

Book Review

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Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Revised Third Edition), New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010, 576 pages.

Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind is one of the most influential books on the study of cross-cultural management. This book includes the authors' research findings conducted in more than seventy countries over a forty year span and helps us to examine how we think- and how we fail to think- as members of groups.

The book has four parts with twelve chapters. The first part, 'The concepts of Culture', explains the book's subtitle 'software of the mind'. According to the authors, though human beings are not programmed like computers, their behaviour is partially influenced by mental programs which are inherited (e.g. human nature), learned (e.g. culture) and inherited and learned (e.g. personality). Since mental programs depend largely on the social environment in which one grew up and on past life experiences, human beings have a basic ability to deviate from their mental programming in unexpected ways. Values are the fundamentals of mental programming. Throughout the book, the term 'culture' is used for mental software. The author describes culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another.

Traditionally, cultural traits have been attributed to hereditary characteristics. However, according to the authors, culture can be learned. Cultural differences vary and they are manifested in symbols, heroes, rituals and values. The core of culture is formed by values. Culture continues from generation to generation. Creating shared rules is essential for group survival. Hence once a culture is set, it also has the tendency to reproduce itself. Each group of people carries a set of general mental programs that constitute its culture. Often each individual belongs to various groups at the same time (e.g. a father, civil servant, etc.) which leads to conflict in layers of mental programming. Referring to the onion model of culture, the author argues that culture change can be fast for the outer layers. Furthermore, he states that in the rapidly changing world, new practices can be learned but the core values remain unchanged. Although foreign cultures are often judged as better or worse, the authors state

that there are no scientific findings which support a culture of one group being superior or inferior to that of another.

Similarly, nations also have their own identities, values and institutions which differentiate them from other nations. The second chapter of the book elaborates the research process used by Geert Hofstede, one of the authors, in his studies from 1984-2001 on cultural differences. The vital feature of this book is the cultural dimensions which Geert Hofstede initially identified from the empirical findings of the International Business Machines (IBM) data. Cultural dimensions, he argues, broadly characterize national culture in terms of its characteristic features. The first four he had named in the earlier editions of this book, based on IBM data were namely; 1) power distance, 2) individualism/collectivism, 3) masculinity/femininity, 4) uncertainty avoidance. He explained them as follows.

1) *Power distance: Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.*

2) *Individualism/collectivism: Individualism is the extent to which people feel independent, as opposed to being interdependent as members of larger wholes.*

3) *Masculinity/femininity: Masculinity is the extent to which the use of force is endorsed socially. In a feminine society, the genders are emotionally closer, competing is not so openly endorsed, and there is sympathy for the underdog.*

4) *Uncertainty avoidance: Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.*

In later years, the IBM questionnaire was used by many researchers and improved versions of the questionnaire were developed. Following the popularity of Geert Hofstede's initial four dimensions in cross-cultural research communities, he added a fifth universal dimension: long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO), based on research he did with colleagues in China and Taiwan. Long-term oriented societies are said to see the world as in flux and adapt to changing circumstances by forecasting future trends whereas short-term oriented societies foster virtues related to the past and use the past as a moral compass for present action (e.g. preservation of face, national pride, respect for tradition, etc.).

A sixth dimension was introduced in this edition of the book, called Indulgence versus Restraint. This is based on happiness research, and on the third author, Michael Minkov's analysis of World Values Survey data. According to the authors, indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

The second part of the book explains in detail the previously mentioned six universal cultural dimensions. The authors have allocated one chapter per dimension in which he represents results of all the countries in which these studies have been done. In addition, he also explains how each dimension influences the individual, family, organizations and state.

The third part of the book is "Cultures in Organizations" in which he discusses major management theories in relation to national culture. The author argues that professors who wrote the theories belong to a culture and their work reflects cultural bias. Discussing Henry Mintzberg's cultural and organizational structure, the author pointed out that Mintzberg did not study the link between values and nationality. Geert Hofstede sees the possibility of some links between his dimensions of national culture and Mintzberg's typology of organizational configuration. He believes that people from a particular nationality will prefer a particular organizational configuration. Furthermore, he mentions that management functions such as planning and controlling are strongly influenced by cultures. Hence, it would be extremely difficult to measure the effectiveness of management functions.

Similarly, the authors discuss popular motivation theories and practices such as Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, David McClelland's theory of achievement motive and Frederick Herzberg's motivation versus hygiene among others. They stress on the role of culture in programming the mind as well as in motivation, arguing that motivation strategies depend on culture. Thus, the theories are valid only in the cultural environments in which they were conceived. For instance, theories originating in the U.S cannot be applied in Asia. The authors state that there is no universal formula for developing successful managers.

The final part of this rather dense book, consist of the concluding chapters which explain the practical implications of cultural differences. Firstly, the authors highlight likely consequences when people are exposed to foreign cultures. In this part, they explain some important cultural phenomena such as cultural shock, ethnocentrism, xenophilia, stereotyping, differences in language and humour. The authors argue that dominance of technology over culture is an illusion and advancement of technology makes information easily accessible to people but it does not change people's value systems. They detail possible intercultural consequences in tourism, schools, minority groups, negotiations and multinational business organizations. They

explain how intercultural communication skills can be learned and improved, and emphasized the role of media in spreading multicultural understanding. The last chapter of the book looks into the evolution of culture.

This book is useful in understanding the cultural differences and the importance of cultural diversity. The implications described by the authors will help managers to understand employee behaviour. Most of the detailed examples referred to by the authors are from Europe, with specific focus on the western cultures. The book would have been more comprehensive if the authors had provided more examples from Asia and other regions equally.

It is clear that the book is targeted for a student readership. The glossary at the end of the book provides definitions for all of the social scientific vocabulary used by the authors. Though, at times, the details can be tedious, anyone interested in cultural differences will find this book worth reading. Particularly focused on the management disciplines, this book would also be a useful read for readers of other disciplines such as social psychology, political science and behavioural science. It is also a good read for anyone interested in intercultural communication and cooperation and for those interested in pushing the boundaries of cross-cultural research.
