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# **Intercultural Research: The Current State of Knowledge**

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## *Abstract*

*This paper gives a short overview of the main concepts and theories in intercultural and cross-cultural communication, thus providing a brief introduction into the field of empirical research into culture-based value variations and providing a short outline of the major works in this area (e.g. the works of Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, and Schwartz).*

Comparative and so called ‘intercultural’ studies are becoming increasingly more important in the global business environment. However, despite its rising importance few researchers and educators rely on empirical cross cultural and intercultural research to interpret their observations. This paper aims to give a short overview of the major concepts and theories which are useful to interpret cultural variances at a more profound level than the merely behavioural one.

The word ‘culture’ is often used loosely in everyday language to describe a number of quite distinct concepts; for example, the word is often used to describe concepts such as ‘organisational culture’ as well as ‘arts and culture’. What all of these concepts have in common is the implication that culture is an abstract entity which involves a number of usually man-made, collective and shared artefacts, behavioural patterns, values or other concepts which taken together form the culture as a whole. For example, people in an organisation are said to “share the organisational culture” – yet, at the same time, they define the organisational culture.

Historically, the word derives from the Latin word ‘colere’, which could be translated as ‘to build’, ‘to care for’, ‘to plant’ or ‘to cultivate’. Thus ‘culture’ usually referred to something that is derived from, or created by the intervention of humans – ‘culture’ is cultivated. With this definition in mind, the word ‘culture’ is often used to describe something refined, especially ‘high culture’, or describing the concept of selected, valuable and cultivated artefacts of a society. (Dahl, 1998, 2000)

On a more basic level, 'culture' has been used to describe the modus operandi of a group of people, such as implied by organisational culture. This concept of culture implies not only the shared modus operandi but also the shared values that underpin the modus operandi. A company can be said, for example, to have a 'highly competitive culture', thus implying that competitiveness is valued highly within that company, or in other words forms a core value within the company as a whole. Hence it can be argued, that 'competitiveness' is a shared value among those people working in that company. It also implies that the company as a whole will behave very competitively in the way it is conducting its business. Thus the concept describes both the underlying value as well as the behaviour that can be observed. Notably, the concept does not necessarily imply that all employees share the same value to the same degree, but it does imply that the employees will be more likely to share the common value, and express it, if not necessarily individually, then collectively. On a broader scale, Triandis introduced the concept of "subjective culture", or a "characteristic way of perceiving its social environment" (Triandis, 1972, p. viii) common to a culture. Based on these perceptions, and what has been perceived to work well in the past, values are passed on from generation to generation.

Not surprisingly this concept of shared values resulting in shared behaviour and artefacts has also been applied to other groups outside one's own group or society. For example, Kroeber & Kluckhohn's definition of culture reads 'Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.' (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 181; cited by Adler 1997: 14)

Their definition implies the existence of a larger 'culture' (or meta-culture) of the different cultures that make up one's society's culture. Using this concept, it is implied that one can distinguish between the culture of the society of which one forms part – and the culture of another society at large, of which one does not form part. This concept is manifest in the usage of the word 'culture' when talking about, for example, the 'French

culture' – or the multifaceted values and resulting behaviour and artefacts that abstractly represent France, the French society as well as the French person at a high level of abstraction. In other words, the concept of 'French culture' implies that the society shares certain values and exhibits resultant behaviour and artefacts, which can easily be distinguished from other 'cultures', such as the 'German culture' or the 'Spanish culture'.

The idea of a shared, yet distinctive, set of values held by one society with resulting behaviour and artefacts is also fundamental to the basic idea of 'culture' within the realm of intercultural communication. Hofstede (1994) defined culture as "*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another*"(p.5). Hofstede expands the concept of 'collective programming' by suggesting that culture could therefore be situated between human nature, which is not programmed, nor programmable on the one side – and the individual's personality on the other side. This idea of the culture in the individual is particularly useful for explaining the concept of culture on the one side – as well as allowing for the diversity of individual personalities within any one culture.

