



# The theory of cultural dimensions by Hofstede

Exploring an intercultural framework



# Background

Hofstede's studies represent one of the most ambitious attempt to explore central, cross-sectional values or cultural standards to date. In the studies, which he initially conducted in 1968 with over 116,000 IBM employees in 40 countries and then extended to 72 countries in 1972, supplemented by specific surveys for Europe and the Middle East, Hofstede identified five central values, which he referred to as cultural dimensions:



# Power Distance

The cultural dimension "Power Distance" represents the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations in a country expect and accept unequal power distribution.

The effects of unequal power on the social sphere are reflected, for example, in education (authoritarian education?) or in school (participation of students?).

→ Would you think that you receive an authoritarian education?

→ How much do students participate in the decisions at university?



# Power Distance

- The main criteria that characterize a society as one with high or low power distance are the process and perception of decision-making processes, whether they are autocratic/patriarchal or participatory.
- The nature of these processes then shapes both the willingness of employees to express a different opinion to their superiors and the willingness to take initiative, the relationship between parents and children, between teachers and students, and influences salary differences.



# Barriers to Inclusion in High Power Distance Cultures

- Fear of Speaking Up
- Subordinates avoid challenging leaders, stifling innovation.
- Overdependence on Authority: Creativity is limited by rigid hierarchies.
- Exclusion of Marginalized Groups: Those with less power (e.g., juniors, minorities) are overlooked.



# Barriers to Inclusion in Low Power Distance Cultures

- Risk of Disrespect: Overly casual communication may offend high-power-distance colleagues.
- Conflict Over Authority: Employees from hierarchical cultures may resist flat structures.



# INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

- The cultural dimension "Individualism – Collectivism" indicates the extent to which people in different cultures are guided by individualistic or collectivistic ideas, the degree to which they value individual responsibility and autonomy over the group constraints of a collective.
- In individualistic societies, people are more conditioned to take personal responsibility, and there are relatively loose connections among individuals (fear of loss of self-respect in case of rule violation).
- Collectivistic societies place great importance on the identification of the individual with "we-groups" and a strong sense of belonging (fear of expulsion from the group, social network is identity-forming).



# INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

- According to Hofstede's findings, individualism seems to be dependent on wealth, which is often associated with professional mobility and career.
- Communication differences are also linked to value orientations: verbal communication plays a particularly important role in individualistic cultures, silence is considered abnormal or suspicious;
- in collectivistic countries, mere togetherness is emotionally sufficient, communication is only necessary when information needs to be exchanged.



# INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

## examples

### Individualist Cultures (Like the USA, UK, etc.)

In these places, people really care about *themselves* doing well. Bosses and companies give rewards (like extra money, bonuses, or praise) to *one person* when *that person* does a great job. It's all about *ME, ME, ME!*

Example: *If you work super hard and sell a ton of stuff, your boss might give you a big fat bonus—just for you, not your coworkers.*



# INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

## examples

### **Collectivist Cultures (Like Japan, China, etc.)**

In these places, people care more about *the team* doing well, not just one person. Bosses and companies reward *the whole group* when they succeed together. It's all about *WE, WE, WE!*

Example: *If your team finishes a big project, everyone might get a party, a bonus split between them, or a group vacation. No single person gets all the credit—it's shared!*



# INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

- **Why Does This Matter?**

Because in some countries, people get mad if you only reward one person—they think it's unfair. In other countries, people *expect* to be rewarded alone if they did the best. So companies have to be careful how they hand out prizes!

→ How would you do communicate a success to your colleagues?



# MASCULINITY VS. FEMININITY

- In the cultural dimension "Masculinity – Femininity," Hofstede distinguishes between a "hard" society oriented towards professional success (work more important than private life) and material wealth (masculine) and a "soft" society focused on people and emotions (desire for equality, solidarity, consideration for the weaker, striving for compromises and consensus solutions) (feminine).



# MASCULINITY VS. FEMININITY

## examples

Some countries act more like **"tough guys"** (masculine cultures), while others act more like **"chill caregivers"** (feminine cultures). This affects how people work, live, and what they value.



# MASCULINITY VS. FEMININITY

## examples

**Example Countries:** USA, Japan, Germany

**Motto:** *"Work hard, win big, or go home!"*

- **Hustle culture** – People brag about working 80-hour weeks.
- **Money & status = success** – Big salaries, fancy job titles, and "being the best" matter most.
- **Winners vs. losers** – If you're not aggressive, you get left behind.
- **Example:** In the U.S., people say *"Sleep when you're dead!"* and glorify burnout.



# MASCULINITY VS. FEMININITY

## examples

**Example Countries:** Sweden, Norway, Netherlands

**Motto:** *"Work to live, don't live to work."*

- **Shorter workdays** – Sweden tested **6-hour workdays** (same pay, more free time).
- **Vacation & family time** – 5+ weeks off per year is normal.
- **No shame in relaxing** – Success = being happy, not just rich.
- **Example:** In Sweden, leaving work early to enjoy sunshine isn't lazy—it's smart!



# UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE– RISK TOLERANCE

- The cultural dimension "Uncertainty Avoidance" refers to the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by unknown or uncertain situations (e.g., question about stress)
- A high uncertainty avoidance index implies a tendency towards prejudice, rigidity, intolerance, and non-acceptance of disordered situations, while members of a culture with a low index react more tolerantly and calmly.



# UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE – RISK TOLERANCE - examples

- Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)= *"How much a culture hates surprises"*
- High UAI → Strict rules, resistance to change (e.g., Japan's traditional business practices).
- Low UAI → Flexible, adaptable (e.g., Silicon Valley's "fail fast" mentality).
- Fail fast mentality: business and innovation strategy that encourages **rapid experimentation, quick iterations, and early failure** to accelerate learning and improve products or ideas. It's rooted in **agile development, lean startups, and Silicon Valley tech culture**.



# LONG-TERM VS. SHORT-TERM ORIENTATION

- This dimension aims to explain differences between Asian and Western cultures
- For example, in short-term oriented countries, short-term profit, the promotion of values associated with the past and present (respect for traditions), face-saving, and fulfillment of social obligations are important
- In long-term oriented countries, preparation for the future, perseverance, frugality, and the belief that traditions must be adapted to endure are emphasized.



# LONG-TERM VS. SHORT-TERM ORIENTATION

## examples

Some countries play **the long game** (slow and steady), while others want **quick cash**

- **Long-Term Cultures** = Plant a tree now, eat fruit in 20 years.
- **Short-Term Cultures** = I want results NOW



# References

- Hofstede, Geert (2001). Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations.



КИЇВСЬКИЙ МЕДИЧНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ  
KYIV MEDICAL UNIVERSITY  
EST.1992

**Karlshochschule**  
International University



MINISTRY  
OF EDUCATION AND  
SCIENCE OF UKRAINE



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,  
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