RESTART@WORK: A STRATEGIC PATTERN FOR OUTPLACEMENT
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Guidelines for the cross-cultural transfer of R@W outplacement intervention

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Foreword

The main goal of these guidelines is to maximize the effectiveness of the interventions that will be planned and carried out in France, Spain and Bulgaria following the R@W model, which turned out to be effective in the Italian culture. There are many aspects that might *influence – positively and negatively* – the effectiveness of R@W-based interventions. We call these aspects "*moderators*" of the relationship between the R@W protocol and its localized effectiveness. Some moderators are just out of our control and should therefore be taken for granted. An example is the number of positions opened in the job market in a determined period in time, which set the top limit to the number of people that can re-enter the job market in the same period of time. Obviously, the effectiveness of R@W-based interventions is strongly influenced by these limits. Many moderators are relatively unchangeable and should therefore be used to *adapt the intervention in order to maximize efficiency*. Most of these "input" aspects are related to *the socio-economic context* in which the interventions are carried out and they constitute precious information according to which *the R@W-based interventions should be tailored*. Other moderating factors are related to the users. For instance, one or more of the peculiarities that are most related with the effectiveness of R@W-based interventions in Italy, such as trainees' need for re-motivation, optimism, and hope, might not have a similar impact on the effectiveness of the model or might not even be a key factor in the interventions. Different groups of users might have different needs, and *the ability of the intervention of satisfying those needs is one of the major predictor of its effectiveness*. To exemplify, motivating and empowering strategies that are so helpful in Italy might be useless for another set of users for whom, on the contrary, technical training is the first and most important barrier preventing re-integration in the job market. In order to maximize the effectiveness of R@W-based outplacement interventions it is therefore *essential to conduct situated and thorough context analysis and training needs analysis*. As far as the latter, R@W-based outplacement interventions should also be *tailored around the final users*. To satisfy their needs, so that they can re-enter the job market quickly and effectively, it is critical to have information regarding their skills, values, interests and personality (among others). Hence, it is essential to conduct valid assessments of these individual

characteristics. The tools that have been used in Italy are provided as annexes to the R@W protocol and should be used as an initial prompt. Previously localized (or "indigenous") tools should be employed in case the vocational designers think that they could outperform the original tools, because *the main goal of the adaptation is maximizing effectiveness rather than comparing different countries*.

Yet, there still might be a (valid) concern that the cross-cultural adaptation process of both assessment and training activities might itself limit the effectiveness of the R@W model. Hence, these guidelines should be used to *minimize the negative influence that the process of translation and adaptation of the R@W model have on the effectiveness of localized R@W-based interventions*. In the adaptation process, the *need to establish the appropriateness of the training actions and assessment tools within the importing culture has the highest priority*. The need to compare the results of both training and assessment interventions across different cultures has a lower priority (but still is desirable).

Italy, Spain, France and Bulgaria compared according to Hofstede's 4 factor model of national culture

Highlighting the cultural differences between Italy, the country in which the R@W model has been developed, and the three "importing" cultures might help to focus on a cross-cultural perspective that is useful to understand and predict how and when there might be *cross-cultural discrepancies that prevent the generalization of the R@W model in some of its aspects and/or that prevent the generalization of the knowledge that has been built using the model to plan outplacement interventions*. At this aim, Hofstede (1980, Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012) provides the most famous normative framework of cultural dimensions that differentiate citizenships of different countries in how they behave at work and at home. This comparison is useful because Italy, Spain, France and Bulgaria might seem culturally closer than they are.

For example (see Figure 1), Italy scores 50 at the *Power distance* scale, which is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed *unequally*" (Hofstede et al. 2010). Hence, in Italy hierarchy and inequalities across people (of wealth, power, status, benefits, …) are relatively accepted. Spain is slightly higher (57) in power distance. The biggest difference can be seen between Italy and both *France (68) and Bulgaria (70), where the unequal distribution of power and benefits is largely justified and deemed acceptable*. In countries with low power distance, industrial democracy is a need and employees think that they should participate more in the decisions taken by management. In these countries, autonomy and "pro-activity" are more important. In high power distance societies employees expect to be told what to do by a benevolent and autocratic leader. Compared with Italy and Spain, which are somewhat in the middle, France and Bulgaria are closer to the higher end of the continuum.

