

The Hofstede Model of Cultural Dimensions

National cultures can be described according to the analysis of Geert Hofstede. These ideas were first based on a large research project into national culture differences across subsidiaries of a multinational corporation (IBM) in 64 countries. Subsequent studies by others covered students in 23 countries, elites in 19 countries, commercial airline pilots in 23 countries, up-market consumers in 15 countries, and civil service managers in 14 countries. Together these studies identified and validated four independent dimensions of national culture differences, with a fifth dimension added later.

The drawbacks of applying the Hofstede Model

The Hofstede Model of Cultural Dimensions can be of great use when it comes to analyzing a country's culture. There are however a few things one has to keep in mind.

Firstly, the averages of a country do not relate to individuals of that country. Even though this model has proven to be quite often correct when applied to the general population, one must be aware that not all individuals or even regions with subcultures fit into the mould. It is to be used as a guide to understanding the difference in culture between countries, not as law set in stone. As always, there are exceptions to the rule.

Secondly, how accurate is the data? The data has been collected through questionnaires, which have their own limitations. Not only that, but in some cultures the context of the question asked is as important as its content. Especially in group-oriented cultures, individuals might tend to answer questions as if they were addressed to the group he/she belongs to. While on the other hand in the United States, which is an individualistic culture, the answers will most likely be answered and perceived through the eyes of that individual.

Lastly, is the data up to date? How much does the culture of a country change over time, either by internal or external influences?

For more indepth information you can find this model clearly outlined in Geert Hofstede's book, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind*.

Source: <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/>

Power Distance Index

Hofstede's Power distance Index measures the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders.

Individualism

Individualism is the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Masculinity

Masculinity versus its opposite, femininity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The IBM studies revealed that (a) women's values differ less among societies than men's values; (b) men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine'.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index

Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man's search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth; 'there can only be one Truth and we have it'.

Long-Term Orientation

Long-Term Orientation is the fifth dimension of Hofstede which was added after the original four to try to distinguish the difference in thinking between the East and West. From the original IBM studies, this difference was something that could not be deduced. Therefore, Hofstede created a Chinese value survey which was distributed across 23 countries. From these results, and with an understanding of the influence of the teaching of Confucius on the East, long term vs. short term orientation became the fifth cultural dimension.

Below are some characteristics of the two opposing sides of this dimension:

Long term orientation

- persistence
- ordering relationships by status and observing this order
- thrift
- having a sense of shame

Short term orientation

- personal steadiness and stability
- protecting your 'face'
- respect or tradition
- reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts