

2014

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# **National Culture Underpins Individual Behaviour and Work-Related-Values: The importance of nationality**

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## **Abstract:**

This analysis is devoted to the national culture and its linkage with individual behaviour and work-related values. The authors will investigate into what extent the national culture underpins individual behaviour.

## **1.1. Culture: definitional approaches**

Culture is a topic that was firstly discussed in the area of anthropology. Anthropologists refer to culture in two different ways: Firstly, they use the generic culture which is devoted to the “quality of Homo sapiens that is specific to human behaviour” (Friedman, 1994: 72). The second kind of culture is the differential culture which is the most generally accepted kind. Differential culture “consists in the attribution of a set of social behavioural and representational properties to a given population” (Friedman, 1994: 72).

Primarily, the authors gives the most important definitions of the term “culture”. Hofstede (1997: 80) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”. Similarly, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) argued that culture is about a team of people who have common understanding and meaning of things around them. The authors believes that the aforementioned collective programme or meaning is generated during the teenage of a human being. Therefore, Ralston *et al.* (1993) rightfully consider culture as the values and beliefs which are commonly shared by a society. In the same way, Ronen and Shenkar (1985) and Taylor (1913) pointed out that culture includes the history, the religion, the art, the morals, the law and the education of a specific society. The authors supports that the most accurate and comprehensive definition is that of Hofstede (1997). Nevertheless, his favourite definition is that of Geertz, “the culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1993: 89).

For the purposes of this analysis, the authors refers to the national culture and the importance of nationality. According to Hofstede (1997) people have various layers of mental programming, relating to different levels of culture. One of these levels is “the national level of culture according to one’s country” (Hofstede, 1997: 10). Nation and culture are linked because people like to interrelate with other people and be politically governed by organizations, dependable beliefs and values with which they recognize (Peterson and Smith, 1997). Nationality is a very important aspect of a human being’s life because of political, sociological and psychological reasons (Hofstede, 1983). Every nation has its own history and its own institutions like the educational system, the type of government, labour system etc. Moreover, nationality makes the people to differ

among the crowd and gives their origins. People feel that they belong somewhere and nationality identifies who people are. Lastly, people carry their nationality for their whole life. They are psychologically connected with national culture, because of their experiences in their family, the education and local organizations.

Hofstede (1980a; 1991) defines national culture as the collective mental programming of a group of people from a specific country. He supports that the people of a country share common mental programming with the same beliefs, values and behaviours among the nation. Additionally, national culture “is as inherited ethical habit which can consist of an idea or value, or of a relationship based on ethical codes by which societies regulate behaviour” (Fukuyama, 1995 quoted in Morden, 1999: 20). In other words, national culture is the culture of each nation. National culture can be used in order to distinguish different nationalities and countries. “National culture is a concept that helps to determine similarities and differences between the cultures of the countries” (Agourram and Ingham, 2007: 643). The authors believes that the best definition of national culture of the existing study is that the national culture is the work-based values and attitudes of the citizens of a nation (Bird *et al*, 1999; Tayeb, 1997).

After a literature review, the authors found out that there are many kinds of models of national culture. These models were generated in order to measure the similarities and differences among national cultures. Some of them are based upon a single dimension variable (Hall, 1976; Lewis, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995) while some others are based on multiple dimension variables (Hofstede, 1991; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1994; Lessem and Neubauer, 1994). For the purpose of this study the authors refers to the single dimension model of Hall and presents the multiple dimension of Hofstede.

Hall (1976) used a single dimension in order to differentiate national cultures: high context versus low context. “Context is defined in terms of how individuals and their society seek information and knowledge” (Hall, 1976 quoted in Morden, 1999: 21). People from high context cultures gather information from personal information networks while people from low context culture get information from data-bases and formal readings.

Hofstede (1980a) argued that national culture could be categorised in four dimensions as it influences the environment of work and management: the power distance, the uncertainty avoidance, the individualism-collectivism and the masculinity-femininity.

*Power distance* dimension has to do with how a society deals with the inequality of its people. Hofstede supports that human beings are not equal regarding wealth, prestige and status. Some countries have high power distance which means that despite the inequalities, the relationships between people are harmonious. In the case of low power distance people have conflicts and mistrust.

*Uncertainty avoidance* is about the extent that a society copes with the uncertainty of the application of law, rules, religion and technology. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance like to predict rules, work schedules and relationships for the future while they avoid taking risks. On the contrary, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance enjoy taking risks and they are more tolerant in uncertainty and ad hoc situations. For

example, according to Chhokar *et al.* (2001), workers in high uncertainty cultures worry about their future; they try to remain at their present job and do not have achievement motivations.

