

Cultural Dimensions

Definitions

Culture: A dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life (Matsumoto & Juang).

Cultural norms: These are the rules which indicate the expected behaviour in a group.

Ethnocentrism: The inability to empathize with another culture; to assume that one's own culture is the standard by which other cultures are assessed.

Etics: An approach to studying culture based on the premise that there are universal properties of cultures which share common perceptual, cognitive and emotional structures - typically employed in cross-cultural psychology where behaviours are compared across cultures.

Emics: An approach to studying culture with the idea that behaviours are culture-specific. This is also characterized as **cultural relativism**.

Dimensions of culture: The perspective of a culture based on values and cultural norms. Dimensions work on a continuum. The two that we will examine are:

1. **Individualist** vs. **collectivist** cultures (see end of this study guide).
2. Time orientation - **monochronic** vs. **polychronic** (see end of this study guide).

Research: Individualist vs. Collectivist Dimension

The key study on cultural dimensions is the one by Hofstede's 1973 IBM study. In this study Hofstede had employees fill in surveys about morale in the workplace. He then carried out a **content analysis** on the responses, focusing on key differences of people from different countries. The trends he noticed he called dimensions.

- Whiting (1979). Case study of Americans on Japanese baseball teams. Found that Americans who tried to "do their best" were often ostracized by the team. Those who put the team above individual progress were seen as more valuable players.



- Domino & Hannah (1987) Studied Chinese and American children ages 11 - 13. Children were given a series of story plots to complete - for example: *John and Bill are playing ball and break a neighbor's window, but no one sees them do it.* Content analysis of 700 stories. Chinese children emphasized family dishonor or embarrassment, something that never occurred with the American children. The Chinese children emphasized good behaviour, cooperation, and obedience.
- Gabrenya, Wang & Latané (1985) found that **social loafing** is not a universal phenomenon. In Chinese groups they found what they called "social striving." On group performance tasks, Chinese students exerted a greater effort than did American children.
- Hamilton et al (1991) compared teaching styles of Japanese and American teachers in elementary classrooms. American teachers directed their instruction to individual children during both full class instruction and private time; Japanese teachers consistently addressed the group as a collective. Even when working with a student individually, the Japanese teachers would check to make sure that all children were working on the same task.
- Oyserman et al. (2002) conducted a **meta-analysis** of 83 studies. Found that IC had moderate effects on self-concept and rationality, and large effects on attributions and cognitive styles. Individualist cultures tend to overemphasize **dispositional** factors, whereas collectivist cultures tend to overemphasize **situational** factors.

Research: Time Orientation

- Jones & Brown (2004) carried out a **correlational study** on time orientation and academic achievement. Found that African American students who were "future-oriented" were more academically successful than those who were not.
- Stratham et al (1994) found that future-oriented individuals are less likely to engage in risky health behaviour.
- Burnam et al (1975) 62 undergraduates were classified on their level of time-consciousness. Results indicated that those who were highly time-conscious worked on a task at near maximum capacity, irrespective of the presence or absence of a time deadline. Those with low time-consciousness, by contrast, exerted more effort only when the task had an explicit deadline.
- Glass et al (1974) Conducted an experiment with a total of 71 male undergraduates to examine behavioral consequences of a sense of time urgency. Time-urgent participants became more impatient and irritated than less time-urgent participants when both types

were systematically slowed down in their efforts to reach a solution on a joint decision-making task.

- Cole et al (2001) investigated the association between a sense of time urgency and non-fatal myocardial infarction [MI] in a study of 340 cases. They used a **matched pairs design** where the groups had an equal distribution of age, sex, and personal habits - for example, smoking. They concluded that a sense of time urgency was associated with a **dose-response increase** in risk of non-fatal MI, independent of other risk factors - that is, as stressors increased, the risk of heart-attack increased.

Evaluation

- Hoefstede & Hoefstede (2001) have cited over 400 correlations of the IBM dimension scores with other studies, claiming that the results obtained in the 1970's are consistent with scores obtained 30 years later. However, Hoefstede's study was originally meant to describe organizational cultures and not national cultures.
- **Inductive content analysis** depends on the trends that are identified by the researcher. **Researcher bias** can play a significant role in which trends are noticed.
- There is a need for **prospective studies** with regard to time-orientation. The difficulty with studying the effect of time-orientation on our health is that our health is multi-factorial, and it is difficult to isolate the effects of time consciousness. This is further complicated because time orientation in individuals can change over the life-span.
- We have to avoid the **ecological fallacy** - that is, that we cannot attribute these characteristics to individuals, but use them to describe the general behaviour of the group. There is some concern that the dimensions are simply a stereotypical view of culture. Triandis argues that these labels may be more helpful at an individual level than at a cultural level (Triandis)
- Much of the research is correlational and does not establish a cause-and-effect relationship.



Appendix i: A Measure of Individualism and Collectivism (Oyserman et al, 2002)

Individualism: *valuing personal uniqueness, personal achievement, and personal freedom.*

Uniqueness

1. It is important for me to develop my own personal style.
2. My personal attributes make me who I am. I prefer being able to be different from others.
3. It is important for me to be myself.

Achievement

1. Hard work and personal determination are the keys to success in life.
2. I enjoy looking back at my achievements and setting new goals for myself.
3. My achievements define who I am.

Freedom

1. If I make my own choices, I will be happier than if I listen to others.
2. My personal happiness is more important to me than almost anything else.
3. I often have personal preferences.

Collectivism: *valuing family, relationships with others, and belief in a common fate*

Family

1. I often turn to family for social and emotional support.
2. Learning about the traditions, customs, values and beliefs of my family is important to me.
3. My family is central to who I am.
4. It is important for me to respect decisions made by my family.

Relationships with others

1. My relationships with others are an important part of who I am.
2. My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.
3. I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am a part of.

Common fate

1. The history and heritage of my religious, national or ethnic group are a large part of who I am.
2. In the end, a person feels closest to member of his/her own religious, national, or ethnic group.
3. A person of character helps his/her religious, national or ethnic group before all else.



Appendix ii: A Measure of Polychronic and Monochronic Orientations

(Adapted from Jamison, 2009)

Monochronic Cultures

1. People do one thing at a time.
2. People focus on time commitments. They tend to develop plans with firm deadlines.
3. Tend to be "future oriented."
4. People follow privacy rules about disturbing others.
5. Time is a commodity that "can be wasted." Tend to be work-oriented.
6. People respect property.
7. People emphasize punctuality as a positive personal characteristic.
8. People tend to be more literal; focus more on verbal than non-verbal language use.

Polychronic Cultures

1. People do many things at once and are easily distracted.
2. People tend to think in terms of goals and are not so deadline focused.
3. Tend to be "past oriented."
4. People put relationships first.
5. People are more likely to share what they have - borrowing and lending from one another.
6. Promptness is based on relationships. Tend to be on time for respected members of the family - but not for someone outside the family.
7. People tend to be more figurative in their language use; pay attention more to non-verbal language.