The *Individualism/Collectivism* scale typically highlights huge differences between eastern and western countries, with the latter being more individualist. The scale measures the degree of interdependence that a society maintains among its members (Hofstede et al., 2010). In individualist societies people have to care about their selves and their family. In collectivist societies the group is more important than the individual and members of a group are protected in exchange for loyalty. The four countries involved in this analysis show moderate to large differences. Italy is the most individualist country and France is slightly lower. Both countries are centered on the individual. Spain is in the middle and Bulgaria focuses much more on the "we"

dimension. *In Spain and moreover in Bulgaria (the latter being the only collectivist society among the four), loyalty and commitment toward the "in-group"* (which can be a family, a group of colleagues, or the working organization) *are more important and appreciated*. In collectivist societies, *cooperation rather than competition is appreciated in the workplace*. Hence, the importance of training teamwork skills might be higher in these countries (especially in Bulgaria) than in Italy. In addition, vocational group training might be more effective than in Italy, since people might aggregate more easily and the group might develop quickly to the more mature "performing" stage of group development (Tuckman, 1965).

The third dimension of Hofstede's model of national culture is *Masculinity/Femininity*. A high score at this scale represents Masculinity and indicates that people are driven by need for achievement, competition and success. *Being the best in one's field is very important in Italy, which scores 70 at this dimension*. The other nations involved in this comparison score slightly below the mean, at about 40. This dimension is important to understand the basic drivers of motivation. In psychological terms, need for achievement (being the best, prove that you are better, demonstrate competency) is motivating in Italy, whereas need for competence and learning (i.e. a learning goal orientation) is more important in the other three nations. In these nations it is less important to prove others that you are right, or to demonstrate others that you are good at something. Instead, people might more likely feel the need of mastering the problem at hand and would probably try to demonstrate to their selves (and not to others) that they can effectively manage their tasks. In Feminine countries, liking your job is more important than being good at your job. *Feminine countries focus on "working in order to live", and managers adopt a participative style in which consensus is important*. In *Spain, France and Bulgaria (feminine countries) people value equality, solidarity and quality in their working lives*. Conflicts are resolved by compromise and negotiation. On the contrary, the most frequent conflict negotiation style in Italy is domination, competition and authority. In Feminine societies, benefits such as free time and flexibility are appreciated. Focus is on well-being, status is not shown. It is therefore reasonable to hypothesize that *in Spain, France and Bulgaria individual and organizational well-being is more valued by unemployed people than in Italy, where self-affirmation is a leading drive*. This is important when R@W based interventions will have to select organizations and propose them the unemployed.

Fig. 1 Italy, Spain, France and Bulgaria compared across Hofstede's 4-dimension model of national culture.

R@W - Restart@Work
a strategic pattern for outplacement
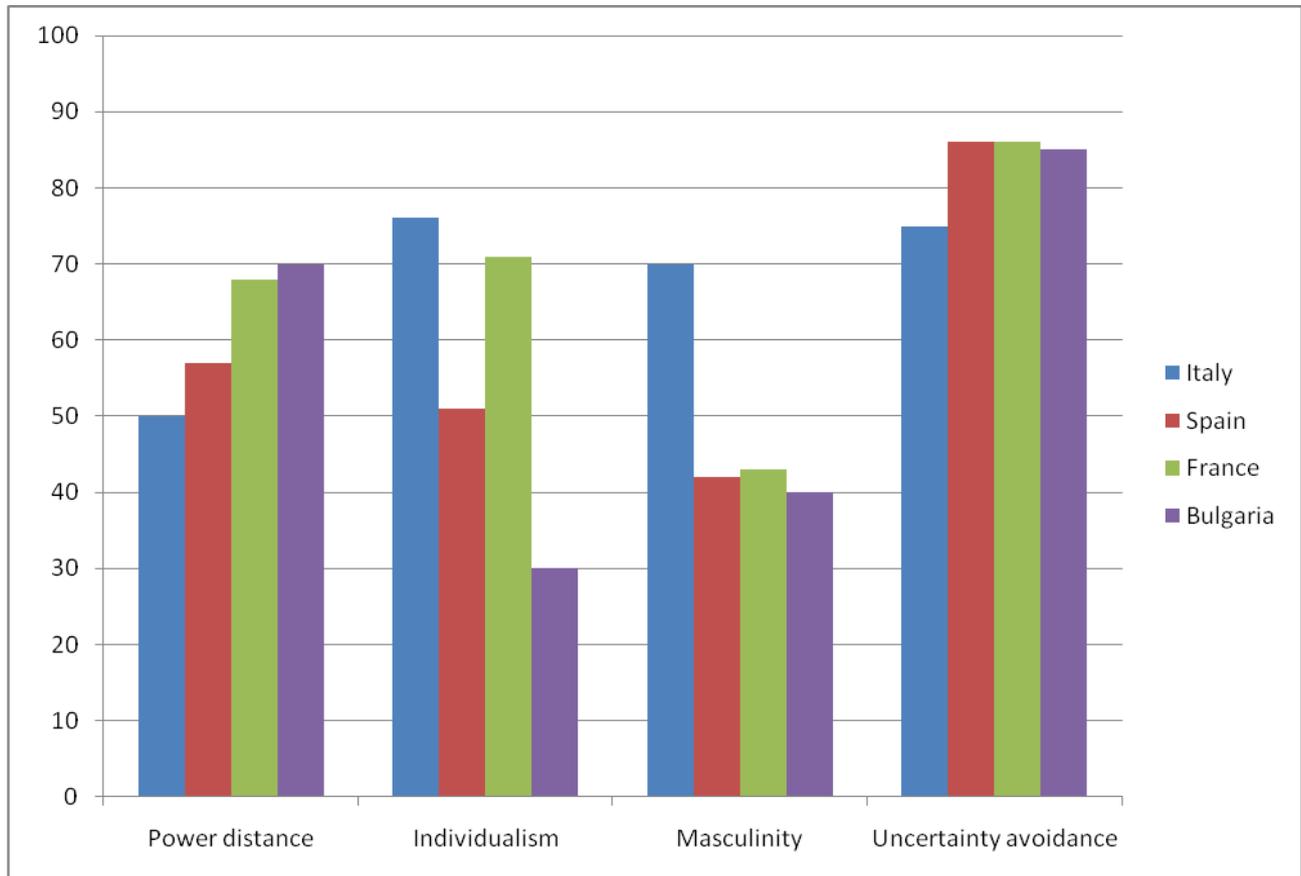
Uncertainty avoidance is the fourth dimension in this analysis. It is defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these (Hofstede et al., 2010). Countries with a high uncertainty avoidance drive strive to control the future and are anxious regarding ambiguous situations. All countries involved in this comparison score high at this scale, meaning that at the cultural level they would like to avoid uncertainty, respect codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant to uncommon behavior or persons. Precision and punctuality are the norm, and innovation/creativity might be resisted, at least in daily life. Security is an extremely important driver and it is very valued. In all the countries involved in this comparison, people work hard to gain security and control for their future.

