

4.1: Taxonomies of Cultural Patterns

Learning Objectives

- Explain the similarities and differences of Hall, Hofstede and the GLOBE Taxonomies.

To develop confidence in intercultural communication, you must understand differences in cultural patterns. Cultural patterns are the similar behaviors within similar situations we witness due to shared beliefs, values, norms and social practices that are steady over time. In this chapter, you will explore three different taxonomies, which help us understand similarities and differences in these cultural patterns. Specifically, we will examine Edward Hall's High-Low context cultural taxonomy, Geert Hofstede's six dimensions, and Shalom Schwartz's seven dimensions of culture. (Stokes Rice, 2019).[i]

Hall's High-Low Context Cultural Taxonomy

Anthropologist Edward Hall founded the field of intercultural communication in 1959 with his book *The Silent Language*. The book was originally intended for the general public, but it sparked academic research in intercultural communication and fueled interest in subjects like nonverbal communication, according to [Keio Communication Review](#).^[ii]

High and Low Context^[iii]

Think about someone you are very close to—a best friend, romantic partner, or sibling. Have there been times when you began a sentence and the other person knew exactly what you were going to say before you said it? For example, in a situation between two sisters, one sister might exclaim, “Get off!” (which is short for “get off my wavelength”). This phenomenon of being on someone’s wavelength is similar to what Hall describes as high context. In high context communication the meaning is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words. When we have to rely on the translation of the words to decipher a person’s meaning then this is said to be low context communication. The American legal system, for example, relies on low context communication.

While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. In the example above between the two sisters, they are using high context communication, however, America is considered a low context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high context.

Hall defines intercultural communication as a form of communication that shares information across different cultures and social groups. One framework for approaching intercultural communication is with high-context and low-context cultures, which refer to the value cultures place on indirect and direct communication.

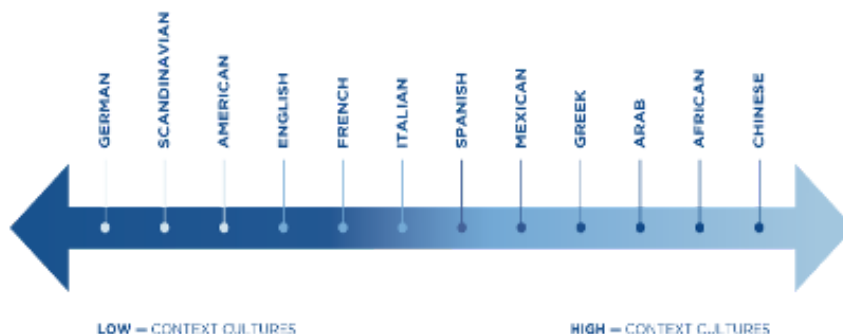


Figure 4.1.1 Low – High Context Cultures

High-Context Cultures

A high-context culture relies on implicit communication and nonverbal cues. In high-context communication, a message cannot be understood without a great deal of background information. Asian, African, Arab, central European and Latin American cultures

are generally considered to be high-context cultures.

High-context cultures often display the following tendencies, according to C.B. Halverson's book *Cultural Context Inventory*.

- **Association:** Relationships build slowly and depend on trust. Productivity depends on relationships and the group process. An individual's identity is rooted in groups (family, culture, work). Social structure and authority are centralized.
- **Interaction:** Nonverbal elements such as voice tone, gestures, facial expression and eye movement are significant. Verbal messages are indirect, and communication is seen as an art form or way of engaging someone. Disagreement is personalized, and a person is sensitive to conflict expressed in someone else's nonverbal communication.
- **Territoriality:** Space is communal. People stand close to each other and share the same space.
- **Temporality:** Everything has its own time, and time is not easily scheduled. Change is slow, and time is a process that belongs to others and nature.
- **Learning:** Multiple sources of information are used. Thinking proceeds from general to specific. Learning occurs by observing others as they model or demonstrate and then practicing. Groups are preferred, and accuracy is valued.

