

Should I Use GLOBE or Hofstede? Some Insights That Can Assist Cross-Cultural Scholars, and Others, Choose the Right Study to Support Their Work

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Abstract

As the GLOBE Study scholars continue to release results of their exhaustive look at national cultures and leadership universals, more and more academics seem unsure about whether to use Hofstede or GLOBE. Here I attempt to look at the studies dispassionately and offer some comparisons of the strengths and weaknesses of each. My goals in this paper are two: First, to inspire a personality-free debate among cross-cultural researchers about the merits of the two studies, and secondly, to provide a primer to researchers whose main focus is something other than cross-cultural work, but that relies on a cross-cultural component.

Hofstede or House? *The GLOBE Study* or *Culture's Consequences*? I hear these questions from two distinct sets of scholars: those that know a lot about cross-cultural research and those who know little. For instance, I have a colleague working on a paper regarding universals in accounting ethics and he needs to include a small section explaining cultural differences. He does not need to read the exhaustive works of both schools, but may need to understand why some of the conclusions of the two studies seem at odds with one another. In another discussion down the hall where cross-cultural studies dominate, I hear voices rise in defense of one researcher or in attack of another. This occurs in the literature as well, where the battles between scholars seem very personal regarding this subject, and result in multiple round heavyweight fights (McSweeney, 2002).

In writing this paper I felt that I had an opportunity to serve both of these constituencies and in different ways. For the accounting (or human resource, or finance, or management) scholar in need of a comparative primer on cross-cultural research, I hope this paper introduces the streams of scholarship without requiring a major detour from their chosen field. For the cross-culturally focused researcher, I hope it can serve as a dispassionate review and comparison of the two streams of research.

For the first twenty-four years following the publication of Geert Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences* (1980), the work maintained a near monopolistic position on the research into cultural dimensions. Hofstede acquired access to an extremely large survey data set of surveys completed by IBM employees positioned around the world in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Hofstede, 2006). From this data he developed a framework of national cultures that consisted of four dimensions and he calculated scores for each of the dimensions for each of the countries for which he had data. A

cursory look at Google Scholar informs that Hofstede's works based on this original study have been cited over 30,000 times making it a giant among academic studies, and one that defined the landscape for the future of this field of research. The results of his work have been used to in support of, and the creation of, innumerable theories (Kogut & Singh, 1988, Schwartz, 1999), and are a standard in business textbooks. However, the study left many scholars believing the work had shortcomings (McSweeney, 2002, Javidan, et al, 2006, Ailon, 2008, Newman & Nollen, 1996) and should be revisited.

It was not until the publication of the GLOBE Study in 2004 that a true alternative to Hofstede gained the interest of a broad range of management and cross-cultural scholars. It is what Triandis (2004) referred to as the "Manhattan Project of the study of the relationship of culture to the conceptions of leadership." This revisitation came from a team assembled and led by Robert House of the Wharton School with the development of the GLOBE Study (House, et al 2004). Drawing heavily on Hofstede (1980) and McClelland's motivation studies (1985), GLOBE developed nine dimensions, and a framework that would bisect each into "values" and "practices." While it has not yet achieved the level of influence and use that the Hofstede study enjoys, it has been cited over 1700 times. Portions of the research that created the massive study have already created a number of papers for its many authors, contributing greatly to the cross-cultural landscape. The newness of the study has also meant that it has been less tested and criticized than the Hofstede work (Venaik and Brewer, 2008) and may be in something of a honeymoon phase.

While our understanding of the differences that separate us, and the universals that connect us, is better today than at any time since societies began interacting with each other, it remains far from settled science. In this paper I will consider the original work of Hofstede, and his revisions to it, and the more recent GLOBE Study (House, et al, 2004). I will then present some thoughts that can generate debate between cross-cultural scholars regarding the areas of strength of each study and that can also act as a primer to those in related fields of scholarship who need a cursory understanding of the two works to chose which one maybe more salient to their research.

Hofstede

Geert Hofstede was working with IBM in 1966 when they began work on an employee attitude survey that would become his life's work. When data collection started in 1968, Hofstede had a sense that this data set may offer more information than its original mission; when it was completed in 1973 they had 117,000 surveys from sixty-six countries. In 1975, IBM funded a research grant and Hofstede started the work of transforming his data set into his famous study of national cultures. It was first published in the book, *Culture's Consequences*, in 1980 (Hofstede, 1980) and it and Hofstede's follow-up papers and books have been used by thousands of scholars and practitioners ever since. As the work is so well known, in this section of the paper I will limit my overview, and highlight sections of his work that will foreshadow the remainder of the paper.

