Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith – a failure of analysis

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ABSTRACT   Geert Hofstede's legendary national culture research is critiqued. Crucial assumptions which underlie his claim to have uncovered the secrets of entire national cultures are described and challenged. The plausibility of systematically causal national cultures is questioned.

KEYWORDS   causality ∎ evidence ∎ Hofstede ∎ methodology ∎ national culture

Introduction

Do nations have cultures? Within each of the 'management disciplines' there is a significant literature which assumes that each nation has a distinctive, influential and describable 'culture'. As Hickson and Pugh (1995) declare: 'it shapes everything' (p. 90).

Other than a priori belief, what is the basis of claims that influential national cultures exist? What is the quality of the evidence appealed to? Frequently, within the management disciplines, the causal–national–culture accepting literature justifies its reliance on the notion of national culture by citing approvingly the work of Geert Hofstede (1980b) who claims to have successfully 'uncover[ed] the secrets of entire national cultures' (p. 44). Whilst Anderson (1991) has vividly described nations as 'imagined communities' and Wallerstein (1990) states that he is 'skeptical that we can operationalise the concept of culture . . . in any way that enables us to use it for statements that are more than trivial' (p. 34), Hofstede (1980a, 1984,

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1991) claims to have identified the four (later five) 'main dimensions' of national culture along which countries can be hierarchically ordered.[1] By 1998 he could confidently claim that the scale of acceptance of his notion of distinctive–identifiable–influential national cultures was such that 'a true paradigm shift' had occurred (1998a: 480; see also Sondergaard, 1994: 453).

Hofstede's model could be evaluated in a number of ways. It could be compared with alternative depictions of national cultures, especially with those that have emerged more recently (for example, Schwartz, 1992). His notion of culture and values could be contrasted with arguably richer conceptions of culture (for example, Geertz, 1973). His project could be dismissed as a misguided attempt to measure the unmeasurable (MacIntyre, 1971; Smelser, 1992). His findings could be judged solely on the basis of their predictive value by reviewing the many smaller-scale replications. The approach of this article, however, is an evaluation of his research methodology. Are Hofstede's identification claims warranted? What is the quality of his evidence? What presuppositions does he rely on and are they justified?

This article proceeds as follows. First, it briefly outlines Hofstede's identification 'model'. Second, it explores the implications of theorizing culture as *national*. Thirdly, it unpacks and critiques[2] Hofstede's (1980a) claims to have 'empirically' identified multiple national cultures or differences[3] between such cultures by challenging five crucial methodological assumptions he makes. Finally, the article considers the plausibility of a determinate relationship between national culture and uniform national actions/institutions.

Hofstede's model

Hofstede's main research on *national* culture is principally described in *Culture's consequences* (1980a, 1984). On a few occasions he has added to his model, but he has never acknowledged any significant errors or weaknesses in that research. Indeed many of his subsequent publications are robust, at times aggressive, defences of his 1980 methods and findings. As most readers will already be familiar with Hofstede's national culture research, only a very brief outline is given here. Where necessary, greater detail is provided in the critique of his research methodology.

Hofstede's primary data were extracted from a pre-existing bank of employee attitude surveys undertaken around 1967 and 1973 within IBM subsidiaries in 66 countries. In retrospect, some of the survey questions

seemed to Hofstede to be pertinent to understanding the respondents' 'values' which he defines as 'broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others' and which are for him the 'core element in culture' (1991: 35). He statistically analysed the answers to these survey questions. That analysis, together with some additional data and 'theoretical reasoning' (p. 54), revealed, he states, that there are four central and 'largely independent' (1983: 78) bi-polar dimensions of a national culture and that 40 out of the 66 countries in which the IBM subsidiaries were located could be given a comparative score on each of these four dimensions (1980a, 1983, 1991). Hofstede defines these dimensions as follows. *Power Distance*: 'the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede, 1991: 28; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 401). *Uncertainty Avoidance*: 'intolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity' (Hofstede, 1991: 113; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 401). *Individualism versus Collectivism*: 'the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups' (Hofstede, 1991: 51; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 401). *Masculinity versus Femininity* 'assertiveness and competitiveness versus modesty and caring' (Hofstede, 1991: 82–3, 1998b; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 401).[4]

How does Hofstede conceptualize national culture? He treats it as implicit; core; systematically causal; territorially unique; and shared. These alleged characteristics are first described, and later challenged.

Implicit

The notion of 'culture' has multiple and variously inclusive definitions (Kroeber & Kluckholm, 1952; Bock, 1999). Sometimes the description 'culture' is applied exclusively to what is observable or 'recordable' (e.g. Lukacs (1971[1922]; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Crane, 1994; Melville & Readings, 1995). An alternative conception of culture is: 'subjective', or 'implicit'. Hofstede is firmly of this view. He describes culture as 'mental programming', as 'software of the mind', as 'subjective' (1980a). Similarly, Rossi (1989) speaks of the 'unconscious infrastructure', and Schein (1985) of the 'basic assumptions and beliefs . . . that operate unconsciously'. Cultural 'systems' and social systems are treated as analytically distinct but related – the latter being theorized as the dependent variable.

Core

The alleged distinctiveness of a national culture has been characterized in the literature as an absolute difference between either (a) the *total* or 'complete'

(Mead, 1962: 409) culture of those in one nation and that of others; or (b) more commonly as a nationally discrete part, *core*, a 'nucleus' (Fromm, 1960[1942]). Hofstede (1980a) assumes the latter; that national culture is a 'common component' (p. 38) of a wider culture which contains both global and sub-national constituents.

Systematically causal

Within the wider literature, the causal status of culture varies from being a supremely independent variable, the superordinate power in society to, at the other extreme, a mere epiphenomenon, a powerless superstructure (Archer, 1989; Alexander & Seidman, 1990). It is possible to assume the existence of national culture but without attributing significant and unique, indeed any, social patterning effects to such cultures. However, Hofstede (1991) credits strong, often absolute, causality to national cultures (e.g. p. 170). Essentially he endorses national cultural determinism.