Another concept of culture, yet not a contradictory but rather refining concept, is put forward by Hall. Hall (1983) views culture as often subconscious. He compares culture to an invisible control mechanism operating in our thoughts. In his view, we become only aware of this control mechanism when it is severely challenged, for example by exposure to a different culture. He believes that members of a given society, internalise the cultural components of that society, and act within the limits as set out by what is 'culturally acceptable': "*Culture has always dictated where to draw the line separating one thing from another. These lines are arbitrary, but once learned and internalised they are treated as real. In the West a line is drawn between normal sex and rape, whereas in the Arab world is much more difficult, for a variety of reasons, to separate these two events.*" (1983, p.230)

So far, we have considered the definition of culture as a concept that is subconscious most of the time, and which represents a set of shared values that manifest themselves in the behaviour and other artefacts of a given group. Culture is also 'programmed' – or

learned, i.e. it does not form part of the human nature and it is distinct from individual personality, however it is shared by the members of one group.

Spencer-Oatey (2000) extends the concept of culture. She introduces a number of additional factors apart from values and resultant behaviour/artefacts, including a description of the functions that 'culture' performs: "*Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the "meaning" of other people's behaviour.*" (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p.4)

The inclusion of an interpretive element in the culture concept is significant in as far as this explains not only what culture is, but also the function which culture performs in everyday life. It considerably expands and clarifies the idea hinted at in Hall's definition, i.e. the role of culture as both an influence factor for behaviour as well as an interpretation factor of behaviour. The interpretative role of culture, as introduced by Spencer-Oatey, is especially important when considering cross-cultural interaction, or reaction towards products created in a different cultural context.

Concluding, we can say that 'culture' consists of various factors that are shared by a given group, and that it acts as an interpretive frame of behaviour.

## **TOWARDS THE DIFFERENT LAYERS OF CULTURE**

As indicated above, culture consists of various levels. At the most rudimentary, 'culture' consists of two levels: a level of values, or an invisible level, and a visible level of resultant behaviour or artefacts of some form. This view of culture is embodied in the popular 'iceberg model' of culture. The multilevel nature of culture is important because of several aspects: It identifies a visible area as well as an area that is not immediately visible, but that can be derived by careful attention to the visible elements of the cultural system as we understand it.

However, regarding culture as merely a two-level system seems to be too rudimentary for a meaningful model of culture. Hofstede (1991) proposes a set of four layers, each of which encompasses the lower level, as it depends on the lower level, or is a result of the

lower level. In his view, 'culture' is like an onion: a system that can be peeled, layer by layer, in order to reveal the content.

At the core of Hofstede's model of culture are values, or in his words: "*broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others*" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 8). These values form the most hidden layer of culture. Values as such represent the ideas that people have about how things "ought to be". As such, Hofstede also emphasises the assumption that values are strongly influencing behaviour.

Above the values, Hofstede (1991) describes three levels of culture that are more clearly observable:

- Rituals, such as ways of greeting and paying respect
- Heroes, such as admired persons who serve as an example for behaviour
- Symbols, such as words, colour or other artefacts that carry a special meaning

In Hofstede's model 'practices', a set of visible practices that carry an invisible cultural meaning extends across all the three outer layers and subsumes these. The concept of 'practices' is however somewhat confusing as it seems connected to some extent to rituals and symbols, yet distinct from these. In practice, Hofstede's model represents an extension of the previously discussed two-layered model of culture, where the outer layer has been extended to allow for a more refined analysis of the visible results of cultural values.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) present a similar onion-like model of culture. However, their model expands the core level of the very basic two-layered model, rather than the outer level. In their view, culture is made up of basic assumptions at the core level. These basic assumptions are somewhat similar to 'values' in the Hofstede model, a lower level of values, i.e. basic assumptions are the absolute core values that influence the more visible values in the layer above. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner give the example of human equality, as a basic assumption that goes largely unquestioned.

However, it is hard to draw a precise line between the notion of 'basic assumptions' and 'values' as most are inferred indirectly and are frequently not questioned. It therefore seems sensible to recombine these two levels but to keep the label different. Spencer-

Oatey (2000) does this in the model she proposes by combining both basic assumptions and values in one 'segment' of the 'culture onion'.

In her view, basic assumptions and values in combination form the inner core of culture. This inner core is encircled by a more elementary level of 'beliefs, attitudes and conventions'. This distinction is useful, as it makes it possible to account for changes in beliefs, for example, without a more dramatic shift in values.

In her model, 'beliefs, attitudes and conventions' influence another layer, consisting of 'systems and institutions', which in turn are encircled by a split outer layer of culture. In the split outer layer of culture, Spencer-Oatey locates 'artefacts & products' on the one side and 'rituals & behaviour' on the other side. Spencer-Oatey therefore distinguishes between the manifestation of culture in human behavioural pattern (rituals and behaviour) on the one hand, and non-behavioural items on the other (artefacts and products).

