Work Cultures: How Professions Form Subcultures
Comparing an iWAM sample for a profession with a sample for a culture

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Recently I have received several requests like this one: "We are doing a study about marketing our products in the U.K. Can you give me a profile of the work attitude of marketing executives who work in the distribution sector?" This paper describes how such a question can be answered by applying our modeling principles on the iWAM questionnaire.

Collecting the data

While since December 2001 we added some limited occupational categories to the iWAM public database, we currently don't have the amount of data to give a full answer to a question as described above. The best answer would come from selecting a strict sample of people matching the query. In the sample above, that would mean getting 20 or more senior sales executives working in what that customer means by "the distribution sector" to fill out the iWAM questionnaire. Given that we know that metaprograms are context-specific, it would be even better to give the instruction to fill out the questionnaire for the specific context of making purchases. Lacking that amount of detail and not having the necessary data means that at this moment the correct answer is: "Sorry, I can't help you with that question."

However, our iWAM database does have categories such as "Executive/senior management" and "sales/marketing/advertising." The sample size of the database is becoming large enough (for some countries) to draw meaningful conclusions. In an earlier study[1] we found that it was difficult to draw valid international conclusions based on occupation. This might be because national differences balance out the occupational differences. In this study, we examine the relationship between the occupational culture and the national culture. For this paper we mined 4 samples from our database[2]. First we'll look at U.S. executives and senior managers, compared with the U.S. cultural profile. Next we'll do the same comparison for the U.K. Thirdly, we'll compare sales/marketing/advertising professionals from both countries to their respective cultures.

Making a model

Once we have a group of people, the next step is making the model. Given we do not know whether the persons who filled out the iWAM questionnaire are successful in their profession, we are limited to building a standard group of that profession. In summary, that means computing the average and standard deviation for each of the 48 iWAM parameters. The standard group is then defined as the area between [mean – 1 stdev] and [mean + 1 stdev]. If we presume that the population can be interpreted as a "normal distribution," we know that approximately two-thirds of the persons tested fall into the area defined as the standard group.

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[1] Occupational Study, published in discussion forum of LABprofile.org (8 June 2002)

[2] Samples for other countries such as Belgium were too small at the time of this study (12 November 2002)

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Explaining the models

To make sense of the resulting standard group, we can compare this standard group to standard group representing the country's culture as a whole. The average sample size is only 25, which is a bit on the small side for drawing general conclusions, but which is enough to give a good indication of the kind of observations one can make, especially when our findings are confirmed by other studies. Since our findings are different from other studies, the results should be looked at with some precaution.

I have chosen to represent the results graphically, comparing the models for the profession with their cultural model. An explanation of the parameter names below the graphs can be found in Appendix 1.

Model 1: U.S. Executives & Senior Managers

Figure 1 represents the first 22 parameters from the iWAM questionnaire. The purple area indicates the U.S. Standard Group commonly used by the iWAM software (built in October 2001, n=231). The blue lines indicate the high and low of the standard group for the executive/senior management group (consisting of 26 people working in the U.S. tested during 2002).
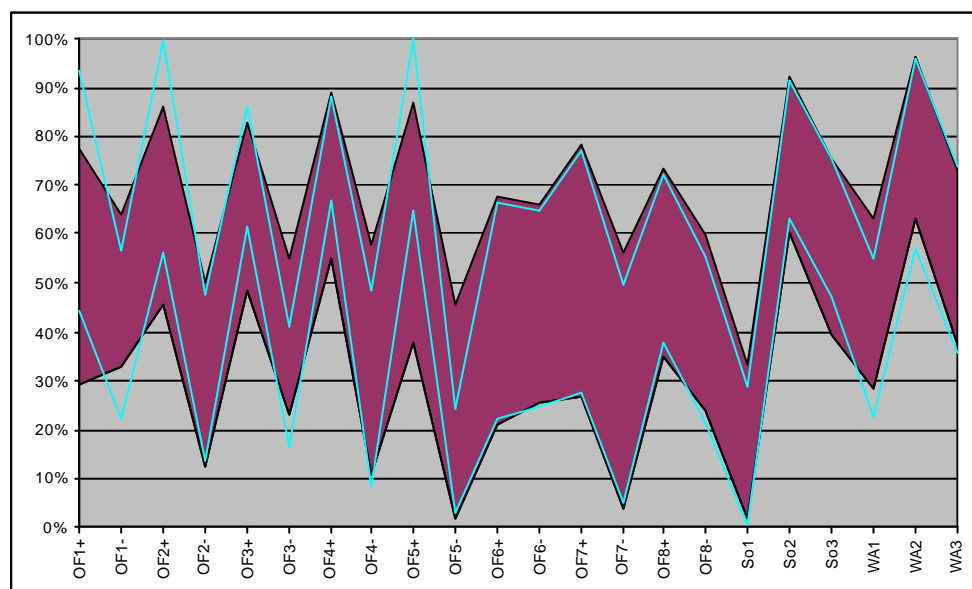

