



Leading Across Cultures

IEMA:Organizational Dynamics



Professor Philip Hallinger

Culture: Hofstede's Definition

The collective mental programming of the people in an environment. Culture is not an aspect of an individual person, but of a collection of people. It includes all people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience.



Same Behavior but
Different Cultural
Interpretations



Unit Learning Objectives

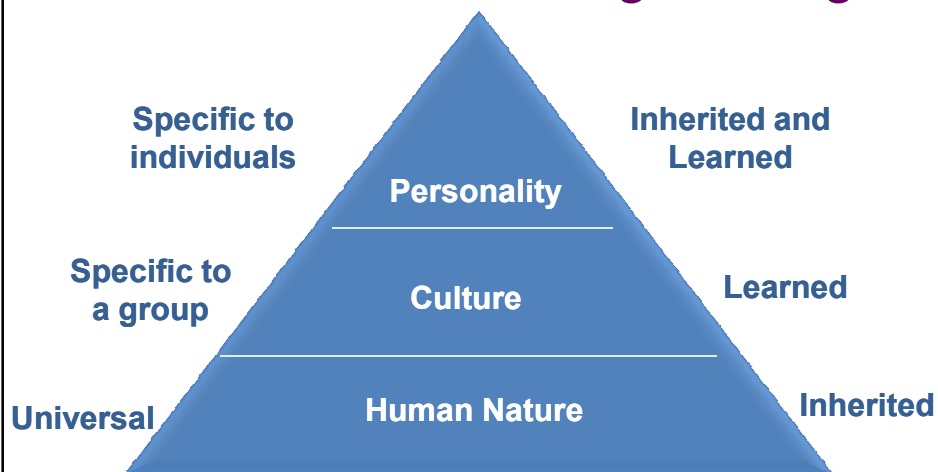
- ◆ To define culture and understand the distinction between high and low context cultures.
- ◆ To identify and define the elements of Hofstede's model of cultural differences.
- ◆ To analyze causes and consequences of cultural differences in the workplace.
- ◆ To develop and apply management solutions to problems arising from cross-cultural differences.



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Levels of Mental Programming



Michita Champathes Rodsutti, 2003

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“Introduction” to Cross-Cultural Differences

- ◆ Think about your first encounters in a ‘foreign culture’.
 - What stood out to you?
 - What surprised and confused you?
- ◆ Think about how difficult it can be getting the simplest things done. Other than language, why was that the case?



Lost in Translation

[Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands](#)

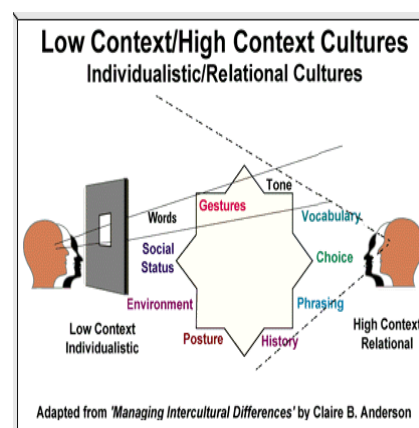


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High and Low Context Cultures

- ◆ Cultures vary according to the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of people.
- ◆ Cultures have been termed “High Context” and “Low Context” based on the amount of background (contextual) information needed to correctly interpret what is going on.



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Low Context Cultures

- ◆ A low context culture is one in which things are fully (though concisely) spelled out. Things are made explicit, and people place great importance on what is said and written down.
- ◆ Low context cultures include Anglos, Germanics and Scandinavians.

Interactions between high and low context peoples can be problematic. Japanese can find Westerners to be offensively blunt. Westerners can find Japanese to be secretive, devious and bafflingly unforthcoming with information. The French can feel that Germans insult their intelligence by explaining the obvious, while Germans can feel that French managers provide no direction.

[Differences in Cultures](#)

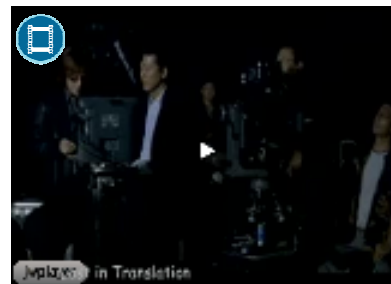


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High Context Cultures

- ◆ In High Context Cultures, you must know a lot about the people and situation to correctly interpret behavior
- ◆ In high context cultures, what is **not** said, and subtle body language conveys as much as what is actually said (or written down).
- ◆ High context cultures include Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Arabs, and French.



