

---

# Geert Hofstede: Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind

---

## Inna Čábelková

**Geert Hofstede: Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind**, Harper Collins Publishers, London 1994.

This book is one of the most widely used books about cultural differences by the community of international firm managers. It explains the differences in thinking of people of different nationalities across the globe on the very simple four dimensional scale. In the first and second part of the book Geert Hofstede describes his four dimensional model of cultural differences, defines the dimensions, and presents scores of almost 60 countries on these dimensions. The third part is devoted to organizational cultures. The fourth part is about intercultural encounters and intercultural understanding.

Hofstede's dimensions correspond to four main questions each society has to answer or four main problems each society has to resolve in order to function smoothly. The first problem concerns inequality in society and the relationship with authority. Each institutionalized group of people, be it nation, ethnic minority or work organization, has to somehow agree on the distribution of power within it and the relations between those who are higher up on the power pyramid and those lower down. Most of this "agreement process" is unconscious and predetermined by the past experiences of the group members, mainly by the way they were brought up. Geert Hofstede uses the term "cultural programming" of individuals to describe this predetermination based on the values spread in a culture. Once being "programmed" an individual may not be aware on the conscious level about the "programs" he or she has. The "programs" manifest themselves mostly on emotional level. As inequality concerns, we can differentiate between organizations, institutions or nations on so called emotional power distance scale's: whether the emotional distance between the people higher-up in the hierarchy and people lower-down is large (power distance is large) or whether inequality in the society is just inequality of roles with little emotional importance (power distance is small).

The author defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 1994, p.28). It is intriguing that according to the author it is better to define power distance from the point of view of the subordinate rather than the boss. "Authority survives only where it is matched by obedience." (Hofstede, 1994, p.28) The author presents the results of the statistical analysis as for the ranking of about 50 countries on the power distance scale and discusses the influence of this dimension on the relationships between people in families, schools, workplaces, states. The last point of the power distance chapter is the influence of this dimension on ideas bred in the countries including the prevalence of religious ideologies and philosophical ideas, their economic performance, and, finally, the past and the future of the countries as for the power distance dimension.

The second dimension of culture author calls collectivism versus individualism. It answers the question about the relative importance of an individual versus a group. The author defines it as follows: "individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty." (Hofstede, 1994, p. 51) As is the case of power distance the author discussed the influence of this dimension on family, school, workplace, and state. He also looked for correlations between collectivism-individualism index and the economic wealth of the countries. The interesting result is that nearly all wealthy countries are on the individualist side of the scale, while nearly all poor countries are on the collectivist side. Another important finding is that collectivist countries are more attracted to communistic ideas. Finally the author discusses where the particular score on the collectivism-individualism dimension of a country came from and whether and how it may change in the future.

The third dimension of culture concerns masculinity versus femininity or, in other words assertiveness versus modesty. The author defines it 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, 83). This is the only dimension in which men and women scored consistently different. It describes not only the attitude of the society toward assertiveness of modesty, but also gender roles typical for that society. The author

discusses the manifestations of masculinity-femininity dimension in family, school, workplace, and state, its influence on ideas born in the country and the past and the future of the country's score on this dimension.

The last dimension presented in book is uncertainty avoidance. This term has been borrowed from American organization sociology (Cyert and March, 1963). It deals with the extent to which people can or cannot tolerate ambiguity, or, in other words, the extent to which people emotionally need rules. The author defines it as "the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations." This dimension tells us about the level of tension and stress prevalent in the society, whether emotions and aggression should or not be shown, to which extent deviant and innovative ideas or behavior are tolerated. As in the case of previous dimensions, the author discusses manifestations of this dimension in the family, school, workplace and the state, its influence on ideas bred in a country and the past and the future of uncertainty avoidance.

This dimension ends the part of the book devoted to the cultural differences between nations. The next part of the book is devoted to organizational cultures. It shows the differences between organizational and national cultures, describes six following dimensions of organizational cultures:

1. Process oriented vs. results oriented
2. Employee oriented vs. job oriented
3. Parochial vs. professional
4. Open system vs. closed system
5. Loose control vs. tight control
6. Normative vs. pragmatic

(Hofstede, 1994, p. 188). Finally the author presents his ideas about how to manage (or manage with) the organizational culture depending on its score on these dimensions. These part is the most useful for the people doing managing work.

The final fourth part of the book is devoted to implications of cultural differences. Geert Hofstede writes about intercultural conflicts, cultural shocks and acculturation, ethnocentrism and xenophobia, group stereotypes and intercultural encounters in different fields of human contacts: tourism, schools, development cooperation, between host countries and migrants, in international negotiations, in international business organizations and in the case of multinational corporations. Finally he writes about possibilities of intercultural education.

It would be very difficult to at least briefly summaries all the important ideas of the book in this review. Actually, there is so much of interesting and well structured information, that the book can be used as a textbook. So, I did not dare here to present all the main ideas, but rather tried to show the reader what can be found in the book.

The original research of Geert Hofstede, which was later summarized and interpreted in this book, gave impulse to exist for at least three other books by the same author and hundreds of papers published by the author himself and other researchers of different nationalities. The dimensions are constantly updated and published on the author's web pages. On the basis of them new training centers for businessmen of multinational corporations were found. Personally, I consider this book to be very inspiring. It explained well the misunderstandings I had with the people from different nations. The book is also available in Czech language.

#### Literatura:

Cyert, Richard, M. and James G. March. 1963. A Behavioral Theory of the Firm. Ehglewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hofstede, Geert. 1994. Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind. Harper Collins Publishers. London. 273 p.

Mulder, Mauk. 1976. "Reduction of power differences in practice: the power distance reduction theory and its applications." In European Contributions to Organization Theory, G. Hofstede and M. S. Kassem eds., Assen Netherlands: Van Gorcum.

Mulder, Mauk. 1977. The Daily Power Game. Leiden Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

After the book was completed the author founded the fifth dimension: long term orientation versus short term orientation.

Geert Hofstede is currently the director of the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (IRIC) at the university of Limburg at Maastricht, the Netherlands.

For example Geert Hofstede, 2001. Culture's Consequences : Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations. Sage Publications; 2nd edition, April 15,

[http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert\\_hofstede\\_resources.shtml](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml)

Inna Čábelková