First notice that for many parameters the group for the model is quite different from the U.S. standard group, and often the group for the model is much smaller. From looking at these differences, we can conclude how executives and managers differ from the average population. Especially when the differences are large, these would be confirmed when comparing the means of both samples (using T-tests). Parameters only showing small differences would probably show up as not being significantly different when using T-tests[3].

From our visual analysis we learn that the executives and senior managers are much proactive than the average population (OF1+), have less patience (OF1-), are more goal-oriented (OF2-), are more internally referenced (OF3+) and listen less to other people (external reference, OF3-). Furthermore, they are more options-oriented (OF4+) and are less likely to follow procedures (OF4-). They look at the big picture (OF5+) and are less concerned with

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[3] If one has very large data samples, even small differences between 2 mean scores will prove statistically relevant. As Arnold, Cooper and Robertson argue in *Work Psychology* (3rd ed. 1998): "*if the effect is so small, albeit detectable, are we going to worry about it?*"

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details (OF5-). Finally, in their work approach there is less willingness to do things themselves (see WA1: "use"), which is consistent with the notion that managers should delegate in stead of doing things themselves. These findings are confirmed by other studies.

Figure 2 represents the other 26 iWAM parameters in similar fashion. We can see that the group of executives and senior managers is more motivated by power and status than the average population (Mo1). For deciding whether someone is good at the work they do, they require more consistency (Co6), but are less interested in doing things together (Co8). Most executives and senior managers are people oriented (IF1), are less interested in tools (IF2), and a bit less to systems (wider range for IF3, especially downwards) and finally pay less attention to timing and specific deadlines than the average population.
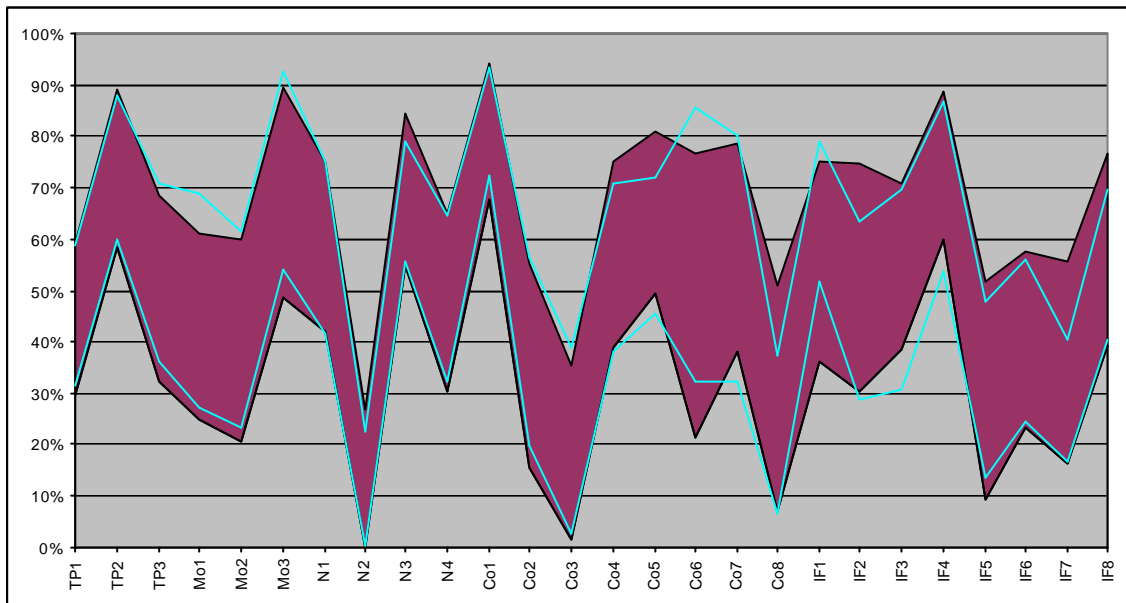