*Individualism-Collectivism* deals with the way that people live together. In other words, it examines in what extent people of a country like to act either as individuals or as members of a group. Countries that support the group work and collegiality belong to the collectivism dimension while the others are individualistic countries. Pagell *et al.* (2005: 376) pointed out that “the level of individualism or collectivism will affect members’ reasons for complying with organizational requirements, as well as affect the type of people admitted into positions of special influence”.

*Masculinity-Femininity* refers to the roles of sexes in the society. Therefore, it refers to the degree that a society allows the same characteristics between the roles of women and men. The division of labour among the genders varies from one country to another. Each country prolongs its gender patterns through education, family and work. According to Pagell *et al.* (2005), it is generally accepted that men appear more aggressive, independent and dominant while women are more helpful, encouraging and affiliating. Consequently, countries that promote the former characteristics present levels of masculinity while countries that promote the latter characteristics present levels of femininity.

In 1991, Hofstede completed another research which comes to add a fifth dimension of national culture. The fifth dimension that is based on Michel Harris Bond study is the long-short term orientation (Hofstede, 1997). “It is a measure for the degree of long or short term orientation in a country’s culture” (Latifi, 2006: 2056). Cultures with a long-term orientation are more anxious about the future, while the values of cultures of short-term orientation are attached with the past (Hofstede, 1991). At the past orientation people believe that plans should be based on the cultural traditions of the society and that change and the introduction of new things are acceptable if they are based on past experience.

Hofstede’s dimensions and work have accepted lot of criticism. The authors present some of the comments and his opinion. Some researchers advocate that the period of collecting the data (1968-1973) is irrelevant, because it was collected over 30 years ago (Fernandez *et al.*, 1997; Verbeke, 2000; Spector *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, the study has also been criticized for its sample. The data gathered came only from the IBM organization, a fact that limits the generalization of the results (Tayeb, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 1996; Rose, 1986; Korman, 1985). Lastly, Hofstede used only questionnaires which caused problems regarding the triangulation<sup>1</sup> of data. According to Triandis (1982) and Smucker (1982) the study of cultural differences necessitates the use of multiple tools for gathering data.

The authors believe that the study of Hofstede is very important and the aforementioned critics can be contradicted. The strong criticism does not work as an inhibitory factor for many researchers (Dugan *et al.*, 1998; Jeanquart-Barone and Peluchette, 1999; Chhokar

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kellaghan *et al.* (2003: 162) triangulation is “a way of pulling together a variety of information sources to build a credible picture”.

*et al.*, 2001; Clark, 1990). Specifically, a recent research of Merritt (2000) quotes the value of Hofstede's dimension of national culture and reconfirms its validity. Similarly, the authors believe that the five dimensions of national culture are very significant and helpful in understanding individual behaviour and work-related values among nations. Additionally, many studies proved that Hofstede's study gained generalization (Furrer *et al.*, 2000; Matila 1999).

## **1.2. National culture and individual behaviour**

The national culture in relation with individual behaviour is a topic that recently started to preoccupy the research community. According to Chhokar *et al.* (2001) the differences among culture and nations did not seem to affect the individual's behaviour in USA and many behavioural theorists expanded this result across the universe. Despite this fact, during the last century, some researchers tried to investigate the aforementioned topic (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Adler and Graham, 1989; Hofstede, 1980b) and indeed they found out that culture influences the behaviour of people.

The national culture underpins the behaviour of the individuals. "As nations are subculturally heterogeneous individuals do not all have common subcultures, but most or all are said to share a common national culture: the collective programming which I call culture should be seen as collective component shared in the minds of otherwise different individuals and absent in the minds of individuals belonging to a different society" (Hofstede, 1980a: 37). This is a statement that clearly identifies the connection between individual and national culture.

The authors believe that the culture of each nation plays a significant role for the development of its human capital. Biddle (1979: 68) pointed out that individuals behave in different and predictable ways but their behaviour is depended on the situation and their social identities. Social identity is shaped by the society where each person lives and by the values and culture adapted by the nation. Consequently and unavoidably every human being is underpinned by the culture of its nation.

