# Empirically Based Dimensions of National Cultures:

# G. Hofstede's Contribution to the Interface of Culture and Psychology

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## Introduction

In 1967, Geert Hofstede, an organizational psychologist in The Netherlands working for the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), initiated a project of unprecedented scope and complexity that stands to this day as a landmark of cross-cultural investigation. In the course of this research, questionnaire responses on work-related values were collected from all IBM employees at the various sites around the world where that multinational corporation was operating. In the course of two rounds of this survey, over 116000 questionnaires were gathered in 72 countries in 20 languages (Hofstede, 2001). The sheer number of respondents as well as of the countries and languages represented had never been equaled before and has rarely if ever been exceeded since. The initial results of this unique research effort were reported in a monograph by Hofstede (1980). Twenty-one years later, Hofstede (2001) presented and reviewed his accumulated evidence and integrated it with the prodigious number and variety of studies that his research had generated. More recently, another volume (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) appeared, designed to share Hofstede's results and insights on a less technical level with a wider circle of readers interested in the interplay between culture and behavior.

The objective of this article is to introduce the Hofstede's rationale and his findings as well as their wide-ranging implications for the various domains of psychology. To this

end, the pivotal concepts in Hofstede's research will be defined, his objectives and methods described, his results presented, and their implications teased out. In particular, questions will be raised as to the range of convenience of Hofstede's results beyond the corporate settings in which they were obtained, in relation to social behavior, personality, adjustment and maladaptation, and counseling and psychotherapeutic intervention.

When Hofstede embarked upon his research, neither he nor IBM had access to potential participants in the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries. Consequently, Latvia and its two Baltic neighbors were excluded from the date collection in the 1960's and 1970's. These barriers fell in 1991, and time has come to take stock of what pertinent information has been gathered and what remains and needs to be done.

**Key Concepts to Be Defined: Culture and Values**

Although social scientists share an intuitive concept of culture, the quest for an optimal definition has proved elusive. Several decades ago, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1953) counted 164 definitional statements. Against this background, perhaps it is best to limit oneself to the definition of culture by Kroeber and Parsons (1958, p. 583), quoted by Hofstede (2001, p. 9) as "transmitted and created pattern of values, ideas, and other symbolic meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior." Emphasis then is placed on "culture in our heads" or, more formally, subjective culture (Triandis, 1972). In elaboration of this notion, Hofstede (2001) describes culture "*as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another"* (italics in the original). The notion of the software of the mind (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) is

fundamental to the multinational, worldwide comparative project undertaken and completed by Hofstede. In his words, "the mind stands for the head, heart, and hands – that is for thinking, feeling, and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills. And as Kluckhohn has affirmed, culture in this sense includes values; systems of values are a core element of culture"(Hofstede, 2001, p.10).

Values are somewhat easier to define. Hofstede (2001, p.5) describes value "as a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others." Values are more permanent than attitudes and more general than beliefs. Values are directed to and away from objects. As such, they have direction and intensity. Hofstede (2001) cautions against equating values with deeds. Values can be measured by direct inquiry, through standardized questionnaires, and they can be plausibly inferred from tests and scales that are designed to measure attitudes, beliefs, and personality.

**Measures, Methods, Objectives: The Conduct of Research**

Hofstede's basic research tool was a self-report questionnaire that was specifically designed for the worldwide IBM survey. The content of the items pertained to satisfaction with working conditions, perceptions of the work situation, and personal goals and beliefs about the company and the job, in addition to the standard demographic information about age, gender, years of employment, years of schooling, and other variables. IBM's interest was to ascertain employees' satisfaction and problem areas. Hofstede's concern was to identify the basic dimensions of values in a corporate environment in order to eventually compare them across cultures.

With this objective in mind, the mass of data was subjected to a sequence of

multivariate statistical procedures. The major component of these procedures was factor analysis. Factor analysis makes it possible to substitute for a multitude of discrete correlation coefficients a limited number of dimensions that are statistically independent of each other. Factor analysis then can be likened to a statistical shorthand that results in making the data obtained comprehensible and eventually interpretable. Factor analysis, however, provides no information on the interpretation or meaning of the data obtained. Once the factors are identified, accumulation of information on the correlates of the factors identified can shed light on what these factors are like and what they measure. This is precisely what was done in the course of Hofstede's research project.