Low-Context Cultures

A low-context culture relies on explicit communication. In low-context communication, more of the information in a message is spelled out and defined. Cultures with western European roots, such as the United States and Australia, are generally considered to be low-context cultures.

Low-context cultures often display the following tendencies, according to Halverson:

- **Association:** Relationships begin and end quickly. Productivity depends on procedures and paying attention to the goal. The identity of individuals is rooted in themselves and their accomplishments. Social structure is decentralized.
- **Interaction:** Nonverbal elements are not significant. Verbal messages are explicit, and communication is seen as a way of exchanging information, ideas and opinions. Disagreement is depersonalized; the focus is on rational (not personal) solutions. An individual can be explicit about another person's bothersome behavior.
- **Territoriality:** Space is compartmentalized. Privacy is important, so people stand farther apart.
- **Temporality:** Events and tasks are scheduled and to be done at particular times. Change is fast, and time is a commodity to be spent or saved. One's time is one's own.
- **Learning:** One source of information is used. Thinking proceeds from specific to general. Learning occurs by following the explicit directions and explanations of others. Individual orientation is preferred, and speed is valued.

Communication Dynamics in High- and Low-Context Cultures

Cultural differences shape every aspect of global communication, says *Forbes* contributor Carol Kinsey Goman. This helps explain why people in Japan (a high-context culture) prefer face-to-face communication over electronic technology favored by other industrialized countries like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany (low-context cultures).

High-context cultures also prefer personal bonds and informal agreements over meticulously worded legal documents. They "are looking for meaning and understanding in what is *not* said — in body language, in silences and pauses, and in relationships and empathy," Goman says. Meanwhile, low-context cultures "place emphasis on sending and receiving accurate messages directly, and by being precise with spoken or written words," she explains. U.S. business leaders often fall into a communication trap by disregarding the importance of building and maintaining personal relationships when interacting with people from high-context cultures.

People should also watch for differences within high- and low-context cultures. This classification is an oversimplification, according to A.C. Krizan and others in the book *Business Communication*. "For example, although American culture is classified as low context, communication among family members tends to be high context," they write. "Family relationships and members' high level of shared experiences require fewer words because of mutual understandings."

On the other hand, communication between two businesspersons from a low-context culture tends to be more specific and direct. Attention focuses more on what is said than relationships. In China or Japan, words receive less attention than relationships, mutual understandings and nonverbal body language.

Hofstede's Taxonomy[iv]

The theory of Hofstede's cultural dimensions constitutes a framework revolving around cross-cultural communication, which was devised by Geert Hofstede. The dimensions collectively portray the impact of the culture ingrained in society on the values of the

members of that society. They also describe the relationship between these values and behavior, with the help of a structure based on factor analysis. In other words, this theory studies significant aspects of culture and provides them a rating on a comparison scale.

So far as international business is concerned, the dimensions of culture form an important facet. Knowledge of the manner in which different features of a business are viewed in different cultures, can help a manager in understanding and sailing successfully across the international business market.

