

CHAPTER FOUR

The Work-Related Values Perspective of Hofstede

4.1 Introduction

Contextual space is important in deciding on a framework to describe the construct of work values. In the South African context, values cannot be studied without giving consideration to the construct of culture.

In as much as I view it impossible to separate the construct of values from career psychology, I view it impossible to separate the issue of culture from values. Socially co-constructed realities are embedded in a cultural context and associated with cultural values. These realities are constructed from the meaning that forms an intrinsic part of culture and human activity. As the cultural relativism movement gains popularity, the issue of culture becomes all the more prominent. This movement assumes the stance that no aspect of a person's life can be removed from culture. Therefore aspects such as perception, attitudes and behaviour can only have meaning through culture (Hardy, 1993).

The theorist can take a dichotomous stance with regard to culture by localising constructs to cultures, or, can attempt to view culture as one contextual space from where further distinctions can be made. Through this recursive operation of drawing distinctions, a reality can be constructed where stability and change are closely related (Keeney, 1993).

Cultural contexts in South Africa have been expanded from an artificial, dichotomous separation between Afro- and Eurocentrism, to the construction of the popularly referred to Rainbow Nation. The cultural contextual space of the 1990's differs significantly, expanding from its previous position. The cultural contextual space of this study is one of complexity, marked by an interplay between complementary and symmetrical interactions. I described the problems that were created by the notion of a dichotomous approach in my dissertation on the beliefs about work of South African youths (Engelbrecht, 1991).

Hofstede (1980) produced a landmark study on the relation between work values and culture and he developed a work value questionnaire. The questionnaire was used as a basis for a comparative study of work-related values. This study first included 40 cultures and was later extended to include 53 cultures. Participants in Hofstede's (1980) study were employees from different subsidiaries of a multi-national company. Measurements of values were factor-analysed and four dimensions of work-related values were established. Hofstede and Bond (1984) related each of these dimensions to a basic anthropological-social issue.

I decided to use Hofstede's work as basis for the development of a South African Work Values Questionnaire because of three reasons. First, his work focuses on the topic of values. Second, the dimensions of his scale were conceptualised in a multi-cultural context. In other words, his work shows sensitivity to the notion of cultural contextual space and diversity. Third, the dimensions were developed within the contextual space of the working environment. All three of these aspects are relevant to the South African situation. I am sensitive to the fact that Hofstede's work has limitations. His questionnaire was developed for employees within IBM in 53 countries. Further, these constructs were developed at the beginning of 1980. A study by Merritt (2000) found that the Hofstede dimensions were replicated in the commercial aviation environment, which indicate that the instrument and constructs could still be considered useful.

The focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of Hofstede's constructs. Before I discuss these constructs in detail, I will give a brief overview of each of the four dimensions. I conclude the chapter by discussing Hofstede's work in relation to two other relevant work value models.

4.1.1 Power Distance

Power Distance can be defined as the extent to which less powerful people in the organisation accept that power is distributed in an unequal manner. High Power Distance is representative of this definition, while low Power Distance represents a preference of an equal distribution of power (Hofstede, 1980). The anthropological-

social questions posed focus on the relation between Power Distance and social inequality as well as the amount of authority that one person can exercise over others (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

4.1.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (1980) defines the second dimension as Uncertainty Avoidance. This dimension refers to the extent that people feel threatened by uncertain situations and the extent to which convictions and institutions are created to remove this uncertainty. High levels of Uncertainty Avoidance refer to a high level of discomfort with uncertainty and low levels of Uncertainty Avoidance refer to low levels of discomfort in uncertain situations (Hofstede, 1980). The anthropological-social questions posed, refer to the relation between Uncertainty Avoidance and the manner in which society deals with conflict and aggression as well as life and death (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

4.1.3 Individualism versus Collectivism

The third dimension is a bipolar continuum of Individuality versus Collectivity. Hofstede (1980) defines Individualism as a context in which it is expected of individuals to take care of themselves and their closest family only. Collectivism is defined as a context in which a person has membership of an in-group or collectivity that takes care of her affairs in return for loyalty. Individualism refers to a situation where a person gives preference to a loose social system, where persons in a collective situation give preference to a strong cohesive social system (Hofstede, 1980). The basic anthropological-social question posed deals with the balance between the individual's dependence on the group or in other words his or her self-concept of "I" or "we" (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

4.1.4 Masculinity versus Femininity

In the fourth dimension, Masculinity refers to the dominant values in society of success, money and material things. Femininity refers to a society where the dominant values are caring for one another and quality of life. Masculinity refers to communities where roles are strongly determined by gender, while femininity refers

to communities that practice minimal differentiation along gender lines (Hofstede, 1980). The underlying anthropological-social question refers to a choice of sex roles and the effect thereof on people's self-concept (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

The rest of this chapter will deal with a detailed description of the four dimensions as conceptualised by Hofstede.

