

**ACTA FACULTATIS PHILOSOPHICAE  
UNIVERSITATIS ŠAFARIKIANAE 138**

**2020**

---

**Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach  
Filozofická fakulta**

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky



**Theories of Intercultural Communication**

Renáta Panocová

Košice 2020

## 2.3 Research basis for Hofstede's cultural dimensions

In the 1970s Hofstede had access to a large database of questionnaires about values of people in more than 50 countries all over the world. They all were employed by the multinational corporation IBM. He used these data to find dimensions of cultural differences. In his research analysis Hofstede (1980) identified four main value dimensions in which cultures differ.

- **Power distance**
- **Uncertainty avoidance**
- **Individualism versus collectivism**
- **Masculinity versus femininity**

The first one in the list is **power distance**, which is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality. **Uncertainty avoidance** is concerned with the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future. **Individualism** versus **collectivism** focuses on the integration of individuals into primary groups, and **masculinity** versus **femininity** maps the division of emotional roles between women and men. The IBM data analysed by Hofstede and his four cultural dimensions empirically supported the four basic problem areas defined earlier by Inkeles and Levinson (1969).

External validations of the data continued and resulted in a list of 400 significant correlations between the IBM-based scores and results of other studies, published in Hofstede (2001). According to Hofstede (2011: 7) also “recent validations show no loss of validity, indicating that the country differences these dimensions describe are, indeed, basic and enduring”.

Shortly after the first publication, Hofstede and Bond (1988) added a fifth cultural dimension, **long-term orientation** versus **short-term orientation**, based on the research carried out in the Far East. This dimension is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present and past. Finally, in the 2000s, Hofstede et al. (2010) included a sixth dimension **indulgence** versus **restraint**, associated with the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life (Hofstede, 2011: 8).

On the basis of a score on each dimension, an individual country has been assigned a position, relative to other countries. The six cultural dimensions are statistically distinct and occur in all possible combinations, although some combinations tend to be more frequent than others (Hofstede, 2011: 8). In the next sections we will consider each cultural dimension in more detail.

## 2.4 Power distance

The **power distance** dimension is related to the acceptance of inequality as normal by people with very little power and influence in society. Hofstede (2011: 9) emphasizes that power and inequality are characteristic of any society and although all societies are unequal, some are more unequal than others.

Cultures with **low scores** on this dimension believe that power differences should be minimal. This means that people with hierarchically higher position are not considered superior to people with lower positions. Subordinates expect to be consulted and people at all levels reach out to people at all other levels. In addition, people with little power believe that they can gain more power through hard work and motivation (Hofstede, 1980). Low power distance cultures prefer having pluralist governments based on

majority vote and changed peacefully, where the occurrence of corruption cases is less frequent and scandals normally mean the end of a political career (Hofstede, 2011: 9).

An example of a country with a low index of power distance is Austria.<sup>4</sup> This means that prototypical features of Austrian culture are independence and equal rights. A hierarchy exists, but it is rather a matter of convenience. At work, superiors are accessible, experience of team members is valued, subordinates are consulted. The communication style is direct and participative.

On the other hand, cultures with **high scores** on the power distance dimension accept differences in power in society as natural. The role of hierarchy is decisive. People in superior positions give instructions to subordinates and subordinates are not consulted, they act in line with the superior's orders. High power distance cultures often have autocratic governments. Corruption is frequent, with a strong tendency to cover up scandals (Hofstede, 2011: 9). There tends to be a large gap between income at the top and bottom of the hierarchy (Hofstede, 2011: 9).

Interestingly, Hofstede's interactive web tool labels Slovakia, as a high power distance country.<sup>5</sup> The power distance index shows that in Slovakia it is taken for granted that some people have more power than others. It is also accepted and expected that these people use their power for the general well-being of others. Superiors are expected to supervise their subordinates. A good boss should be highly

---

<sup>4</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/austria/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/slovakia/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

visible and tells others what to do. Hierarchical organizations are accepted as a norm. According to Hofstede's web interpretation of the score for Slovakia, "a key issue for foreigners to understand is that in spite of the very high score, a manager still has to prove him or herself in order to make people respect and accept decisions from above or the (foreign) headquarter".