Territorially unique

The notion of national culture in the work of Hofstede (1980a, 1983) is not merely of culture of a particular type – causal core 'mental programming' – but one which is territorially unique. National culture is not theorized as the only culture, or the totality of cultures, within a nation, but by definition it culturally distinguishes the members of one nation from another. The population of a nation can be differentiated on many grounds, but Hofstede claims that regardless of these divisions every national population somehow shares a unique culture. The notion is both separatory and unifactory. By the term national culture Hofstede means the culture of a country or state and not necessarily of a nation. For example, although the state 'Great Britain' is composed of at least three nations – England, Scotland and Wales – Hofstede treats it as a single entity with a single 'national' culture.

Shared

Hofstede inconsistently relies on two notions of national cultural sharedness: that common to all individuals within a nation or alternatively a statistical averaging of heterogeneous 'components'. The second definition underlies his primary analysis of his principal data – questionnaire responses from some IBM employees.

Definition 1: Common individual national culture

As nations are 'subculturally heterogeneous' (Hofstede, 1980a) *individuals* do not all share common 'subcultures', but most or all are said to share a common *national* culture.

Hofstede refers, in multiple instances, to the common 'characteristics', the 'common traits' (1991:19) of the *inhabitants* of a particular nation (1980a: 375, 1991: 3, 162, 1996: 157, for example). Thus, a unique national culture is assumed to be individually carried by everyone in a nation. In a similar sense A.J.P. Taylor states: 'The problem with Hitler was that he was German' (in Davies, 1999).

Definition 2: Statistical average

The second sense in which Hofstede characterizes the sharedness of national culture is as not necessarily carried by individuals per se or indeed by any individuals – *but as a statistical average* based on individuals' views. He calls this a 'national norm' (1980b: 45), or a 'central tendency' (1991: 253), or 'an average tendency' (1991: 253). As he states:

> We do not compare individuals, but we compare what is called *central tendencies* in the answers from each country. There is hardly an individual who answers each question exactly by the mean score of his or her group: the 'average person' from a country does not exist.
>
> (1991: 253)

Hofstede's findings

So far this article has identified the sense(s) in which Hofstede uses the notion of *national* culture. There is an extensive literature which critiques such a conception of culture (e.g. Alexander & Seidman, 1990: 1–27). However, rather than engaging with Hofstede's research on a rival concept basis – arguing that another characterization of culture is somehow better – this article directly considers the adequacy of his research methodology.

Hofstede's use of questionnaires

Hofstede, and many of his devotees, make much of the scale of the IBM survey – 117,000 questionnaires administered in 66 countries (Hofstede, 1980a: 54, 1983: 77, 1998a: 480; Hofstede et al., 1990: 287, for instance). Using a large number of respondents does not of itself guarantee representativeness

(Bryman, 1988), but in any event a closer examination of the number of questionnaires used by Hofstede reveals that the average number per country was small, and that for some countries it was minuscule.

Two surveys were undertaken – around 1968–9 and repeated around 1971–3. The figure of 117,000 questionnaires is the combined number for *both* surveys. Furthermore not all the questionnaires were used – although the survey covered 66 countries, the data from only 40 countries were used in characterizing national cultures.

In only six of the included countries (Belgium, France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan and Sweden) were the numbers of respondents more than 1000 in both surveys. In 15 countries (Chile, Columbia, Greece, Hong Kong, Iran, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey) the numbers were less than 200. The first survey in Pakistan was of 37 IBM employees, the second of 70 employees (Hofstede, 1980a: 73). The only surveys in Hong Kong and Singapore were of 88, 71 and 58 respondents respectively (1980a: 411). In response to criticisms of the small number of respondents in some countries (Goodstein, 1981), Hofstede (1981) stated that:

> . . . if a sample is really homogeneous with regard to the criteria under study, there is very little to gain in reliability over an absolute sample size of 50. . . . I could therefore have done my research on 40 (countries) × 50 (respondents per country) × 2 (survey rounds) – or 4000 respondents in total – and obtained almost equally reliable results.
>
> (p. 65)

The crucial condition in this claim is: the homogeneity of the population, so that a sample of 50, indeed even 1, would be representative of that population (Mead, 1962). Later I argue that such a condition cannot validly be deemed to have been satisfied by the IBM surveys analysed by Hofstede. For the moment I observe that were an academic to claim that she or he had been able to compare the 'intelligence' of the populations of two particular nations on the basis of the examination results of, say, 88 and 58 students, his or her views would rightly be scorned. Even if the notion of measuring 'intelligence' were not deemed problematic, few, if any, would regard the students in any class in any university to be representative of the entire population of their respective nations. So why should a claim to have measured national cultures absolutely or comparatively from the responses of similarly minute proportions of national populations be regarded as any more valid?

The scale problem of Hofstede's research is radically compounded by the narrowness of the population surveyed. Although he speaks of 'national

samples' (1980a, 1999), the respondents were exclusively from a single company – IBM. Furthermore, although the surveys (which were undertaken within IBM for quite different reasons) covered all employees, the data used by Hofstede to construct national cultural comparisons were largely limited to responses from marketing-plus-sales employees (1980a). He argues as follows.

Those surveyed were similar in every respect other than nationality. As the respondents all worked for IBM they shared a single monopolistic 'organizational culture' common between and within every IBM subsidiary. As they were matched on an 'occupational' basis, each matched group also shared a common 'occupational culture'. Thus, he states that:

> The only thing that can account for systematic and consistent differences between national groups within such a homogeneous multinational population is nationality itself. . . . Comparing IBM subsidiaries therefore shows national culture with unusual clarity.
>
> (1991: 252)

This article now examines five crucial assumptions upon which this conclusion is based. These assumptions are 'crucial' in the sense that *each* is a necessary condition for his identification claims. The failure of even one would invalidate his identification assertions. It is argued that they are *all* flawed.

Assumption 1: Three discrete components

The cultures carried by each respondent are effectively assumed to be exclusively three non-interacting and durable cultures: the 'organizational', an 'occupational', and the 'national'. As the respondents were all from the 'same' organization and were matched by Hofstede on an occupational basis, *Assumption 1* allows him to conclude that the response differences show 'national culture with unusual clarity' (1991: 252).[5] There is, he assumes, only one IBM culture – not cultures – which, as it were, possesses all employees and every occupation has a common worldwide occupational culture (p. 181). Every IBM employee – whether in, say, a long-established Texan plant or a then, recently established, Turkish branch, it is claimed, was a bearer of the same single organizational culture and he assumes that every member of the same occupational category in (or indeed outside) IBM shared the same occupational culture – every German 'laboratory clerk' (1980a: 79), had the same laboratory clerks' culture as every other German laboratory clerk which was also the same occupational culture as that of

every Bangladeshi laboratory clerk, and so forth; otherwise, he could not have attributed the response differences to national cultures.