Model 2: U.K. Executives & Senior Managers

For the second model, we proceed in a similar fashion as we did for the model above. Figures 3 and 4 show the comparison of 24 executives and senior managers working in the United Kingdom tested in 2002 with our 2001 U.K. standard group (n=104). In addition, we can also compare this sample to their U.S. counterparts by analyzing how the blue lines on these 2 figures compare to the blue lines on the previous 2 figures.

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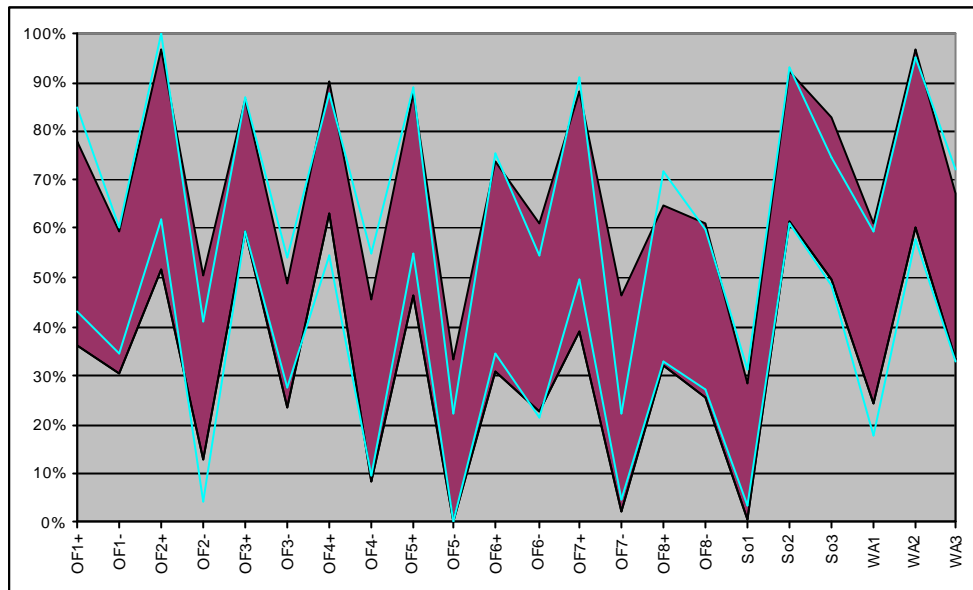
As was the case for their U.S. counterparts, this group is more proactive than the general work population (OF1+ higher, OF1- lower) and is more goal oriented (OF2+). If we compare the British manager to our previous U.S. sample, they are more willing to wait (OF1- higher) and listen more to others (higher on OF3-). They seem to be less interested to search for alternative ways of doing things (larger standard group for OF4+). Actually, the range for OF4+ is even wider than for the average U.K. population, as is the range for procedures (OF4-), which means that the sample is more spread out for these 2 parameters. As expected, the group looks more at the big picture (high on breath: OF5+, low on depth OF5-) than the general population, but it's less outspoken than for their U.S. counterparts. Both in comparison to the general population and especially when compared to their U.S. counterparts, they tend to pay more attention to the non-verbals (OF6+ higher) and less to how things are said (OF6- lower). Managers tend to appreciate social contact but compared to their U.S. counterparts, they like more working with others (higher OF7+, lower OF7-), and require less that their office door is closed. Some U.K. managers want more sole responsibility than the general U.K. population (OF8+).
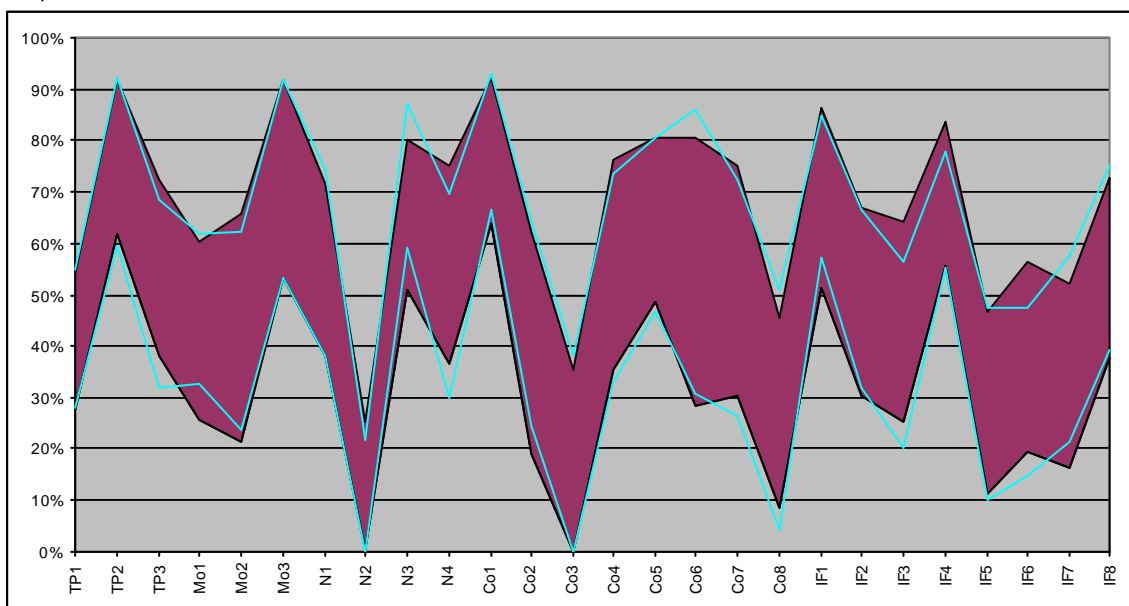