Spencer-Oatey's model has a number of advantages over the previously discussed two models, from which it is derived: It clarifies the concept that there are two levels of core values that are distinct yet have a fuzzy boundary. These two core values (or values and basic assumptions) are accounted for in the model.

The model also allows for another 'mental' level of culture which is more 'practical': The introduction of a level containing 'attitudes, beliefs and behavioural conventions' makes a useful distinction between values on the one hand, and their expression in a more precise, but at a non-implemented level on the other.

In conclusion, it is possible to describe culture as a shared set of basic assumptions and values, with resultant behavioural norms, attitudes and beliefs which manifest themselves in systems and institutions as well as behavioural patterns and non-behavioural items. There are various levels to culture, ranging from the easily observable outer layers (such as behavioural conventions) to the increasingly more difficult to grasp inner layers (such as assumptions and values). Culture is shared among members of one group or society, and has an interpretative function for the members of that group. Culture is situated between the human nature on the one hand and the individual personality on the other. Culture is not inheritable or genetic, but culture is learned. Although all members of a

group or society share their culture, expressions of culture-resultant behaviour are modified by the individuals' personality.

### **Culture, national boundaries and the individual**

There is a significant debate about what level of analysis is desirable for the concept of 'culture' to be a viable tool. As culture is shared, it implies that it is not necessarily directly connected to the individual on the one hand, yet at the same time it is problematic to establish how many individuals who share a 'culture' make up any one culture. In everyday language words like 'Latin culture' suggest that countries as diverse as Italy, Spain and Brazil share a common culture. Equally, the notion of 'European culture' can frequently be heard, again suggesting that a large number of people share a common culture across political and language boundaries. At the other extreme, there are notions of small cultural units, probably more correctly referred to as sub-cultures, such as 'Afro-American culture' or 'Bavarian culture'. It is therefore quite difficult to set a distinct level of resolution which is justified by the definition we have given above, as the definition arguably can be applied to both the larger as well as the smaller units referred to above.

In more practical terms, national boundaries have been the preferred level of resolution, and therefore countries the preferred unit of analysis. There are several good arguments for this:

Firstly, the nationality of a person can easily be established, whereas membership of a sub-culture is more difficult to establish, particularly in cases where individuals may declare themselves members of various sub-cultures at the same time. The use of nationality is therefore avoiding unnecessary duplication and removes ambiguity in the research process, as the nationality of a person can usually be established easily.

Secondly, there is considerable support for the notion that people coming from one country will be shaped by largely the same values and norms as their co-patriots (Hofstede, 1991; Smith and Bond, 1998).

At the same time, it is important to point out that culture is not the only factor influencing human behaviour, i.e. that an individual belonging to a certain culture will be shaped by the culture, but is not a 'slave to the culture'. Although general 'dimensions' of culture can be established at a culture-level, these may not necessarily be reflected in the behaviour of each individual from that culture. In other words, using data from one level of analysis (such as the culture level of analysis) at another level of analysis (the individual level) is inappropriate. This type of error is labelled an 'ecological fallacy' by Hofstede (1980, 1991). Culture level analysis always reflects "central tendencies (...) for the country" (Hofstede, 1991, p.253), it does not predict individual behaviour.

## **RESEARCH INTO CULTURAL PATTERNS**

Interest in other cultures is probably as old as the exposure of human tribes to other tribes, and therefore an exposure to 'foreignness'. However it was not until the late 1950s that a more structured approach was adopted from which a theory was derived as to how to classify cultural pattern. In his review of the history of intercultural communication, Hart (1997) dates the beginning of intercultural communication in the year 1959, the year that Hall's "The Silent Language" was published.

### **Basic cultural concepts and patterns**

A number of mostly behavioural concepts has been identified that can be used to distinguish between cultures. These include, for example, the differences in the usage of kinesics (body movements), proxemics (space organisation), oculosics (eye movement), haptics (touching behaviour) as well as paralinguistic concepts, such as accents, intonation, speed of talking and so on. Not surprisingly each of these concepts plays an important role in intercultural communication, particularly in communication where the context plays an important role. Most people will either consciously, or subconsciously look for affirmative action (or reaction) by their counterparts when speaking to them face to face, for example to signal that what is being said is understood. In those cases the affirmative action is, not surprisingly, often directly linked to cultural context. Failure to provide the correct affirmative action may well be interpreted as undermining the spoken

word. Depending on the context, this may lead to a complete communication breakdown. For example, eye contact is an important part of the communication process in Western cultures. It is often seen as an affirmative action of what is said. However, maintaining eye contact is not usually acceptable in certain Asian cultures, where, for example, a woman can only maintain eye contact with her husband. Clearly a woman from such a culture will cause confusion, if not disbelief, when communicating with a Western interlocutor.