The reductive and mechanical basis of Hofstede's tri-partite cultural component assumption can be seen from its expression as an equation:

$$(NC_1 + OrC + OcC) - (NC_2 + OrC + OcC) = NC_1 - NC_2$$

in which NC = National Culture, OrC = Organizational culture, OcC = Occupational Cultures, and $NC_1 - NC_2$ = Difference(s) between two national cultures.

It is important to distinguish between Hofstede's *process* of matching of respondents with the aim of attaining 'functional equivalence' and the *claims* he makes about the 'findings' from his analysis of responses categorized on that basis. The first is a mundane but desirable process in good factor analysis, but the second is erroneous as it relies on notions of organizational and occupational culture that are far too crude and implausible to underpin Hofstede's emphatic empirical claims.

Organizational culture

Hofstede supposes that in IBM there is a singular, uniform and monopolistic organizational culture (cf. Risberg, 1999; Parker, 2000). The principal flaw of this characterization is not to have claimed that there is a single world-wide IBM organizational culture – albeit that is contestable, and not self-evident as he suggests – but to treat that culture as the *only* organizational culture in IBM. The extensive literatures which argue for recognition of multiple, dissenting, emergent, organic, counter, plural, resisting, incomplete, contradictory cultures in organization are effectively ignored (cf. Jelinek et al., 1983; Smircich, 1983; Spender, 1998).

However, about 10 years after the initial publication of his analysis of the IBM survey data, Hofstede had begun to belatedly acknowledge that there *is* cultural variety within and between units of the same organization (e.g. 1991: 193, 1998a: 11). Research projects which he directed on *organizational cultures* revealed, he states, 'considerable differences' (1991: 182). An inevitable implication of this changed characterization of organizational culture is that during the IBM survey periods there were cultural differences both within each IBM national unit and between them (1991: 253) and not cultural uniformity as Hofstede had originally claimed and trumpeted as a distinctive virtue of his research. An acknowledgement that organizations possibly have multiple cultures and not a single culture might seem to contradict a crucial part of *Assumption 1* and thus undermine Hofstede's national culture mapping claims.

However, in parallel with his belated acknowledgement of cultural heterogeneity in organizations, Hofstede redefined 'organizational culture' in terms – which if accepted – would not invalidate *Assumption 1* and would therefore leave his national culture identification claims undisturbed. How? He states that 'national cultures and organizational cultures are phenomena of a different order' (1991: 182). Whilst national cultures are characterized, he says, by core [phenomenological] values – which his questionnaire analysis sought to identify – 'the core of an organization's culture', is he states, not shared 'values', but, 'shared perceptions of daily practices' (1991: 182–3). Thus he concludes that the cultural heterogeneity within IBM did not affect his cross-subsidiary comparison of values, as organizational culture does not contain/reflect values (1999: 38). This change can be seen in the revised equation which excludes organizational culture:

$$(NC_1 + OcC) - (NC_2 + OcC) = NC_1 - NC_2$$

However, Hofstede's more recent de-valuing of organizational culture is also problematic. First, his depiction lacks clarity. He does not sufficiently distinguish between, nor adequately define, the concepts of 'practice' and 'perceptions of practice'. Although there are many different metaphysical and epistemological varieties of practice theory and extensive controversies (Turner, 1994), Hofstede fails to locate his notion within a particular tradition. Instead he treats the notion of 'practice' and perceptions of 'practice' as if their properties are uncontested and self-evident. As Harry Triandis (1993) points out: 'the present book [Hofstede, 1991] makes no attempt to link with recent social science literature' (p. 133).

Second, the sources/causes of the differences at the organizational level between practices or perceptions of practices are not addressed – somehow they just exist – but practices are not constituted, understandable, or perceivable in themselves. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1971) states: 'no institution or practice is what it is, or does what it does, independently of what anyone whatsoever thinks or feels about it' (p. 263); see also Schmid, 1992.

Third, he ignores research which directly criticizes or rejects the treatment of levels of culture as methodologically distinct. Schwartz (1992), for example, states that 'in contrast to Hofstede's findings, the dimensions derived at the two levels of our research appear to be closely related' (p. 2), and Bond (1988) says that an 'ecological or culture level approach [used by Hofstede] does not yield individual level dimensions of values' (p. 1009). Finally, notwithstanding Hofstede's separation of national culture and organizational culture, his own research into organizational cultures reveals

some value differences: 'the organizations differed somewhat on three clusters of values' (1991: 193).

Occupational

Hofstede's initial supposition of a single world-wide IBM culture and his later assertion that organizational cultures are value-free practices has allowed him to claim that by occupationally matching the IBM responses he was able to isolate the differences caused by national cultures. His earlier and later notions of organizational culture were criticized earlier. His notion of uniform world-wide *occupational* cultures also rests upon highly contestable suppositions, specifically on a deterministic model of permanently imprinted socialization (cf. March, 1966; Morgan, 1986; DiMaggio, 1997; Bock, 1999, 2000). Such cultures (and indeed national culture also) are, he claims, 'programmed into' carriers in pre-adulthood. 'Values', he states:

> . . . are acquired in one's early youth, mainly in the family and in the neighbourhood, and later at school. By the time a child is 10 years old, most of its basic values have been programmed into its mind. . . . For occupational values the place of socialization is the school or university, and the time is in between childhood and adulthood.
> (Hofstede, 1991: 182; see also Hofstede et al., 1990: 312; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 405)

Hofstede's supposition of continuity – the notion that national and occupational cultures are permanent and completed consequences of early 'socialization' – has few supporters. It echoes the much-criticized views of Parsons. But even Parsons had a less mechanical concept of internalization of culture (Inkeles & Levinson, 1969; Smelser, 1992). And yet the continuity assumption is crucial for Hofstede's analysis. Without it, the mere matching of respondents on an occupational basis could not be deemed to isolate national cultural values.

