

# Case Study on a Global Company: Between Ethical Principles and Reality.

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## *Abstract—*

Since the first wave of globalization between 1870 and 1914, our world has experienced increasingly complex interactions. Although diversity can be a significant advantage, it also introduces a certain degree of complexity. We live in a world of continents, countries, and citizens—each shaped by their own cultures, histories, educations, and economies.

Just as a foreign individual must undergo an acculturation process, companies must adapt to the countries they aim to enter. In the past, some companies succeeded so well in this that they influenced entire societies (e.g., Amazon, Coca-Cola, McDonald's). This case study explores such a scenario through a hypothetical German company seeking global expansion—worldwide and without delocalization.

In this entirely fictitious scenario, we take on the role of executives at "LooCat Co." Our goal is to define the kind of company we are and explore the implementation of four core ethical principles across other countries. What might be the outcomes? How can we create a guideline based on our German model in countries like China, the United States, and South Africa? What are the risks? And ethically speaking, what challenges might arise?

*Keywords: Utilitarianism; Categorical Imperative; Sinocentrism; Hofstede's Principles; Statement of Work; Consequentialism; Non-consequentialism; Hedonism; Monochronic and Polychronic Time; Acculturation; Enculturation.*

## I. Depiction of LooCat.Co and our Principles

A company established in a foreign country might be seen as a cat among tigers. Acceptance requires adaptation to a new environment and new rules. But at what cost? How does this new "family" function? What defines success, and how can we preserve our identity—the essence of our brand—while navigating these new rules? Are we prepared to accept all necessary changes, or will our flexibility cost us our original identity and reputation? What is the cultural fabric that binds people and their ethical principles together? (Much like nesting dolls, there is always one world within another.)

**LooCat:** Our company operates with active participation from employees. A collaborative decision-making process is standard. We aim to ensure that immoral behaviors are prevented, and for that reason, we encourage everyone to report misconduct.

Our approach to ethics is formal, grounded in a non-consequentialist framework (Kant). Based on this, we are committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all members of the organization—regardless of age, gender, origin, or religion.

## **II. Solve the Problem, Find the Challenge: Ethics, Categorical Imperative, or Utilitarianism?**

Hence, we have four principles that shape our identity:

1. Decision-Making Process
2. Reporting Hierarchical Superiors' Misconduct
3. Rejection of Corruption
4. Equal Opportunity

### **1. Decision-Making Process:**

According to Hofstede's principles, the decision-making process should reflect a low power distance between employees and superiors. But what if the majority of employees are men, and there is a team without women? (Obviously, the opposite could happen.) As in a democracy, decision-making in the interest of the majority might not align with our values. Following a utilitarian view with a quantitative result (Jeremy Bentham), it may be ethical to accept this despite everything, for the well-being of the greater number. This kind of action could lead to a greater amount of happiness for a larger number.

Sticking to this approach, the benefit of such an action would also be positive on a qualitative level, considering the mental advantage of having co-workers agree with each other. If they collectively choose this rule, they would be more likely to respect it. Generally, the outcome of a participatory decision is respected. Assume your choice; respect your rules.

The process could be validated, and relationships within our company would likely have a good sense of “serenity.” But is it ethically correct? [1]

Let’s revisit this first point with another example. Imagine 90% of a team loves “chips” and votes to eat chips five times a week, while the country where we want to operate has a strong “green” lifestyle (Italy, Greece, with their Mediterranean diet, or Japan with its semi-vegetarian food low in fat and sugar).

If all members of the team “impose” their own decision, we will face a severe adaptation problem with Japanese culture. Looking at the categorical imperative dimension, the rule of “eating chips” cannot be adopted because it’s not a universally applicable rule. We need to be rational, as Kant wrote: “Without rationality, the universe would be a waste, in vain, and without purpose.”

### **2. Reporting Hierarchical Superiors' Misconduct:**

Should this be adopted in our charter? Utilitarianism or categorical imperative ethics?

Is this a good principle for “Loocat” Co? Or for a more communitarian sphere?

A bold unity begins with solid trust. Trust is solidarity. Working day after day in a suspicious atmosphere, suspecting one another of siding more with their superiors than with their peers, may lead to a sharp deterioration in relationships among team members.