Lost in Translation

[Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands](#)



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HOFSTEDE'S 5 DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

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Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Gert Hofstede conducted a global study of IBM managers seeking to identify patterns of cultural differences. He found 5 dimensions that were common across cultures:

- ◆ Power distance
- ◆ Collective/Individual
- ◆ Uncertainty avoidance
- ◆ Masculine/Feminine
- ◆ Time orientation



Cultural Dimensions 

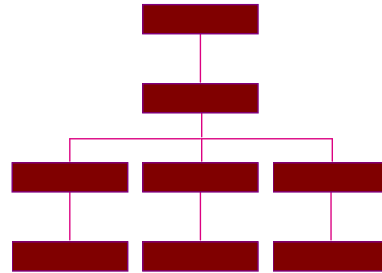
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Power Distance

- ◆ Degree to which people accept differences in power between people as natural
- ◆ Large PD cultures see differences in status as natural
- ◆ Small PD cultures seek to reduce power differences among people
- ◆ Not good or bad – different



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Power Distance in Thailand

- ◆ Sakdi Na was a formal system of social status differentiation dating to 1454. It was abolished in 1932 but lives on in the culture today
- ◆ Complex system of ranks based on birth. All members have a rank and are expected to respect the rank of others.
- ◆ Led to patron-client system in which there is voluntary relationship which yields mutual benefits



HR Manager Carrefour
Thailand

Holmes, H. & Tangtongtavy, S. (1995).

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“When the boss is right, he’s right; when the boss is wrong, he’s right.”

- ◆ “The senior managers create policies and pass them down to us. They don’t ask our ideas, but expect us to carry out policies to the best of our ability. We try very hard to do this because it’s our job, even though sometimes we know before we start that policies won’t work.”
- ◆ “We don’t say anything because they didn’t ask us and they wouldn’t listen to us anyway if we did. They’d think we were being troublemakers and we’d pay for it in the end. They made the policies, so they must believe they are right. If it fails, they will find out for themselves.”

A Thai middle Manager

Holmes, H. & Tangtongtavy, S. (1995). *Working with Thais*. Bangkok: White Lotus Books, p. 18.

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Power Distance Comparison

China, Japan, Thailand	USA, UK, Australia
High PD cultures	Low PD cultures
Children learn to accept, respect, and acknowledge differences in status in behavior	People view differences in status as less important and something we “should” reduce
Rigid hierarchy; power status is codified formally & informally	“All men are created equal” (US Constitution)
Accept differences in rank as “natural” and “normal”	Emphasis on ‘flat’ organizations and reducing hierarchy

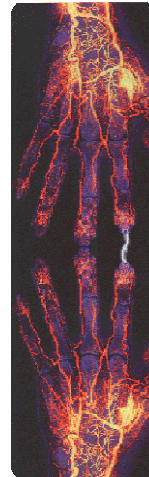
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Collectivism v. Individualism

- ◆ Degree to which cultures are organized around groups or individuals
- ◆ In collectivist cultures the group is the center of activity and decisions
- ◆ In individualist cultures, people are expected to look after themselves
- ◆ “We” vs. “I”



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Relationships in Individualistic and Collectivist Societies

- ◆ “For most Westerners, having connections with senior management is important, but one’s track record and professionalism is more vital.”
- ◆ “For Thais, being well-connected is everything – internally and externally.”
- ◆ In the West they focus on “know how” and in Asia on “know who”.



Holmes, H. & Tangtongtavy, S. (1995). *Working with Thais*. Bangkok: White Lotus Books, p. 18.

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Collectivism Comparison

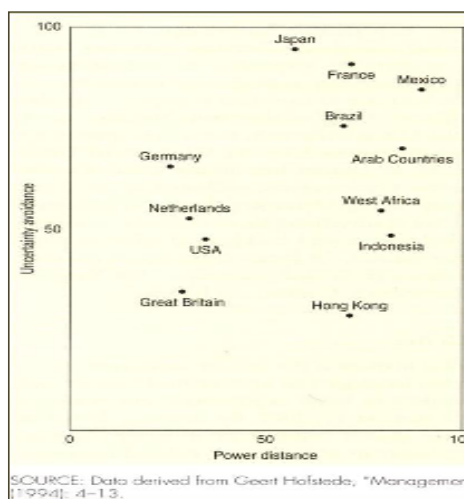
China, Japan, Thailand	USA, UK, Australia
High collectivist cultures	Individualistic culture
Identity based on family, peer groups, company	Focus on "I" - "Me" <i>Loosely linked</i> social networks
Building relationships is key; heroes are group exemplars	Cultural heroes stand out from the group
Group looks after its members	Belief in individual decisions
People change in groups, trying to <i>blend</i> in with the group's direction	Being "different" is valued. Think in terms of "my goals".

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Uncertainty Avoidance

- UA is the extent to which members of the culture prefer structured to unstructured situations.
 - Low level of tolerance for uncertainty.
 - Strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations.
 - Goal: Control everything to avoid/eliminate the unexpected.
 - Society doesn't accept change easily.



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Uncertainty Avoidance

- ◆ Japan and Korea are both high on UA
- ◆ High UA cultures seek to reduce uncertainty by:
 - Career stability (e.g., lifetime employment in Japan)
 - More rules
 - Avoid different ideas
 - Belief in expertise
- ◆ This clip is an orientation from an orientation film designed for new Japanese managers in Thailand.



