



## DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL CULTURE AS PREDICTORS OF CROSS-NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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**Summary**—The value of predicting cross-national variations in Subjective Well-Being (SWB) from Hofstede's dimensions of national culture (1980) was examined using data collected in 36 nations. The Hofstede dimensions were: Individualism-Collectivism (IDV), Power Distance (PDI), Masculinity-Femininity (MAS), and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI). With factors other than the Hofstede dimensions of national culture (National Wealth/Purchasing Power, Civil Rights and Income Social Comparison) being equal across nations, low UAI succeeded in predicting high national levels of SWB. As anticipated, a significant negative interaction was observed between MAS and National Wealth in predicting national SWB levels: in the poorer countries Masculinity correlated positively with SWB, whereas a negative association was observed for the subset of richer countries. Relatively speaking, feminine-rich countries reported the highest SWB levels. The predictive capability of MAS × National Wealth was independent of that of UAI. The predictive capabilities of MAS × National Wealth and UAI were both independent of national character.  
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### INTRODUCTION

While it is possible to study the somatic and psychological health of 'individuals' in relation to, for example, personality, demographic or socio-cultural variables, it is also feasible to examine the health of 'countries'. At the latter level of analysis, one can gain an understanding of how broad environmental, demographic, epidemiological and unalterable, constitutional factors may influence the health of large populations. Studies of this kind fall within the so-called holo-cultural tradition (e.g. Rohner, 1986, p. 38) where cultures (nations) are treated as units and culture (national) scores on the variables of interest are correlated with one another (see, for example, Bond, 1991; Diener & Diener, 1995; Matsumoto & Fletcher, 1996; Waldron *et al.*, 1982).

It has been suggested that the ways in which people around the globe think, feel and act in response to relevant issues are structured; that the sources of such so-called mental programmes lie within the social environments (family, school, work place, living community etc.) in which one grows up and acquires one's life experiences; and that such programmes, also termed 'mental software' (or 'culture') (Hofstede, 1991, p. 4), have important consequences for the functioning of societies, of groups within those societies, and of individual members of such groups (Inkeles & Levinson, 1969 [1954]; cf. Hofstede, 1991, p. 13). Thus, Hofstede (1991, p. 5) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another; culture determines how common basic problems are dealt with worldwide.

From their broad 'descriptive' survey of the English-language literature on national culture, Inkeles and Levinson (1969) concluded that there are three issues that may qualify as having universal psychosocial relevance, namely

1. Relation to authority;
2. Conception of self, in particular
  - a. the relationship between individual and society, and
  - b. the individual's concept of masculinity and femininity;

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3. Conflicts and their resolution, which includes the control of aggression and the expression vs inhibition of emotions.

These fundamental dilemmas of mankind were identified 'empirically' by Hofstede (1980, Chapter 2) who provided a four-dimensional model for the description of differences among national cultures.

## HOFSTEDE'S DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL CULTURE

### *The dimensional system*

The empirical base of the four-dimensional model of interest has been described in detail in Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1990, 1991). Briefly summarised, in the 1970s, Hofstede collected paper-and-pencil responses on 32 work-related value items from large samples of employees of subsidiaries of the same multinational business corporation in 40 different countries (later expanded to 50 countries and three regions) to study the relationship between nationality and mean value scores. Hofstede (1980, p. 19) defines values as "broad tendencies to prefer certain state of affairs over others". The total number of Ss involved in the study was over 116,000. The national samples were very well matched by occupational status, biological sex and age. A country-level (or ecological) factor analysis revealed four factors that accounted for about 50% of the variation in mean value scores across nations. Hofstede (1980) labelled these four dimensions: Individualism–Collectivism, Power Distance, Masculinity–Femininity, and Uncertainty Avoidance.

*Individualism–Collectivism (IDV)*. In individualist cultures (e.g. U.S.A., the countries of northern and western Europe), Ss strive foremost for the attainment of their own goals in a loosely knit social framework. That is, they experience themselves as autonomous individuals and are at most loosely integrated into a variety of supraordinate social entities. Members of their nuclear families may be included as objects of their care and responsibility. Beyond their family boundaries, altruism, selflessness, and even self-sacrifice may be practiced, but on the basis of an individual, deliberate, personal decision. By contrast, members of collectivist cultures (e.g. Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela) experience themselves prominently in reference to the groups they are members of: family, community, nation. They seek and obtain fulfilment by maintaining and enhancing the harmony of the group, even at the expense of subordinating their goals and aspirations (cf. Draguns, 1990).

*Power Distance (PDI)*. In the words of Hofstede (1986, p. 307) Power Distance refers to "the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal". Inequality exists within any culture, but the degree to which it is tolerated varies from one culture to another. The following key differences (among others) between small and large power distance societies, respectively, were noted by Hofstede (1991, p. 43): the use of power should be legitimate and is subject to evaluation vs power prevails over rights or whoever holds the power is right and good; all should have equal rights vs the powerful have privileges; power is based on formal position vs power is based on family or friends, charisma, and ability to use force; the way to change a political system is by changing the rules (evolution) vs the way to change a political system is by changing the people at the top (revolution); violence in domestic politics is rare vs domestic political conflicts frequently lead to violence. Among the low power distance countries are for example Austria, Denmark and New Zealand; high power distance countries are Malaysia, Guatemala and Panama, among others.

*Masculinity–Femininity (MAS)*. In Hofstede's view, these two characteristics differ in the social roles associated with the biological fact of the existence of two sexes, and in particular in the social roles attributed to men. The cultures labelled as 'masculine' strive for maximal distinction between how men and women are expected to behave and to fulfil their lives. In Hofstede's formulation, "[the masculine cultures] expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. [Masculine cultures] expect women to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. 'Feminine' cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different quality of life than material success; and men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow" (Hofstede, 1986, p. 308). Thus, in masculine cultures (e.g. Japan, Austria, Venezuela) political/organizational values emphasize

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