From the data, Hofstede created a framework of four bi-polar dimensions, Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Individualism (IND), and Masculinity (MAS). Each of these existed in the cultural studies zeitgeist of the time (Mulder, 1971, Cyert & March, 1963, Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961, McClelland, 1967, Spenner & Featherman, 1978), and the framework was derived from the questions on the pre-existing questionnaires. Although later studies of culture have dissected some dimensions and added others (including Hofstede himself [Hofstede & Bond, 1988]), most have, at their core, held to these four. One of the most frequent criticisms of the study is the monolithic nature of IBM as the data source (McSweeney, 2002). Hofstede (2002) answers this by contending that matching samples in this way, in addition to being his only choice, added controls for many other variables.

Power Distance is the degree to which members of a society who lack power are comfortable with the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 1980). Prestige, wealth and power are all assets that can cause this disparate condition, and those with less of any one of these will strive to close the gap, while those with more will work to maintain it (Mulder, 1973). Hofstede's items to measure this refer to the decision-making style of the boss and to whether colleagues (as proxies for themselves) fear open disagreement with the boss (Hofstede, 1980, 2006). If a researcher were to use these items

on a small scale survey, attention should be paid to the potential skewing of results that a boss's leadership style could contribute. Of the countries surveyed, the Philippines and Mexico top the list; Austria and Israel have the lowest scores (Hofstede, 1980).

Uncertainty Avoidance is the desire to have predictable outcomes, and this can be accomplished through negotiation or a short-term focus (Cyert & March, 1963). Hofstede (1980) measured this through items concerning rule orientation, stress reduction and workplace stability. Later studies have questioned these measurement items, even while keeping the dimension (House, et al, 2004). Uncertainty Avoidance is a useful construct in many areas of research, from accounting and finance to institutional theory where, for instance, a desire to avoid uncertainty can lead to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and the predictability of myths and ceremony it brings (Meyers & Rowan, 1977).

Of the four, the dimension of Individualism (and its polar opposite, Collectivism) has garnered perhaps the most attention (Schimmack, et al, 2005). Some critics have contended that this is due to the simplistic way it lines up with Eastern and Western differences as described by Ailon (2008) as "The West against the Rest." The United States has the highest individualism score, and most Asian and Latin countries are in the lower half. The dimension is also salient because of its relationships with other constructs: negatively correlated with Power Distance and positively correlated with national wealth. This is comfortable territory for Americans and their general acceptance of the Weberian work ethic (Weber, et al, 2002).

Of the original four of Hofstede's dimensions (Long-term Orientation was added in 1988 [Hofstede & Bond, 1988]) Masculinity is the least studied. The label he chose has caused discomfort throughout the years (Javidan, et al, 2006), and he wrote a 1998 book on the subject subtitled, *the taboo dimension of national cultures* (Hofstede, 1998), where he describes the dimension in terms similar to the construct of gender identity. His conceptual reasoning is based on the relationships between masculinity and assertiveness and femininity and nurturing, although neither assertiveness nor nurturing are strictly gender specific. It is likely that the label has limited the use of this

dimension (Javidan, 2006, Hofstede, 1998). Interestingly, high Masculinity scores have positive correlations with speeding and traffic deaths, as well as segregation in higher education, and negative correlations with the percentage of professional women in the workforce and spending (by wealthy countries) on developing countries (Hofstede, 1980).

Added in 1988, Long Term Orientation (Hofstede and Bond, 1988) was an attempt to bring in an Eastern construct. Most scholars have felt it never truly integrated with the other dimensions, nor understood the Eastern perspective of time orientation (Fang, 2003). Although I will now progress to a review of the GLOBE Study, I will revisit Hofstede to examine the relationship between the two, and glean lessons for cross-cultural management from them.

The GLOBE Study

The GLOBE Study was, and is, a huge undertaking, where coordination and cooperation are often as challenging as the research itself. The effort was conceived in 1991, and funded in 1993, with the theoretical goal of understanding societal and organizational leadership effectiveness. With one-hundred and seventy researchers representing sixty-two societies around the world studying two factors of nine dimensions and six styles of leadership, it is not surprising that it took eleven years to publish its first book (House, et al, 2004) or that it had generated over a hundred articles along the way. My goal here, as it was with Hofstede, is not to provide a detailed recap of the work of this group, but rather to give a brief overview, and introduce concepts that will be more fully examined as I look at how this Study can interact and coexist with the work of Hofstede.

