



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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CONTRIBUTION OF HOFSTEDE'S CULTURE MODEL TO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

Culture has been identified as a variable of paramount importance in international business. But it has been difficult to operationalize culture for international research before Prof. Geert Hofstede's Model. Hofstede's dimensions have made it possible to measure culture and to be applied across various aspects of International business. This article paper puts forward this model and discusses the various application of it.

KEYWORDS

culture, Hofstede, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, long term orientation

INTRODUCTION

Culture's role in International business has been widely recognized and accepted. It is the man-made part of environment and largely determines the course of our lives (Herskovits, 1969). Culture as a subject of study was closely associated with anthropology and sociology for about last one and half century, but in recent decades it gained importance in disciplines like management (Ganesh, 2005). It is an all pervasive construct in social science research, thus reflecting its importance (Singh, 2007). In business management, culture is important at "various levels: marketing, human resource management, product development, negotiation, supply-chain management, leadership among others" (Ooi, 2007). The importance of culture is evident in business literature and it's effect has been analyzed on various dependent variables such as brands (Roth, 1995), consumer decision making styles (Lyonski and Durvasula, 1996); economic growth (Johnson and Lenartowicz, 1998); consumer innovativeness (Steenkamp, Hofstede and Wedel 1999); entrepreneurial orientation and global competitiveness (Lee and Peterson, 2000), price perceptions (Sternquist, Byun and Jin 2004), reward management (Chiang, 2005), product diffusion (Dwyer, Mesak and Hsu, 2005), ethics (Arnold et al., 2007), leadership (Singh and Krishnan, 2007), and sexual harassment (Luthar and Luthar, 2007).

Though there have been different frameworks proposed by different scholars for operationalization of culture but Hofstede's (1980) framework of cultural values has been the most famous and widely used for calculating the cultural values of nations. Till the publication of Hofstede's book most of the research was "atheoretical", simply comparing a managerial phenomenon in different countries and it was only after Hofstede's work that measured dimensions of culture began to be linked to every aspect of management (Triandis 2001). Bond (1994) regards Hofstede's work as "godsend, providing the integration of cultural differences that was so desperately needed" (Allick and Realo 2004). Recognizing the importance of this model this paper explains Hofstede's model and enlists the application of this model.

HOFSTEDE'S DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

Hofstede (1980; 2001) developed the most influential national culture framework (Roth 1995; Steenkamp 2001). His model has been path breaking and influential theoretically and methodologically in the discipline of International Business. This seminal work is one of the most cited on Social Science Citation Index (Hofstede 2001). It was cited 1,101 times from 1987 to 1997 (Sivakumar and Nakata 2001). Chandy and Williams (1994) observe that Hofstede is the third most cited author after John Dunning and Michael Porter in international business research published between 1989 and 1993 (Sivakumar and Nakata 2001). Hofstede through his study across more than fifty countries on IBM employees has identified five independent dimensions of national culture differences. The five dimensions of national culture are as follows (Hofstede 2001):

POWER DISTANCE (PDI)

It is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 2001). This dimension is related to the basic problem of social inequality in a society. Hofstede (2001) has listed the societal norms for Power Distance differences in a society. In a low PDI society inequality is minimum while in high PDI society there is an order of inequality in which everyone has his/her rightful place. The hierarchy in case of low PDI society is for inconvenience in which subordinates and superiors are like each other. Whereas in a high PDI society the hierarchy means existential inequality in which superiors and subordinates are regarded of being different kind.