Another frequently examined concept is “thought patterns”. These can be summarised as being logical or pre-logic, inductive or deductive, abstract or concrete and alphabetic or analphabetic (Maletzke, 1996). These concepts are more complex, and they may require more attention, as they are slightly more difficult to grasp. For example, inductive or deductive thought patterns may have a profound impact on argumentation and communication styles, but also on the way the world is seen and understood. According to Maletzke (1996) Anglo-Saxon thought patterns are predominantly inductive, Latin American and Russian thought patterns are predominantly deductive. Whereas inductive thinking aims to derive theoretical concepts from individual cases, deductive thinking aims to interpret individual cases within previously derived theoretical concepts. Clearly, argumentation styles will be quite different in the two approaches. Equally, thinking within the Aristotelian logical tradition, which is dominant in most Western cultures may not be understood by people from a culture which emphasises a more holistic approach to thinking.

Although all of the concepts that have been proposed are interesting as a possible way to examine differences in cultural patterns, they are difficult to apply in the context of a wider study because of the severe lack of quantitative data. It is thus necessary to look for classifications of cultural patterns at a deeper level than the behavioural one (or the outer layer of the culture onion), as well as research that is backed up by the availability of empirical data. All of the concepts referred to above are limited to only one aspect out of the multi-aspect differences that make an effective research agenda into cultural differences. Even when taken together, they do not allow a broad analysis or classification of cultures to any great extent or depth. More systematic and profound

concepts, such as Hall (1959, 1969) and Hofstede (1991, 1994) were required to allow for a more detailed analysis of culture at a different level than only behavioural.

### **Hall's classic patterns**

Based on his experience in the Foreign Service, Edward T. Hall published two books, "The Silent Language" (1959) and "The Hidden Dimension" (1969). In them, he identified two classic dimensions of culture. Firstly, he identified high-context and low-context cultures, where the high and low context concept is primarily concerned with the way in which information is transmitted, that is to say communicated. According to Hall, all "information transaction" can be characterised as high-, low - or middle - context. "High context transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low context transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context." (Hall, 1976, p.101)

The high/low context concept remains one of the most frequently used concepts when analysing, for example, face-to-face communication. The implications of this concept are far ranging, and reaching from interpersonal to mass communication.

The high/low context concept is one of the easiest concepts to witness in intercultural encounters. This concept deals primarily with language, which is located in the outer layer of the 'culture onion', and is one of the most rudimentary concepts for any type of intercultural communication, or analysis thereof. For example, many business negotiators, particularly from the West, find it difficult to deal with Chinese business negotiators. Often they have been found to encounter severe problems understanding their counterparts, and interpreting correctly what their counterparts want to convey. Although clearly it is not only the high/low context concept that makes communication difficult, the high/low context concept may well play an important role in the difficulties encountered when a person from a high context country, such as China, communicates with a person from a low context country, such as Germany.

Equally, mass communication is likely to be influenced by the high/low context concept. In particular, it can be expected that the information content of advertising, for example,

is lower in high context cultures than low context cultures (eg. Biswas, Olsen and Carlet 1992; Lin 1993; Mueller 1987, Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000)

However, there is little, if any, statistical data available which identify where given countries are located on the high-low context dimension, and linguistically, it is very complex to identify degrees of directness, since explicitness – implicitness, communicative strength, and bluntness-cushioning are all involved (see Bond et al., 2000)

Hall's second concept, polychronic versus monochronic time orientation, deals with the ways in which cultures structure their time. Similar to the high/low context concept, this concept is easy to understand, but it lacks empirical data. The monochronic time concept follows the notion of “one thing at a time”, while the polychronic concept focuses on multiple tasks being handled at one time, and time is subordinate to interpersonal relations. Table I. gives a brief overview of the two different time concepts, and their resultant behaviour.