The GLOBE Study has nine dimensions, and within each dimension it tries to understand both the values and practices at the societal and organizational level. The dimensions are in large measure an extension of the work of Hofstede (1980), and also draw heavily from McClelland (1985) as well as other works in the study of culture. The development of the dimensions is graphically presented on the following page in Figure 1 (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961, Putnam, 1993, Mulder, 1971, Cyert & March, 1963, Triandis, 1995, Hofstede & Bond, 1988). GLOBE effectively split two of

Hofstede's dimensions into a total of four, turning Masculinity into Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness, and Individualism, after choosing the label of its opposite pole, into two types of Collectivism: institutional and in-group. They kept the labels and dimensions of Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance, but adjusted the way in which they are measured, particularly Uncertainty Avoidance. Humane and Performance Orientation are derived most directly from McClelland (1985), and Future Orientation, while sounding similar to Hofstede's Long-term Orientation, is derived more directly from Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck's (1961) Past, Present and Future Orientation.

As the theoretical underpinnings of this work were aimed at the idea of leadership universals and differences, the GLOBE Study also identified several leadership behaviors and the relationship between those behaviors and the GLOBE dimensions. These behaviors include charismatic, team-oriented, participative and humane oriented leadership. As the scope of this paper will not attempt a thorough understanding of this part of the GLOBE Study, I will limit my discussion of this to the relationship of leadership behaviors to dimensions as presented in figure 1.

Insert figure 1 about here

Here is a brief description of the dimensions that are additional to, or very different from, those of Hofstede's: Performance Orientation is the way that members of the group are encouraged to improvement and performance. In most societies, there is a large disparity between how performance is valued and how it is practiced, with societies generally valuing it highly (House, et al 2004). Humane Orientation is how a society rewards fair, altruistic and caring behavior. In a high humane orientation culture, discrimination is discouraged and affiliation needs are high (House, et al 2004). Future Orientation represents the way in which individual gratification is delayed, and the society engages in planning and investment. Spiritual and financial success are seen as parts of a singular whole. Gender Egalitarianism is the degree to which a society promotes gender equality and allows opportunity regardless of gender. Places where this dimension scores highly have more equal educational opportunities for women, as well as more women in positions of power within organizations. Assertiveness is the measure of acceptance in a society to confrontation,

aggressiveness and assertiveness. Where assertiveness is high, communication is direct and power is highly valued. Institutional Collectivism is the degree to which institutional practices reward the distribution of resources and collective action. In-Group Collectivism is the pride individuals have in their organizations or families (House, et al 2004). When this is high, the distinction between in-groups and out-groups is very high and completion of in-group duties and obligations guide behavior.

Within each of the dimensions, respondents are asked to rate how things are, and these responses represent the practices of the organization or society. They are also asked to rate how things should be, and from these answers the societal or organizational values are determined. For seven of the nine dimensions, the practices and values are negatively correlated, which was not originally theorized by the GLOBE researchers (Javidan, et al 2006), and has been criticized by others (Hofstede, 2006). Currently, the most commonly hypothesized reason for this finding is that values may be viewed from a position of deprivation. 'I want low Power Distance because I live in a society with high Power Distance,' the logic would go. This seems to be a reasonable proposition and is the likely target of future research. As the GLOBE factors within each dimension are seldom positively correlated, it is not a surprise that the corresponding Hofstede dimension generally has a positive correlation with the value or the practice, but not both (see Table 1).

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Interaction of Hofstede and GLOBE

Not all challenges to old theories are as revolutionary as when Copernicus suggested heliocentrism, but occasionally they are still judged in heretical terms. Hofstede and a number of other scholars have, at times, treated his work as canonical; either leaning on it heavily in further research (Hofstede, 1983, S ndergaard, 1994), or defending it against its critics (Hofstede, 2002, 2006, 2009, Chapman, 1997). The other focal study of this paper, the GLOBE Study (House, et al, 2004), began life in the early 1990's with the hope of shedding additional light on societal cultures, and the effective interaction of those cultures with societies, organizations and leadership (House, et al, 2004). It was deeply rooted in Hofstedian ideas, drawing from his cultural dimensions to develop six