As the authors already mentioned, the culture is like a mental programming being produced by social environment and life's experiences. Hofstede (1997) quoted that every human being is underpinned by thinking, acting and feeling patterns which were captured throughout their lifetime. Similarly, Adler (1991) mentioned that national culture can be shared by the majority of members of a community; adult people of the community try to forward it on to the youngest and it shapes the individual's behaviour, values, morals, customs and laws. Firstly, a human being starts to be programmed from its childhood, at a time that a child learns and assimilates things more easily. The roots of this programming come from the members of the family who traditionally learn to the baby born the first 'steps' of life. Afterwards, the role of the family is enforced by the school, the neighbourhood and friends. In teenage, an individual becomes more independent and tries to be an active part of a community's life. Thus, the youth parties and organizations develop in a better way the mental programming. Lastly, through university and therefore the workplace environment, an individual shapes its behaviour.

An individual's behaviour has extensive relation with the national culture of the born country. Characteristically, Hofstede (1997) referred to an example from a theatre piece where a group of people was angry about the politeness of a defendant. He was an immigrant young boy who was brought up with values like politeness. Hofstede (1997) quoted that the boy was many years in the new country however he still had the same behaviour as he was raised. "He carries within himself an indelible pattern of behaviour" (Hofstede, 1997: 3). Indeed, an individual cannot change easily some traits that come from the national culture. For example, the writer comes from Cyprus where hospitality is one of the strongest values of the national culture of the island. When he was abroad for a couple of years, some people noticed this value. A part of them loved it while some others rejected it, calling it fake behaviour. This example shows the cultural differences and that national culture underpins human behaviour.

National culture is also the 'culture two' as Hofstede (1997: 5) called it: "greeting, eating, showing or not showing feelings, keeping a certain physical distance from others, making love, or maintaining body hygiene". There are various ways of greetings: kiss to the mouth, salaam, shake hands, honour, wave hand, and kiss cheek to cheek. The greeting is an individual daily behaviour which differs among countries. This is because national culture. For example, the salaam greeting is used only by Arabs because this is their traditional greeting while shaking hands is used by most of the people because it is a universal greeting.

Greeting is a kind of gesture and therefore a symbol. This encourages the writer to refer to the value of national symbols, heroes, rituals and values in shaping an individual's behaviour. "Symbols are words, gestures, pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognized by those who share the culture" (Hofstede, 1997: 7). Each nation has its own flag, language, clothes, fashion etc. Inevitably, the behaviour of the individual is affected by national symbols. For example, the writer likes very much and he has a collection of items concerning the Cypriot national animal, the mouflon. If he came from another country he would most probably not know the existence of mouflon. Moreover, a good example is the "burka" cloth which is mostly worn by women of Islam and it is a strong proof that the national culture underpins an individual's behaviour.

Furthermore, each individual has a hero, a person who admires and imitates. "Heroes are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics which are highly prized in a culture, and who thus serve as models for behaviour" (Hofstede, 1997: 8). Human beings grow up having in mind some heroes and exemplars. It is reasonable that each nation has different heroes, for example Popeye in Malta, Zorba in Greece or Obelix in France.

Additionally, part of the national culture is any kind of ritual which takes place in any nation. "Rituals are collective activities, technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered as socially essential: they are therefore carried out for their own sake" (Hofstede, 1997: 8). A kind of ritual is the religion which affects the behaviour of the individuals. There are several religions among nations like Christianity, Mohamnism, Buddhism etc. Each religion has its own rules,

ethos and customs. Consequently, the behaviour of a religious individual is guided by his/her religion. For example, a Christian individual goes to the church and makes the sign of the cross while a Mohammadan person goes to mosque and bows three times per day or a Christian respects and honours Christ, while Buddhist worships Buddha. Another kind of ritual is the cultural celebrations and customs. For example, Cypriots celebrate the first day of the spring by parading at the main street of the towns in order to welcome spring, while some other nation used to swim in the cold sea during winter in order to welcome Christmas. As we can see, each nation has its own customs and so do its citizens.

Moreover, the core of national culture is the values. “Values are what we regard as right, proper, good or bad” (Anderson *et al.*, 2003: 33). Similarly, according to Hofstede (1997: 8) values are about “ugly versus beautiful, dirty versus clean, paradoxical versus logical, rational versus irrational and abnormal versus normal”. Gross (1985) proposed “three different kinds of values: integrative, regulatory-directive and motivating, which influence different aspects of our lives” (quoted in Anderson *et al.*, 2003: 46). Integrative values are those values that lead individuals into collectivity while motivating values help the individual to shape collective thoughts about interests and needs. According to Gamble and Gibson (1999), values exist only in a social context, like national culture, family, regional community and work groups.