With figure 4, we learn that while managers are more motivated by power and status than the average U.K. work population, in comparison to their U.S. counterparts Power (Mo1)

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is less important for the British. Compared to the general U.K. population, managers have a higher willingness to be the kind of person the organization wants (higher N3) and less tolerance for diverging behavior (N4). Their people orientation (IF1) is similar to that of U.S. management, but given cultural differences between the U.S. and the U.K., it's more in line with the U.K. average. Finally, compared to U.S. managers their attention for systems (IF3) is even smaller, but they pay more attention to time (IF7) than U.S. executives.
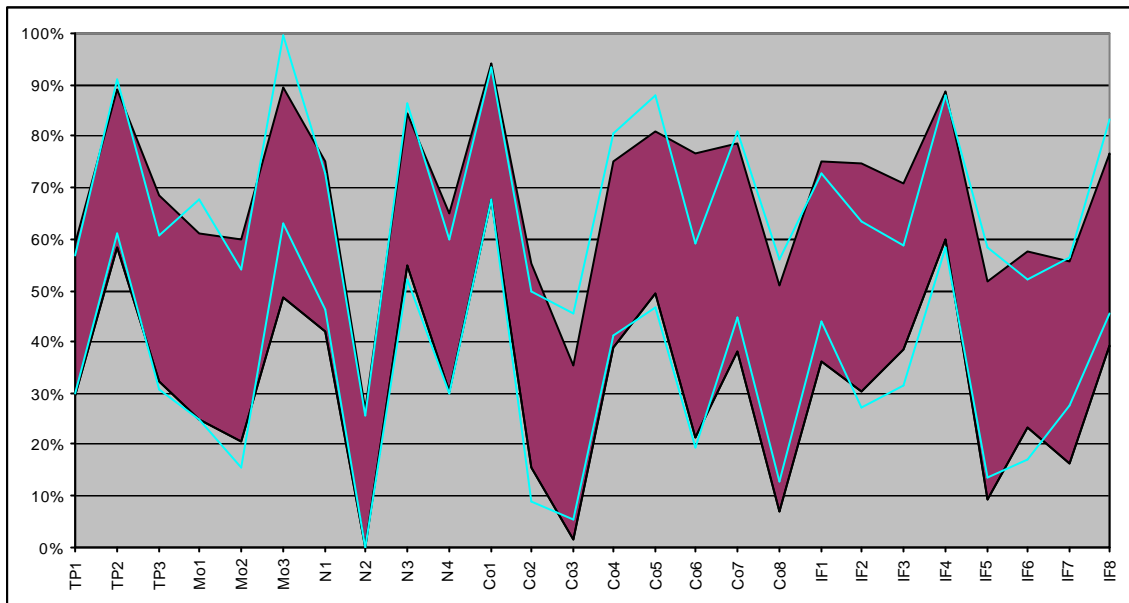
Model 3: U.S. employees in Sales/Marketing/Advertising