(or arguably seven) of the eventual nine. It hoped to add a fine-grained look into the familiar territory mined by Hofstede, and to do it in a theory-based, poly- and geocentric fashion. Whether this added complexity of GLOBE is helpful has been point of contention. Smith (2006) appreciated the finer dice of the GLOBE results, but was not convinced that it was worth the additional complexity, pointing out that many study designs could not incorporate it. Yet other researchers were able to pull out a subset of leadership traits and cultural dimensions and apply it to studies of a more modest scope (Waldman, et al, 2006). It would extend learning through the bisection of practices and values, and it would create a more robust link between leadership styles and the dimensions. Somehow the pursuit of these goals, and Hofstede's reaction to it, has positioned GLOBE and Hofstede against one another, engaged in a fairly open battle. Hofstede's actions seem aimed to protect the franchise, quickly penning counters to any one that questions his work (McSweeney, 2002, Javidan, 2006, Ailon, 2008), while GLOBE, with thousands of researcher-years invested, may feel that their time has arrived. It is a case where outside scholars seem more able to draw on the synergistic attributes of the studies (Smith, 2006, Earley, 2006) than the combatants themselves, who vociferously pick at points large and small in each other's work (Hofstede, 2006, Javidan, 2006). My intent here is to consider the interaction of these studies and the extensions provided by GLOBE, but to do so without touching on this disagreement would be to have ignored the elephant in the room. I will now steer toward the tricky but less treacherous waters of what these studies add to our understanding of cross-cultural issues.

The GLOBE study was differentiated from Hofstede from its earliest conceptual phase. House, a long time leadership scholar (House, 1971) was focused on whether or not the charismatic leader was a universal concept (House, et al, 2004); rather than relying on existing models, he determined to put together a team of cross-cultural researchers to assist him. Where Hofstede had focused on cultural differences, House intended to focus on leadership, and frame it through culture. The GLOBE Study (House, et al, 2004) theorized that while they would find managerial and leadership etics, like a leader's desire to hire people of his choosing, that the reality would expose emic differences, such as the role of family connections of job candidates (House, et al, 2004). While Hofstede (1980)

considered international management in his writings, empirical tests regarding it were beyond the scope of his work. He did see an emic component to international management. U. S. managers, likely to be highly rated on Individualism, put a lot of faith in market processes and their organizations tended to focus more attention on managers than subordinates (Hofstede, 1993). Yet he felt that in much of the world, subordinate values must be considered for leadership success (Hofstede, 1980). This belief later becomes an important consideration in the GLOBE theory of leadership. He also sees a country's Power Distance as an important predictor, intuiting that it would be easier for managers to move from countries with low Power Distance to countries with high Power Distance than to move in the other direction. Power Distance interestingly was one of the lesser involved dimensions in the later GLOBE findings on leadership, where it was tied only to a generally ineffective leadership behavior. This may be because the leadership behaviors are tied to values and not practices, and lower Power Distance is almost universally sought by those without power.

One of the foundational theories of the GLOBE Study (House, et al, 2004) was that of implicit leadership (Lord & Maher, 1991). Together with the work of Hofstede (1980) and Triandis (1995) on culture, McClelland (1985) on motivation, and Donaldson (1993) on structural contingency theory and organizational form, it built the backbone of the GLOBE Study. The essence of implicit leadership theory is that subordinates, through experience, hold certain expectations of leader behavior. From this, the workers create a schema that must be matched by the leader for the leader to be effective (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004, Lord & Maher, 1993).

Conclusion

The study of cross-cultural management has added bountiful knowledge to our understanding of the societies and organizations around the world, yet leaves us with many unanswered questions. In this paper, I provided insight that may help future researchers to answer two of these questions, but I did not truly answer them, nor indicate that they are indeed answerable. The first question researchers grapple with is whether GLOBE (House, et al 2004) is preferred to Hofstede (1980)? GLOBE (House, et al 2004) has several advantages over the original work of Hofstede (1980), I will