**Table I.: Monochronic and Polychronic Cultures**

	Monochronic Culture	Polychronic Culture
Interpersonal Relations	Interpersonal relations are subordinate to present schedule	Present schedule is subordinate to Interpersonal relations
Activity Co-ordination	Schedule co-ordinates activity; appointment time is rigid.	Interpersonal relations co-ordinate activity; appointment time is flexible
Task Handling	One task at a time	Many tasks are handled simultaneously
Breaks and Personal Time	Breaks and personal time are sacrosanct regardless of personal ties.	Breaks and personal time are subordinate to personal ties.
Temporal Structure	Time is inflexible; time is tangible	Time is flexible; time is fluid
Work/personal time separability	Work time is clearly separable from personal time	Work time is not clearly separable from personal time
Organisational Perception	Activities are isolated from organisation as a whole; tasks are measured by output in time (activity per hour or minute)	Activities are integrated into organisation as a whole; tasks are measured as part of overall organisational goal

(adopted from: Victor, 1992,p.234)

Although the concept of monochronic/polychronic time concepts is very useful, and like the high/low context concept easily observed, the lack of empirical data makes the concept more difficult to apply in research. This is particularly true for research comparing cultures that are seen as relatively close.

Both of Hall's concepts are therefore extremely useful on the one side, yet very ambiguous on the other. The ambiguity makes it difficult to apply the concepts within the framework of a more analytical approach, especially for comparing cultures that are seen as culturally close. The usefulness for broad based research is also limited by the limit of the concepts to only one aspect of culturally based behaviour, rather than a broad explanation of underlying values.

### **Hofstede's cultural dimensions**

The lack of precision, and the lack of a universally applicable framework for classifying cultural patterns, has been addressed by a number of researchers. The most famous and most often cited work in this area is the research by the Dutch organisational anthropologist Hofstede. Hofstede derived his culture dimensions from examining work-related values in employees of IBM during the 1970s. In his original work he divides culture into four dimensions at culture-level: power distance, individualism /collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance.

Power distance is defined as *"the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally"*. (Hofstede, 1994, p. 28)

The power distance concept is clearly more far-reaching than the work place alone. Power distance is often reflected in the hierarchical organisation of companies, the respect that is expected to be shown by the student towards her or his teacher, the political forms of decentralisation and centralisation, by the belief in society that inequalities among people should be minimised, or that they are expected and desired.

The second dimension proposed by Hofstede is Individualism/Collectivism. The concept is one of the most frequently discussed and researched concepts. Hofstede defines this dimension as: *"individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's*

*lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.*" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 51)

This concept is the most popular among the Hofstede dimensions. It is frequently cited in a variety of intercultural research, as Hofstede points out, sometimes confusingly and confused with other dimensions (1999). It may not be extremely surprising that this dimension is popular: It is the dimension that is most easily grasped and frequently encountered when looking at other cultural behavioural patterns.

Masculinity/femininity is an equally powerful, yet often understated, dimension.

Hofstede defines this dimension as follows: *"masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct (i.e., men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life); femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap (i.e., both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life).*" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 82-3)

Hofstede points out that this dimension is often neglected. Maybe the controversial name given to this dimension has somewhat influenced the popularity of it. Equally, it appears often to be confused with Individualism/Collectivism (Hofstede, 1999; Mooij 1994, 1998).

Uncertainty avoidance is the final dimension present in Hofstede's original work.

Hofstede defines uncertainty avoidance as *"the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations."* (Hofstede, 1994, p. 113)

This dimension is fairly easily grasped, and can often be seen reflected in business negotiations.

In his later work, Hofstede (1991) introduces a fifth dimension. The long-term orientation dimension is the result of his co-operation with Michael Bond, who links this dimension to the work of Confucius. Hofstede describes long-term orientation as characterised by persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame, whereas short-term orientation is characterised by personal steadiness

and stability, protecting your "face", respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favours, and gifts.

The work of Hofstede is probably the most popular work in the arena of culture research. Although the work provides a relatively general framework for analysis, the framework can be applied easily to many everyday intercultural encounters. It is particularly useful, as it reduces the complexities of culture and its interactions into five relatively easily understood cultural dimensions.

### **Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner**

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) classified cultures along a mix of behavioural and value patterns. Their research focuses on the cultural dimensions of business executives.

In their book "Riding The Waves of Culture" (1997), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner identify seven value orientations. Some of these value orientations can be regarded as nearly identical to Hofstede's dimensions. Others offer a somewhat different perspective.