Hofstede et al. (2010) found that power distance scores tend to be higher for East European, Latin American, Asian and African countries and lower for English-speaking Western countries.

## 2.5 Uncertainty avoidance

The dimension of **uncertainty avoidance** "indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual" (Hofstede, 2011: 10). Hofstede emphasizes that uncertainty avoidance is not identical with risk avoidance, but "it deals with a society's tolerance for ambiguity" (Hofstede, 2011: 10).

Typically, cultures with **high scores** on the uncertainty avoidance dimension do not feel comfortable in ambiguous situations. Therefore, there are strict codes of behaviour and a tendency to support beliefs in absolute truths. Work organizations have precise rules and require punctuality (Jandt, 2004). Hofstede's research results indicate that "people in uncertainty avoiding countries are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy" (Hofstede, 2011: 11).

Greece is a nation that can be seen as a prototypical culture avoiding uncertainty in Hofstede's model. Bureaucracy, laws and rules are perceived as indispensable



to create a safe environment. The high score in this dimension also tells us that Greeks tend to show their emotions easily through body language. According to Hofstede, “the Greek myth about the “birth” of the world tells us a lot about high Uncertainty Avoidance: at the very beginning there was only Chaos but then Chronos (Time) came in to organize life and make it easier to manage”.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, cultures with **low scores** on uncertainty avoidance accept ambiguity and less structured context more easily. Individual people are more open to innovations and in general to ideas which are different from what they are used to (Hofstede, 2011: 11). Rules are frequently ignored and punctuality has to be taught or reinforced (Dainton and Zelle, 2011: 185).

Among European countries, Sweden scores low on this cultural dimension. In everyday life this means that the attitude to norms and rules is more flexible. Swedes are also convinced that if rules do not work properly, they should be changed. In addition, a general expectation is that the rules must be meaningful. In workplace, schedules remain flexible, hard work is done only when required by the situation. On the other hand, people are not afraid of innovative ideas.<sup>7</sup>

Hofstede et al. (2010) report that uncertainty avoidance seems higher in East and Central European countries, Latin countries, in Japan and in German speaking countries.

---

<sup>6</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/greece/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/sweden/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

Typically lower scores are found in English speaking countries, Nordic countries and countries with Chinese culture.

## 2.6 Individualism versus collectivism

The **individualism** versus **collectivism** dimension addresses the issue of how people define themselves and their relationships with others. Hofstede (1980, 2011) considers this dimension fundamental in all societies world-wide. Hofstede (2011: 11) lists ten major features in which individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ and we will consider some of them in more detail.

First, individualistic cultures emphasize individual responsibility of taking care of oneself and one's immediate family. This contrasts with collectivists where people are part of larger groups from birth and it is a responsibility of the extended family or another larger group to protect individuals. In return, loyalty to such a larger social unit is expected.

The most obvious difference between the two ends of this dimension is the one between I-consciousness and We-consciousness. The former is often exemplified by the question *What's in it for me?*, perfectly acceptable especially in situations when an individual person is asked for something more standard. In other words, the focus on self is prioritized over other relationships.

The right of privacy is valued in individualistic cultures whereas in collectivistic cultures it is of less importance. For instance, in Western European cultures it is normal first to call and find out whether it is OK to visit a friend or a family member. The same practice is not followed by typically collectivistic cultures such as China or South Korea where it

is fully acceptable to enter the private life of members of the extended family.

Another feature of individualistic cultures is that they are often characterized as guilt cultures. This means that if someone breaks the rules, he often feels guilty, guided by an individually developed conscience that functions as a private inner pilot (Hofstede et al. 2010: 110). On the other hand, collectivistic cultures are described as shame cultures in the sense that if rules are broken, the whole group to which a person belongs to is ashamed of the behaviour of its individual member. Hofstede et al. (2010: 110) explain that “shame is social in nature, whereas guilt is individual; whether shame is felt depends on whether the infringement has become known by others. This becoming known is more of a source of shame than the infringement itself“.