**Japan is high on
Uncertainty Avoidance**

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Perception of Japanese Working Culture from a Chinese Manager

- ◆ "When I visited Japan plant this June, I was astonished that when employees cross the pavement, every employee should point front, left and right then walk. I asked the friend why should do this, his answer is for the safety. What a silly rule, I thought. But every employee, from the operator to top management all obeys the rule.
- ◆ Also when I visited their lab, everything is in order. The colleague told me proudly that the Japan lab is the best 5S implementation in the whole company. So, I understand why many new products are developed by Japanese S&T, not only do they have abundant experience but also they have very precise attitude toward work and science.
- ◆ From these examples we can see Japan is the highest country in the world on UA; they accept rules and authority, take steps to systematically reduce risk, and also provide career stability."

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UA Comparison

Japan, France, Mexico	US/UK/Australia
In Asia, moderate (China, Thai) to High (Japan)	Low UA cultures
Uncertainty creates anxiety	More willing to take risks
High need for consensus	Fewer rules are better
Strange ideas are rejected	Less bureaucracy
Need for written rules	Authorities exist to serve people
Strong belief in experts	If rules can't be kept, change them
Ordinary citizens are not competent compared with formal authorities	Acceptance of dissent and different ideas

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Femininity/Masculinity

- ◆ Masculine cultures value performance, money, assertiveness.
- ◆ Feminine cultures value caring for people, quality of life, harmony.
- ◆ These reflect the trend within whole societies, though within a culture women tend to behave towards the feminine and men towards the masculine.



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Jai Yen (cool heart) Norms in Thailand Reflect Femininity

- ◆ Restrain your emotions
- ◆ Politeness, moderation
- ◆ Find win-win solutions
- ◆ Avoid direct criticism
- ◆ Maintain harmony
- ◆ Avoid display of strong emotions
- ◆ Patience, dignity, face
- ◆ Middle way of Buddhism



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Western Assumptions about Conflict

- ◆ Productivity is the primary goal of a work team.
- ◆ Conflict, if managed well, increases productivity and confrontation is often needed to find the “best” solution.
- ◆ Face saving is considered to lead to less effective solutions.
- ◆ In this video clip a manager is meeting with a lawyer and his secretary to resolve a conflict.



From LA Law

K. Leung & D. Tjosvold (Eds), (1998). *Conflict management in the Asia Pacific*. New York: Wiley.

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Asian Assumptions About Conflict

- ◆ Workplace harmony is a virtue and maintaining face is essential to harmony.
- ◆ Inequality is natural, and loyalty to one's boss is essential to long-term well-being.
- ◆ Maintaining relationships is more important than completing tasks.
- ◆ Unspoken conflict within the group is normal and acceptable.



K. Leung & D. Tjosvold (Eds), (1998). *Conflict management in the Asia Pacific*. New York: Wiley.

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Feminine/Masculine Comparison

Thailand, France (Feminine)	USA, UK, Japan (Masculine)
All people should be caring	Men should be assertive
Sympathize with people who are less fortunate	Admire success
Quality of life is more important than success at work	Performance and achievement are most important
"Work to live"	"Live to work"
Service provides motivation	Ambition provides motivation

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Short v. Long Time Orientation

- ◆ Degree to which a culture takes a long-term or short-term perspective towards time.
- ◆ LT cultures don't see time or future events as controllable and tend to work in cycles.
- ◆ ST cultures believe events are under our control and seek to manage through accomplishment of tasks in sequenced steps or series.



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ST and LT Cultural Interpretations of the Same Event

- ◆ This clip shows a conversation concerning a common friend, Dr. Aziz, who was just placed in jail earlier that day.
- ◆ The British Headmaster feels compelled to "do something" to help his friend find a way out of his trouble.
- ◆ The Indian teacher has a different perspective on the same problem. Notice the emotion as well as the content of the conversation.



From A Passage to India

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Time Orientation Comparison

China, Japan Thailand,	USA , UK, Australia
Long-term orientation	Short-term orientation
Buddhist notion of living many lifetimes	Task-goal orientation to “managing time”
Connections between the events of lifetimes rather than individual tasks and goals	Greater sense of urgency to “get things done”
Cyclical rather than scheduled work. Work in bursts rather than steady flow	Work is steady and scheduled to maximize effectiveness

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Weak points of Hofstede's Model

- ◆ Influenced by the corporate culture (IBM) of the research sites for the study.
- ◆ Average score of each country does not mean that **individuals** of that country are higher or lower than in other countries.
- ◆ Does not account for gender differences since most of Hofstede's interviewees were males.



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Principles for Leading Across Cultures

- ◆ Be aware of differences.
- ◆ Don't assume – behavior you think means one thing could mean something else.
- ◆ Learn to interpret the different meanings of similar actions.
- ◆ Understand the meaning of what is being said, *or not being said*.
- ◆ Find and check your own assumptions and understandings with 'trusted informants'.



Senior Manager Carrefour
Thailand

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Summary

- ◆ Cultures are described by their dominant values and norms
- ◆ Research has identified 5 key dimensions of difference
- ◆ Developing an awareness of differences is a critical first step towards being able to interact effectively across cultures
- ◆ Culture is an additional lens through which we can analyze organizational problems
- ◆ Cultural norms are deeply programmed and only change slowly



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Leading Across Cultures

END LESSON

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