The seven value dimensions identified were:

Universalism versus particularism

Communitarianism versus individualism

Neutral versus emotional

Diffuse versus specific cultures

Achievement versus ascription

Human-Time relationship and

Human-Nature relationship

Of these seven value dimensions, two reflect closely the Hofstede dimensions of Collectivism/Individualism and to a lesser extent power distance. Trompenaars and

Hampden-Turner's communitarianism/individualism value orientation seems to be virtually identical to Hofstede's Collectivism/Individualism. Their achievement/ascription value orientation, which describes how status is accorded, appears to be linked to Hofstede's power distance index, at least if one accepts that status is accorded by nature rather than achievement, and that this reflects a greater willingness to accept power distances. It is, however, not a complete match, as Hofstede's power index does not only relate to how status is accorded, but also to the acceptable power distance within a society, an area that is not touched upon by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's other dimensions seem to focus more on some resulting effects of underlying value dimensions. For example, their neutral/emotional dimension describes the extent to which feelings are openly expressed, i.e. a behavioural aspect rather than a value in itself.

Their universalism/particularism value orientation, describing a preference for rules rather than trusting relationships, could be interpreted as part of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension on the one side, and to some extent the collectivist/individualist dimension. Their diffuse/specific value orientation, describing the range of involvement, seems to have no direct link to any of Hofstede's dimensions.

Human-Time relationship is closely related, if not identical, to Hall's polychronic and monochronic time perceptions. The Human-Nature relationship appears to be closely related to the Human-Nature relationship in Strodbeck and Kluckhohn's (1969) Value Orientations.

### **Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner compared**

Hofstede, as well as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, derive their data from questionnaires that were distributed among professionals – in the case of Hofstede among employees of IBM, and in the case of Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner among a large number of executives from different organisations.

Hofstede's work is based on a questionnaire originally designed to evaluate work values, and, not surprisingly, it is mostly focused towards that end. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's questionnaires on the other side asked respondents for preferred behaviour in a

number of both work and leisure situations. What both studies have in common is that in both questionnaires the focus is on the ultimate goal state, and that the underlying values are derived from a series of questions about more outer layers of the 'culture onion'.

This research focus gives both approaches a very practical flavour. Yet at the same time, the underlying value claims are frequently the result of very little data, or are derived from a limited number of questions. This has at least the potential to disturb significantly the derived value predictions. It may also hide certain dimensions, or values may be wrongly derived because of certain situational influences on the respondents. Examples of this would include the notion that Italy is, when looking at Hofstede's data, an individualistic culture, or that French respondents show a preference for universalism in one answer in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's questionnaire and for particularism in all the other answers. Such unexpected findings clearly suggest the influence of situational variables or other potential problems in the application of the data derived.

### **From behavioural questions to values – Schwartz Value Inventory**

A different approach to finding (cultural) value differences has been taken by Shalom Schwartz (1992, 1994). Using his "SVI" (Schwartz Value Inventory), Schwartz did not ask for preferred outcomes, but asked respondents to assess 57 values as to how important they felt these values are as "guiding principles of one's life". Schwartz's work is separated into an individual-level analysis and a culture-level analysis, a major difference compared to the works of Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner who sometimes fail to clearly distinguish between the two levels, although generally claim to work at the culture-level.

Schwartz distinguishes between value types and value dimensions. Although this distinction is similar to some of Hofstede's work, it is more pronounced in Schwartz's work. A value type is generally a set of values that can conceptually be combined into one meaningful description, such as egalitarian commitment at the culture level. Values located in that value-type have other values that are located at the opposite, or in the opposing value type. In the case of egalitarian commitment, this would be hierarchy at the culture-level. Together these two value types form the value dimension of 'egalitarian

commitment versus hierarchy'. This is somewhat similar to, for example, individualism versus collectivism in Hofstede's work, which combined form the individualism versus collectivism value dimension. However, as indicated before, the difference between value type and value dimension is more clearly worked out and pronounced in Schwartz's work.

From data collected in 63 countries, with more than 60,000 individuals taking part, Schwartz derived a total of 10 distinct value types (power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security) at an individual-level analysis.

