

Aspects regarding Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model

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Abstract

This paper attempted to present cultural dimensions which can be used to describe a specific culture. Culture does not result from tradition but from the activity of sharing, exploiting, using some area of the earth and its resources. Successful cultures are those that adjust these activities in response to the changing physical, social, and economic constraints of their environment.

Key words: *culture, cultural dimensions, national cultures*

The Romanian Culture Particularities

The notion of culture has faced various changes over time. More than one hundred years ago, E. B. Taylor (1871) defined culture as that complex whole which included knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. At the middle of this century, A. L. Kroeber (1948) described culture as consisting of speech, beliefs, customs, art, technologies, ideals and rules. In 1995, Francis Fukuyama defines culture as an inherited ethical habit. Max Weber was among the first researchers to look at the relationship between culture and development [4].

A few remarkable features of the Romanian culture is that although it is a Latin Culture, the predominant religion is orthodoxy, making it the only non-catholic Latin nation in the world. The Romanian culture tenaciously preserved its Latin roots and harmonized them with traditional eastern religion of Orthodoxy.

Another feature of the Romanian culture is the special relationship between folk culture, mainly located in villages, and the enlightened culture, mainly located in the urban centers. This relationship is determined by two major factors: the rural character of the Romanian communities imprinted on the folk culture and, until the 18th century, the learned culture that consisted mainly of historical, juridical, moral, or religious works centered on the courts of princes and boyars, as well as in monasteries.

The Romanian political history can be categorized as being full of rebounds, and, at times, attempts were made to synchronize political life with European political culture. This was especially true for the years just before and after of the Phanariot ruling when, in a favorable historical context, Romania chose the Western way of life. The periods of radical changes and modernization of the Romanian culture coincided with the creation of the national state in 1859

and 1918. The national identity was thus defined in relation to the European model, and later on in devoting itself to the synchronization with the model.

The Romanian history contains periods of maximum manifestation of nationalism, and it seems that the Romanian people naturally have this inclination that at times led to unjustified pride. During the communistic period, nationalism became the new religion.

After the enthronement of communism, an attempt was made to build up a new culture identity on this basis of socialism and lend legitimacy to the new order by rejecting traditional values. During this time, the propaganda apparatus imposed by the Soviet puppet government attempted to tell the Romanian people that they were socialist in nature. In the 1960's that was soon over, and what followed were two decades of Ceausescu's dictatorship where pressures were made to impose a showy nationalism.

After the revolution of 1989, there has been an invigoration of the Romanian society, through a revision of the collective system of values and norms.

One of the most important facets of the Romanian culture is the value it places on family and friends. In the national orientation, friendships and family ties typically last for a lifetime. Another key aspect of the Romanian culture is that it is less achievement-oriented than their Western counterparts. The Romanian belief is that enjoying life and relationships is often more important than achieving particular goals; work is more a means to an end than an end in itself.

Romanians use a more indirect style of communication than people in the United States, Germany, or Australia. In this sense, the Romanian culture mirrors that of the Asians, who are often very polite and will tell others what they want to hear. In Romania, being slightly dishonest about feelings is less offensive than being overtly direct.

More Romanians find their roots in the rural area of the country, yet this phenomenon has less to do with geography and more to do with mentalities or mind-sets. Very often, people are not eager to take certain risks or engage in certain behavior, not necessarily out of conviction, but rather out fear and shame of this all-powerful "village mouth". As result of this phenomenon, many Romanian people tend to build their dreams and lives according to the path allowed by the "world's mouth". In turn, it will become extremely difficult for a Romanian to pull himself/herself from the crowd to formulate and sustain his/her own opinions.

Hofstede's Five Cultural Dimensions

According to Geert Hofstede, there is not such thing as a valid universal management method or management theory. Management is not a phenomenon that can be isolated from the other processes taking place in society. It interacts with what happens in the family, at school, in politics, and government it is obviously related and beliefs about sciences.

During 1978-1983 Hofstede conducted detailed interviews which involved hundreds of IBM employees in 53 countries. Through standard statistical analysis of fairly large data sets, he was able to determine patterns of similarities and differences among the replies. From this data analysis, he formulated his theory that world cultures vary along consistent, fundamental dimensions.