There are problems even *within* his deterministic notion of permanent programming of 'occupational cultures'. It wrongly implies that: (a) members of each organizational occupation regardless of country will have attended the same type of courses – yet someone in, say, marketing in IBM was just as likely to have studied zoology, or anthropology, or French, as 'marketing' itself; (b) the fundamental contents of the pertinent third-level courses are the same, regardless of country, and yet we are all aware that even within single countries there is not uniformity of course content; (c) occupational 'socialization' only occurs pre-work: at 'school or university' (1991: 182) – thus

excluding occupational socialization at the work place, or in parallel with work – in, for example, the vast number of post-experience courses; and (d) respondents regardless of age or length of service had never changed occupations outside or within IBM.

As the social and the institutional are defined as consequences of national culture, Hofstede's model is closed to the idea that values might be, or might also be, the consequences of the social/institutional (cf. Whitley, 1992; McSweeney, 1994; Djelic, 1998). Thus, the possibility that the views of members of particular occupational groupings in a country, say US accountants, might be influenced by – amongst many other factors – the short-termism of the US capital market compared with the possible effects of the longer-termism of the German capital market on German accountants is ignored, so maintaining the convenient, but fantastic, assumption that throughout the world, members of the same occupation, regardless of diverse entry requirements, regulations, social status, structure and number of trade associations or professional bodies, each share an identical world-wide occupational culture. National cultures are said to influence occupational contexts and practices, but somehow that national diversity is not assumed to create national differences in occupational or organizational cultures.

Assumption 2: The national is identifiable in the micro-local

This assumption underlies Hofstede's claims in two ways – depending on which definition of the sharedness of national culture he relies on. National culture is said to be carried by all individuals in a nation (1980a: 38) or a 'central tendency' (1991: 253).

Assumption 2: Version 1 (the national is uniform)

When Hofstede relies on *Definition 1* he is presupposing the existence of that which he purports to have 'found' (1980b: 44). Only by presupposing national uniformity (of culture or whatever else) may a general conclusion be based on local sites of analysis. But how could this be known? As Maurice Farber (1950) states:

> There has been a tendency in some . . . circles . . . to minimise this problem, apparently on the theoretical ground that every member of [or organization in] a nation necessarily exhibits the national character, so that it matters little which particular individuals one studies. *To simplify, it is as if all members of a nation were envisaged as having*

> been immersed in the homogeneous fluid of national culture, with the
> soaked up fluid readily identifiable by trained observer.
>
> (p. 37, emphasis added)

The circularity of Hofstede's reasoning is evident from the effect of not presupposing national uniformity. Without that supposition there are no valid grounds for treating the miniscule local as representative of the national. Instead there is a huge and unbridged conceptual chasm between the micro-local (IBM) and the national. To *assume* national uniformity, as Hofstede does, is not appropriate for a study which purports to have *found* it.

Assumption 2: Version 2 (<u>an</u> average tendency is <u>the</u> average tendency)

In Hofstede's cultural triad, occupational and organizational cultures are defined as uniform. If Hofstede were epistemologically consistent, he would also define the third component as homogeneous (*Definition 1*); that is, each individual within a country would share the same national culture. This he sometimes does, but he cannot do so when analysing the IBM survey data because their heterogeneity contradicts *Definition 1*. If a national culture were common to all national individuals (and survey responses could identify those cultures) then there would not have been significant intra-country differences in individuals' responses. But the IBM survey responses *within* each country were characterized by radical differences. Hofstede acknowledges this. Relying on his second definition of national culture he states that there was only an 'average' or 'central' 'tendency' (1991: 253). Although, for example, some Japanese respondents 'scored more individualist' than did some American respondents, each of the diverse responses were nationally averaged and then held to be representative of the cultural differences between the countries. Highly varied responses were converted into single national IBM responses and those averaged responses – when compared with other nationally classified data – were then labelled the respective national cultural differences.

Within a very heterogeneous set of data there is, in principle, always an 'average tendency'. If it is supposed that there are national cultures then it can be legitimately argued that national cultures as 'central tendencies' exist. But Hofstede maintains not merely that in each country there is a national cultural central tendency, but that he identified such national tendencies, or differences between them, from data from some respondents in a single micro-location.

If somehow the average tendency of IBM employee responses is assumed to be nationally representative then, with equal plausibility – or rather equal implausibility – it must also be assumed that this would be the same as the average tendency in every other company, tennis club, knitting club, political party, massage parlour, socialist party, and fascist party within the same country. The 'average [national culture] tendency' in New York City Young Marxist Club, for example, is (if Hofstede's *Assumption 2*, defined earlier, is believed) the same as in the Keep America White Cheer-Leaders Club in Smoky Hill, Kansas, USA.

But there are no valid reasons for assuming that the IBM responses somehow reflected 'the' national average. This argument would be correct even if a 'typical' (whatever that might be and however it might be identified) national company or sports club, or whatever had been surveyed. But in any event IBM subsidiaries had many nationally atypical characteristics. These include: the company's selective recruitment only from the 'middle classes' (Hofstede, 1980a: 56) – 'the crisp young white-shirted men who move softly among [the computers] like priests' (*Time* magazine cited in Alexander, 1990: 309); the frequent international training of employees; the technologically advanced and unusual characteristics of its products during the survey periods – which were before the development of the 'personal computer' (Warner, 1981: 76; Baumgartel & Thomas, 1982: 195; Lowe, 1981: 312); the 'frequent personal contacts' between subsidiary and international headquarters staff (Hofstede, 1980a: 55); its tight internationally centralized control; its US ownership during a period in which foreign direct investment was comparatively new and controversial; and 'the relatively young and inexperienced managers [that is in comparison with those in other companies in the same countries] due to fast company growth in the 1960s' (Hofstede, 1980a: 56). Furthermore, IBM employees most likely diverged from the general population more in some nations than in others. Each IBM unit surveyed was not, contrary to Hofstede's claim, 'atypical in the same way from one country to another' (1980a: 39). For instance, during the time the survey(s) were undertaken, working for a non-family owned firm or the public sector would have been much more unusual in Ireland or Taiwan for example than in, say, Britain, or the USA and working for high-technology business would have been more unusual in Third World nations such as El Salvador and Bangladesh than in industrialized nations such as West Germany and the United States (Whitley, 1992; Lytle et al., 1995). As Lytle et al. (1995) state: 'Hofstede's (1980) data . . . was representative of a very limited segment of the overall national population' (p. 197).[6]

Hofstede's research can legitimately be called a cross-national-opinion comparison only in the sense that data *from* organizations in

different countries were compared. He fails to satisfactorily justify his claim that *an* average tendency based on questionnaire responses from some employees in a single organization is also *the* national average tendency. His generalization to the national from the micro-local is unwarranted.

