



CULTURE TIPS

EDITION NO. 22

The Five Dimensions of Culture

In the 1970's, a psychologist, Dr. Geert Hofstede asked the question referring to "why are there so many cultural differences and from where does all the difference come?" After a decade of study and thousands of interviews he developed a model of 5 cultural dimensions that has become an internationally recognized standard.

The five dimensions are:

- 1. Power/Distance (PD)**-refers to the extent of inequality that is seen in a culture among people with and without power. A low PD society refers to a culture where power is shared and dispersed among others who view themselves as equal, such as seen here in the United States. A high PD society indicates a culture that accepts an unequal distribution of power with people understanding their 'place' in society, seen in places like Malaysia, where one would refer decisions only to the top management of a company.
- 2. Individualism (IDV)**-refers to the strength of ties and kinship people have within their community. High IDV =a loose connection with people, a lack of interpersonal connection and little sharing of responsibility beyond family and a few close friends. Low IDV = a strong cohesion within the group with a large amount of respect and loyalty for members, binding the group together. These groups are larger and take more responsibility for each other's well being.
- 3. Masculinity (MAS)**-the degree to which a group values and enforces traditional male and female roles. Low MAS=male and female roles are blurred. Males and females work together equally across professions, males can show emotion and females can work hard for professional success. High MAS = societies where males are expected to be the provider, tough, assertive and strong. If the female works outside the home she has to have a separate profession from the males in the society.
- 4. Uncertainty/Avoidance Index (UAI)**-the degree of anxiety a society feels when in unknown or uncertain situations. Low UAI = enjoys new events and values differences. These groups have few rules and the people are encouraged to discover their own 'truths'. High UAI = societies that try to avoid uncertain situations whenever possible. This group is governed by rules and orders, comfortable with a shared 'truth'.
- 5. Long Term Orientation (LTO)**-refers to how much a society values long-standing – as opposed to short term – traditions and values. This fifth dimension was added in the 1990's after Hofstede's research discovered that Asian countries with a strong link to Confucian philosophy acted differently from western cultures. Low LTO = one can do almost anything in terms of creative expression or novel ideas, making them willing to try innovative plans as long as they are allowed to participate fully. High LTO = delivering on social obligations and avoiding 'loss of face' is considered very important.

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