4.2 Power Distance

Hofstede (1980) posits that varying solutions in different societies, referring to the human inequality, form the basis of the Power Distance dimension. Societies deal in different ways with the issues of prestige, wealth and power. Inequality within organisations is inevitable and functional and is embedded in the so-called boss-subordinate relationships. Hofstede (1980) found that the Power Distance dimension scores differ according to countries, gender, age, education and occupation.

In the context of society inequality manifests in physical and mental characteristics, social status and prestige, wealth, power, laws, rights and rules. In each society, the battle between status consistency and overall equality is prevalent. Societies differ in terms of the mobility between different status levels within that society. In other words, in certain societies movement between status groups is easier than in others. Large inequalities can still exist even in more mobile societies. In modern societies, status ladders are formed according to occupation, income and education.

Organisations mirror the societal inequality of a member's ability and power. The essential characteristic of an inequality of power within an organisation relates to the maintenance of structure and order within the organisation. It can also be viewed as a mechanism to minimise chaos within the organisation. Power becomes formalised in hierarchical structures, which in turn establish the basis for boss-subordinate relationships. The context of these relationships is determined by objective factors (expertise), subjective factors (personality and values) and emotional learning that took place in earlier relationships such as the parent-child relationship. Power in organisations is associated with greater discrepancies in rewards, privileges and opportunities between bosses and subordinates.

Differences in the manner by which power in a hierarchical system is expressed, bears on the values of both bosses and subordinates. Hofstede (1980) emphasises that in the same manner as the need for independence balances with the need for dependency, the need for power balances with the need for security.

Hofstede's (1980) definition of Power Distance in a hierarchy "is the difference between the extent to which the boss can influence the behaviour of the subordinate and the extent to which the subordinate can influence the behaviour of the boss".

Three questions measure the Power Distance dimension in individuals. The first question, which is answered on a five-point scale measuring from very frequent to very seldom is "How frequently, in your experience, does the following problem occur: employees being afraid to express disagreement with their managers?" Hofstede (1980) explains that he views this to be a projective question that is expected to reflect the participant's subjective feelings. The other two questions in this dimension poses four descriptions of managerial decision-making styles. First, participants indicate which of the styles they prefer. Second, participants indicate which style they perceive their manager to follow. The four decision-making styles include autocratic (tells), persuasive (sells), consultative (consults) and democratic (joins). Since 1970 the last style has been referred to as participative (consensus).

The administration of these questions produced the following results. In 40 countries there was a significant correlation between the average scores of employees who were "afraid to disagree" with managers and the average percentage of workers who perceived their managers to be autocratic or persuasive in their decision-making style. This results in a conclusion that the more autocratic the manager is, the more afraid the employee will be to differ from management.

According to Hofstede (1980) a person's choice of a preferential management style can be viewed as an expressed value. He defines these values according to the theoretical perspective of values as desire. A significant correlation was found with regard to the question of management style. The less afraid workers were to differ from management, the greater their preference was for a consultative management style. This contrasted with the finding that in countries where employees were

perceived as afraid, they preferred autocratic, persuasive or democratically styled managers.

Where superiors maintain high levels of Power Distance, subordinates become either dependent or counter-dependent. In other words, they prefer that their superiors make all the decisions, or to leave all decisions to a majority vote. In the event where superiors maintain low levels of Power Distance, interdependence exists between employees and managers.

4.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (1980) identifies three indicators of Uncertainty Avoidance, namely rule orientation, employment stability and stress. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index refers to a combination of these three indicators. Hofstede follows the same approach as with the previous scale and discusses Uncertainty Avoidance in the context of society, the organisation and the individual. The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension scores differ according to country, age, education and occupation.

Society develops mechanisms to deal with uncertainty. Examples of such mechanisms include the technology that controls nature, laws that determine the rules for human conduct and religion that gives content to uncertainty relating to the unknown. An institutionalised attempt (family, school and state) to deal with uncertainty differs from one society to the next. Totalitarianism can be viewed as an extreme example of society that avoids uncertainty. Hofstede (1980) understands uncertainty and ambiguity to refer to the same concept. In societies, a tolerance towards rigidity and dogmatism, intolerance of different opinions, traditionalism, superstition, racism and ethnocentrism relate to the concept of Uncertainty Avoidance.

