

Five aspects of culture essay



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Contents

- LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

Hofstede's Five Aspects of Culture Hofstede's cultural factors Explanations – Culture – Hofstede's cultural factors Power | Self | Gender | Predictability | Time | So what? Geert Hofstede, a Dutch cultural anthropologist, analyzed cultures along five dimensions. He rated 58 countries on each dimension on a scale from 1 to 100. Power Hofstede named this Power Distance (PD or PDI). It is the extent to which less powerful members expect and accept unequal power distribution. High PD cultures usually have centralized, top-down control. Low power distance implies greater equality and empowerment.

Malaysia, Panama, and Guatemala rated the highest in this category. The US was 38th. Self Hofstede named this Individualism versus Collectivism (ID or IDV). In an individual environment the individual person and their rights are more important than groups that they may belong to. In a collective environment, people are born into strong extended family or tribal communities, and these loyalties are paramount. The US was number 1 here, closely followed by Australia and Great Britain. Gender Hofstede named this Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS).

It focuses on the degree to which “ traditional” gender roles are assigned in a culture; i. e. , men are considered aggressive and competitive, while women are expected to be more gentle and be concerned with home and family. Japan led the list, followed by Austria and Venezuela. The US was 15th. Predictability Hofstede named this Uncertainty Avoidance (UA or UAI).

It defines the extent to which a culture values predictability. UA cultures have strong traditions and rituals and tend toward formal, bureaucratic structures and rules. Greece was number 1, followed by Portugal and Guatemala.

The US was 43rd. Time Hofstede named this Long- versus Short-term Orientation (LTO). It is the cultural trait that focuses on to what extent the group invests for the future, is persevering, and is patient in waiting for results. China led this dimension, followed by its oriental colleagues, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The US was 17th. So what? When working in other countries and with people from overseas, first research their national culture along these dimensions, then check first whether the people use these. By default and when talking with national groups, take account of these factors.

Note that Hofstede and Trompenaars are both Dutch purveyors of international cultural models, and are each very critical of the others' models. Geert Hofstede's 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. If you follow the links below you will find a map of the world for each cultural

dimension, which enables you to quickly see how similar or different countries or regions are.

- Power Distance
- Individualism
- Masculinity
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Long-Term Orientation

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.

POWER DISTANCE

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. For example, Germany has a 35 on the cultural scale of Hofstede's analysis.

Compared to Arab countries where the power distance is very high (80) and Austria where it very low (11), Germany is somewhat in the middle. Germany does not have a large gap between the wealthy and the poor, but have a strong belief in equality for each citizen. Germans have the opportunity to rise in society. On the other hand, the power distance in the United States scores a 40 on the cultural scale. The United States exhibits a more unequal distribution of wealth compared to German society. As the years go by it seems that the distance between the 'have' and 'have-nots' grows larger and larger.

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.

For example, Germany can be considered as individualistic with a relatively high score (67) on the scale of Hofstede compared to a country like Guatemala where they have strong collectivism (6 on the scale). In Germany people stress on personal achievements and individual rights. Germans expect from each other to fulfil their own needs. Group work is important, but everybody has the right of his own opinion and is expected to reflect those. In an individual country like Germany people tend to have more loose relationships than countries where there is a collectivism where people have large extended families.

The United States can clearly be seen as individualistic (scoring a 91). The “American dream” is clearly a representation of this. This is the Americans’ hope for a better quality of life and a higher standard of living than their parents’. This belief is that anyone, regardless of their status can ‘pull up their boot straps’ and raise themselves from poverty.

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'. For example, Germany has a masculine culture with a 66 on the scale of Hofstede (Netherlands 14).

Masculine traits include assertiveness, materialism/material success, self-centeredness, power, strength, and individual achievements. The United States scored a 62 on Hofstede's scale. So these two cultures share, in terms of masculinity, similar values.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

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'. For example, in Germany there is a reasonable high uncertainty avoidance (65) compared to countries as Singapore (8) and neighbouring country Denmark (23). Germans are not keen on uncertainty, by planning everything carefully they try to avoid the uncertainty. In Germany there is a society that relies on rules, laws and regulations.

Germany wants to reduce its risks to the minimum and proceed with changes step by step. The United States scores a 46 compared to the 65 of the German culture. Uncertainty avoidance in the US is relatively low, which can clearly be viewed through the national cultures.

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