

Abstract

In 1980, Hofstede (1980; 2001) introduced a national cultural framework based on data collected in two survey rounds between 1967 and 1973. The cultural dimensions identified in that framework, i.e., individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS), power distance (PDI) and uncertainty avoidance (UAI), have since become a standard for cross-cultural research and are widely used to predict differences between members of different national cultures (Lonner and Berry 1998; Sondergaard 1994).

Hofstede believed these national cultural characteristics to be enduring and relatively stable over time. Changes, if they were to occur, would result from outside forces causing changes in a country's ecological factors, which, in turn, would slowly change values and institutions. In addition, as such outside forces would commonly affect more than one country, changes would occur synchronously among countries, maintaining the differences among them.

Among the fifty-three countries and regions included in Hofstede's study, Japan was distinctive. In clustering these countries on the basis of their scores on IDV, PDI, MAS, and UAI, Japan remained separate, the only country that did not group with another country. Interestingly, Japan did not cluster with other Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, or Hong Kong. During the 1800's and 1900's, Japan has faced considerable outside forces. Were these forces of sufficient strength and duration to affect the cultural uniqueness of Japan as measured by the Hofstede dimensions?

Data were gathered for matched samples from a single industry segment, accountants working for public accounting firms in Japan, in 1985 and in 2002, and used to compute the Hofstede indices as of both time periods. The two samples were matched in terms of location, gender, occupation, level, and education to control for the potential influences on culture from other sources. The results show significant change has occurred for two of the four dimensions between 1985 and 2002.

Our research makes a unique contribution because it enables the examination of the relative stability of the Hofstede indices while controlling for other factors. The paper discusses possible reasons for the changes as well as the potential impact on cross-cultural research.