Basic concepts in cross-cultural research and main steps of the translation process

In cross-cultural research, the goal is typically to compare different countries on a specific construct (e.g., general knowledge, intelligence, personality, …). When researchers find a difference in the measures they collected by means of their tools (e.g. tests of knowledge tests of intelligence, or personality inventories), they have to be sure that this difference can be interpreted as a difference in the underline construct (e.g. general knowledge) rather than a *measurement artifact,* i.e. a difference that can be explained, totally or partially, by the tools that have been employed to collect the data. The "noise" that the measurement tools

add to the assessment conducted by practitioners or researcher is called *method variance*, i.e. variance that comes from the method employed to measure the object of study. When different groups are compared, an assumption is made that the method variance is equal across groups. Otherwise, differences between the groups might be misinterpreted as differences in the construct under investigation rather than a mere method artifact. In cross-cultural research, the term *bias* is used to indicate disturbances to the interpretation of findings. An example will clarify this point. van de Vijver & Poortinga (2005) report that in the European Values Survey, the Spanish scores on an item measuring loyalty deviated from the overall pattern of results for this country. Upon closer examination, it appeared that, unlike other languages, the Spanish word for loyalty that was used has the connotation of sexual faithfulness ("fidelidad" was used rather than "lealtad"). This example illustrates why it is advisable to *use multiple translators* and ask them to converge by consensus on the final version. This error might have been detected by translators who know both countries and are familiar with the intended purpose of the question at hand. Also, the practice of *translating and back-translating* is useful and might effectively detect such errors. Beyond the semantic meaning (does the term translates back in the same way?), a great deal of attention has to be put on *comprehensibility, readability, and style*.

But *bias* might also derive from accurate translations. Suppose you have to measure general knowledge in Italy and in France, and you use the item "What is calvados made of?" You will probably find a large percentage of French people and a much smaller percentage of Italian people know that it is made from apples. How to interpret this result? It would be incredibly wrong to interpret this finding as an indication that French people have more general knowledge than Italian people (which may be, but we need better evidence!). The "noise" that has been introduced by *translating* (and not adapting) the question is that calvados is typical in France and a market niche in Italy, hence it is *less familiar* in the latter nation than in the former. This example illustrates why the typical translation/back-translation procedure can miserably fail (but still is useful and should be employed). The question "What is calvados made of?" is very easy to translate and can be translated back and forth in the two languages without any error (at the eyes of a skilled translator). An important principle that should be followed in adaptation is that "Effects of cultural and linguistic differences *that are not important to the intended uses of the tests* in the populations of interest should be minimized" (Hambleton, 2001). Hence, *translators should be able to identify sources of method bias*. Also, *translators must have knowledge of both cultures and a general knowledge of the subject matter*. In addition, it is useful to have experience with psychological tests, respondents' motivation, effects of speededness, and so on. Anytime there is a doubt that the adapted question, or sentence, or stimulus is not being understood equally in the two languages, *the amount of overlap in the construct measured* should be assessed a-posteriori (i.e. after a data collection) via construct-validity investigations. These investigations should be conducted by an expert in cross-cultural adaptation.