The innovative feature of Hofstede's research was the conduct of ecological factor analysis by means of which countries or cultures, rather than individuals, were compared. It is the ecological factor analysis that made possible the identification of stable, independent, and interpretable dimensions that constituted the principal finding of Hofstede's projects. Hofstede, moreover, is adamant in his warning that individual and ecological factor analyses should never be confounded. Thus, it should never be assumed that individual and ecological factor analyses would yield the same correlates.

**The Five Dimensions of Values Across Cultures**

On the basis of ecological multivariate procedures, Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions or axes and named them power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance, respectively.

Power distance refers to the acceptance of inequality in the exercise of leadership and

authority as well as in wealth, status, and privilege. The power distance index derived

from the value survey features three items concerned with fear or reluctance to express

disagreement with superiors, perception by the subordinates of autocratic or paternalistic

style of the decision makers, and the preference for such a mode of decision making.

High scorers endorse obedience as a central value and view social and economic

inequality as an established, natural order of things that is universal and immutable. Low

scorers favor egalitarianism, participatory decision making in families and in educational,

governmental, and business institutions. Socially, they prefer informality and are

uncomfortable with an excess of etiquette and ritual. In Hofstede's original data-base,

Middle Eastern and other Asian countries scored high on the power index scores; the

lowest scores were obtained in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland as well as in

New Zealand, Israel, and Austria.

Individualism-collectivism is a bipolar dimension. At the high end of the continuum,

individualism describes societies in which individual strivings and aspirations are

considered to be cardinal values. In such societies, social ties, especially to primary

groups such as families are less strong and permanent than they are in collectivistic

cultures, where integration into the family and community is solid and lifelong. Indeed, in

collectivistic societies, personal goals are subordinate to those of the larger social entity.

Individualists favor autonomy and strive toward the realization of their personal goals.

Collectivists prize social acceptance by the in-group and value harmonious, conflict-free

relations within it. Families in individualistic cultures tend to be nuclear and in

collectivistic cultures, extended. The three major English-speaking countries, United

States, Great Britain, and Australia, are at the top of the distribution in individualism, followed closely by bilingual Canada and The Netherlands. At the collectivistic end, most Latin American countries were placed, along with some in Asia , such as Taiwan, China, South Korea, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

The other bipolar factor, masculinity-femininity pertains to the distribution of emotional roles between the two genders "*A society is called* masculine *when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct; men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called* feminine *when emotional gender roles overlap; both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.*" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 120) (Italics in the original). Consequently, there is more overlap between occupational and social roles in feminine than in masculine societies. The paramount striving in masculine cultures is for performance and achievement; feminine cultures assign highest value to caring. The four Nordic countries as well as The Netherlands, Slovenia, Costa Rica, and Chile provide prime examples of such a caring orientation. Not surprisingly, all of these countries cluster at the feminine end of the continuum. High masculinity is exemplified by Japan, Austria, Venezuela, the German-speaking (but not the French-speaking) part of Switzerland, and Italy.

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance describes societies in which discomfort and insecurity tend to be generated by ambiguous, unforeseen, or unknown situations. Persons who are high in uncertainty avoidance seek guidance and rules and often find

them in precedent, tradition, ritual, and etiquette. Low uncertainty avoiders thrive on ambiguity, improvisation, and surprise. Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, and Uruguay were the highest-scoring countries in uncertainty avoidance on the Hofstede Value Survey, followed by Belgium, Salvador, and Japan. Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, and Hong Kong scored lowest on this dimension.