In individualistic cultures it is expected that people freely express their personal opinions and speak their minds. In collectivistic cultures, opinions and votes are predetermined by the in-group and harmony is valued more than expressing individual personal opinions directly. In line with Hofstede et al. (2010), individualism tends to dominate in developed and Western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed and Eastern countries. Prototypical examples of individualistic cultures are the United States, or the Netherlands, collectivistic cultures are represented by China or South Korea. Interestingly, for instance, Japan and Slovakia take a middle position on this dimension.

## **2.7 Masculinity versus femininity**

The next dimension focuses on the relationship between men and women and what is considered a gender-appropriate behaviour. It is important to understand that this dimension



is not about individuals, but about expected emotional gender roles (Hofstede, 2011: 12). A typical property of **masculine cultures** is that biological sex is taken as a basis for distinct roles for men and women. This means that men are expected to be assertive, ambitious and competitive whereas women's roles are supportiveness, nurturing and deference. These roles are also visible in the workplace. In masculine cultures, managers are supposed to be decisive and assertive (Jandt, 2004). Women are not treated equally, usually they are given lower salaries, less stable positions and fewer opportunities to make progress in their professional careers (Kim, 2001).

In contrast, in **feminine cultures**, biological sex is not taken as a firm basis for distinctions between gender roles. Men and women are equally assertive or deferent, competitive or nurturing. Feminine cultures concentrate on the facilitation of interpersonal relationships and concern for the weak (Jandt, 2004). When applied to the workplace, feminine cultures focus on a search for agreement and they tend to prefer quality of life over material success.

Hofstede's results show that Slovakia is a typical masculine country. This means that it is highly success-oriented. Only successful people can reach their goals. Status is an important aspect in this, especially status symbols like cars, impressive houses, branded clothes etc. People work hard to achieve a high living standard and be able to "show their achievements". Long working hours are needed in order to achieve this.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the Netherlands has a typically feminine culture. As mentioned above, in feminine countries

---

<sup>8</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/slovakia/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

it is important to keep up the life/work balance. An effective manager is supportive to their people, and decision making is achieved through involvement. Managers aim for consensus and people value equality, solidarity and quality in their working lives. Conflicts are resolved by compromise and negotiation and the Dutch are known for their long discussions until consensus has been reached.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.8 Long-term versus short-term orientation

The fifth dimension is grounded in Confucian thinking and was added after criticism of Hofstede's original four dimension for a Western bias. This dimension was added after obtaining data from Chinese scholars (Hofstede, 2011: 13).

A **long-term orientation** is connected with thrift, savings, perseverance, and the willingness to subordinate oneself to achieving a goal. Characteristic features of long-term oriented workplaces is a strong work ethic and having distant goals to achieve (Hofstede, 2011: 15). People believe that truth depends very much on context and time and they can adapt traditions easily to changed conditions.

A **short-term orientation** focuses on a desire for immediate satisfaction. People in short-term cultures tend to spend money on the same expensive objects as their friends or neighbours. They are worried about seeming less important socially than they are. People also prefer fast results to distant gain (Hofstede, 2011: 16). At work,

---

<sup>9</sup> This information is available at <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/the-netherlands/>, retrieved 11 August, 2019.

immediate pay and benefits are preferred to achievements in the long term.

Long-term oriented cultures are found in East Asian countries, followed by Eastern and Central Europe whereas the United States and Australia, Latin American, African and Muslim countries are rather short-term oriented (Hofstede, 2011: 16). Slovakia is closer to the long-term end of the scale, which means it is clearly a pragmatic country.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.9 Indulgence versus restraint

Finally, the sixth dimension was added in Hofstede et al. (2010). **Indulgence** is characterized “by a perception that one can act as one pleases, spend money, and indulge in leisurely and fun-related activities with friends or alone. All this predicts relatively high happiness” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 281). At the opposite pole we find **restraint** understood as “a perception that one’s actions are restrained by various social norms and prohibitions and a feeling that enjoyment of leisurely activities, spending, and other similar types of indulgence are somewhat wrong” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 281). As this dimension is new, further research is needed, but according to Hofstede et al. (2010: 286) it “solves the paradox of the poor Filipinas who are happier than the rich citizens of Hong Kong”.