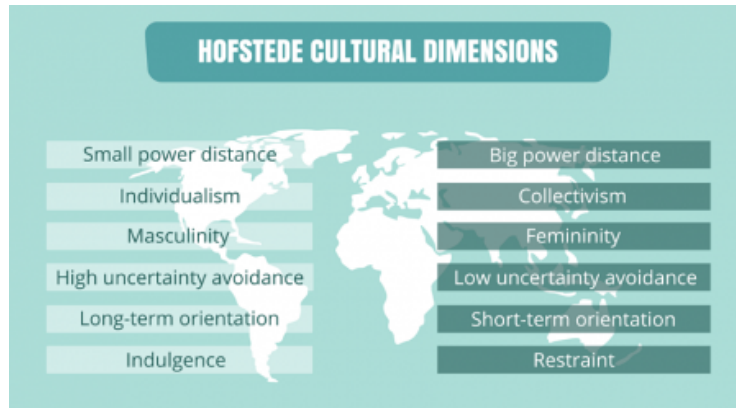


Figure 4.1.2 Hofstede cultural dimensions

In this article, we discuss the topic of Hofstede cultural dimensions by exploring 1) an **introduction**; 2) the **six cultural dimensions of Hofstede framework**, and using those dimensions to better understand cultures and people based on 3) a **case study of cultural differences**; 4) the **urgency of managing cultural difference as part of human resources management**; and 5) **conclusion**.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The original model of Hofstede was the outcome of factor analysis done on a global survey of the value system of employees at IBM between the years 1967 and 1973. This theory was one of the initial ones which could quantify cultural differences.

The original theory that Hofstede proposed talked of four dimensions, namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism and masculinity vs. femininity. After conducting independent studies in Hong Kong, Hofstede included a fifth dimension, known as long-term vs. short-term orientation, to describe value aspects that were not a part of his original theory. Again in 2010, Hofstede devised another dimension, the sixth one, indulgence vs. self-restraint, in an edition of '*Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*', co-authored by Michael Minkov.

Hofstede's work serves as the base for other researches in cross-cultural psychology, inviting a number of researchers to study different aspects of international business and communication. These dimensions founded by Hofstede illustrate the deeply embedded values of diverse cultures. These values impact not only how people with different cultural backgrounds behave, but also the manner in which they will potentially behave when placed in a work-associated context.

This is a brief overview of the six cultural dimensions:

1. **Power Distance:** This dimension explains the extent to which members who are less powerful in a society accept and also expect that the distribution of power takes place unequally.
2. **Uncertainty Avoidance:** It is a dimension that describes the extent to which people in society are not at ease with ambiguity and uncertainty.
3. **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** The focus of this dimension is on the question regarding whether people have a preference for being left alone to look after themselves or want to remain in a closely knitted network.
4. **Masculinity vs. Femininity:** Masculinity implies a society's preference for assertiveness, heroism, achievement and material reward for attaining success. On the contrary, femininity represents a preference for modesty, cooperation, quality of life and caring for the weak.
5. **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation:** Long-term orientation describes the inclination of a society toward searching for virtue. Short-term orientation pertains to those societies that are strongly inclined toward the establishment of the absolute truth.
6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint:** This revolves around the degree to which societies can exercise control over their impulses and desires.

Hofstede's Dimensions and Understanding Countries, Culture and People

According to Geert Hofstede, culture is the mind's collective programming that differentiates between one category of people and members of one group from another. The term 'category' might imply nations, religions, ethnicities, regions across or within nations, genders, organizations, or occupations.

#1: Power Distance

Power distance stands for inequality that is defined not from above, but from below. It is, in fact, the extent to which organizations and societies accept power differentials.

Societies with large power distance are characterized by the following features:

- Autocracy in leadership;
 - Authority that is centralized;
 - Paternalistic ways of management;
 - A number of hierarchy levels;
 - The acceptance of the privileges that come with power;
 - A lot of supervisory staff;
 - An expectation of power differences and inequality.
- Societies that have small power distance possess the following features:
- Participative or consultative style of management;
 - Decision-making responsibility and authority decentralized;
 - Flat structure of organizations;
 - Supervisory staff small in proportion;
 - Questioning the authority and lack of acceptance;
 - An inclination toward egalitarianism;
 - Consciousness of rights.

#2: Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members belonging to a society are capable of coping with future uncertainty without going through stress.

Weak uncertainty avoidance comes with the following features:

- Undertaking risk;
- Flexibility;
- Tolerance toward differing opinions and behaviors.

Strong uncertainty avoidance is represented by the following aspects:

- Tendency to avoid risk;
- Organizations that have a number of standardized procedures, written rules, and clearly delineated structures;
- Strong requirement for consensus;
- Respect for authority;
- Requirement for predictability highlighting the significance of planning;
- Minimal or no tolerance for deviants;
- Promotions depending upon age or seniority.