Again we compare a sample of 25 persons to the U.S. standard group. The aggregated group for sales, marketing, and advertising is more diverse in terms of attitude than for executives and senior managers. Other studies have concluded that some types of sales may be more procedural (high on OF4-) while marketers and advertising specialists are more options-oriented and are known for preferring new things (high on So3). Aggregating these two professions in one group may thus balance out typical differences.

Yet, even with this warning in mind, figure 5 below allows us to conclude that persons active in sales, marketing, and advertising are also more proactive (OF1+) than average and share the goal orientation drive (OF2+) with executives, but have more difficulties dealing with bad news (OF2-), while having more patience (OF1-) than U.S. executives. Since it's more important for sales people to listen to the customer, a major motivation is naturally external reference (OF3-). If the population had been a pure sales population, we would have expected a smaller range for that parameter, higher on the scale. They like social contact at work (OF7-). They want sole responsibility and don't desire to be team players (high on OF8+, low on OF8-). They tend to like evolution, change and new things (So2 & So3).
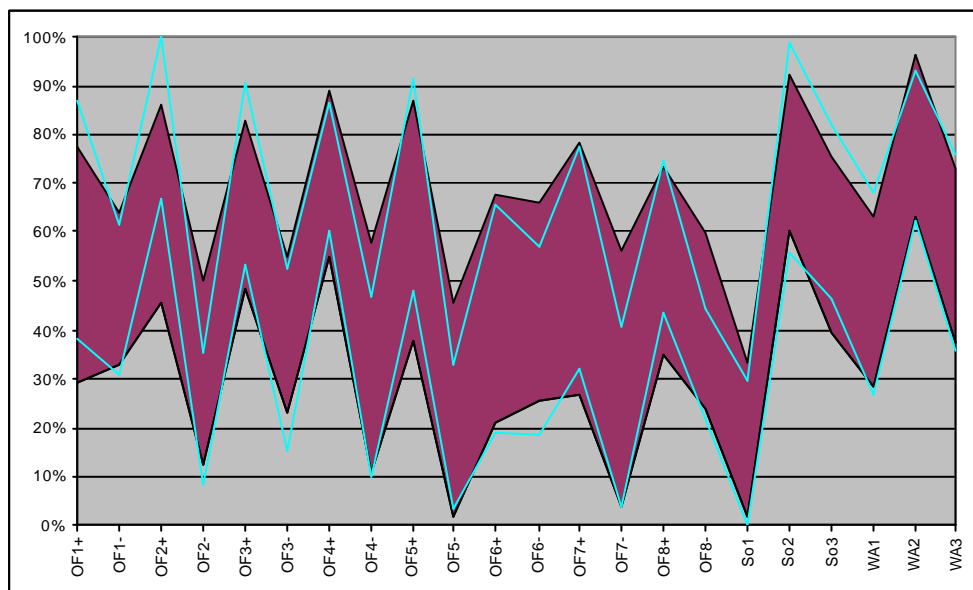

From Figure 6 we learn that they are less interested in the future (TP3) than the average U.S. work population (and executives), are more motivated by status (Mo1) and achievement (Mo3), and are more likely to be convinced by reading something than by other means (Co3). In contrast to senior managers, they don't think that it needs to proven time after time whether someone is good (low on Co6). They aren't as people oriented as the senior managers (IF1), but share the lack of interest for tools (IF2) and systems (IF3), while being a bit more money oriented (higher upper limit of standard group for IF5) and more interested in doing things (IF8) for themselves.

