

The use of geert hofstede of cultural dimensions

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Abstract

Along with the trend toward globalization, communication across cultural and national boundaries has a significant effect on business. The Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede's work of cultural dimensions is regarded as an approach to measure inter-cultural differences to business for scholars and practitioners. However, such a significant work does not escape criticism. Even though his theory consummates to six dimensions based on varies datum and is widely applied by many academics, McSweedney and many specialists assert his work as an absolute assumption.

Introduction

Nowadays, the country boundaries are shaped by the spread of global communication networks and the development of transportation. Because of globalization, countries are tied closer than ever before. Since the beginning of 1970s, scholars such as Geert Hofstede started to notice the importance of cultural differences for many aspects of business life, in particular, when business related to communicate between people with different cultures. Hofstede (<http://geert-hofstede.com/dimensions.html>) claimed that " Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy.

Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster. " Such conflicts are determined by the people's perception which is partly the product of culture. Therefore, in order to avoid the conflict caused by culture, it is important to recognise cultural differences under global business environment. Hofstede's cultural framework provides a guideline to

recognize the differences between cultures and may improve the inter-cultural communication in business area. However, his work is critiqued by scholars and researchers as an unreliable framework.

This essay firstly outline Hofstede's cultural framework briefly and then apply his theory into practical situation to access whether it can improves the inter-cultural communication in the workplace. Afterwards, it will critique the limitations based on the literatures opposite to Hofstede's viewpoint.

Hofstede's Model

Geert Hofstede's work is ground-breaking and he himself is considered as the pioneer and pathfinder in inter-cultural study (Bond, 2002 and Sondergaard 1994). He described his significant research result based IBM employees' attitudes and work-related values around the world.

In the past 30 years, he persists to refine his theory from the previous four to six dimensions: Power distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty avoidance and Long-term orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint (Hofstede et al, 2010). In his book, each country is evaluated by scores on every dimension, thus people can take an insight into the cultural differences by comparing countries' scores. Power distance (PDI) is defined as that, to what degree people can perceive the unequal power distribution in a society.

PDI scores, deriving from value of the less powerful people, indicate the level to which members accept power inequality. A low score demonstrates that members of the society preferequality; whereas a country has a high PDI score means that people accept large power differences. Individualism

versus Collectivism (IDV) is the dimension relating to how people ties to others within the community. Individualism pertains to societies whose members tie loosely and concern about themselves and their immediatefamily. On the contrary, in collectivistic countries people belong to strong and cohesive group.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) refers to whether emotionalgender rolesare distinct or overlap. In masculine societies men are supposed to behave ‘ assertive, competitive and tough’, on the contrary, women are supposed to be ‘ modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life’ (Hofstede, 2010: 140). Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) related to extent to which members handleanxietywith ambiguous and unknown situations. Strong UAI Countries maintain “ rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas”.

Countries exhibiting weak UAI encourage practice than principles with a more relaxed attitude. Long-term versus Short-term orientation (LTO) deals with which kind of value is fostered. This dimension is based on Bond’s World Values Survey on “ Confucian dynamism”. Long-term oriented countries foster virtues such as perseverance and thrift for future rewards, whereas short-term orientation focuses on rewards in the present and the past, which means particularly ‘ respectfor tradition, preservation of ‘ face’, and fulfilling social obligations’ (Hofstede, 2010: 239).

Indulgence versus Restrain is linked tohappiness. An indulgent society permits ‘ relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun’ (<http://geert-hofstede.com/dimensions.html>). On the contrary, restraint countries use strict social <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-geert-hofstede-of-cultural-dimensions/>

norms to control gratification of needs and regulates. Application As the world becomes globalized, to remain competitive and minimize conflicts which are the result of ignoring cultural differences, companies should not adopt an ethnocentric management mode to different cultural staff.

To minimize these conflicts, many scholars and practitioners utilize Hofstede's work of cultural dimensions as a means to narrow the cultural gap in business. One reason why his framework is widely adopted is that his data are collected from varies companies and the fifth dimension is based on ' Confucian dynamism'. Thus, to access its practical applicability to decrease the negative aspect of cultural differences and to elevate cross-cultural communication level, it is important to apply Hofstede's work into real cases.

Since the late 2009, the famous Japanese auto-maker Toyota struggled into an unprecedented crisis due to pedal quality problems which led Toyota to its historical largest recall in the world. The Economist (Feb. 6, 2010) commented that safety recall is a common issue in vehicle manufacture but Toyota changed the order. In the process of managing crisis, Toyota acted according to Japanese culture without taking the American cultural values into account. It can be said that one reason deteriorates the normal recall cars to a crisis is the ignorance of cultural differences.

Some literatures analyse the cultural aspect affecting the crisis and group them into two main points (Feng, 2010, Huang, 2010). Firstly, the Japanese management mode and organizational behaviour is different from American. As a result of the Japanese organizational culture, Toyota responded slowly after the accident. It is reported that on American time 28th August 2009, a Lexus ES 350 caused a fatal crash due to the gas pedal was stuck and the <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-geert-hofstede-of-cultural-dimensions/>

car was out of control (Los Angeles Times, Oct. 25, 2009). Yet Toyota did not respond to the accident immediately.