Organisations manage uncertainty through controlling individual behaviour with specific reference to time frames and the structure of work within the organisation. Aspects of organisational functioning that are affected by this concept include theories of decision-making under uncertainty, contingency theories and theories of strategic behaviour. Specific mechanisms that are used to avoid uncertainty can be identified. Examples of such mechanisms include the predictable outcome of

technologically controlled production processes, rules that control the behaviour of members and share holders such as rituals, meetings, memorandums, reports, accounting systems, the use of experts and planning and control systems. Effective rituals can alleviate stress for employees within the organisation (Hofstede,1980).

The individual worker's capacity to deal with uncertainty underpins Uncertainty Avoidance in society and within organisations. Hofstede (1980) measured three dimensions of Uncertainty Avoidance in individuals, namely, rule-orientation, employment stability and stress. Rule orientation is measured by responses to the following statement "Company rules should not be broken - even if the employee thinks it is in the company's best interests." Respondents indicate their position on a five point scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This item relates conceptually to the structuring of activities. The person who strongly disagrees with this statement can deal with higher levels of uncertainty. The person who strongly agrees with this statement will show a greater tendency to Uncertainty Avoidance.

The second item refers to the concept of employment stability. Employees indicate the average time that they expect to be employed by the particular organisation. Respondents choose from four responses, namely a) Two years at the most; b) From two to five years; c) More than five years (but I probably will leave before I retire); d) Until I retire. Persons with high levels of Uncertainty Avoidance will show high tendencies of employment stability. Those with low levels of Uncertainty Avoidance regard employment stability as less important.

Hofstede (1980) describes stress as the third indicator of Uncertainty Avoidance. The stress question is: "How often do you feel nervous or tense at work?" Respondents rate their answers on a five point scale where one refers to "I always feel this way" and five to "I never feel this way". According to Hofstede (1980), rule orientation, employment stability and stress are all indicators of the average levels of anxiety within a particular country. The greater the anxiety levels, the more stressed people are, the greater their need for security that manifests in rule orientation and employment stability.

4.4 Individualism

This dimension refers to the relationship between an individual and the collectivity prevalent in the society in which she lives. Societies differ in the stance they assume with regard to Individualism. In some societies, Individualism is perceived in a positive light, while in other societies it is viewed to be alienating. The Individualism dimension scores differ according to countries, age, education, organisational size and technology.

In societies, the complexity of family units is an indicator of the balance in the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. Some people live in nuclear families, while others live in extended families or clans. Hofstede (1980) associates these differences with economic evolution and development. According to Hofstede, the relationship between the individual and the collectivity does not only refer to how people live but also relates to the core of societal norms. This in turn impacts on societal structures, such as, educational, religious, political and utilitarian institutions. The relationship further impacts on the self-concept of individuals in different societies. In some societies, a strong sense of the individual self exists, whereas in other cultures persons have a sense of a collective identity.

Hofstede (1980) states that the balance between Individualism and Collectivism in a given society would impact directly on the relationship between a person and the organisation in which the person is employed. In collective societies, there is greater interdependence between organisations and their employees. The people have a greater dependency on the organisation and the organisation assumes a broad responsibility for employees. Second, it impacts on the manner in which employees are involved within the organisation. In the collectivist society, horizontal relationships in organisations are more important as opposed to the individualistic society, where vertical relationships are more important. Third, the type of person who has special influence in the organisation will be different for the two societies. In the collectivist climate, the influential person keeps himself busy with problems inside the organisation. In the individualist climate, the influential person maintains minimum relations within the organisation and views himself to be a world citizen. Higher levels of trade union involvement are associated with collectivism.

Individuals who value personal time, freedom and challenge are associated with an employee's independence from the organisation and an individualist climate. According to Hofstede (1980), these aspects refer to personal accomplishment. Training opportunities, the use of skills and working conditions are negatively related to Individualism. These aspects refer to things the organisation should do for employees.

4.5 Masculinity

Hofstede (1980) describes the duality of the sexes as a fundamental difference that societies deal with in their own manner. Within societies, sex roles are transferred through socialisation in families, schools, peer groups and the media. Hofstede identifies the predominant theme of socialisation for men, as assertiveness and for women, as nurturing. The Masculinity dimension scores differ according to country, gender, age, education and occupation.

Within societies certain types of behaviour are regarded as more suitable for men and others more suitable for women. Culture will determine the content of these norms. Hofstede (1980) identifies general trends whereby men will occupy themselves with economic and other achievements while women will take care of other people and more particularly, children. This has created a platform for male dominance in certain sectors. Hofstede (1980) goes so far as stating that he believes that the stability of sex role patterns is almost entirely determined by socialisation.