Values are learned by the individual at the very early childhood; they are part of the rest of his/her life. The authors has already mentioned to politeness and hospitality which are two values, but as it proved, they are not necessarily important for all nations. By the same way and regarding the national culture, individuals do not have same values and beliefs. Similarly, Chhokar *et al.* (2001: 79) quoted that theory and recent research propose that people who come from different cultural environment will not essentially accept the same patterns of values and they will have not have the same opinions about situations and the desired outcomes of life.

### **1.3. National culture and workplace values**

The life of individuals is driven by values. A big part of a human life is the work and therefore the work-based values. Schwartz (1999: 41) stated that “work-related values refer to the goals or rewards people seek through their work, and they are expressions of more general human values in the context of the work setting”. Additionally, he divided the values into four categories: intrinsic values (autonomy, personal growth, creativity and interest), extrinsic values (security and payment), social values (societal contribution and people’s contact) and power values (authority, influence and prestige) (Schwartz, 1999). Moreover, work-based values are motivation (McClelland, 1963), hygiene factors (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959) and social needs (Maslow, 1959). Lastly, values such as helpful, polite, clean, imaginative, intellectual, cheerful, loving, courageous, capable, independent, obedient, forgiving etc. are instrumental work-based values (Bigoness and Blakely, 1996).

National culture plays a significant role in the development of work-related values and therefore their continuation. In strong organizational cultures, the employees sustain particular ways of working (Schneider, 1989; Laurent, 1983). According to Smith



(1992) the national values are related to the organizational behavior; the preferable leadership style, the types of solving problems and conflicts and the formal norms.

Occupational values are socialized at the school or university, in age between childhood and adulthood (Hofstede and Peterson, 2000). According to Hofstede (1972), work-related values are different among occupations and nations. On the one hand, the values are depended on the kind of the work while on the other hand on the nationality. Every organization has its own culture which is called organizational culture and underpins the values of the organization. According to Bhasharan and Gligorovska (2009) organizational culture is influenced by the nation political, historical, economic and social factors and by the nationality of the managers and the owners of the organizations. "Organizational culture reflects the values of their founders and the ways in which they were set up" (Hofstede, 1984: 393). Additionally, according to Denison (1990) organizational culture is a system of common meanings in the organization which affects the behavior of the workers.

One of the values that are connected with individual and work is the lifelong learning. Nowadays work takes a new meaning; "occupation is an anchor for lifelong learning and a basis for network participation" (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996: 374). However learning beliefs come from the very early years of an individual; they are produced by the culture, the activities and the environment in which they are learned (Jehng *et al.*, 1993). As it seems, the thoughts of an individual about learning are related with the national culture and are cultivated from its childhood. As Rodrigues *et al.* (2000: 24) pointed out "characteristic learning-style of a nation/culture is also institutionalized and reinforced through its child rearing practices and education systems". For example, according to Hofstede (1986), cultures with weak uncertainty-avoidance are open minded and try to reduce uncertainty. Thus, they accept new things and lifelong learning. Moreover, the study of Youn (2000) proved that individualist countries like United States have stronger learning beliefs than collectivist countries like Korea because individualism promotes the challenge to work.

Lifelong learning leads the authors to refer to the career of the workers. According to Venter (2002), career paths are connected to the cultural values. At a macro societal level, an individual's career is influenced by national culture (Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). For example, Hong Kong's national culture and family promotes women's career, while Britain's culture does not (Venter, 2002; Hills, 1995). Consequently, women in Hong Kong have better careers and work opportunities while in Britain "women's career roles are at times sacrificed for their family role" (Venter, 2002: 205). This difference among Britain and Hong Kong derives from the belief about the role of family. According to Lau and Kuan (1988), the loyalty to the family at Hong Kong is the strongest value; the individual by itself is not valuable. Thus the women struggle for a succeeded career in order to secure the wealth of the family. Similarly, Hills (1995) pointed out that the future career of the individual is affected by the perceptions of parents about their children.

Taking into consideration the dimensions given by Hofstede (1991), the authors present the major influences of culture on the work-related values which have been proved by the study of Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998).

In large power distance countries, the subordinate and supervisor have big emotional distance between them, a fact that discourages the subordinate of getting advice by the supervisor. On the contrary, in small power distance countries the working relationships are more promoted and there are skill-development behaviors, communication and networking.

According to Hofstede (1991), there are countries which promote individualism while some others promote collectivism. Concerning workplace, the workers from individualism are more independent, worry about them and plan future career. In contrast, employees from collectivism are more open to training, sharing their skills, having good relationships and support common tasks.