Cultural dimensions are the major psychological dimensions, or value constructs, which can be used to describe a specific culture. National cultures can be described according to Geert Hofstede's analysis. He identified five dimensions (culture variables) and rated 53 countries on indices for each dimension, normalized to values (usually) of 0 to 100 (example in figures 1, 2, 3) [2]:

- power distance;

- uncertainty avoidance;
- individualism as opposed to collectivism;
- masculinity as opposed to femininity;
- long-term versus short-term orientation.

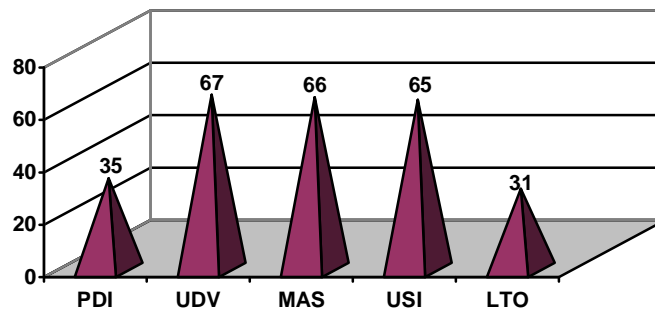


Fig. 1. Hofstede's five indices for Germany [5]

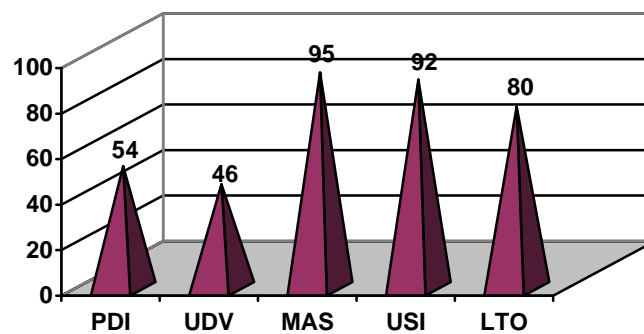


Fig. 2. Hofstede's five indices for Japan [5]

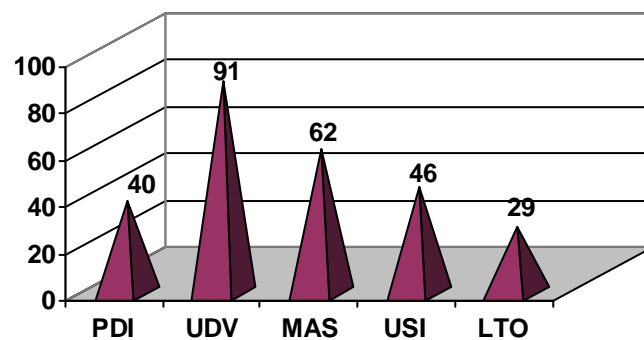


Fig. 3. Hofstede's five indices for United States [5]

Power Distance (index PDI)

According to Hofstede, power distance stands for the degree of inequality in the relationship between bosses and their subordinates. A high power distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow for significant upward mobility of its citizens. A low power distance ranking indicates that the society de-emphasizes the differences between citizen's power and wealth. In these societies, what is stressed is the equality and opportunity for everyone [1].

The power distance in Romania between social, economic, and cultural environment has been, and it seems that it will, remain high. The first major proof is the fact that the Romanian society is still structured as pyramid based education, family background, and income. The peak of the pyramid continues to be the ideal destination of most Romanians. Secondly, there is an almost inexistence middle-class. These absences increase even more the power distance between social classes.

The presence of politeness pronouns in the Romanian language, are used either due to age or seniority or due to title and position, and they represent a strong argument for a high power distance in the Romanian culture.

Uncertainty Avoidance (index UAI)

Uncertainty avoidance explains how societies tolerate ambiguity. A high uncertainty avoidance ranking indicates the fact that the country has low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. A low uncertainty avoidance ranking indicates the country has less concern about ambiguity and uncertainty and has more tolerance for a variety of opinions. This is reflected in a society that is less rule-oriented, more readily accepts change, and takes more and greater risks.

The stormy history that has characterized Romania along the ages seems to have made survival the Romanians' key objective. This, in turn, has made most Romanians very intense when it comes to uncertainty avoidance. The first reason for this is the fact that most people in Romanian today are confronted with existential problems like food, current expenses, and shelter. Secondly, there is currently no culture of risk-bearing in Romania. In the previous regime, the state made the major decisions and assured that no one needed to worry about anything. This mentality that the state is responsible for all the major decisions is still persistent in many people's minds.