US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said that documents show that Toyota knew of the problem in late September but did not give response until late January, moreover, “ they knowingly hid a dangerous defect for months from US officials and did not take action to protect millions of drivers and their families” (Thomas, 2010). The second reason is the different communication behaviours between Japan and the U. S. A. In the American hearing and variety interviews, Akio Toyota, the president of Toyota Motor Corporation, spoke implicative, tactful and modest with a large number of modest words without any directly answers (Huang, 2010).

In addition, Akio Toyota’s behaviours are understood as hiding the truth by American people. According to Hofstede’s framework, Western culture, represented by the U. S. A. , and such Japanese Eastern culture have significantly differences. The magnitude of the differences has been directly described in ways. See from the figure 1. 1. Figure 1. 1 Japan and the U. S. A. It is obvious that there exist large differences between Japan and the United States. One of the most telling to explain the crisis can be the collectivist versus individualist dimension.

The fundamental issue related to IDV is the extent of connection between individuals and the group (Hofstede, 1980). From the data provided by Hofstede, Japan, at a score of 46 on a scale of 1 to 100, is a collectivist society, whose group allegiances are strong, cohesive and invoke higher authority. The individuals adhere to the entity and preserve harmony. Thus the Toyota North American office was been called a “ little safety deaf” by <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-geert-hofstede-of-cultural-dimensions/>

LaHood (CBC news, Feb, 2010). The North American office need invoked by the highest authority to handle the accident and the applicable proposal must pass through the whole company.

Nevertheless, this system is not adaptable in handling problems in America. According to Hofstede, Toyota needs to handle the problem immediately rather than make a long-term agreement. Meanwhile, the high power distance (Japan 54) can be used to analysis the slow response. Japan is a more centralized decision country, and it is therefore all the command should be endorsed by the president of Toyota Motor Corporation, Akio Toyoda. Because only the CEO can respond to the allegations, the response to the event was hauled in respect to the stakeholders living in a country that has only 40 in the index.

As mentioned before, the official recall and apologize came four months later after the car accident has been reported. Yet the stakeholders demanded immediate response to the accident from Toyota regardless from the CEO or other representative. Moreover, during the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing, in response to why Toyota responded so slow, Toyoda claimed that do not answered directly but reiterates his plan to set up a global commission to address complains more quickly (CNN Politics, Feb. 24, 2010).

This phenomenon can adopt Hofstede's fifth dimension, long- term versus short-term orientation to demonstrate the inevitability of this divergence. Hofstede himself defines long-term orientation as 'the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards' (Hofstede 2010: 239), which means that high long-orientation scores countries (Japan 80) pay more attention to the <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-geert-hofstede-of-cultural-dimensions/>

things that will benefit the future whereas low score countries tend to focus on nearby benefits or rewards. Jealous writes, " In America, we ultimately judge people on what they are doing today for tomorrow, not for what they did yesterday. (CNN Politics, Feb. 24, 2010). In the hearing, American part were expected that Toyota undertake their obligations by providing continuous plans to the stakeholders. Akio did not account for this and responded indirectly to the solution to the current accident therefore caused Americans the disgusted and suspected feeling. Consequently, if Toyota can notice the cultural differences and adopt Hofstede's theory to handle the problem in their American market in the bud, the common recall would not exacerbate American people and became a crisis which will threaten its reputation.

Critique

Culture is deeply rooted in many aspects of business life when people must interact with the people such as suppliers, buyers, employees or stakeholders. The case of Toyota crisis demonstrates that Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions is practical to uncover these conflicts in cross-cultural communication. If people could realize the cultural differences concluded by Hofstede and take proper communication style and management mode, the fate of Toyota might be changed. However, the framework cannot act as a textbook to interpret the whole cultural gap even in the case of Toyota crisis.

Many intercultural researchers criticized Hofstede's theory for not providing valuable guiding intelligence or regard it as absolute assumptions. Hofstede did not mention the impact of linguistic on the communication. Different

languages and contents have objectively impact on the understanding of the conversation. Take the US-based 3M Company as an example. The company earns \$7 billion per year in their overseas market, it become the “ forefront of language instruction by sponsoring an in-house Language Society that provides linguistic and cultural support” to 3M (Frey-Ridgway, 1997).

Freivalds (1995) said that the French firm Bull adopted the 3M model to train its employees in the competition of global marketplace and still in success. Language plays an irreplaceable position in the inter-cultural communication. Different types of body languages cause misunderstanding as well. In japan, apology needs humility, in order to be forgiven, Japanese usually avoid eye contact stands for rudeness, offend and provocation, but it would be decoded as disinterest, dishonesty and cunning in western countries (Huang, 2010, Dahl, 2004).

