

The cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories

[Business](#), [Management](#)



1. Power Distance (PDI): The extent to which the less powerful members of society tolerate the inequality in power among different members of their society.
2. Individualism (IDV): Individualism defines the extent to which a person in society only cares about themselves and their immediate family rather than caring for their whole “ in-group”.
3. Masculinity (MAS): In masculine cultures, the roles of men and women are strongly delineated whereas, in feminine cultures, the roles of men and women overlap to a great extent.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): In highly uncertainty avoidant cultures people are made uncomfortable by unstructured, unscripted or unpredictable social situations.

From this data, he collected answers to the questions that, in his opinion, pertained to these four values. These included questions about what type of boss the respondent preferred and what factors describe their ideal job.

Findings Among Hofstede’s findings were the conclusion that Asian countries generally have a power-distance, USA and other Western countries are generally individualistic, South American and Asian countries are generally collectivistic, Asian countries are generally highly masculine while Nordic countries are highly feminine.

Research Implications/Limitations Hofstede’s methodology and the conclusions drawn from it have been strongly criticized by a number of other sociologists, such as McSweeney (2002); a common criticism is that Hofstede has inferred broad aspects of national cultures from the situationally specific replies of a handful of questionnaire responses received from the employees

of just one company.

Value Hofstede's work seems to be deeply flawed with respect to methodology and as such can only be of limited value to the reader. It would probably be wise for a manager not to base their cross-cultural communication upon a work based on such flimsy evidence. While it may be valid to classify individuals as being more individualistic or masculine, attributing cultures with such attributes is just a more subtle form of stereotyping. Hofstede's study has not produced any great insights about people and their culture but serve merely to confirm existing crude racial and cultural stereotypes for example that Asians are servile toward their despotic leaders, that Americans are individualists, that South Americans are very family-oriented people, that Nordic societies are highly liberal and progressive societies where the differences in status between men and women have largely been eliminated while Asians oppress their women and keep them chained in their homes.

Hall, E. T., & Hall, M. R. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*.
Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc.

Purpose Hall and Hall (1990) attempt to present several aspects of differences among cultures that managers should be aware of in multicultural organizations.

Design/Methodology/Approach Hall and Hall espouse their theories regarding the differences between cultures in a non-judgmental manner however the authors fail to present much evidence for their theories from scientifically conducted experiments and other such objective sources. It seems that a lot of the author's theories may have been based upon personal observation or

anecdotal evidence.

Findings Accord to the authors, cultures tend to differ with respect to the speed at which communication takes place, the amount of background context given in messages, in the locations that people prefer to have, in the amount of personal space that people need to have in order to feel comfortable, their toleration of and reaction to multisensory experience. In addition Hall and Hall, theorize that different cultures perceive time in a different manner and that the passage of time is a concept dependent upon culture. Some cultures are ' monochronic'; they tend to allow a specific period of time to one task at one time. Other cultures are ' polychronic', in such cultures, people tend to multi-task many different processes at once and time schedules are flexible. Another aspect of difference in culture with regards to time is that some cultures are present and near-future oriented, some are past-oriented and some are past and present-oriented.

Research Implications/Limitations The study lacks information about the exact methods the researchers used to come up with their models of culture. Broad conclusions, like the assertion that Germans are future-oriented while Americans are present-oriented, have been made without giving proper evidence.

Value Of particular value to the readers may be the parts where Hall and Hall give the example of how these seemingly subtle aspects of culture affect communication between cultures and warn that managers need to be aware of cultural factors when engaging in communication with people of other cultures. Misunderstandings and misattributions may occur if one or more party in cross-cultural communication is not aware of cultural differences.

This warning is always appropriate, many embarrassments and mishaps could have been avoided had people not attributed wrong meanings to the non-verbal communications of people from other cultures. Hall and Hall highlight how it is important to remember, when interacting with people from other cultures, that non-verbal communications such as facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, body posture and motions, and positioning are interpreted by the people of different cultures in different ways and it is necessary for someone conversing with a person from another culture to try not to infer their own meanings and interpretations from the communications of the other person.