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Model 4: U.K. employees in Sales/Marketing/Advertising

For this last model, we compared 25 people to the U.K. 2001 standard group. In addition, comparing the sample to their U.S. counterparts may again bring us some interesting observations.
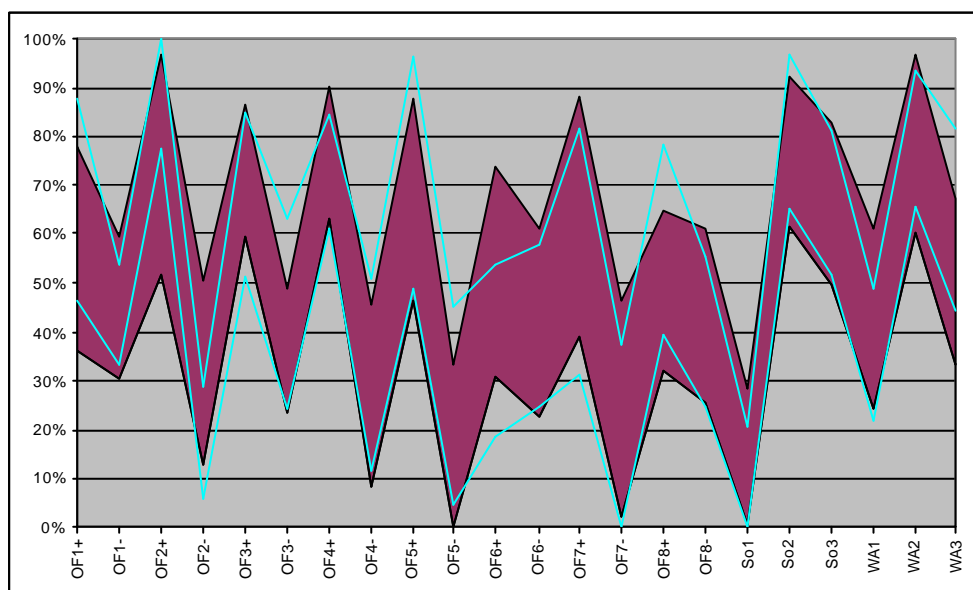
In their U.S. counterparts, we notice their proactivity (OF1+), their goal orientation (OF2+) and demotivation when confronted with problems (OF2-). But U.K. salespeople are even more proactive (OF1+) and pay more attention to external reference (OF3-) than their counterparts. They seem to pay more attention to detail (OF5-) but less to the non verbal aspects of communication (OF6+). Their desire to have sole responsibility (OF8+) is strong compared to the UK standard group but comparable to that of the Americans for this profession. This British sample shares the interest for evolution and novelty with the U.S. sample, but the British are even more interested in new things (So1, So2 & So3). Finally, this graph teaches us that when compared to an average U.K. population, this sample prefers organizing things (WA3) above doing things (WA1). Compared to their U.S. colleagues they have less energy for doing things themselves (WA1: use is lower).