A utilitarian would likely consider these actions, referred to here as “denunciation,” as civic acts within an individual process where “the end justifies the means.” If you are untainted, you should accept the possibility of being denounced by anyone.

We don’t want to instill fear, and fear will prevail if indirect communication is established.

With qualitative utilitarianism, we recognize that experiences generate the most fulfilling results for the group. Quantitative utilitarianism focuses on limited distribution, such as assigning numerical scores to each potential project based on various parameters and comparing which one will produce the maximum positive impact. Outcomes in this framework are measurable.

### **Categorical Imperative? A Sensitive Subject.**

#### **Reason and Empirical Truth:**

According to Kant, moral law is universal, impartial, and rational, allowing any action to pass the tests of universality, impartiality, and rationality.

1. **Universality:** Yes, we could, but not without creating other potential negative outcomes.
2. **Impartiality:** Yes.
3. **Rationality:** Yes.

On the scale of global values, any human being may evolve in a world where faults are reported, but this comes at the cost of privacy and under the threat of constraints on freedom. In this case, the answers could be: Yes, No, Yes.

No one should adopt bad behavior simply because we can’t all coexist in this way. The pleasure or ease of succumbing to temptation does not excuse the morality of the action. Utilitarianism is not appropriate here. To move forward, we demand no corruption and seek “betrayers.” Should the “divide and rule” policy (Philip II of Macedon) prevail? The enculturation and history of a single agent must be considered.

This brings us to the third point...

### **3. Corruption and Ethics.**

Even if a bouquet of white flowers could save the world? A good leader acts for the health of all. But at what price? According to the World Population Review [2], there are currently 32 countries at war (2023), meaning over 32 legal representatives are working on negotiations for the final interest of:

1. Utilitarianism = Peace <-> Consequence (for themselves?)
2. Kantian Ethics = Peace <-> Action (for a bet on the future?)

We must decide whether to act for the greatest number or for the peace of all populations. Thus, we face either the LooCat principle or adaptation. We must either remain ethically correct for ourselves or risk being discarded by a new culture and the state of implantation. Denying our own ego is a tricky dilemma because we cannot foresee the consequences of our actions or their repercussions. What might be considered bribery?

### **Corruption, Politics, Culture, and Ethics**

Even a breath of peace can turn into war due to a lack of firmness or misunderstanding. However, let us return to the matter at hand. It is crucial to highlight that we do not want to lose our identity. We operate in the field of economics and face significant local competition.

“Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are expected to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; Women are expected to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” (Hofstede, Masculinity/Femininity Traits)

Following this precept, men may be more inclined to indulge in corruption for material gain, such as land and weapons, while women may focus more on social aspects like health and comfort.

However, it would be unfair to claim that women are less corrupt than men, or vice versa. Accurate data are challenging to validate. [3] With a masculinity trait in a decision-making context, we might assume men could be more susceptible to accepting “bribes” or gifts in a quantitative sense. Women, on the other hand, might accept “bribes” for a better quality of life, reflecting a qualitative aspect. Our principle as LooCat Corporation follows a categorical imperative approach. We emphasize integrity, and while not accepting such behavior isn’t among the Ten Commandments, maintaining moral values and our responsibility under the scrutiny of the world and the law is paramount. [4]

#### 4. Equal Opportunity:

“A company or organization that understands and obeys its legal duty not to treat employees or applicants unfairly because of their race, religion, age, etc.” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Let’s consider our first point from a utilitarian perspective:

Diversity might be seen as complexity; relationships can be a win-win situation at best, but we must learn how to navigate them. For instance, hiring women comes with the risk of pregnancy.

Possible utilitarian thinking, seeking hedonism:

Equal opportunity could foster competitive spirits for better rankings, emphasizing a single-minded craving for advancement, which might lead to unethical reasoning or behavior. For example: “I don’t care if she is pregnant; I just need to work harder to compensate for her absence.” Or from a woman: “I don’t care if he broke his leg skiing; I just need to work harder to cover for him.”

Now, what could be gained from accepting equal opportunity? The chance for someone in a lower position to be promoted, regardless of who might be displaced in the higher status (e.g., Sam Altman and OpenAI, regardless of his return as CEO).