There are *two options* for the translation of learning and assessment tools. The first is called "*application*", and it is useful when a linguistically appropriate translation also turns out to be appropriate at the psychological level. The application only needs a good literal translation. Yet, *the translators* (or her supervisor) *have to be able to understand when this is not possible* and the "*adaptation*" option should be preferred. In the "Calvados" example, the translator should have noticed that the object around which the question was built is *differently familiar* in the two cultures. At this point, the item shall be translated "unfaithfully" in order to preserve as much as possible the original function of the question. For example,

asking Italian people "What is Grappa made of?" might have been a valid option. Obviously, in case a cross-cultural comparison will be based on this question the equivalence should be then established a-posteriori.

The following steps have been adapted from Hambleton & Patsula (1999) specifically for the transfer of the R@W placement protocol.

1. Ensure that construct equivalence exists in the language and cultural groups of interest. E.g. has the term "competency" the same meaning in the two countries?

2. Decide whether to import the proposed materials, use "native" materials, or develop new materials.

3. Select well-qualified translators.

4. Translate and/or adapt the material, choosing between application and adaptation.

5. Review the adapted version and make necessary revisions.

6. Conduct a small tryout of the adapted version.

7. Carry out a more ambitious field-test (

After the R@W protocol has been translated and/or adapted to the importing country, *its flexibility should be used to customize each intervention*. The most important aspect in this process is *context analysis*, from which general and specific goals shall be developed, deployed, and evaluated at the end of the intervention.

Implementing the adapted R@W protocol:

the importance of context analysis (R@W protocol, phase 1.1)

The R@W protocol is based on a Plan-Do-Check-Act (Deming, 1986) model of service delivery. In the Plan phase, the first activity is context analysis, according to which project designers should identify the geographical framework of reference, and collect and analyze data on the 1) economic system (gross regional product, trade, production, capital base), 2) social and demographic systems, including; 3) labor market and social security policies, including labor market public and private institutions, labor standards, unemployment benefit, re-employment services, training schemes, skills base, education levels and special competencies. The initial definition of the *geographical framework under investigation should both consider where the unemployed comes from and where they could successfully re-enter the job market*. For example, if major downsizings occur in a region, workers may still find many good-fitting positions opened in another developing region. Then, data regarding the *local economic and productive systems* should be collected and analyzed. Object of this analysis are production chains, industry clusters, number and size of the firms, gross regional product and development rate, and path-dependences. Industry clusters (or local industrial production systems) are geographically close and interdependent firms and industries that are characterized by buyer-supplier relationships, shared technology and know-how, and shared labor pool and institutions. Examples are "Pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing", "Cutlery and hand tool manufacturing", or

"Olive oil production". Path-dependence represents the extent to which affordances – the set of decisions available – are limited by decisions made in the past, even if past circumstances might no longer be relevant. It refers to the limits imposed by the productive history of a region or land.

The initial context analysis should also provide a *detailed quantitative representation of social and demographic characteristics* of people living in the geographical framework compared to those of unemployed people. Lastly, a detailed analysis of *the labor market and of social policies* should be conducted. Main aspects of interests in this phase are unemployment rate (e.g., percentage of labor force unemployed for more than 3 months, percentage of unemployed who are looking for a job, percentage of unemployed that no more look for a job – i.e. discouraged workers, percentage of unemployed that do not have the skills to look for a job – i.e. marginally attached workers, …). In the labor market and social policies analysis special attention should be devoted to the accurate description of *unemployment benefits* (or compensations), networks of *public and private institutions such as employment services, vocational training bodies and/or placement professionals* active in the geographical framework, and *regional, national and European legislation regarding labor and employment*. In addition, the labor market analysis should highlight the foreseen market demand of specific professional profiles (e.g. "web developer", "key account manager", "buyer"). Lastly, a first set of *funding agencies* should be listed in order to help fund raisers in their job before and during the intervention.

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