Individualism/Collectivism (index IDV)

Individualism, as opposed to collectivism, describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself/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 to protect them in exchange for an unquestioned loyalty. The word "collectivism" in this sense has no political meaning: it refers to the group, not to the state. Again, the issue addressed by this dimension is an extremely fundamental one, regarding all societies in the world.

The Romanian national character was forced to think in collectivistic terms during communist times, but today, the Romanian culture seems to have an opposite reaction and its swiftly heading towards individualism. This can be observed on a micro level in the relations between partners, where more often than not the norm for partnership is a win-lose situation. Other arguments in favor of individualism development in Romania are the reorientation towards Western culture, private property concept and individualistic courage in the economic field.

At this point in its history, the Romanian society is truly a society in transition on more than one aspect: the national culture, the political culture, and the economic structure. There is a tension all throughout Romania due to the reshaping of its national identity.

Masculinity/Femininity (index-MAS)

Masculine/Assertiveness characteristics include association with high earnings, recognition for a good job, advancement, and challenge to have personal accomplishments. In these societies, gender roles are clearly distinct. Feminine/Modesty characteristics include good working relationships, cooperation, desirable living area for family, and employment security. In F societies, roles are often merged or overlap for the sexes.

A high masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with females being controlled by male domination. A low masculinity ranking indicates the fact that the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

The Romanian culture has been and continues to be a culture characterized by a high degree of masculinity. It is more acceptable in the Romanian culture for men to be the major decision-makers and to hold the influential jobs with power and authority.

Further more, there are few visible attempts made by women to fight the traditional stereotypes. Currently, even after Romania's liberalization, there are a limited number of women rights organizations, and even they are poorly funded and overwhelmed by needs.

Long-Term Orientation (index-LTO)

This dimension was related to persistence and perseverance, status and order in positions, thrift, and sense of shame. Its opposite (short-term orientation) was characterized by personal steadiness and stability, protecting "face", respect for tradition, and reciprocity of greetings, favors and gifts.

High long-term orientation ranking indicates the country prescribes the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. This is thought to support a strong work ethic where long-term rewards are expected as a result of today's hard work. However, business may take longer to develop in this society, particularly for an "outsider". A low long-term orientation ranking indicates that the country does not reinforce the concept of long-term, traditional orientation. In this culture, change can occur more rapidly as long-term traditions and commitments do not become impediments to change.

Conclusions

Hofstede states it that some cultural relativism is necessary: it is difficult to establish absolute criteria for what is noble and what is disgusting. There is no escaping bias; all people develop cultural values based on their environment and early training as children. Not everyone in a

society fits the cultural pattern precisely, but there is enough statistical regularity to identify trends and tendencies. In a multi-cultural world, it is necessary to cooperate to achieve practical goals without requiring everyone to think, act, and believe identically [2].

In management, culture influences, and sometimes even determines policy, style, structure, etc. of the organization. When managing a company in a domestic operation with a homogeneous culture everyone seems to speak the same language, understand the same cues, and have similar values and norms.

Culture and cultural dimensions are considered the collective horizon representing a specific social reality (the objectivity of subjectivity). The cultural dimensions set up the representational forms in which cultures fill in the contents. Here's where the challenges begin. Culture does not result from tradition but from the activity of sharing, exploiting, using some area of the earth and its resources. Successful cultures are those that adjust these activities in response to the changing physical, social, and economic constraints of their environment [3].

Hofstede's work is probably the most popular work in the arena of culture research. Although the work provides a relatively general framework for analysis, the framework can be easily applied to many everyday intercultural encounters. It is particularly useful, as it reduces the complexities of culture and its interactions into five relatively easily understood cultural dimensions.

In 2001, it is adopted by the UNESCO General Conference, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The declarations predicated on the consideration of culture as a full-fledged resource for development. Explicit in the declaration is that cultural diversity is as important a factor for development as biological diversity. Cultural diversity presupposes the existence of a process of exchanges, open to renewal and innovation but also committed to tradition, and does not aim at the preservation of a static set of behaviors, values and expressions.

References

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Aspecte privind modelul dimensiunilor culturale al lui Hofstede

Rezumat

Acest articol încearcă să prezinte dimensiunile culturale care pot fi utilizate pentru a descrie specificul unei culturi. Cultura nu este rezultatul tradiției, ci al activităților de împărțire, exploatare, utilizare a aceleiași zone a globului și a resurselor sale. Succesul culturii este acela care reglează aceste activități ca răspuns la schimbările fizice, sociale și la constrângerile economice ale mediului.