PSM and *PSM-fit* had an impact on job satisfaction; it yielded no significant results. With regard to the development of PSM theory, we can conclude that the willingness to work in the public service sector in both Western and Asian contexts. does not reflect one's job satisfaction. This is particularly noteworthy given the fact that prior studies have found that PSM significantly influences the willingness to work in the public service sector (e. g., Lewis and Frank, 2002). We also conclude that working in an environment with high levels of *PSM-fit* does not translate into elevated job satisfaction. PSM, as measured in this and previous studies, might thus be considered more a driver of job choice than job satisfaction.

In line with our hypothesis regarding cultural differences, we find that intrinsically motivated Germans were more satisfied with their jobs than their Japanese counterparts. In fact, intrinsic

motivation did not seem to play an important role for Japanese people who wanted to work in the public service sector. A closer look at both of the significant weights of intrinsic motivation for Japan (Table 3) revealed that the ability to work independently (ITR 2) had zero contribution. As Japanese have a strong group culture, working independently might thus not be something people would most likely strive for. In Germany, on the other hand, the ability to work independently appears to be of major importance, reflecting another aspect of cultural differences between both countries. The finding for Japan is contrary to the frequently stated hypothesis that people who would like to work in the public service sector are intrinsically motivated. In line with our hypothesis on the importance of work relationship, Japanese scored higher than Germans (Table 4), especially with regard to relationship with the management. In conclusion, we find differences in the drivers of job satisfaction for people with the intention to switch jobs, depending on whether they are Germans or Japanese. As for practical implications, both countries need to be aware of the specific needs of employees from the private sector joining the public service sector. Managers of the private sector need to be aware of unfulfilled needs, i. e., that in Germany and Japan, 37% of workers may want to switch job sectors.

This study is not without limitations. Our study population comprised people with intention to work in the public service sector, but we have to acknowledge that we did not know to what extent or how long this wish persisted. Some of the participants might only be toying with the idea of seeking employment in the public service sector, while others might have more serious intentions. Moreover, our study population comprised employees from only two countries, Germany and Japan. Finally, as our data set is not new, there might be a possibility that attitudes of Germans and Japanese might have changed in the past few years, although we do not think this is likely.

Appendix

Table 1: Questionnaire items reflecting indicators

Latent variable	Indicator	Questionnaire item
Job satisfaction	JS1	How satisfied are you in your (main) job?
PSM	PSM1	How important is a job that allows someone to help other people?
	PSM2	How important is a job that is useful to society?
PSM-fit	PSMF1	My job is useful to society.
	PSMF2	In my job I can help other people.
Extrinsic rewards	EXR1	My opportunities for advancement are high.
	EXR2	My job is secure.
	EXR3	My income is high.
Intrinsic rewards	ITR1	My job gives me a chance to improve my skills.
	ITR2	I can work independently.
	ITR3	My job is interesting.
Work relations	WKR1	In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between workmates/colleagues?
	WKR2	In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between management and employees?
Work stress	WKE1	How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your family life?
	WKE2	Do you find your work stressful?
	WKE3	Do you come home from work exhausted?

Notes: Questions are taken from the English version of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2005 "Work orientations III" questionnaire.

Table 2: Results for the measurement model (reflective)

Latent variable	Indicator	Cr. α / CR	Germany				Japan				
			loading	AVE	t-value	p-value	Cr. α / CR	loading	AVE	t-value	p-value
PSM	PSM1	.709	.994***	.70	3.233	.001	.876	.908***	0.88	4.304	.000
	PSM2	/.815	.639**		2.048	.041	/.938	.970***		5.330	.000
PSM-fit	PSMF1	.605	.883***	.71	13.064	.000	.810	.992***	0.79	4.361	.000
	PSMF2	/.833	.806***		8.544	.000	/.880	.770***		3.202	.001

Notes: **/** Significant at 5% and 1%, respectively; Cr. α = Cronbach's α ; CR = composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted. The Fornell-Larcker criterion (i. e., the latent variable correlations) and HTMT criterion are fulfilled, but the results (available from the authors upon request) are not displayed for simplicity.

Table 3: Results for the measurement model (formative)

Latent variable	Indicator	Germany				Japan			
		Weight	VIF	t-value	p-value	Weight	VIF	t-value	p-value
Extrinsic rewards	EXR1	-.051	1.175	.151	.880	-.752	1.215	1.047	.295
	EXR2	.351	1.185	1.193	.233	-.288	1.125	.621	.534
	EXR3	.839***	1.239	3.424	.001	1.058	1.301	1.222	.222
Intrinsic rewards	ITR1	.343**	1.775	2.343	.019	.407**	1.089	2.097	.036
	ITR2	.398**	1.246	2.378	.017	-.100	1.065	.476	.634
	ITR3	.498***	2.045	2.880	.004	.825***	1.150	5.517	.000
Work relations	WKR1	.278*	1.095	1.897	.058	-.100	1.152	.476	.634
	WKR2	.882***	1.095	11.196	.000	.825***	1.152	5.517	.000
Work stress	WKE1	.610***	1.178	2.882	.004	.059	1.299	.212	.832
	WKE2	.149	1.654	.491	.623	.964***	1.328	5.117	.000
	WKE3	.508**	1.565	2.213	.027	.024	1.164	.089	.929

Table 4: Results for the structural model (path coefficients)

	Germany				Japan			
	PC	VIF	t-value	p-value	PC	VIF	t-value	p-value
PSM	-.06	1.16	.86	.39	.05	1.27	.57	.57
PSM-fit	.03	1.39	.40	.69	-.01	1.34	.11	.91
Extrinsic rewards	.16**	1.08	2.17	.03	.12	1.03	.72	.47
Intrinsic rewards	.31***	1.51	4.48	.00	.09	1.71	1.03	.30
Work relations	.35***	1.39	5.47	.00	.46***	1.56	5.44	.00
Work stress	-.19***	1.08	3.40	.00	-.27***	1.16	3.28	.00

Notes: PC=Path coefficients; VIF=ariance inflation factor; R²: Germany 48.9% / Japan 46.0%; N_{Ger}=159, N_{Jap}=105;

Table 5: Results of the multigroup analysis (MGA)

	Diff means	t-value	p-value
PSM	.11	.98	.33
PSM-fit	.04	.33	.74
Extrinsic rewards	.04	.26	.79
Intrinsic rewards	.22**	1.97	.05
Work relations	.11	1.02	.31
Work stress	.08	.82	.41

* * * An earlier draft was presented by the second author at the Academy of Japanese Business Studies (JABS) in New Orleans, June 27th to 30th 2016.

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