Assumption 3: National culture creates questionnaire response

Differences

It would have been remarkable if the analysis of employee responses *classified on the basis of their national location* had not produced response *differences*. But the crucial question is: what is the representational status of those differences? Every conceivable stratification of the questionnaire responses would most probably produce differences. Hofstede's unjustified analytical leap is to treat the differences identified on the basis of his national stratification as a consequence of national culture.

There are potentially an infinite number of ways of stratifying questionnaires – and of defining a 'variable' component (Roberts, 1995). The IBM questionnaires could have been categorized in ways which reflected possible response differences additional or alternative to Hofstede's triad; for example, race, religion, and first language. The problem for Hofstede's analysis is that most, if not all, of these stratifications would produce response differences (Schwarz, 1999). Each classification would 'identify' unique differences which, consistent with Hofstede's methodology, could have been labelled a particular 'culture' or cultural difference on the basis of whatever a priori classification framed the data stratification. But Hofstede ignores this problem. Instead he merely pronounces that the differences which his particular classification of employees inevitably produced were caused by, and are the means of identifying, differences between national cultures.

If, not withstanding these criticisms, we very charitably accept all Hofstede's claims about the characteristics and influence of the three cultures (organization, occupational, and national) but introduce just one other influence – cultural or non-cultural – on responses at the time the questionnaires were being administered then assuming that the response differences identified were exclusively (if at all) caused by national culture is unjustified. As Jim March (1966) has observed: 'where the unexplained variance is rather large, as it often is when we consider social-choice systems, we can easily fool ourselves into believing that we know something simply because we have a name for [it]' (p. 69).

Hofstede's depiction of the reported response differences as caused by

national cultures is merely the product of his supposition that such causality exists. His production of nationally classified data provides *no* evidence in support of his assumption as *any other* classification would also have produced response differences between the classifications.

Hofstede denies the influence of suppositions on his analysis. In contrast, those who have provided different descriptions are 'subjective'. All but one of the multiple pre-1980 characterizations of national cultures/national culture reviewed by Hofstede (1980a: 44–7) used cultural dimensions which differ from his. The exception – the dimensions used by Inkeles and Levinson (1969) – are, he says, 'amazingly similar to the dimensions empirically found' in the IBM study, but the other categorizations are said to have been 'strongly colored by the subjective choices of the authors'. 'Amazingly' we are expected to believe that only the pre- and post-1980 depictions of the dimensions/characteristics of national cultures which differ from Hofstede's are 'strongly colored by subjective choices' and yet to accept that Hofstede's dimensions are real as they alone have been 'empirically found' (cf. Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997; Triandis, 1982).

Dopes: *Assumption 3* also relies on a very contestable notion of individuals, and specifically of the individual questionnaire respondents. They are conceived of as mere relays of national culture (or values). Respondents are effectively assumed to be 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967). Without this conception of individuals, the assumed causal link between individuals' values as the determinants and their opinions as derivatives would be problematic and hence so too would the statistical analysis that supposes the adequacy of the 'input' data: the opinions.

Hofstede's implicit conception of the questionnaire respondents is contestable (Kertzer, 1988; Steinmetz, 1999). Although individuals' answers were, in the main, confidential, the respondents' foreknowledge of the end purpose of the surveys could well have encouraged them to manipulate their answers to improve their, and their divisions', position. The administration of the survey and the ownership of its results were IBM's; some of the questionnaires were completed within groups and not individually; *and* the respondents had foreknowledge that 'managers were expected to develop strategies for corrective actions which the survey showed to be necessary' (Hofstede, 1984: 46). As subjects, we take positions within our relations of power and within our understanding of those relations. How much of our own practices, or our stated views, could be said to freely reflect some pure self or are a composite of the gaming we believe we should, or have to, incessantly play? It cannot be reasonably assumed that, when answering questions such as: 'To which one of the above types [described] would you say your own superior most closely corresponds?' (1980a: 419–21), IBM employees

did so in a manner uninfluenced by the possible consequences of their answers (Kondo, 1990: 301; DiMaggio, 1997: 271). Yet Hofstede relies on the supposition that the answers are immune to respondents' gaming and were the pure outcomes of unconscious pre-programmed values (1980a, 1991; Hofstede & Peterson, 2000).

Assumption 4: National culture can be identified by response difference analysis

Having assumed that the pertinent response differences were caused by national values, Hofstede then supposes that the questionnaire response differences are decipherable manifestations of culture (cf. Kreweras, 1982; Smucker, 1982; d'Iribarne, 1991). *Assumption 3* may be a necessary condition for *Assumption 4*, but it is not a sufficient condition.

Despite the criticisms above of *Assumption 3*, let us temporarily assume it to be correct. It requires another analytical leap to assert that the cause may be identified through its assumed consequences. Disregarding this problem, Hofstede obfuscates the questionnaire response differences with national culture. But 'cause' and 'effect' are not identical: the particulars (opinions) are logically and empirically distinct from culture. Culture is conceptualized as a force, as a determinant, but descriptions of it are based on analysis of specific texts – answers to fixed-choice questions. The notions of culture as a force, and as a decipherable manifestation, are inappropriately conflated (Archer, 1989).

Even if Schwartz's (1992) claim 'that one cannot derive the normative ideals of a culture from the average of individual responses' (p. 51) is ignored and we momentarily accept Hofstede's counter-view, how comprehensive were the answers of the individual IBM respondents?

The authenticity of the questionnaire answers was doubted as discussed earlier. But even if the answers are assumed to be pure manifestations of underlying national values (*Assumption 3*) it does not follow that the questions asked were comprehensive, as Hofstede acknowledges. But the consequences of not having comprehensively 'identified' the value set are not merely incomplete descriptions, but more importantly inaccurate descriptions. As Schwartz (1992) states:

> . . . if the value set is not comprehensive, studies of the correlates of value priorities will be compromised: Influential values that might counterbalance or outweigh the values that were measured would necessarily be overlooked, so the assessed priorities would be distorted.
>
> (pp. 2–3)

Is it not probable that Hofstede would have 'found' different national cultures had he used additional, amended, or alternative questions? Attempts to identify some national cultures using different questions from those of Hofstede have indeed usually produced different descriptions (d'Iribarne, 1991; Schwartz, 1992; Lytle et al., 1995). Hofstede (1980a) acknowledges that there may be 'other dimensions related to equally fundamental problems of mankind which were not found . . . because the relevant questions were simply not asked' (pp. 313–4). Schwartz (1994), for instance, found seven culture-level dimensions which were, he states, 'quite different' from those of Hofstede (p. 116). Even *replications* (same method and questions) have included those that have been disconfirmatory as well as confirmatory (e.g. Salter & Niswander, 1994).

