Indulgence Versus Restraint

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory identifies and explains various cultural values. One of these values is the extent to which a cultural group is willing to be more indulgent or restrained, which means how interested a culture is in enjoying life versus following strict social norms. In Hofstede's theory, this value is called the "indulgence-versus-restraint" cultural dimension.

More-indulgent societies are comfortable with the idea of people pursuing pleasures and having fun, and they place great importance on individual leisure time. More-restrained societies, on the other hand, have a tendency to suppress, or put aside, personal desires. Restrained cultures often have strict moral values and carefully regulated social norms. The degree to which a society is indulgent versus restrained is important for managers and employees to keep in mind when working abroad because it helps them to determine how to behave in certain situations.

Nations that rank high on the indulgence scale include Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, the United States, Canada, and Australia. In fact, most of North America and South America are composed of indulgent countries. In Europe, Great Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands also rank high on the scale. Some of the cultural values of these societies include a strong interest in happiness, a perception of control over one's own life, optimism, extroverted attitudes toward strangers, and a firm belief in freedom of speech. In addition, these societies tend to be more flexible when it comes to social rules about sex. They also tend to have higher crime rates but smaller police forces. It is important to note that not all of these characteristics apply to every country that ranks high on the indulgence scale, and of course, these characteristics represent just a range of behaviors and attitudes that might be present.

According to Hofstede's theory, nations that are on the opposite end of the spectrum are more restrained. In these countries, generally speaking, there is a weaker sense of overall happiness and a belief that one is not in control of one's own destiny. Many of these societies do not place a great deal of importance on leisure time, and compared to indulgent societies, restrained societies are more pessimistic. In addition, Hofstede's research found that many people in restrained cultures are introverted—or at least not overtly friendly—toward strangers. So, for example, people may not be as likely to smile at or greet strangers. The countries that fall into this category include some Asian nations, as well as many countries in the Middle East. In Europe, those countries in eastern Europe tend to be more restrained than those in western Europe. In addition, cultures in restrained societies place more importance on national stability than on free speech, and because of this, many of these nations have lower crime rates but larger police forces than those found in indulgent societies. Of course, restrained countries are also very different from one another in many ways, and the characteristics mentioned here, like those of indulgent countries, vary from place to place.

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1. What does the indulgence-versus-restraint dimension measure?
a. How much money a country has
b. How much a culture enjoys life or follows strict rules
c. How fast a country develops technology
d. How polite people are

2. What do more-indulgent societies value?
a. Strict social norms
b. Working every day with no free time
c. Enjoying life and having fun
d. Large police forces

3. What do restrained societies tend to do with personal desires?
a. Encourage them
b. Ignore them completely
c. Suppress or put them aside
d. Celebrate them openly

4. Why is this cultural dimension important for people working abroad?
a. It helps them learn a new language
b. It helps them know how to behave in different situations
c. It helps them find cheaper food
d. It helps them choose a good hotel

5. Which region has many countries that rank high in indulgence?
a. Eastern Europe
b. The Middle East
c. North and South America
d. Central Asia

6. Indulgent societies often show which characteristic?
a. Pessimism
b. Strong belief in freedom of speech
c. Very strict moral rules
d. Large police forces

7. According to the text, people in restrained cultures are often more _____.
a. extroverted
b. friendly to strangers
c. optimistic
d. introverted

8. Compared to indulgent societies, restrained societies tend to be more _____.
a. optimistic
b. pessimistic
c. flexible
d. interested in pleasure

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9. What do restrained societies value more than free speech?

a. Happiness
b. Personal freedom
c. National stability
d. Leisure time

10. Which statement is TRUE about restrained societies?

a. They have smaller police forces than indulgent societies
b. They place great importance on leisure time
c. They believe people control their own destiny
d. They often have lower crime rates

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