From a categorical imperative perspective:

We support equal opportunity. From this viewpoint, we embrace complexity, and the social aspect of our original country is essential. The same rules should be established at all levels with a “universal” compassion.

**“She or he is absent; that bothers me. But maybe one day I’ll be on the sick list, and at that time, I’d appreciate a compassionate response from my coworkers.”**

Another illustration to emphasize the complexity in the collective process relates to whether working more to earn more is preferable versus choosing if we want to work more (or not, for additional free time). The first scenario is egalitarian, while the second emphasizes equity. Our principle clearly disapproves of fraud; hence, are we operating in the first or the second case?

It’s challenging to establish a general rule for all. Everyone must work equitably, or they should be compensated accordingly. As previously stated, it would be inequitable for some to do the work of others without financial compensation. Furthermore, if our categorical imperative dictates that all members work equally hard, without giving them a choice, we could foster aggressive competition for better salaries.

The equal opportunity principle seems beneficial, primarily because diversity is a strength. However, rules are necessary to create a positive work environment.

Having the choice to engage in a competitive mode or not may be a better alternative between:

- A general rule open to everyone, which carries risks for all,
- and a general rule imposed on everyone, which may not suit individual needs.

When equality and equity are summarized as:

**“You can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs,”** but perhaps not everyone wants to eat eggs. [5]

### III. Risks of Unadaptable Guidelines Across the World: Ethics, Social, and Economic

Space, context, and time—how to be in the right place at the right time under the best conditions. All negotiations occur in the most favorable environment. Whether in politics or business, the social aspect is crucial. It would be highly inappropriate to discuss how delightful our past Thanksgiving meal was with someone who is starving or to serve pork to a Muslim guest.

LooCat aims to make profits. We have principles—strong principles—but this study seeks to understand how to achieve profits worldwide without compromising our identity based on our ethical code. Why not consider creating a simulation of these principles as they apply in each continent? What are the risks of an unadaptable “code” of guidance? We have a whole world to define, much like a “little big planet” in a galaxy.

Religion often leads to morality, law, and ethics. Japan, for example, exemplifies a country with high impartiality and a narrow margin of tolerance regarding flexibility in moral behaviors. It adopts a conduct characterized by high masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Taking risks and “betting” on external factors is generally not considered as much as in Russia, which is more pragmatic and accepts greater flexibility concerning context and time (lower long-term orientation). [6]

The rate of moral deviation rules is key. Since Taylorism at the end of the 19th century (Statement of Work), through Fordism as a symbol of effective mass production in the 20th century, to Toyotism, the strategies of economic, social, and political management have evolved. Maintaining a strong team where 35,711 employees work together (e.g., Starbucks stores worldwide in 2022) with a “common force,” or like Tesla, deserves in-depth analysis.

