

HOFSTEDE'S DIMENSIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

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While most of the notoriety assigned to Hofstede is related to his groundbreaking work on the dimensions of national culture he has also conducted smaller studies that focused on organizational culture and attempted to identify dimensions of organizational culture that can be used a descriptive framework for organizational cultures.¹ Hofstede acknowledged that his specific research base was too narrow to credibly argue for the universal validity and sufficiency of the six dimensions that he identified and noted that additional dimensions may be necessary or some of the six may be less useful in other countries and/or when analyzing other types of organizations. In fact, while the organizations that he studied did evidence widely divergent perceptions of daily practices he was only able to uncover “modest” differences in values after taking into account the effect of non-organizational factors such as nationality, education, age and gender. Nonetheless, the following summaries of Hofstede’s rudimentary dimensions of organizational culture are useful²:

(1) Process-oriented versus results-oriented. As the name implies the foundation of a process-oriented culture is generally an elaborate system of technical and bureaucratic routines. In contrast, a results-oriented culture focuses primarily on achieving the desired results or outcomes and is not terribly concerned with the processes that are used to meet the goals and objectives of the organization. The degree of homogeneity among the members of the organization played an important role in determining where the organization fell on this dimension: in results-oriented organizations most of the members perceived their practices in the same way while in process-oriented organizations vast differences among the members could be identified with respect to perceptions of how work should be conducted.³

¹ G. Hofstede, B. Neuijen, D.D. Ohayv & G. Sanders. Measuring organizational cultures: A qualitative and quantitative study across twenty cases. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 35 (1990), 286-316. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected in twenty work organizations or parts of organizations, ranging from a toy manufacturing company to municipal police corps, in the Netherlands and Denmark.

² The summaries below are based on G. Hofstede, *Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context*. In W.J. Lonner, D.L. Dinnel, S.A. Hayes, & D.N. Sattler (Eds.), *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2: Conceptual, Methodological and Ethical Issues in Psychology and Culture* (Bellingham, WA: Center for Cross Cultural Research, 2006).

³ Organizational cultures have been categorized as “strong” or “weak” and a key determinant of where an organization falls on this continuum is the degree of homogeneity. Peters and Waterman have found that strong cultures are more results-oriented than weak cultures, and vice versa. See T.J. Peters & R.H. Waterman, Jr., In

(2) Job-oriented versus employee-oriented. An organization with a job-oriented culture limits its responsibilities toward employees to their job performance while an organization that is employee-oriented takes a broader view of its responsibility to employees including an obligation to watch out for their overall well-being.⁴ Hofstede's research found that the orientation of an organization on this dimension tended to be strongly influenced by historical factors including the philosophy of the founder(s) and whether or not there has recently been an economic crisis relating to the organization that has led to collective layoffs.

(3) Professional versus parochial. In organizations with a professional culture the members, who typically are highly educated with degrees in recognized professional, scientific and engineering disciplines, tend to identify primarily with their professions. In contrast, the members of parochial organizations are reliant on the organization itself for their identity. Hofstede noted that the poles of this dimension corresponded to the contrast between "local" (i.e., an internal frame of reference) and "cosmopolitan" (i.e., an external frame of reference) that had been popular among sociologists.⁵

(4) Open systems versus closed systems. This dimension focuses on identifying and classifying the styles commonly used within the organization for internal and external communications and the ease with which outsiders and newcomers (e.g., new employees) are admitted and integrated into the organization.⁶

(5) Tight versus loose control. This dimension focuses on the level of importance given by the organization and its members to formality and punctuality and appears to be influenced, at least in part, by the technology deployed within the organization. Among the organizations in Hofstede's survey tighter controls were found among banks and pharmaceutical companies and looser controls appeared among research laboratories and advertising agencies.

(6) Pragmatic (flexible) versus normative (rigid). The dimension focuses on the methods most commonly used by an organization in dealing with its environment in general and with customers in particular. Hofstede associated scores on this dimension with the level of "customer orientation", a popular topic among management theorists,

Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's best-run companies. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

⁴ The popular Managerial Grid theories of Blake and Mouton had previously identified job orientation and employee orientation at the level of individual managers. See R.R. Blake & J.S. Mouton, *The Managerial Grid* (Houston TX: Gulf, 1964).

⁵ See, e.g., R.K. Merton. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. (New York: Free Press, 1949).

⁶ Hofstede noted that this was the only one of the dimensions where he found systematic differences between organizations in different countries and suggested that there was a societal characteristic of "organizational openness" that impacted the degree of openness found among individual organizations.

and observed that organizations involved in the sale of services tended to be more pragmatic while organizations that were engaged in the application of laws and rules were more normative.