The division of labour in organisations includes men and women and differs between countries and organisations. The principal goal of achievement according to which organisations functions can be described as masculine. Most frequently men lead organisations and men determine the organisational climate. A bias against female managers was detected.

Hofstede (1980) gives an overview of differences between men and women in terms of work goals. Men attach greater importance to advancement, earnings, freedom, supervising others, responsibility, working on problems central in the organisation and creativity. Women attach greater importance to supervision, social aspects of the

job, working conditions and hours, ease of work, co-workers, clearly defined responsibilities, traveling to and from work, congenial associates, ample leisure time and variety. These differences became obsolete when a comparison was made between men and women who rated their job as central in their lives.

4.6 Hofstede's work in the context of other value theories

I decided to discuss the work of Hofstede in the context of two specific work value theories namely that of the *Study of Values* of Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1970) and the *Work Importance Study* of Super (1995). *The Study of Values* is selected in light of the historical importance of this work. This was the first landmark study on this topic. The *Work Importance Study* is selected in light of its international prominence and importance.

Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1970) originally published their *Study of Values* in 1931. The *Study of Values* measures six values as indicative of interests or motives in personality. The six values are directly derived from Eduard Spranger's *Types of Men*. The six value scales are the Theoretical, Economic, Aesthetic, Social, Political and Religious scales.

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The Theoretical scale describes a person's chief aim to order and systematise his knowledge. This value touches on the need for Uncertainty Avoidance as set out by Hofstede (1980). The Economic scale describes the value that a person attaches to wealth, production and consumption. These aspects of the Allport et al (1970) scale are shared with the Masculinity dimension of Hofstede (1980). The Aesthetic scale emphasises form, harmony, grace, symmetry and fitness. This scale has nothing in common with any of the Hofstede dimensions. The Social scale focuses on the value of altruistic love for others through kindness, unselfishness and sympathetic behaviour. These aspects relate to components of Hofstede's Collectivity dimension. The Political scale describes power as the highest value. This concept can be associated with aspects of the Power Distance dimension of Hofstede. The Religious scale describes the values that a person attach to unity, the mystical and comprehending the cosmos as a whole. This scale has nothing in common with any of the Hofstede dimensions.

The *Work Importance Study* Value scale of Super (1995) is utilised in a cross-national study where the responses of 18 318 persons from ten countries are compared. Super (1995) criticises the work of Hofstede, as the Hofstede Value scale is developed within the context of one multi-national company. The Super Value scale that is used in a cross-national scale presents the following five factor structure (Sverko, 1995).

Table 4.1 Five factor structure of the Super Values scale

Utilitarian Orientation	Orientation towards Self-Actualisation	Individualistic Orientation	Social Orientation	Adventurous Orientation
Economics	Ability Utilisation	Autonomous Life Style	Social Interaction	Risk
Advancement	Personal Development		Social Relations	
Prestige	Altruism			
Authority				
Achievement				

In this study, the South African sample of secondary school subjects expressed an above average concern for utilitarian values including achievement, advancement, authority, economics, prestige and working conditions (Sverko, 1995). In essence all these constructs are reflected in Hofstede's dimensions. There are no direct comparisons in terms of factor structure between the Super Scale and the Hofstede Scale.

4.7 Discussion

A number of problems are identified with regard to the Hofstede questionnaire. First, this questionnaire was developed in the context of a multi-national organisation. Second, the items of the questionnaire are not suitable for use by scholars and students. Third, Hofstede (1980) describes Individualism and Collectivity as a bipolar phenomenon, while the research of Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) and the lifelong work of Triandes (Triandes, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988; Triandes, Leung, Villareal &

Clack, 1985) regard these concepts as distinctly separate. The dimension of Masculinity is not represented in other literature describing cultural values or work values. Fourth, the Hofstede questionnaire is developed from a perspective of evolutionary – and continuous development. This questionnaire and dimensions do not consider other forms of work and discontinuous changes in working life. Hofstede's constructs were developed prior to the postmodern project and therefore lacks emphasis on themes such as sensitivity to diversity, feminism and a challenge to the general paradigm of progress.

These problems lead me to the conclusion that in order to explore a work values structure for this study a new description of work values should be generated, incorporating the work of Buchholz and Hofstede as point of departure. This description is utilised in compiling a Work Values Questionnaire. The postulated framework and theoretical description is presented in Chapter Five.