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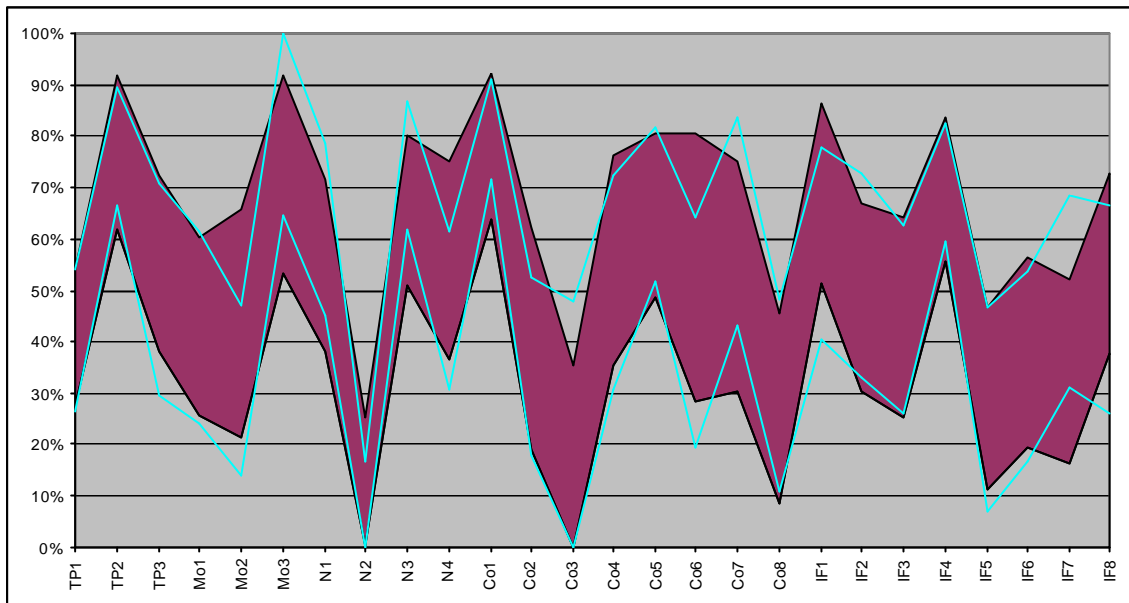
Again comparing this sample to the U.S. sample we can say that the British sample pays more attention to the future (TP3) and is less concerned by power and status (Mo1). We find the same lack of interest for affiliation as with the U.S. sample (Mo2), but this difference is even larger when we compare it to the U.K. population. The sense of being part of the team seems a better motivator than in the United States. Similarly, people in the sample try to be the person the organization needs (N3), as do their U.S. counterparts and do not appreciate deviant behavior (N4). These patterns become especially visible when compared to the UK work culture. Again, we find the same convincer patterns as for their U.S. counterparts, with similar differences from the general population. Their interest for people (IF1), tools (IF2), systems (IF3) and time (IF7) is higher than for their U.S. counterparts, while they are far less concerned by what they are doing (IF8).

Conclusions

This paper has illustrated how the iWAM database can be used to analyse work cultures, both on a country level as on a job level. Still, this kind of analysis has its limitations. First, the iWAM database for the specific occupations is too small to draw absolute conclusions about these differences, especially when the findings aren't similar to what can be found in the literature[4]. Secondly, given that the iWAM questionnaire is context specific, we would like more precise data samples to give detailed answer to questions as the one presented in the introduction to this paper. Thirdly, the method of analysis should be complemented by t-tests in order to evaluate the statistical significance of the difference between the groups we have compared.

Even with these warnings, the findings in this article present some **important lessons**: First, it indicates that different professions need to be approached in different manners. Secondly, using an approach that works in the U.S. may not work in the U.K., both because of general cultural difference but even because of job specific differences.

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[4] As Harry C.Triadis points out in his book "*Culture and Social Behavior*" (1994), an explanation may be that most descriptions of culture focus on *the prototypical individuals* in the culture, while in reality there are large variations within each culture.

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References:

Merlevede, Patrick (2002), Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation (iWAM) – Statistical Manual
Merlevede, Patrick (2002), Models of Reference, published on labprofile.org (sept 11th, 2002)

Appendix 1: iWAM Profile Parameter Overview

Basic Profile: Operating Factors

Note: jobEQ considers the BP patterns as **double patterns**, instead of the single pattern as they were considered others. In contrast to the other patterns (below), other models aggregate the + and - patterns as if they are on one scale – given the statistical data collected for iWAM (statistical clustering), we found that the correlation of most of there related patterns was less than 50%.