These individual level value types each represent a number of values which can be combined in a joint 'idea': Values located in the 'power' value type represent are likely to indicate an individual that values social status and prestige or control and dominance over people and resources. High scores in the 'achievement' value type would indicate a high priority given to personal success and admiration. 'Hedonism' represents a value type where preference is given to pleasure and self-gratification. 'Stimulation' represents a group of values that express a preference for an exciting life, and 'self-direction' a distinct group of values that value independence, creativity and freedom. The 'Universalism' value type on the other side represents a preference for social justice and tolerance, whereas the 'benevolence' value domain contains values promoting the welfare of others. The 'Conformity' value type contains values that represent obedience and the 'tradition' value type is made up out of values representing a respect for traditions and customs. Lastly, the 'security' value type is a value orientation containing values relating to the safety, harmony and welfare of society and of one self (Schwartz, 2001).

Viewed in a circular order, these ten types of values can be ordered into four higher order value types: 'openness to change' combines stimulation, self-direction and a part of hedonism, 'self- enhancement', combines achievement and power as well as the remainder of hedonism. On the opposite side of the circle, 'conservation' combines the value orientations of security, tradition and conformity - and self- transcendence, which combines universalism and benevolence. These four higher order value types form two

bipolar conceptual dimensions. This type of order is derived from the location of values depending on their (negative) correlation within the circle – hence values situated on one side of the circle will be strongly negatively correlated with values on the opposing side of the circle, yet positively correlated with values located nearby. In practical terms, this means that a person who assigns high scores to values which are located in the ‘security’ value type is also likely to regard values located in the ‘conformity’ value type as ‘guiding principles of his life’ – and s/he will be unlikely to assign high scores to values located in the ‘stimulation’ or ‘self-direction’ value types.

Similar to the value domains types at individual level, Schwartz also derives seven distinct value types when analysing the values at a culture-level. The seven value types, which can be summarised in three value dimensions, derived from this analysis are briefly discussed below.

Conservatism (later called embeddedness) is a value type that emphasises the maintenance of traditional values or the traditional order. The value type is opposed to two distinct autonomy value types, which are located at the opposite side of the ‘value circle’ that is produced by Schwartz’s method of analysis. The two autonomy types both promote individual benefit, rather than group benefit. Intellectual autonomy as a value type places emphasis on the perusal of intellectual ideas and directions, whereas the affective autonomy value type places greater emphasis on pleasurable experiences.

Schwartz’s hierarchy value type emphasises a harmonious relationship with the environment, whereas this value type is opposed by mastery, which emphasises an active mastery of the (social) environment.

Another value dimension can be found with a further two opposing value types: hierarchy versus egalitarianism. The hierarchy value type emphasises an unequal distribution of power, whereas the egalitarian value type gives greater emphasis on equality and the promotion of the welfare of others (Schwartz, 2002).

It is important to note, that Schwartz’ work represents a radical departure from the previously presented studies, in as far as the measurement instrument is radically different (values vs. preferred states or behaviour). This may have two consequences: It does eliminate, at least potentially, the chance of situational variables having a strong

impact on the respondents. On the other hand, it does open the argument that when asked about values (rather than specific outcomes) respondents may be inclined to choose a more utopian answer, which in turn may not be reflected in their actual behaviour.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has focused on two main aspects: The definition of culture – and a review of different approaches to research into cultural value dimensions.

Firstly, a definition of culture was derived, identifying culture as “a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretation of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour” (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). The various levels of culture – from underlying values to visible behaviour- have been discussed, and it has been shown that culture can be viewed as an onion-like construct, made up out of different levels that each influence the higher levels.

A number of ways of classifying cultures have been presented in the second part of the paper. These range from single concepts, such as the perception of time, to non-verbal behaviour (such as oculosics). This overview also presented more systematic approaches which focus on the underlying values that influence the more surface levels of culture. In this context, we have briefly discussed the work by Hofstede and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, both of which derive their respective value dimensions from questioning preferred states or behaviours.

Finally, an alternative approach, based on the ranking of values rather than asking for preferred states or behaviours was also presented: Schwartz’s value types, which may provide a more robust approach to classifying value dimensions.

However, despite all efforts there is no commonly acknowledged ‘correct’ concept of culture or cultural dimensions as yet. There is also a considerable debate about the validity of the data from which these concepts were derived. For example, Holden (2002) criticises the relative reliance on Hofstede’s dimensions in the business field. In his view, the data is necessarily outdated, as it was collected more than thirty years ago. On the other side, other research suggests remarkable stability in values (see Schwartz, 1994).

Further research in this area may be needed to fill the gaps and provide more empirical data than is currently available, as well as update the currently available data sets.

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