



Culture's Consequences

We look at the work of Geert Hofstede, one of the best-known experts in cross-cultural studies. Hofstede's book "Culture's Consequences" is based on a large scale, rigorous survey of IBM subsidiaries undertaken in the 1970s using 116,000 questionnaires in 70+ countries. Each national culture scores high to low along the following four dimensions:

Low Power Distance v Large Power Distance

In **high power-distance** cultures the boss is the boss; everyone is in his place; employees are afraid to criticise while by the **low power-distance** code superiors and subordinates are colleagues; those in power try to look less powerful than they are; and employees expect to be consulted.

Low Power-Distance countries include: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, UK, USA and Germany

High Power-Distance countries are: Malaysia, Philippines, Arab countries, India, W Africa, Singapore, Brazil, Argentina, France and Turkey

You can expect that team members from high power-distance cultures will want to make decisions and take charge. Team members from low-power-distance cultures will prefer more consultation. Set very clear expectations about the leader's management style and what it implies for team members' behaviour.

High Uncertainty Avoidance v Low Uncertainty Avoidance

Where **uncertainty-avoidance** is normal behaviour people feel the need for clarity and order; they work hard in stable careers and dislike deviancy; company rules are observed even when damage may result.

While in countries where they don't "avoid uncertainty" each day is taken as it comes; people take a pragmatic view of rules and regulations; and people are more mobile from job to job.

High Uncertainty-Avoidance countries include: China, Greece, Portugal, Russia, Belgium, Japan, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, France, Spain, S. Korea, Italy and India

Low Uncertainty-Avoidance countries are: Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, UK, USA, Switzerland, Germany, Canada and the Netherlands

People from cultures with high uncertainty-avoidance will require more structure in their job role so spend time detailing their task and the context. However, be careful with members who require less structure, as detailing the task will make them feel micro-managed.

Individualist v Collectivist

In highly **individualistic** cultures the emphasis is on personal initiative and achievement; the ideal is to be a good leader; and everyone has the right to a private life and opinion. While at the opposite end is "**collectivism**": loyalty to the clan is rewarded by the clan's protection; the ideal is to be a good member; and commitment to the work organisation overrides personal inclinations.

Individualist countries include: USA, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland

Group-oriented cultures are primarily Asian, African and Arab.

When dealing with *individualist* cultures

- Introduce yourself with confidence
- Give a firm, short handshake, and maintain eye contact
- Keep your physical distance from people
- Be prepared to state your views forcibly and eloquently
- Explain clearly why you cannot take a decision yourself
- Dress in a way that expresses your individuality

When dealing with *group-oriented* cultures:

- Introduce yourself in relation to your company or team – this is one reason for the prevalence of the business card exchange ceremony in many Asian countries.
- Speak calmly and slowly, matching the pace of the discussion.
- Talk early on about their company
- Be ready to negotiate with and as part of a large team – if you do business alone, you will send negative messages. It lowers your status, and insults your hosts, and it means they cannot evaluate your company's teamwork, which is crucial for a *group-oriented* culture.
- Be prepared to do the real business over a meal or in the bar – group meetings in many cultures are for ceremonial purposes, or to exchange information. If you want your Korean, Chinese or Japanese partners to make concessions or explain a problem, it is better done away from the main meeting or the group. This avoids the risk of losing face.
- Dress soberly – make sure your clothes aren't too different from your colleagues.
- Be prepared for physical contact – handshakes can go on for a long time, personal space is almost non-existent, and people are comfortable touching each other on the arm or back.

Masculine v Feminine

Members of *high-masculinity* cultures have these values: performance counts - and is measured partly in material standards; ambition is the driving force; big and fast are beautiful and *machismo* is sexy. While at the "*feminine*" end: Quality of Life matters more than Standard of Living; service/people/the environment are the focus; small is beautiful and unisex is attractive.

Masculine cultures include: Japan, Austria, Italy, Mexico, UK, Germany, USA, Greece, Hong Kong, Argentina, Brazil, India and Chile

Feminine cultures are: Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Finland, Portugal, Thailand, S. Korea, Spain, France and Taiwan.

Finally, with members from feminine-nurturing cultures, be careful not to overdo the 'kill the competition' theme. People from cultures with more 'feminine' orientations are more prone to use technology in a nurturing way, especially during team start-ups.