Even if it is supposed that a national culture is somehow composed of separately identifiable independent dimensions' (Hofstede, 1980a, 1991), why should we accept that Hofstede successfully identified even the 'dominant' dimensions? Robinson (1983) states Hofstede's dimensions are a 'hodgepodge' of items 'few of which relate to the intended construct' (p. 130). Dorfman and Howell (1988) question the composition of Hofstede's dimensions. They point out, for example, that his Uncertainty–Avoidance Index is composed of three items which reflect seemingly disparate constructs: 'level of perceived stress, length of time the individual believes s/he will work for the present company [IBM] and beliefs regarding whether rules should be broken' (p. 130). The notion of discrete measurable non-interactive values is in any event highly problematic. The work of Schwartz (1992), and others, points to 'dynamic relations among values' (p. 47) rather than values that are appropriately classifiable into four (later five) 'largely independent' dimensions (Hofstede, 1983: 78). Dimensions are depicted by Hofstede as bi-polar in the sense that each is composed of contrasting positions, for instance 'individualism' and 'collectivism' are treated as opposite poles of his 'individualism/collectivism' dimension but, as Triandis (1994) states, 'the two can coexist and are simply emphasised more or less . . . depending on the situation. All of us carry both individualist and collectivist tendencies' (p. 42). In Leach's classic study of Burmese highlanders, he records them as alternating between two quite incompatible versions of society. Most Catholics, and others, have been able to live with the apparently contradictory notions of 'free will' and the 'will of God'. But Hofstede's dimensions exclude such coexistence and conflict and thus are blind to key cultural qualities. All of us, including Burmese highlanders and academics, have the ability not only to hold incompatible ideas/values in different situations but we may, in James Joyce's apt phrase, have 'two tinks [sic] at a time'. As Smelser (1992) says: 'any culture will present a number of contradictory adages or sayings ("look

before you leap" and "he who hesitates is lost") as part of its repertoire
(p. 25). Slater (1970) succinctly and sharply states:

> An individual, like a group, is a motley collection of ambivalent feel-
> ings, contradictory needs and values, and antithetical ideas. He is not,
> and cannot be, a monolithic totality, and the modern effort to bring
> this myth to life is . . . delusional and ridiculous.
>
> (p. 27)

A further issue is whether specific expressions – for example 'rules
should not be broken' which was included in the IBM questionnaires (1980a:
409) – had reasonably similar meanings for the respondents in each of the
countries. As Schwartz (1994) observes: 'comparisons are virtually mean-
ingless if there is no equivalence of meaning [and] because Hofstede did not
address this issue, the extent to which his items were conceptually equival-
ent across cultures is unknown' (p. 94).

The fifth dimension

Some time after 'identifying' the four main dimensions of national cultures,
Hofstede added a fifth: 'Confucian Dynamism' (1991) or 'Long- versus
Short-Term Orientation' (1999). As, prior to adding the fifth dimension,
Hofstede had not claimed to have found all dimensions of national cultures,
only the dominant ones, the addition of an extra dimension might seem to
enhance rather than weaken his national culture model. However, an examin-
ation of the research from which Hofstede extracted the additional dimen-
sion – a 'Chinese Values Survey' (CVS) by the Chinese Culture Connection
group (CCC: Bond, 1988) – reveals that his grafting on of this fifth dimen-
sion is problematic. That research identified one of Hofstede's four dimen-
sions – Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) – as irrelevant to Chinese populations
and therefore downgraded UA from being a universal dimension of national
cultures (as it is in Hofstede's 4-D model) to a non-universal dimension
(Bond, 1988; Lowe & Oswick, 1996). None of the CVS factors were corre-
lated with UA. If Hofstede regards the CCC study to be valid he should not
have just added Confucian Dynamism to his prior list of four dimensions. He
should also have downgraded UA in his model. If, alternatively, Hofstede
regards the CCC study as flawed he should not have grafted on the fifth
dimension. However, Hofstede wants it both ways.

In the wider literature on culture such is the elusiveness of the concept
of culture that there is no consensus about which 'units' or 'dimensions'
should be used for describing culture: essentially cultures are still 'grasped'.

Hofstede's arithmetization of some employees' answers to survey questions has not removed this profound complexity.

Assumption 5: It's the same in any circumstances within a nation

The fifth core assumption in Hofstede's analysis is that national culture is situationally non-specific. Although the sub-title of *Culture's consequences* (1980a) is 'International differences in work-place values' – Hofstede claims that 'data obtained within a single MNC [IBM] does have the power to uncover the secrets of entire national cultures' (1980b: 44). He does not claim to have identified national cultural differences that are specific to work-places, but to have compared and hierarchically located differences between national cultures that are *pervasive* (1991: 15). Within each country there is a single national culture, not merely a single national work-place culture. On what grounds does Hofstede make this claim? Again, I suggest, that the apparent *derivation* of a national generalization from situationally specific data is in fact a *presupposition*. The conclusion is not the end but the beginning.

The IBM data analysed were situationally restricted in four ways: (i) the analysed surveys were confined to certain categories of IBM employees – thus excluding blue-collar workers, the non-employed, the retired, the unemployed, full-time students, the self-employed, and others; (ii) the questions were almost exclusively about workplace issues; (iii) the surveys were administered only within the formal workplace – 'the front-room' in Goffman's language; and (iv) the surveys were not repeated in non-work place locations for (a) the same respondents and/or (b) others.

Hofstede's claim of entire-national and not merely national-work-place validity is simply a result of his *presupposition* that national cultures are not situationally specific within a nation. A claim that should have been explored and/or tested is conveniently, but inappropriately, presumed. As Sorge (1983) states: '[a] large power distance in the enterprise [one of Hofstede's dimensions of national culture], for instance, does not necessarily imply a corresponding large power distance in the family, such as between father and children' (p. 628); see also MacIntyre (1971), Kondo (1990), Shearing and Ericson (1991), Hollan (1992) and McSweeney (1995). Triandis (1994) succinctly illustrates this argument with an example: 'I may be very individualistic, but when my university gives me the job to represent it at a meeting, I act collectivistically in that setting' (p. 45).