The welfare societies usually score lower on power distance. Power distance within a society influences the hierarchy in the family, society and organizations. There are correlations between PDI and work areas and media relations mostly though are correlations with consumption patterns. In high power distance country the organizations have tall hierarchy, more concentration of authority and usually centralized decision making while in a low power distance country the organizations are flat, less concentration of authority and there is decentralized decision making. There are usually large number of supervisory personnel in organizations and formal rules in high PDI societies compared to low PDI in which there is proportionately less number of supervisors and managers rely more on personal experience and that of their subordinates. Similarly the leadership in high PDI society is autocratic, authoritative and close supervision leads to satisfaction, performance and productivity as against the low PDI society in which leadership is democratic and consultative which leads to satisfaction, performance and productivity. In organizations in high PDI societies subordinate-superior relations are polarized, subordinates influenced by formal authority, there is no defense against power abuse and MBO (Management by Objectives) cannot work whereas in low PDI the superior-subordinate relations are pragmatic, subordinates are influenced by bargaining and reasoning, there are grievance channels in case of power abuse and MBO is feasible. The privileges and status are expected for managers, there is wide disparity between the salary of the top and bottom managers, more career dissatisfaction, role ambiguity in high PDI society as compared to low PDI society (Hofstede 2001).

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE (UAI)

It is rooted in the basic problem of level of stress in the society in the face of uncertain future. The Uncertainty Avoidance “is defined as the extent to which the members of institutions and organizations within a society feel threatened by uncertain, unknown, ambiguous, or structured situations” (Hofstede 1994). Uncertainty avoiding societies look for the organizations, institutions and relationships to interpret and predict events (Hofstede 2001).

In weak uncertainty societies both known and unknown risks are accepted in contrast to high uncertainty societies where only known risks are taken. People in low uncertainty society are less company loyal, switch jobs frequently, prefer small organizations, admit dissatisfaction with the employer, more ambitious for management positions and have favorable attitude towards younger people, whereas in high uncertainty society people are more company loyal, stay with the same, prefer big organizations, don't admit dissatisfaction with the employer, prefer specialist positions and have critical attitude toward younger people. There is low average seniority in jobs, optimism about employers' motives, less resistance to change, employees may break rules if necessary, most people can be trusted and foreign managers are accepted in a low uncertainty society in contrast to high uncertainty society, where there is high average seniority in jobs, optimism about employers' motives, more resistance to change, company rules should never be broken, most people can't be trusted and there is suspicion about foreign managers.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM (IDV)

IDV is “related to the integration of individuals into primary groups.” This dimension describes the type of relationship the individuals have with the other people in the society. This affects thinking of the people, the structure and functioning of the institutions: family, political, religious, educational and utilitarian. “Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between the individuals are loose. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.”

Hofstede (2001) enlists the various consequences in high or low IDV societies. Management in low IDV society is the management of groups and theories based on individual psychology is of limited use whereas in high IDV society management is the management of individuals and theories based on individual psychology is useful. In low IDV incentives should be given to in-groups, direct appraisal should be avoided and open sharing of one's feelings about him may jeopardize cooperation whereas in high IDV society incentives should be given to individuals, there should be direct appraisal and opening sharing of feeling towards someone may be productive. People in low IDV societies read fewer books, use fewer home computers, watch TV more and rely on social network for information whereas in high IDV society individuals read more books, employ answering machine and media is the main source of information.

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY (MAS)

MAS is “related to the division of emotional roles between men and women.” Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” (Hofstede 2001).

In low MAS societies buying decisions and shopping is shared by the partners whereas in high MAS men make buying decisions and women shop for food. In low MAS more coffeemakers used, homemade products are popular, less demand for foreign products, and purchases are made for consumption whereas in high MAS society less coffeemakers are used, less homemade products, more demand for foreign products, and purchases are usually made to show off. In low MAS car engine powers are irrelevant, motor houses are popular, there is more fiction reading, and there is less confidence in advertising whereas in high MAS engine power of cars is important, no motor homes but vacations include air flights, nonfiction is more read and there is more confidence in advertising.

LONG-VERSUS SHORT-TERM ORIENTATION (LTO)

It “is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or present.” “Long Term Orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, Short Term Orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect to tradition, and preservation of ‘face’ and fulfilling social obligations.” People in short term oriented societies value traditions, expect quick results and persistence is not important, while long term oriented societies adapt to new traditions and value perseverance and persistence. In long-term societies leisure is not important and emphasis is laid on saving for future while in short term oriented societies emphasis is on spending rather than saving.