		+	- (same in reverse)
BP1	action *level*	**Starts**: (OF1P) has energy for initiation and may be impatient (impulsive / *proactive* / action)	**Follows**: (OF1M) has patience & can wait (serenity, endurance, persistence, reflective, reaction)
BP2	**action** *direction*	**Approach:** (OF2P) is goal oriented & motivated by goals, can maintain focus over time (goal focus/toward)	**Avoid (Prevent)**: (OF2M) focuses on problems and errors (problem focus/away from)
BP3	evaluation reference	**Internal (Individual motives)** (OF3P) internal reference frame for evaluation: decides for him/herself - ignores or interprets feedback, does not want to hear what others think	**external satisfiers or expectations** (OF3M) external reference frame for evaluation: needs outside help to decide - needs feedback, cares what others think
BP4	**task attitude**	(OF4P) creates, generates **alternatives** & new *options*	(OF4M) wants and needs to follow *procedures* Note: possibility / necessity (IPU Profile, MPVI)
BP5	task orientation	**Breadth:** (OF5P) understands the overview and the big picture (overview/*general*/global/)	**Depth:** (OF5M) needs to work with details and sequences / exactly (*specific*/detail) - information
BP6	communication sort	**Nonverbal (Affective)**: (OF6P) communicates nonverbally	**Neutral** (content)**:** (OF6M) assumes that all meaning is in the text / may even disapprove overt emotion
BP7	**work environ- ment type**	**Social Contact (Group)**: (OF7P) needs contact with others	**Social Independence**: (OF7M) doesn't need contact with others, wants to work independent, alone
BP8	work assignment type	(OF8P) Needs to have **sole responsibility** for his/her task (*independent*)	(OF8M) wants **shared responsibility** with the *team*

the patterns in both columns might be seen as pulling the person in the opposite direction

Relationship Sorting (The clock/need for change)

needs to change significant aspects of the job every X years

So1= sameness/**similarities**/stability　　　So2= **comparison**/improvement/qualification　　　So3= new, difference/change/**distinctions**

Motivational Types: Hierarchical Criteria - Basic Motive: (McClelland, 1953)

Mo1= motivated by opportunities for control and power, status, competition (winning), politics, **dominance**, preservation, in charge, boss

Mo2= motivated by opportunities to belong (affiliation), connection, relationship, cooperation, **popularity**, harmony, inclusion, respect, friend

Mo3= motivated by opportunities to achieve (success/achievement), competence, **performance**, intelligence, objectives, results, expression, manager

Work Approach (Task Sequence / Distribution of energy)

How does this person sequence their tasks?

Wa1 = % takes action (use) - **activist**

Wa2 = % analyze and theorize / understand (concept) - **theorist**

Wa3 = % organize and establish the relationship between the parts / structure, plan (structure) - **structurist**

Temporal Processing (Time Orientation)

TP1 = % focuses on the **past**, and may tend to be critical

TP2 = % focuses on the here and now (**present**), and may be practical

TP3 = % focuses on the **future**, and may be a dreamer

Norming - Rule Structure (Respect for the norms)

N1 = % needs to tell others how to behave (*my/my*) - rules **assertive** - universalism

N2 = % is indifferent (does not care) about others (*my/.*) - rules **indifference**

N3 = % wants to adapt to the needs of the organization/boss - rules **complacent**

N4 = % tolerates the non-conforming behavior of others (*my/your*) - rules **tolerant** - particularism

Convincer patterns - To be convinced, needs to:

Input Representation	Interpretation process
CO1= *see* (it looks right)	CO5= % needs some *examples* to be convinced
CO2= *hear* (it sounds right)	CO6= % is *automatic*ally convinced
CO3= *read* (it makes sense / list of reasons) - information & instructions	CO7= % is never quite convinced (*consistent*)
CO4= *do* (it feels right)	CO8= % needs some time to be convinced (*period of time*)

Interest Filters (work preference / Focus of attention)

What are the most important things to focus on? (whatever types of things the person focuses on, need to be in the person's environment)

IF1 = % **people** (who)	IF5 = % **money**
IF2 = % **tools** and instruments	IF6 = % **place**, location (where)
IF3 = % **systems** and processes	IF7 = % **time** (when)
IF4 = % **information** / data / facts/ knowledge (What/why)	IF8 = % **activity** / task / do (what/how)