enumerate six of them here: First, it was truly theory-driven. Hofstede knew when he first saw the scope of the survey being conducted at IBM, that there was the potential for scholarly research, but the survey was designed and conducted to measure employee attitudes. Hofstede, in a Herculean individual effort, used these data to create the dimension-based framework for the study of national culture, but the theories attached to it followed the data, not the other way around. Second, instead of one company, GLOBE investigated three industries, adding additional generalizability to the results. While Hofstede argues for the controls inherent in the company matched samples he used, the strength of the IBM culture must be considered a biasing force on the results (McSweeney, 2002). Third, while Hofstede is willing to argue his own international bona fides are as strong as the combined GLOBE team, therefore decentering his work from a Western bias (Hofstede, 2006), this may not pass the reasonable person test. House had as a stated goal and a project design to involve individuals from the scrutinized societies. Despite Hofstede's (2006) assertion that, "the book's twenty-five editors and authors overwhelmingly hold management or psychology degrees from U.S. universities," the fact is that the researchers represent dozens of nationalities. In 1988, Hofstede seemed to acknowledge this shortcoming with the addition of a fifth dimension, Confucian Dynamism (later relabeled Long-term Orientation) to add an Eastern viewpoint. This addition has been widely criticized for its poor fit with the other four (Fang, 2003). Additionally, when Ailon (2008) studied the original Hofstede work using his own value system, she made a strong case that ethnocentrism was present in his findings; Fourth, the process of designing the survey items, pilot testing them, and checking their validity allowed many more culture –focused items to remain in the GLOBE survey. Fifth, the GLOBE study split Hofstede's Masculinity dimension into two, Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness. In addition to adding a category for analysis, it also eliminated a politically charged, but fiercely defended dimension label. Finally, and especially conspicuous for business studies, is the primary focus on leadership practices. While the role of a superior existed in the Hofstede (1980) survey items, and he presents some thoughts on the emic quality of management, it was generally beyond the scope of his work. Conversely, it was the first stated goal of GLOBE Study founder, and long time leadership scholar, Robert House.

All of these important advantages of the GLOBE Study do not, however, mean that it is always preferred to Hofstede. Hofstede (1980) also has a case to make: It is simpler, intuitive and more familiar than the GLOBE Study (House et al, 2004). The original four dimensions provide a level of insight into culture that can be easily remembered and grasped, whereas nine dimensions, with negative relationships between the values and practices with seven of them, will always need a reference guide. Hofstede's dimensions create a common language for researchers in management, psychology, sociology and anthropology to use when interacting within or across disciplines and, just as importantly, they are part of the lingua franca of reviewers who may or may not yet be versed in the GLOBE Study.

For the group of researchers that are only touching on cross-cultural themes in their work in other primary academic fields, this common-language attribute is very important. Audiences and reviewers in other fields are far more likely to be familiar with Hofstede. Therefore, with the goal of audience understanding, or of publication, the researcher will want the focus to remain on the main constructs of the paper rather than an extensive education on the more complex findings of the GLOBE Study.

At this time, it seems GLOBE is a strong contender and a useful tool for certain research scenarios where cross-cultural understanding is the main focus. Its dimensions, along with its bifurcation of values and practices, add a level of detail that can allow for more nuanced comparisons. These scholars need to be open to more and more fine-grained analysis, which includes other important changes in cross-cultural research.

For instance, for many years, cultural labels were automatically attached to all the study participants from a given culture. Americans were automatically treated as individualistic. Now, as we realize the great variation of individuals within cultures, each participant is tested to ensure that they actually embody the predicted traits. Only then can American subjects be labeled as individualistic.

Additionally, other dimensions are also being introduced and explored that are not part of either of the focal studies here. Cultural tightness and looseness is a construct that has existed in anthropology since the 1960's but was generally applied to less developed regions and is now seen as an important

and independent construct in modern cross-cultural research (Gelfand, 2006) into developed countries. The needs and preferences of individual scholars will always dictate which they choose, but I will conclude by suggesting the use of GLOBE when the nuance and layers it offers are a necessity, but that the more simple and universal language of Hofstede may remain a more elegant choice in other instances.

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| GLOBE Scales | | Hofstede Scales |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | | Power Distance |
| Power Distance | Practices (As is) | 0.61** |
| | Values (Should be) | -0.03 |
| | | Uncertainty Avoidance |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | Practices (As is) | -0.61** |
| | Values (Should be) | 0.32** |

Table 1. Convergent Validity Coefficients Between GLOBE Scales and Hofstede Scales (Reproduced from House, et al, 2004, p.140)

| | | Individualism |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Institutional Collectivism | Practices (As is) | 0.15 |
| | Values (Should be) | -0.55** |
| In-Group Collectivism | Practices (As is) | -0.82** |
| | Values (Should be) | -0.20 |
| | | Masculinity |
| Gender Egalitarianism | Practices (As is) | -0.16 |
| | Values (Should be) | 0.11 |
| Assertiveness | Practices (As is) | 0.42** |
| | Values (Should be) | -0.12 |

**=p<.01