Gudykunst and Nishida (1994: 2) said that misunderstanding between Japan and American people often “ stem from not knowing the norms and rules guiding each other’s communication”. In hofstede’s model, the data come from the English-speaking company IBM and it is aim to evaluate work attitude and value, this led his theory ignore linguistic and body language difference. Moreover, in the process of communication among Akio Toyoda and the American interlocutor, the stakeholders, the Congress representatives or the media people, misunderstanding occurred continually.

As mentioned above, Toyota responded euphemistic to the problem (Huang, 2010). Akio repeated the apology several times and declined to give pithy answers to undertake the obligation and to interpret the information and plan for the stakeholders in the hearing (Clark ; McCurry, 2010). The answer

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type can be derived from the patterns of Japanese communication. Lincoln (1995) studied Japanese and found that due to the politeness cultural they reluctance to say “ no” directly. Hall (1976) separated communication into High-context and low-context.

The United States is a typical low-context communication country while Japan belongs to high-context communication. Low-context communication refers to the patterns of communication use explicit verbal to convey meanings, whereas high-context pattern draw heavily on context. This cultural difference is raised by Hall instead of Hofstede. Michael (1997) claim that literatures are lack of specific details and are concluded in broad behavioral terms. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) classified cultures has seven value orientations which is more than Hofstede’s six dimensions and has somewhat different perspectives.

Additionally, Dahl (2004) criticizes the theory is the result of very little data, especially from specific companies with limited numbers of questions. This indicates that culture can be separated into more dimensions and those national scores and ranks are not the exclusive guide to improve inter-cultural communications. From Hofstede’s (1980) research, Japan ranks in the middle level of Individualism versus collectivism dimension. Yet Japan is widely stereotyped as a harmonious society.

Woodring (2010 cited in Jandt, 1995: 163) used the original Hofstede’s questionnaire to study Japanese students and found that students scored lower on power distance whereas higher on individualism comparing with Hofstede’s original sample. Woodring explained that the different scores might be the result of age; that is means, students may praise more on <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-geert-hofstede-of-cultural-dimensions/>

individualism and equality than the whole Japanese society. About 1990, youths 25 years old and under were named as shin jin rui (literally “ new human beings”), who were described as “ selfish, self-centered, and disrespectful of elders and tradition” by older Japanese.

In the description from Hofstede suggested that the Japan is a group oriented and hierarchical country. However, there are evidences to show that the young generation seeks for egalitarian and individualism. This demonstrates that Hofstede’s research can lead to stereotype and this ought to be avoided. Furthermore, this study shows that cultural value is dynamic. Holden (2002) criticizes the “ relative reliance” on Hofstede’s paradigm in the workplace. He points out that the data is outdated as it was collected before 30 years.

Hofstede attempts to set a certain form of culture for people to understand specific cultures and he (Hofstede, 2010: 34) states that “ cultures, especially national cultures, are extremely stable over time”. This has been criticized as “ functionalist ambition of measuring largely unquantifiable phenomena” (Gray and Maloory, 1998: 57). Hofstede himself stated, “ There is no such thing as objectivity in the study of social reality: we will too often to be subjective, but we may at least try to be ‘ inter subjective’. As His data are come from the questionnaire made by a group of western people, as a result of this, the question are tend to reflect western culture which means Hofstede’s theory has its cultural bias. Meanwhile, there is a debate about what level of analysis is practical for the term “ culture” to be a viable tool. McSweeney (2000) questions the classification of culture in Hofstede’s theory. Hofstede (2010: 10) stated that people are shaped by “ certain

cultural trains” from the same country. Although general cultural dimensions can be established at a cultural level, individuals may not necessarily reflect the national culture they belong to. Hofstede (1980, 1991) admits that using data from the level of country to analyze the individuals is not appropriate, and labeled it “ ecological fallacy”. He (1991: 253) affirms that national cultural level reflects “ central tendencies (...) for the country”, it is, not practical to analyze and predict specific individual behaviors or events. Conclusion: Generally overview the assessment, Geert Hofstede’s use of cultural dimensions provides a measurable paradigm to attract people’s attention to cultural differences and contribute to the inter-cultural study.

For those people who are involved in international commerce, culture is important for many aspects of business life, thus, if people go into another country to communicate with local company, changing the management process and practices to meet their values is essential. Concluding from the case analysis of Toyota crisis, Hofstede's cultural model indeed provides an effective reference to support better cross-cultural communication as it uncover the reasons of cultural conflict for people to apply appropriate method to minimize its negative influence.

However, cultural dimension theory functions limited in small space as it is not perfect. It regards culture as a fixed concept and separates it by national boundaries is improper. The data is collected in several decades years before even it has been updated in recent years based on questionnaire in a specific group in international companies from a perspective of western people. Moreover, it narrows culture into six dimensions may potentially

disturb the derived value prediction as certain context influences on the individual respondents.

The inter-cultural communication conflicts exist no matter how much understanding goes both ways. In conclusion, Hofstede's work of cultural dimensions is a supplement for supporting better inter-cultural communication, the bilateral respect of culture and positive attitude are the core to successful inter-cultural communication.

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