In summary, the validity of the identification claims face two profound problems. First, the *generalizations* about national level culture from an analysis of *sub*-national populations necessarily relies on the unproven and

unprovable supposition that within each nation there is a uniform national culture and on the widely contested assertion that micro-local data from a section of IBM employees are representative of that supposed national uniformity. Second, the *elusiveness* of culture. It was argued that what Hofstede 'identified' is not national culture, but an averaging of situationally specific opinions from which dimensions or aspects of national culture are unjustifiably inferred. Even if we heroically assume that the answers to a narrow set of questions administered in constrained circumstances are 'manifestations' of a determining national culture, it requires an equally contestable act of faith to claim that the underlying national culture or cultural differences can be discerned through the explicit and recordable. Hofstede's claim to have empirically measured national culture differences relies on crucial but unwarranted assumptions.

Stories as proof

The analysis presented here has critiqued Hofstede's measurement methodology. It emphatically rejected the claim that 'data obtained from a single MNC does have the power to uncover the secrets of entire national cultures' (Hofstede, 1980b: 44). Hofstede has also sought to demonstrate the validity of his findings by accounts of historical and contemporary events which he argues are explicable by, and are a consequence of, some or all of his dimensions of national culture. He lists a wide range of national institutions, events, and artefacts – including 'architecture', 'religion', 'literature', 'industrial relations systems', 'family structures', 'religious organizations', 'scientific theories', and 'social stratification' which he claims are 'consequences of' (1980a: 27), or 'crystalliz[ations] of' (1983: 76), national cultures. Indeed he seems to suggest that the list is unlimited: 'no part of our lives', he states, 'is exempt' (1991: 170). Unfortunately, the same chronic a priorism that fundamentally flawed his measurement of national cultures also invalidates his allegedly illustrative stories. They are often constructed without regard for *readily* available counter-evidence. The problem for Hofstede's model is not that some, indeed many, of his stories fail when tested. Useful explanatory/predictive theories can suffer from exceptions, albeit that the greater the number of explanatory failures the less useful the theory. Much more problematic for the validity of Hofstede's model, is the manner of the stories' construction. Hofstede's illustrative stories are fabricated, no doubt unwittingly, to vindicate not validate his findings.

The plausibility of systematically causal national cultures

The failure of Hofstede's stories – once unpacked – to show a causal link between his dimensions of a particular national culture and a specific national action is not surprising, given the earlier critique of his construction of his national cultural cameos. But, in any event, how credible is the notion of systematically causal national cultures? The critique above of Hofstede's identification methodology did not rely on a counter-supposition that such causal national cultures do not exist. The analysis was agnostic on that issue. Here, however, I want to raise some doubts about that notion of national cultural social causality and so to suggest that the failure of Hofstede's model goes beyond the technical. Hence, the implication is not to devise improved identification of national cultures or differences between such cultures, but to abandon the notion of a mono-causal link between national cultures and actions within nations.

Other cultural influences

Even if the causes of social actions/institutions within a nation are restricted to that which is cultural, why should it be assumed that only the national culture is influential? Hofstede acknowledges that within nations there are other cultures, or what he calls 'sub-cultures' (Hofstede, 1980a, 1991). But Hofstede is inconsistent in his conception of culture. Whilst national culture is treated as constitutive, other types of cultures are acknowledged to exist but allowed little, if any, influence. Any constitutive interplay between different levels and types of culture is precluded.

Non-cultural causation

Hofstede's reliance on a single explanatory variable effectively closes his model not only to the possible effects of non-national cultures but also to the possible influence of the non-cultural.

Why should the idea of national–cultural–causation be privileged over administrative, coercive, or other means of social action (Archer, 1989)? As Maurice Farber (1950) argues:

> Would it be meaningful, for example, to talk of the religiosity of the Spaniards without description of the officially monopolistic position of the church in Spain, or of the irreligiosity of the Russians without considering the attitude of the Soviet government towards religion?

> (p. 313)

The radical decline in church attendance in post-Franco Spain and the considerable increase in post-Soviet Russia does not support the idea of an enduring national culture driving social action, but rather the influence of other historical specificities of which the demise of coercive regimes is but one illustration. As subjects, or citizens, or partners, or employees or whatever, we take our positions within relations of power and within our understanding of those relations (Kondo, 1990: 301).

Some on-going, and changed actions, may even have simple physical explanations. Cosco (1997) records that:

> Wotherspoon and Satzwich (1993) . . . describe a . . . study that determined that aboriginal Canadian people do not value cars, televisions, and other such material goods. This was considered to be a cultural phenomenon. However, Wotherspoon and Satzwich point out that it may simply be the lousy roads and reception band in their area that have rendered the commodities valueless.
>
> (p. 19)

National heterogeneity

If, as suggested earlier, non-national cultures and/or non-cultural forces operate within nations then national uniformity cannot be presumed. The extent of uniformity of actions structures, institutions, and so forth, within a nation is an open question. Indeed, there is an extensive literature which has 'found' national *diversity*. As Philip Bock (1999) unhesitatingly states 'we must conclude that the uniformity assumption is false' (p. 111); see also Etzioni (1968), O'Reilly and Roberts (1973), Bhagat (1979), Freeman (1983), Merelman (1984), Zeldin (1984), Kondo (1990), Smelser (1992), Steinmetz (1999) and Bock (2000). The prefixing of the name of a country to something to imply national uniformity is grossly over-used (Archer, 1989; Kondo, 1990; Shearing & Ericson, 1991).

'Nations' may fissure, coalesce, combine, be combined, expand, or contract (Connor, 1978). A recent example of the first type was the break-up of Yugoslavia, and a contemporary example of the latter type has been the 'integration' of Hong Kong into the People's Republic of China. What are the implications of these changes for Hofstede's claims? When nations fissure, the only possible conclusion consistent with Hofstede's methodology is that his national culture characterization of the former nation must also be that of each of the multiple new nations. For instance, although Hofstede depicted Yugoslavia as having a high level of Collectivism, a strong degree of Uncertainty Avoidance, and being very Feminine (1980a:

222, 165, 279), it violently disintegrated into a number of separate states. And we are now, consistent with his claims, supposed to believe that the national cultures of each of these states: Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia, and so forth, are identical to each other. Such an idea beggars belief, but if it is not true, then what was really identified/measured as Yugoslavian 'nation culture' – indeed of every nation – by Hofstede? A statistical myth I suggest.

