

Culture dictates how we cope with COVID's impact on our careers

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Whether we're more concerned with our own career development or the success of the company is often determined by our culture, reveals new research from Durham University Business School.

Researchers Yanjun Guan, Hong Deng, and Xinyi Zhou indicated that culture plays a key role in shaping the way people assess and cope with the stress on their work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

They reviewed research on personal cultural orientations, e.g. values and thinking styles, as well as national culture and its influence.

Their findings show that in countries that value individualism – such as the UK, America and Australia – people tend to form an independent mindset to guide their behaviour. This will direct their attention to stressors closely related to their personal career development, such as job insecurity, difficulties of working from home, and new career opportunities. In contrast, in a collectivistic culture – such as in Japan and China – people's attention may go beyond personal career development to issues related to work groups, organisations, and social networks.

To cope with stress associated with COVID-19, individual coping strategies have also been found to be shaped by national culture.

For example, directly solving the associated problems are heavily emphasised in American society whereas accommodating and reconsidering existing problems are more valued in Japanese society.

Many people have also had to use alternative ways – such as working from home and using online communication – to carry on working. People in cultures that have lower levels of inequality, like in the UK, may be allowed some control over their work and life. Findings indicate that as they are likely to be less affected, they'll experience lower stress.

Guan says: "It's also important to remember that, in a globalising world, people take influences from foreign cultures too, by accessing international media and so on. This suggests that we're capable of developing multiple cultural identities, and these identities can be primed and activated by relevant cues to help individuals adapt to the changing situational demands."

This approach helps to understand cross-cultural differences in coping strategies and career management strategies under the COVID-19 pandemic, Guan states, and provides important guidance for individuals to develop a more flexible and adaptive way to cope with the emerging challenges in their career development.

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