#3: Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism set against its opposite collectivism defines the extent to which individuals are inclined toward remaining in groups.

Individualistic cultures are characterized by:

- Fostering contractual relationships that revolve around the fundamentals of exchange. These cultures engage in the calculation of profit and loss prior to engagement in a behavior.
- Concentration on self or at the most very near and dear ones, and concern with behavioral relationships as well as own goals, interests, and needs.
- Emphasis on personal enjoyment, fun, and pleasure, over duties and social norms. They are a part of a number of in-groups which hardly have any influence on their lives.

- Self-sufficiency and value independence, and placement of self-interest over collective interest. Confrontation is accepted as an attribute.
- Stress on horizontal relationships (such as the relationship between spouse and spouse) rather than vertical relationships (such as the relationship between parent and child).
- The notion that they hold unique beliefs.

Collectivistic cultures are characterized by:

- Behavior as per social norms that are established for maintenance of social harmony among in-group members;
- Considering the wider collective with regards to implications of their actions;
- Sharing of resources and readiness to give up personal interest keeping in mind the collective interest;
- Favoring some in-groups (such as friends and family);
- Being a part of a few in-groups that have an influence on their lives. Rather than being individualistic, they have an increased inclination towards conformity;
- Increased concern regarding in-group members. They show hostility or indifference toward out-group members;
- Emphasis on harmony and hierarchy within group;
- Regulation of behavior with the help of group norms.

#4: Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity and femininity revolve around the emotional role distribution between genders, which is again a prime issue in a number of societies.

Masculine cultures possess the following characteristics:

- Clearly distinct gender roles;
- Benevolence has little or no significance;

Men are expected to be tough and assertive with a concentration on material achievements;

- Much value is associated with mastery of people, nature, job, and the like;
- Sense of humor, intelligence, affection, personality are considered preferred characteristic traits of a boyfriend by the women;
- Understanding, wealth, and health are considered desirable characteristic traits of a husband by the women.

Feminine cultures possess the following characteristics:

- Overlapping of social gender roles;
- Men, as well as women, are expected to be tender, modest, with focus on the quality of life;
- Emphasis on the non-materialistic angles of success;
- The preferred traits in boyfriends and husbands are the same.

#5: Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

This is based on the Confucian dynamism. According to the teachings of Confucius, the following aspects of life are evident:

- Unequal relationships existing between people ensure the stability of society.
- Every social organization has its prototype in the family.
- Virtuous behavior involves treatment meted out to others in a similar manner as one prefers to be treated oneself.
- So far as tasks in life are concerned, virtue comprises acquiring skills, working hard, education, being wise in spending as well as showing perseverance and patience.

Long-term orientation (high Confucian values) reflects the following:

- A futuristic, dynamic mentality;
- Emphasis on a relationship order depending on status, and observance of this order;
- Emphasis on persistence and perseverance;
- Stress on possessing a sense of shame;
- Stress on thrift;
- Positive association with economic growth;
- Inclination toward interrelatedness represented in sensitivity toward social contacts.

Short-term orientation (low Confucian values) is characterized by the following:

- Orientation toward past and present;
- Focus on respect for tradition;
- A comparatively static, more conventional mentality;
- Emphasis on saving face;
- Emphasis on personal steadiness;
- Focus on stability;
- Emphasis on reciprocation of gifts, favors, and greetings;
- Negative association with economic growth.

#6: Indulgence vs. Restraint

The dimension of indulgence vs. restraint focuses on happiness. A society that practices indulgence makes room for the comparatively free gratification of natural and basic human drives pertaining to indulging in fun and enjoying life. The quality of restraint describes a society that holds back need gratification and tries to control it through stringent social norms.



Think About It . . . Country Comparison

From years of research, Geert Hofstede organized 52 countries in terms of their orientation. Visit [this website](#) and at the bottom of the page go to the country comparison tool and begin exploring Hofstede's dimensions from different cultures.