A fifth dimension was discovered and added later, after the completion of the initial data collection and analysis. Its development and construction followed a very different path. Unlike the preceding four factors, all of which were derived from a uniform survey administered in the course of the IBM project, this dimension emerged from the Chinese Value Survey developed by Michael Bond, a social psychologist in Hong Kong, on the basis of tenets grounded in Chinese Confucian tradition (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Factor analysis of this scale identified a factor distinct from the four that emerged from Hofstede's multinational project. Its gist lies in fostering the virtues oriented toward future rewards, as exemplified by perseverance and thrift. Other values that loaded high on this factor involved ordering relationships by status and observing this order and having a sense of shame. The opposite, short-term orientation, was characterized by negative loadings for personal steadiness and stability, respect for tradition, and reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts. These items were further studied in an international comparison of 23 countries. As expected, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea emerged with the highest scores in long-term orientation. Short-term orientation was most pronounced in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Philippines, and the scores of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Germany

gravitated toward the short-term extreme.

**Beyond the Workplace: How Far Do Hofstede's Dimensions Extend?**

In the decades since the publication of *Culture's Consequences*, research on Hofstede's dimensions has been vigorously pursued. By the end of the last century, the first edition of the book had been cited in more than 1800 articles in refereed journals (Hofstede, 2001) The results of four independent, relatively large-scale partial replications, in 14 or more countries, have demonstrated the robustness of the findings of the original IBM survey (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, indexes for the five dimensions have been extended well beyond the confines of organizational psychology.

In relation to personality, Value Survey cultural dimension scores for 33 countries were correlated with the means for the factorially based Big Five personality traits for the same countries (Hofstede & McCrea, 2004). A pattern of significant and substantial coefficients was found, exemplified by a positive relationship between extraversion and individualism and a negative relationship with power distance. These and other findings obtained make sense from both a common-sense and a more formal, theoretical points of view. Thus, they have opened a great many avenues for follow-up investigations.

Another interface pertains to the reflection and manifestation of Hofstede's cultural dimensions within the self. In relation to the individualism-collectivism axis, a host of converging expectations has been proposed by a number of authors (Chang, 1988; Kimura, 1995; Landrine, 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Roland, 1988; Triandis, 1989). In Landrine's (1992) words, an individualistic self tends to be "separated [and] encapsulated" (p. 402). Moreover, such a self "is presumed to be [the] cognitive and

emotional universe, the center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action" (p. 402).
Contrast it with the sociocentric self, supposedly prevalent in collectivistic cultures, that
is described as malleable, permeable, and situation-bound, determined on the basis of
relationships with and commitments to specific individuals and categories of persons
within the person's extended family and community. Such a self is characterized by few
if any stable and enduring traits. Perhaps Chang (1988) hit the essence of this distinction
by likening the individualistic self to a wall between the person and the rest of the world
and the collectivistic self, to a bridge or bond that connects the person to other human
beings, especially those of his or her place and time. Beyond self-experience, Triandis
(1995) has concluded on the basis of a major multimethod research program that
collectivism holds advantages in relating face to face in interpersonal situations within
the family or a work-team. On the level of large-scale institutions, however, within the
state or across nations, individualism is more effective in both completing tasks and
assuring individual self-actualization.

In reference to Hofstede's other four dimensions, Draguns (2001) has proposed that
high *power distance* favors the development of a well-delineated self, prominently
concerned with wealth and power while low power distance would foster a more
permeable self centered upon egalitarian social relationships. In relation to *uncertainty
avoidance,* a premium would be placed on consistency and coherence of self experience
at the high end of the dimension; low uncertainty avoidance would be associated with
considerable tolerance for inconsistency, and even implicit contradictions, within the self.
*Masculinity* would promote emphasis upon a pragmatic, action- and achievement.-

oriented self; *femininity* would be associated with a self centered on feelings and caring. *Long- term orientation* is expected to value self-restraint and modesty; *short-term orientation* would be concerned with fostering self-actualization.

These formulations have implications for the culturally preferred modes and styles of psychotherapeutic intervention. Thus, it has been predicted that therapy geared toward insight and self-actualization would thrive in individualistic cultures; therapy in collectivistic milieus would aim at promoting interpersonal harmony and social integration. High power distance would be characterized by directive interventions and status differentiation between the therapist and his or her clients. High uncertainty avoidance would be associated with emphasis on therapist's expertise; in low uncertainty avoidance cultures, improvisation, innovation, and spontaneity would prevail Masculinity would favor adjustment, productivity, and competence as therapy goals; femininity would emphasize relief of distress and subjective well-being. Long term orientation would incline.therapists and clients toward external, somatic interventions; psychological understanding and subjective experience would be paramount in short-range orientation.