Moreover, masculinity and femininity cultures present different work-based values. According to Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998), masculinity deals with challenging work, recognition, opportunity for development to higher level jobs, competition among colleagues and performance, earnings, and finally, facilitates career planning. Femininity cultures support cooperation in work, security and good working relationships. Further, feminine cultures facilitate consultation, skill development and networking; behaviors which, as the authors already mentioned, are promoted by small power distance cultures too.

Nations with weak uncertainty avoidance welcome new ideas, innovative behavior, rewarding systems at the workplace. On the other hand strong uncertainty avoidance cultures resist to new ideas and innovation and support employees motivation by security.

According to the aforementioned Hofstede's dimensions, the national culture affects the workplace values. At this point the author believes that by showing more examples from the existed bibliography on national culture will strengthen his argument that national culture underpins the work-related values.

Bochner and Hesketh (1994) found out that employees from different cultural environment differ in their perceptions according to workplace environment. They have difference in discrimination, acceptable behaviors and diversity. Similarly, McCuddy's and Peery's (1996) study shows that African and Anglo Americans employees have differences in ethic standard and behavior. According to their origin country, the employees have differences in perceptions of unethical behavior and therefore they have different opinion about acceptable behavior of an employee.

Additionally, De Bettignies (1973) stated that the cultural characteristics of Japanese people which underpin their family and history, underpin also the organizational culture and behavior. Japanese workers support the idea of community, gratitude, planning, hard work, devotion to superiors and seniority which are also values of the national culture.

Another example is the study of Sorge and Warner (1981) which investigated factories in West Germany and Great Britain. They found out that the factories differed in

training and education systems, in functional mechanisms and in basic characteristics of industrial systems. They concluded that the differences appeared due to the different national technical culture among the two countries.

Moreover, there is a plethora of examples about collectivist and individualist countries. Hui and Yee (1999) study in Hong Kong proved that there are differences in job satisfaction and teambuilding among collectivist and individualist workers. Collectivists support the teambuilding while individualistic workers promote more the job satisfaction. According to Deresky (2000), in Mexico the workplace is conquered by personal matters while in Japanese workplaces the organization is the major principal. Similarly, Howard *et al.*, (1983) ascertained that Japanese managers develop social values instead of American managers who are individualists. Moreover, Kanungo and Wright (1983) pointed out that British managers give more importance to autonomy and individual achievement than the French managers. On the other hand, French managers give importance to company policies, security, expert management and comfortable conditions in work.

Hall and Hall (1990) pointed out that the countries where citizens take a long time to build relationships and trust other peoples (like some Arab and European countries) present the same behavior in workplace as well. In the working environment the teambuilding needs time to thrive, but when it happens the relationships are strong and long lasting.

Medina *et al.* study (1996) pointed out that Hispanic and Anglo Americans have different opinion about the money earned from work. Hispanic Americans save or spend their money not too fast, in order to gain satisfaction, in contrast to Anglo Americans who spend inconsiderately their money.

Lastly, the authors refer to Redding study (1993) which concluded that Chinese family business remain unstructured and small because of national culture. The national culture of China does not promote the sharing of trust and decentralized decision making. These national values shape by the same way the Chinese family business, in other words the work-related values, and consequently do not help the managers to expand and grow their business.

As the authors already supported, the national culture underpins work-related values. They believe that a significant role in the effectiveness of an organization is the organizational culture, thus he makes some recommendations. Lee and Trim (2008) suggested that the managers have to know the national cultural value system and traits of the people engaged to the organizations. In this way they could link the national culture with the organizational culture. HRM is linked to national culture through some mechanisms: definition of an effective manager, relations between colleagues, rewards systems and face-to-face feedback (Sparrow and Wu, 1998). According to Morden (1999) this linkage could lead to better training programmes and stronger organizational culture. Of course, the most appropriate vehicle for this success is the Human Resource Management (HRM). Sparrow and Wu, (1998: 28) defined HRM as “a menu of strategic choices to be made by HR executives in order to promote the most effective practices”. The authors believe that managers need to give attention to the national

culture of each employee and the culture of the organization itself. Managers can promote a common organizational greeting and communication system, training programmes and therefore common organizational values. Nevertheless, at this point, it is crucial to mention that the adaptation of effective organizational cultures in other organization might be a trap. For example, regarding to Taylor (1999), Japanization is a successful organizational model but it is applicable only in countries that have common national cultures. In order to have an effective adaptation of the import organizational model, the HRM has to adjust the model to the national culture of the local business. The authors concluded on recommendations referring to the words of Hofstede (1983: 88): “practice is usually wiser than theory, and if we see what effective organizations in different cultures have done, we recognize that their leaders did adapt foreign management ideas to local cultural conditions”.

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