

CULTURE AND IT'S IMPACT

Reading: Professor Hofstede's dimensions of culture

Professor Geert Hofstede, who worked at Maastricht University in the Netherlands and for IBM is a giant in the field of intercultural communication. According to Hofstede, each culture can be analysed according to five different dimensions. The theory has been criticised for being too static. However, business people working internationally still use it today.



The Five Dimensions

Individualism/Collectivism: If people are from an individualistic society they will see themselves as single independent actors, not as a group member at a deep level as people in collective societies do. Hofstede emphasises that the groups are 'natural' ones, such as family, not just any group. It is also important to realise that this dimension does not show that some people like to be in groups; they are in groups because it is a matter of identity.

Uncertainty avoidance: In some cultures, people prefer to have everything presented in detail so there will be few, if any surprises. In cultures where uncertainty avoidance is low, people are more relaxed about the unknown and are not worried when they don't have all the details.

Power distance: Hierarchy is a feature of most human life, but in some cultures, the gap between those with a lot of power and those with little power is wider. This leads to a society where power is concentrated on a small number of people at the top who make most of the decisions, and there is less expectation of movement between classes or levels. In cultures where power distance is low, people tend to expect that those in power have earned it. They also expect power relations to be more democratic than those in a high power distance society.

Masculinity: In this dimension, there is a gender gap.

Women's values are said to be more similar across all cultures. Women are said to value kindness, building relationships and reaching agreements through communication. In cultures with a low masculinity dimension, men also share the values connected with women and there is more equality between men and women. However, cultures with a high masculinity dimension have more values connected with men: competition, assertiveness and 'looking out for Number One'. In such cultures, the values of women also move towards the masculinity end of the spectrum.

Long-term/Short-term orientation: Long-term planning, saving and hard work are valued in cultures with long-term orientation, whereas living for the moment is more important in those with short-term orientation.

These five dimensions, taken together, can give important insights for someone wishing to enter a new culture for business, study or other purposes. These dimensions are *tendencies*, not rules. They can help to predict actions of groups, societies or nations, but there will always be different individuals.

Source: Website of Professor Geert Hofstede



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LIVEWORKSHEETS

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1 Read the article. Are these statements true or false?

- 1 People in individualistic societies see themselves as independent.
- 2 People in cultures with a low *uncertainty avoidance* like to have as much information as possible when they make plans.
- 3 People in places where there is *high power distance* expect to be able to move to a position of power more easily.
- 4 Men share the same values as women in *low masculinity* cultures.
- 5 People in places with *long-term orientation* are likely to spend all the money they earn.
- 6 These dimensions are rules and you should always follow them when dealing with people from different countries.

2 Match tips 1–10 with the society a–j that they describe.

- 1 The management values teamwork and wants everybody to be involved in the decision-making process.
- 2 *Hard work is important in these countries.*
- 3 People want to express their own opinion.
- 4 You might employ a management team of men in this society.
- 5 You should give detailed plans of every project.
- 6 You need to communicate with the top managers to get answers and to get things done.
- 7 Respect the traditions of the society.
- 8 You don't worry about the details in this society.
- 9 Men and women should be treated equally. Finding agreement is more important than 'winning' a discussion.
- 10 People in this society probably do not expect a job for life.

- a Individualistic
- b Collectivist
- c High uncertainty avoidance
- d Low uncertainty avoidance
- e High power distance
- f Low power distance
- g Low masculinity dimension
- h High masculinity dimension
- i Long-term orientation
- j Short-term orientation



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