

Intercultural Comparison of Meaning in Life

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Meaning in Life in Peruvian and German Culture

Introduction

The **SoMe Questionnaire** (German: LeBe; Schnell & Becker, 2007) was applied to a representative German (N=604) sample and a translated version (Spanish) to a Peruvian (N=110) sample. The questionnaire was designed to assess individual sources of meaning in life as well as meaningfulness and crisis of meaning. It measures 26 sources of meaning; they are summarised by the five dimensions **Horizontal Self-transcendence, Vertical Self-transcendence, Self-actualisation, Order and Well-being and Communality**. The German version of the SoMe Questionnaire shows high internal consistencies (Cronbach alphas of .84 -.93 for the 5 dimensions), the Spanish version also shows acceptable internal consistencies (.58 -.91).

Results

The results reveal that people from Peru tended to answer *more affirmatively* than Germans (Fig.1). Hence, for analyses of differences, both data sets were ipsatised for making them comparable (Fig.2).

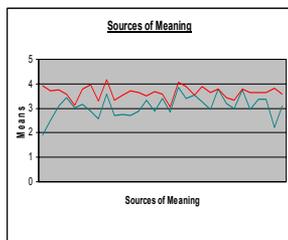


Figure 1: red=Peru, green=Germany
26 Sources of Meaning and 5 Dimensions

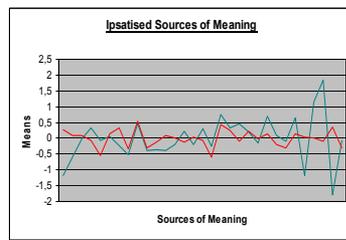


Figure 2: red=Peru, green=Germany
Sources of Meaning and Dimensions after ipsatising the data

❖ Vertical and Horizontal Self-transcendence are more important in Peru than in Germany

❖ Mancova (age controlled) shows differences [F(2,700)=45.7, p<.001, $\eta^2=.12$] between **Vertical** [F(1,702)=89.1, p<.001] and **Horizontal Self-transcendence** [F(1,702)=5.8, p<.01] in Peru and Germany. Peruvians have stronger Vertical Self-transcendence (Effect size d=.85), but less Horizontal Self-transcendence (Effect size d=.07).

❖ The dimension of Well-being and Communality is most appropriate for predicting Meaningfulness in Peru; Self-actualisation in Germany

❖ Multiple regression reveals that the dimension of **Well-being and Communality** is best for predicting Meaningfulness in Peru ($R^2=.50$, p<.001; $\beta=.43$, p<.01). Contrary to predictions, Horizontal Self-transcendence shows the highest regression weight in Germany ($R^2=.50$, p<.001; $\beta=.39$, p<.01).

❖ Order is more important in Germany than in Peru

❖ An independent-samples t-test to compare **Order** in Peru and Germany is significant with $t(164.28)=4.79$, p<.01 (Effect size d=.46).

❖ Self-actualization is more important in Peru than in Germany

❖ An independent-samples t-test to compare **Self-actualisation** in Peru and Germany is significant with $t(177.1)=-2.64$, p<.01 (Effect size d=.24).

Exploratory Factor Analysis for the Peruvian Sample

Principal components analysis (PCA) reveals the presence of four components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 61% of the variance. To facilitate interpretation of the 4 components, Varimax rotation was performed (Tab.1).

❖ **Development and expansion** is similar to the dimension of Self-actualisation in the German sample and indicates an examination of the individual self. Contrary to Self-actualisation, it includes more pleasant sources, as well as Tradition and Practicality. This suggests that it's important for Peruvians to explore themselves, but not forgetting their roots.

❖ **Prudence** points out to the association of Horizontal Self-Transcendence with Harmony and Knowledge, indicating an attitude of foresight and care.

❖ **Piety** includes Religiosity and—negatively loading—Power. It is therefore assumed that for Peruvians, having a very strong belief in institutional religion contradicts an aspiration to power.

❖ **Health** shows a main loading of Health, combined with a minor loading of Achievement. Individuals orienting themselves by these sources of meaning show a disinclination towards Spirituality which is probably viewed as incommensurable with an explicit striving for health.

❖ **Self-transcendence** and **Order** could not be replicated. Peruvian people rather seem to integrate both into their everyday life. According to Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation, we suppose that in Germany, Self-Transcendence and Order are clearly distinguished aspects of life, while in Peru they merge with other sources of meaning into a more integrated understanding of the self.

	Principal components analysis with Varimax Rotation *			
	Development Expansion	Prudence	Piety	Health Awareness
Individualism	.744			
Fun	.707			
Achievement	.705			.366
Wellness	.691			
Practicality	.690	.344		
Tradition	.679			
Attentiveness	.659	.428		
Love	.627	.316		
Self-Knowledge	.621	.340	.377	
Freedom	.616			-.312
Challenge	.592	.409		
Reason	.526	.493		.303
Spirituality	.485		.302	-.397
Power	.482	.440	-.477	
Harmony		.763		
Generativity		.755		
Social Commitment		.735		
Knowledge		.717		
Development		.697		
Creativity		.652		
Union with Nature		.649		
Care	.477	.547		
Morality	.450	.526		
Communality	.517	.530	.306	
Religiosity			.735	
Health				.770

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.
*. Rotation converged in 14 iterations.

References

- Gapp, S. (2007). *Lebensbedeutungen im interkulturellen Vergleich*. Diploma thesis.
Luhmann, N. (2006). *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
Schnell, T. & Becker, P. (2007). *LeBe - Fragebogen zu Lebensbedeutungen und Lebenssinn*. Göttingen: Hogrefe

Discussion

The results show that sources of meaning are manifold in both cultures. Nevertheless, Peruvian and German individuals obtain meaning from different sources, as was expected.

Furthermore, sources of meaning show other correlational patterns in the Peruvian sample than in the German, indicating a more integrated understanding of the self and self-fulfilment. In spite of limitations of the study, such as the relatively small size of the Peruvian sample and possible language problems, it contributes to what we know about the diversity and complexity of meaning in life.