When looking at Hofstede's research and that of others on individualism and collectivism, it is important to remember is that no culture is purely one or the other. Again, think of these qualities as points along a continuum rather than fixed positions. Individuals and co-cultures may exhibit differences in individualism/collectivism from the dominant culture and certain contexts may highlight one or the other. Also remember that it can be very difficult to change one's orientation and interaction with those with different value orientations can prove challenging. In some of your classes, for example, does the Professor require a group project as part of the final grade? How do students respond to such an assignment? In our experience we find that some students enjoy and benefit from the collective and collaborative process and seem to learn better in such an environment. These students have more of a collective orientation. Other students, usually the majority, are resistant to such assignments citing reasons such as "it's difficult to coordinate schedules with four other people" or "I don't want my grade resting on someone else's performance." These statements reflect an individual orientation.[v]

GLOBE Taxonomy

GLOBE stands for Global Leadership and Organization Behavior Effectiveness. It is a means of compiling information on what are the dominant patterns of a culture. The measures that are defined by Hofstede include: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, performance orientation, future orientation, and humane orientation. If a culture's numbers are above zero on the GLOBE scale, then they have high dimensions. If they are low on the GLOBE scale, they will be prone to have low dimensions.[vi]

- Power Distance: The degree to which people believe that power should be stratified, unequally shared, and concentrated at higher levels of an organization or government
- Uncertainty Avoidance: The extent to which people strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on social norms, rules, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability
- In-Group Collectivism: The degree to which people express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their families
- Institutional Collectivism: The degree to which a culture's institutional practices encourage collective actions and the collective distribution of resources
- Gender Egalitarianism: The extent to which people minimize gender role differences and gender discrimination while promoting gender equality
- Assertiveness: The degree to which people are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships
- Performance Orientation: The extent to which people encourage others to improve their task-oriented performance and excel.

- Future Orientation: The degree to which people engage in future orientated behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification
- Humane Orientation: The degree to which people encourage others to be fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind

The "Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness" (GLOBE) Research Program was conceived in 1991 by Robert J. House of the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. In 2004, its first comprehensive volume on "Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies" was published, based on results from about 17,300 middle managers from 951 organizations in the food processing, financial services, and telecommunications services industries. A second major volume, "Culture and Leadership across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies" became available in early 2007. It complements the findings from the first volume with in-country leadership literature analyses, interview data, focus group discussions, and formal analyses of printed media to provide in-depth descriptions of leadership theory and leader behavior in those 25 cultures. Cultural Dimensions and Culture Clusters: GLOBE's major premise (and finding) is that leader effectiveness is contextual, that is, it is embedded in the societal and organizational norms, values, and beliefs of the people being led. In other words, to be seen as effective, the time-tested adage continues to apply: "When in Rome do as the Romans do." As a first step to gauge leader effectiveness across cultures, GLOBE empirically established nine cultural dimensions that make it possible to capture the similarities and/or differences in norms, values, beliefs—and practices—among societies. They build on findings by Hofstede (1980), Schwartz (1994), Smith (1995), Inglehart (1997), and others. They are: Power Distance: The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally. Uncertainty Avoidance: The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events. Humane Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others. Collectivism I: (Institutional) The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action. Collectivism II: (In-Group) The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families. Assertiveness: The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others. Gender Egalitarianism: The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality. Future Orientation: The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future. Performance Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.[vii]

[i] Stokes Rice, 2019

[ii] online.seu.edu/articles/high-and-low-context-cultures/

[iii] courses.candelalearning.com/...-by-culture-2/

[iv] <https://www.cleverism.com/understanding-cultures-people-hofstede-dimensions/>

[v] courses.candelalearning.com/...-by-culture-2/

[vi] http://tevinsic.blogspot.com/2012/03/cultural-patterns-and-communication_02.html

[vii] <https://www.inspireimagineinnovate.com/pdf/globesummary-by-michael-h-hoppe.pdf>

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