The occurrence, or the possibility of, converse situations also destabilizes Hofstede's analysis. If a 'nation' fuses with, or is deemed to have been reunited with another nation then – consistent with Hofstede's assumption that what is true of a part is true of the whole – the national culture of the enlarged nation must be defined as that of the former part(s). An example is the supposed national culture of China. Following the [re]integration of Hong Kong into China are we to believe that what was measured in the IBM subsidiary in Hong Kong is also true for the entire Chinese nation? The IBM unit in Taiwan was also surveyed. There were some radical differences between the national culture dimensions measurements for each of these 'nations' and none of the four dimensional scores were similar (1980a: 105, 165, 222, 279, 315–16, 324; see also Paik et al., 1996). If prior to Hong Kong's (re)integration with the rest of China, Taiwan had been reunited into China then Hofstede's description of Taiwanese culture, and not that of Hong Kong, would be taken, consistent with his national generalization assumption, as characterizing the culture of China as a whole. If Taiwan is subsequently (voluntarily or forcibly) reintegrated into China, which Hofstedeian depiction of China's national culture – that of Hong Kong or Taiwan – should his devotees chose? Which would describe what Hofstede calls 'the Chinese mind' (1991: 162)? The potential instability of the object of analysis is ill matched with Hofstede's claims to have achieved measurement precision.

Concluding remarks

Perhaps when first published Hofstede's national culture claims contributed to the challenge to wholly universalistic notions of management, although it should be recalled that during *and* preceding that time a range of scholarly texts on international cultural differences and similarities were also published including six volumes of the *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology* (Triandis, 1980). Why Hofstede's work should have achieved and retained eminence within parts of the management disciplines is not considered in this article. Although the management literature includes work as

good as the best in other social science disciplines, the on-going unquestioning acceptance of Hofstede's national culture research by his evangelized entourage suggests that in parts of the management disciplines the criteria for acceptable evidence are far too loose.

Perhaps the quantity of data and the 'sophistication' of their statistical analysis impress some. But fallacious assumptions necessarily lead to inaccurate empirical descriptions regardless of the quantity of data and statistical manipulation used. A parallel can be seen with Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana* (1839, in Smith, 1998) which empirically 'demonstrated' that racial hierarchy is a function of differences in mental capacity. Morton had access to the largest collection of human skulls in the world. The cranial cavity of a skull provides an accurate measure of the brain it once contained. Using one-eighth-inch diameter lead pellets he measured the size of the cranial cavities and thus brain sizes. He classified the results by 'race' and his 'hard and irrefutable data' demonstrated that there was indeed a hierarchy of mental capacity – with 'Caucasians' at the top and 'Blacks' at the bottom (Gould, 1981; Smith, 1998). But the conclusions drawn from apparently precise measurements and comparisons rested on a number of invalid assumptions; for example, that brain size is equivalent to mental capacity. Similarly, as this article has sought to show, Hofstede's apparently sophisticated analysis of extensive data necessarily relies on a number of profoundly flawed assumptions to measure the 'software of the mind' as did Morton's measurement of the hardware, as it were, of the mind. Hofstede's claims are excessive and unbalanced; excessive because they claim far more in terms of identifiable characteristics and consequences than is justified; unbalanced, because there is too great a desire to 'prove' his a priori convictions rather than evaluate the adequacy of his 'findings'.

The limited characterization of culture in Hofstede's work, its confinement within the territory of states, and its methodological flaws mean that it is a restricter not an enhancer of understanding particularities. The identification claims are fundamentally flawed and the attribution of national level actions/institutions to national cultures is an easy but impoverishing move. We may think about national culture, we may believe in national culture, but Hofstede has not demonstrated that national culture is how we think. If the aim is understanding then we need to know more about the richness and diversity of national practices and institutions – rather than merely assuming their 'uniformity' and that they have an already known national cultural cause. Both outside and within the management disciplines there are rich considerations of the characteristics of individuals, organizations, societies, nations and regions. Intense reviews and debates about the conceptualization, interaction and effects of 'agency' and 'structure' are now readily

available. Extreme, singular, theories, such as Hofstede's model of national culture are profoundly problematic. His conflation and uni-level analysis precludes consideration of interplay between macroscopic and microscopic cultural levels and between the cultural and the non-cultural (whatever we choose to call it). Instead of seeking an explanation for assumed national uniformity from the conceptual lacuna that is the essentialist notion of national culture, we need to engage with and use theories of action which can cope with change, power, variety, multiple influences – including the non-national – and the complexity and situational variability of the individual subject.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 Sometimes Hofstede claims to have identified differences between national cultures and sometimes that he has identified those cultures. The focus of his analysis of the IBM questionnaire data is on differences. But relying on that analysis he often refers to absolute and not comparative characteristics of specific national cultures.

2 There have been a number of earlier critiques of Hofstede's national culture claims. These have largely been book reviews of Hofstede (1980a, 1984). I am indebted to those earlier critics whose work I hope I have adequately incorporated and built on. Reference to some of these criticisms is made in appropriate parts of the article.

3 Hofstede is inconsistent in sometimes claiming to have identified national cultures per se and yet sometimes also to have identified differences between national cultures. In some of his illustrative stories he asserts that X country is more likely to do Z because of cultural differences between X and Y, but in many of his stories he asserts that Z happens in X because of the absolute, not the comparative national cultural characteristics of X.

4 For a fuller description of Hofstede's data analysis methods see Hofstede (1980a: ch. 2).

5 Hofstede acknowledges that gender and age might also influence responses. He assumes that these factors would have the same impact regardless of country and as the 'the composition of occupational groups by sex and ages varies only marginally among subsidiaries of Hermes [IBM][this] makes it unnecessary to control for sex and age once we have controlled for occupation' (1980a: 73). For a critique of such essentialist notions of gender see Alvesson and Billing (1997).

6 Doubts about the representativeness of the IBM population is the most common criticisms of Hofstede's claims – see for example: Banai (1982), Triandis (1982), Robinson (1983), Korman (1985), Lytle et al. (1995) and Cray and Mallory (1998) (cf. Smith, 1996).

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