In a low LTO society quick results are expected, status is not a issue in relationships, people spend, personal steadiness and stability is a common desire and there is respect for traditions whereas in high LTO society persistence and perseverance is valued, status is the criteria for relationships, people are thrifty, personal adaptability is desired and there is adaptability to new circumstances. Family and business are separated, short term results expected in business and merit is the criteria for social and economic life in low LTO society whereas there is vertical and horizontal coordination in family and business, long term relationships and markets are desired and equality is the preferred way of life in high LTO societies.

Application of Model

Hofstede's dimensions have been used by innumerable researchers as independent variables to prove the effect on various dependent variables like brands (Roth 1995), new product development (Nakata and Sivakumar 1996), Economic growth (Johnson and Lenartowicz 1998), entrepreneurial orientation and global competitiveness (Lee and Peterson 2000), Leadership Theories (House et.al 2002), construction projects (Pheng and Yuquan 2002), Commercial airline Pilots (Merritt 1998), reward management (Chiang 2005), Product diffusion (Dwyer, Mesak and Hsu 2005), Brand Loyalty (Lam and Lee 2005), Customer Relationship Management (Sigala 2006). Hofstede's work is increasingly used in business research making it the dominant cultural paradigm (Sivakumar and Nakata 2000).

The effects of culture and socioeconomics on the global brand image performance have been examined by Roth (1995) employing Hofstede's dimensions. The findings show that cultural power distance, cultural individualism, and regional socioeconomics affect the performance of functional brand image strategies like problem prevention and solving. The effect of National culture on new product development has been

examined by Nakata and Sivakumar (1996). The researchers have incorporated Hofstede's cultural dimensions to find the relationship between culture and new product development. The findings show that four of the five cultural factors: individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance have positive and negative effects on new product development. Aaker and Williams (1998) examine the persuasive effect of emotional appeals in advertising, on members of collectivistic versus individualistic cultures. The Chinese respondents are regarded as collectivistic and the respondents from United States represent individualistic culture based on the categorization of these countries by Hofstede (1980).

To measure the cultural values of Russia, Naumov and Puffer (2000) employ Hofstede's dimensions. The Russian culture in mid-nineties was moderate in individualism, masculinity, and power distance, and high on paternalism and uncertainty avoidance. Generational differences were evidenced as younger and less experienced exhibited higher levels of masculinity and paternalism. Steenkamp 2001 reviews and discusses the role of national culture in international marketing research. He discusses the national cultural frameworks of Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994), and their interrelations.

The effect of culture on online behavior is discussed by Pavlou and Chai (2002). They apply theory of planned behavior to capture behavioral intentions for online transactions in China and United States. They employ Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions to study adoption of e-commerce across the countries. The results of the study emphasize the role of cultural differences on consumer e-commerce adoption. Lam and Lee (2005) examine the effect of culture on brand loyalty. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of culture have been employed to find if culture influences proneness to brand loyalty. The findings of the study showed that respondents who scored high on individualism and uncertainty avoidance were more prone to be brand loyal. The relationship between masculinity and proneness to brand loyalty though is positive but it is non-significant.

The effect of cross-cultural differences on consumer impatience has been examined by Chen, NG and Rao (2005). Their research regards Hofstede's fifth dimension of "long-term orientation" as the foundation of the study. Dwyer, Mesak and Hsu (2005) investigate the influence of national culture on cross-cultural product diffusion using Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions. They found that masculinity and power distance had a positive relationship with cross-national product diffusion. Malhotra et al. (2005) examine service quality dimensions such as reliability, customer understanding, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and tangibility on the basis of study in three countries India, Indonesia and United States. Sigala (2006) investigates the effect of cultural dimensions on eCRM implementation using Hofstede's model and finds that e-shoppers have different expectations on eCRM features depending on their cultural profile but some features are expected by all e-shoppers.

CONCLUSIONS

Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions is a pioneer model of operationalizing culture in international business. Since 1980 there is wide application in every sphere of business research, thus proving its robustness and reliability. The researchers should employ this model for further research to further see its validity in different cultural settings.

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