In addition to personality oriented concerns, research conducted in school settings, interpersonal situations, and in relation to mental health and adjustment has amply demonstrated the heuristic value of Hofstede's dimensions. Questions have been raised and investigated that would not have occurred except for the identification of the five cultural axes in the course of the research that led to the publication of the first edition of *Culture's Consequences*. Since then, an impressive body of largely coherent and consistent findings has been amassed that generally supports the relevance of these five

empirically based constructs well beyond the confines of the major multinational corporation where they were first discovered.

**Hofstede's Dimensions in the Baltic Countries**

As already mentioned, the extension of Hofstede's original research to the Baltic countries was impractical as long as Europe was divided by the Iron Curtain. Once this barrier fell, suggestions were promptly voiced to initiate the collection of data in the Baltic region in order to ascertain where the three states would fall on the five dimensions (Draguns, 1994).This objective has been partially realized in Estonia (Hofstede, Kolman, Nicolescu, & Pajumaa (1996). Although the sample on which the data were gathered was neither representative nor comparable to those included in Hofstede's (1980) IBM investigation, The results obtained fell into a meaningful and interpretable pattern. Thus, Value Indexes for all four dimensions, are either close or adjacent to those for Finland; three of the four Indexes stand in contrast to those for Russia, More specifically, Estonian scores were moderately low in power distance, moderately high in individualism, very high in femininity, and moderately low in uncertainty avoidance. Femininity scores were the only ones in which Estonian participants were close to their counterparts in Russia.

Individualism-collectivism was also investigated by Realo (1999) in Estonia and by Balaisis, Draguns, and Miezitis (2004) in Lithuania, although in neither case were the measures and results comparable to those in Hofstede's multinational sample. Realo's (1998) data substantiate high individualism among Estonians, but also document an undercurrent of collectivism. Of interest is her finding that ethnically Russian participants' scores in Narva fell between those of Russians in Russia and of ethnic

Estonians. Realo's findings justify the following two conclusions: (1) Traditional Estonian culture has proved to be more important in determining dominant values than have the 50 years of experience of living under an ideologically and explicitly collectivistic political and economic system; (2) Individualism and collectivism are not mutually exclusive and, at a specific time and place, can be reconciled and integrated in a number of ways. The question can be raised as to what extent Realo's findings are generalizable to the other two Baltic nations. Replications in and comparisons with Latvia and Lithuania are called for. This research is especially needed because, as the people in the Baltics, but not those outside the region, know there are noteworthy cultural differences across the three nations, perhaps more pronounced than those between within Scandinavia or Benelux.

In Vilnius, Balaisis et al. (2004) have found positive correlations between individualism and internal locus of control and adjustment. One wonders whether the relationship with adjustment might have been reversed if this study were conducted 20 years earlier. In any case, the few Baltic forays into this area of research raise more questions than they  provide answers, and the field is wide open to a multimethod and multifaceted exploration of Hofstede's dimensions in the Baltics in relation to a wide range of dimensions in behavior.

**Conclusions**

Hofstede's contributions have had a revolutionary impact upon cross-cultural psychology; their reverberations extend to other social sciences, notably political science, cultural anthropology, and sociology, and to multiple domains within the field, such as

developmental, educational, social, organizational, personality, and abnormal psychology. Proceeding empirically and systematically every step along the way, Hofstede was able to provide empirically grounded dimensions that could be used for comparative purposes throughout the world. The focus of research both extant and contemplated can shift from a global panorama, through a discrete culture, or two or several cultures , face-to-face groups, dyads or individuals. Four major questions in particular remain to be answered: (1) Where and when in the human lifespan are Hofstede's five dimensions detectable, and how do they originate in the course of socialization and enculturation? (2) What perpetuates these dimensions across generations and despite social change? (3) Under what conditions does a change in these dimensions take place? (4) What are the limits of their applicability and of their explanatory and heuristic value?

Work along these, and many other, lines should and will continue for decades to come

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