

Cultural Dimensions

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What is cultural dimensions theory?

- What is culture?
 - “culture constitutes the unwritten rules of the social game” [1]
 - “culture is the software of our minds” [1]
- Cultural dimensions theory
 - Developed by Geert Hofstede (1928-2020)
 - First evidence found in survey of IBM employees worldwide in the 1970s
 - Trying to quantify differences in how culture affects our behavior
- Provides a descriptive framework for understanding our (sometimes overlapping!) cultural contexts



Geert Hofstede [1]

Acknowledgements

- Marco Salathe, who asked for resources for thinking about cultural issues in academia
- Belinda Bandstra, M.D., M.A. for the idea and sharing slides and other resources

‘Where I work:

*Meeting times are kept very punctually

1 2 3 4 5

Meeting times are only kept approximately

*Quantity prevails over quality

1 2 3 4 5

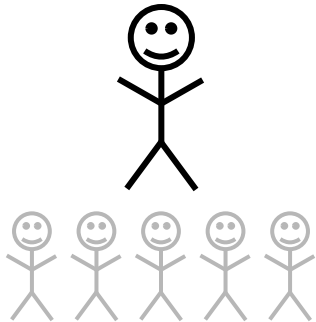
Quality prevails over quantity’

Survey question example, from *Hofstede G. “Attitudes, Values and Organizational Culture: Disentangling the Concepts. Organization Studies.” 1998;19(3):477-493.*

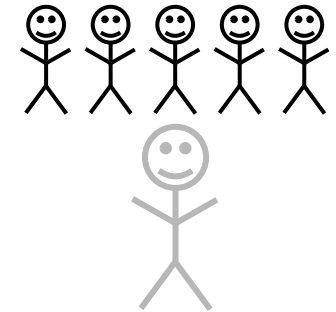
[1] <https://geerthofstede.com>

Dimension 1 of 3: Individualism vs. Collectivism

“On the individualist side we find cultures 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 cultures in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families...” [2]



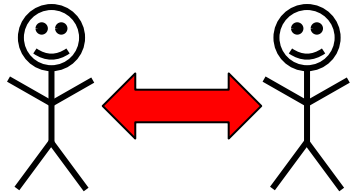
Individualism	Collectivism
Right of privacy	Stress on belonging
Speaking one's mind is healthy	Harmony should always be maintained
Task prevails over relationship	Relationship prevails over task



[2] [Hofstede, G. \(2011\). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2.*](#)

Dimension 2 of 3: Power Distance

“[T]he extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions... accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” [2]



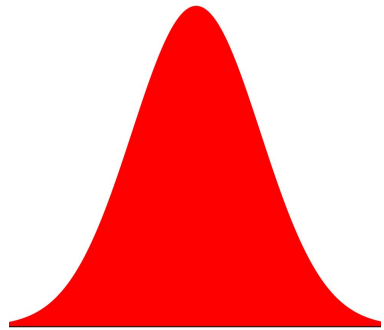
Small power distance	Large power distance
Use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil	Power is a basic fact of society antedating good or evil: its legitimacy is irrelevant
Hierarchy means inequality of roles, established for convenience	Hierarchy means existential inequality
Subordinates expect to be consulted	Subordinates expect to be told what to do



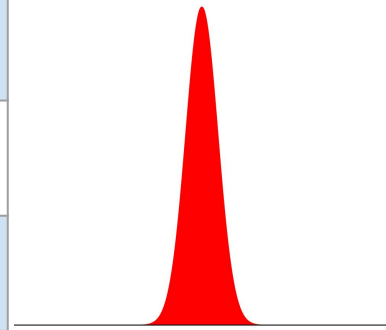
[2] [Hofstede, G. \(2011\). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2.*](#)

Dimension 3 of 3: Uncertainty Avoidance

“[T]olerance for ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations.” [2]



Weak uncertainty avoidance	Strong uncertainty avoidance
Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious	Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous
Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos	Need for clarity and structure
Dislike of rules - written or unwritten	Emotional need for rules – even if not obeyed



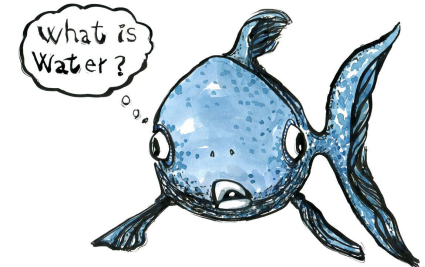
[2] [Hofstede, G. \(2011\). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2.*](#)

How would you describe your own culture (or cultures) using this framework?

How might your culture differ from those of your coworkers?

How might awareness of different cultures improve our ability to be more inclusive?

- differences in individualism/collectivism could affect who speaks up at meetings and gives feedback
- differences in power distance could affect how supervisors and supervisees relate to each other



Frits Ahlefeldt

<https://fritsahlefeldt.com/portfolio/di00056-what-is-water-fish/>

Cultural dimensions:
(1) Individualism/Collectivism
(2) Power Distance
(3) Uncertainty Avoidance

Thank you for your attention



If you have any feedback or questions please contact us at

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