#### Simulation of LooCat Principles Worldwide:

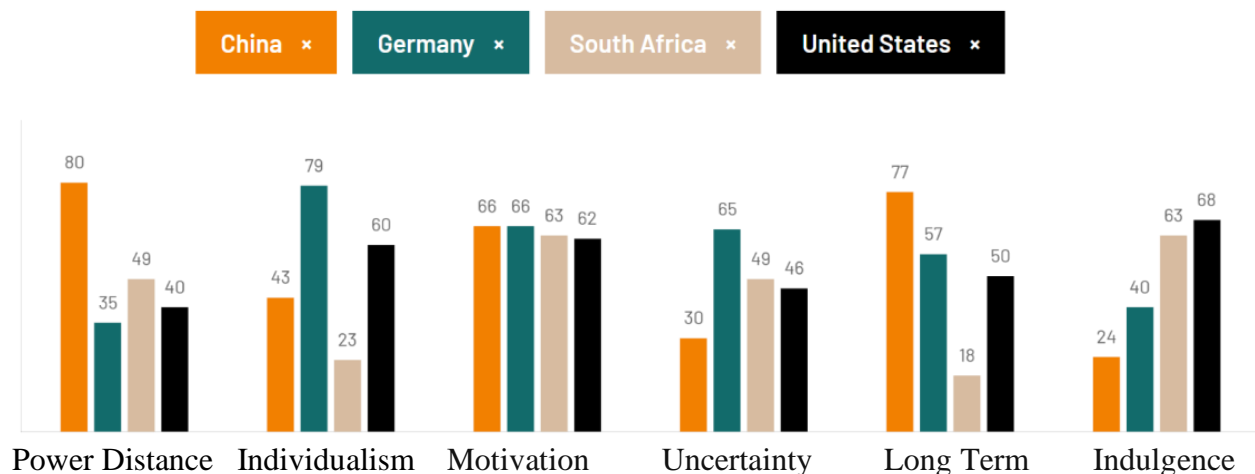
1.Decision-Making Process

2.Report to hierarchical superiors' misconducts

3.Rejection of the corruption

4.Equal opportunity

In Germany\*,China(a), United States(b), and South Africa(c)



Towards avoidance, orientation, achievement and success  
(Chart made with Culture Factor Group) [8]

## 1. Decision-Making Process:

**Germany** (*Us: taken as a first point of comparison, with frank and direct speech*)

**Kant:** Individual < Company < Country (State & Culture)

As we know, and according to Hofstede's effects, collectivism indicates a greater importance placed on the well-being of the group.

a. We established a high level of "decision-making" concerning our primary team guidelines. Allowing employees to criticize their superiors and, thus, authority—without cutting corners or relying on 360-degree feedback—might lead to disagreements in Asia, particularly in China, where hierarchy is viewed as an incontestable order. The differences in ethics and acceptance of actions imposed by the "Empire" are significant. It would be unthinkable for European citizens to accept over 700 million surveillance cameras monitoring them on the streets, even though many countries seem to follow a similar path. [9]

In China, we encounter sinocentrism, which is characterized by collectivism, making adaptive behavior essential. Similar to Japan, long-term relationships and stable interactions are valued. Our approach to dynamic interactions, reporting, and accepting mistakes may not align with the tolerance of Chinese employees towards direct speech. They might feel uncomfortable confronting aggressive interactions, leading to confusion and questioning of trust. An adaptive method is suggested.

b. In the United States, direct speech and decision-making processes are easily assimilated. As shown in the chart, Germany and the United States share similarities in almost every aspect except indulgence, where a notable gap exists. Both managers and employees expect to be consulted, and information is shared frequently. Communication is informal, direct, and participative.

c. In South Africa, there is a mix of both aspects. Like in China, collectivism is strong, which could indicate a weak internal conviction (as per Julian Rotter's 1966 study on various forms of control conviction across cultures), leading to reluctance in sharing personal opinions as individuals. A strong respect for hierarchy supports this notion.

On the other hand, long-term orientation is very low, possibly due to low life expectancy. Fast interactions should be encouraged, and with a power distance similar to Germany, communication regarding options may be straightforward.

## 2. Reporting to Hierarchical Superiors' Misconduct:

**Germany** (*Us: taken as a first point of comparison*)

**Kant:** Underlying this principle: \_General truth? \_Is it applicable globally as a general truth in reality?

**LooCat:** Yes.

a. **China:** In 2020, a citizen rating system was implemented to punish bad behaviors and reward good ones. During COVID-19, we saw how a rise in collective fear, combined with strong authority, could strengthen denunciations among citizens.

One thing is certain: China isn't a democracy. How do we approach this point? [10]

In this context, reporting misconduct to supervisors may be acceptable. However, we consider a crisis period as a unique situation. Power distance in this country is very strong, and obedience to authority is also high; thus, reporting misconduct might be accepted but would need to be done discreetly and with caution.

b. **United States:** Very similar to Germany in the average of the chart, except regarding indulgence (control of desires and impulses). Here, weak control is referred to as indulgence. The U.S. is a contradictory country in terms of attitudes and behaviors—"Work hard and play hard."

It's difficult to predict how a competitive "game" could unfold and whether reports will be false testimonies for personal gain or legitimate concerns.

c. **South Africa:** In line with the "decision-making process," this action is driven by individual willingness to act. It's not standard procedure in Africa, where Ubuntu emphasizes community power. Moreover, like in a family, it would be challenging to ask individuals to "betray" their neighbors, as each one relies on another. The bar chart supports this thesis, showing a very low level of individualism in this location. Asking for such actions could lead to perceptions of our company as

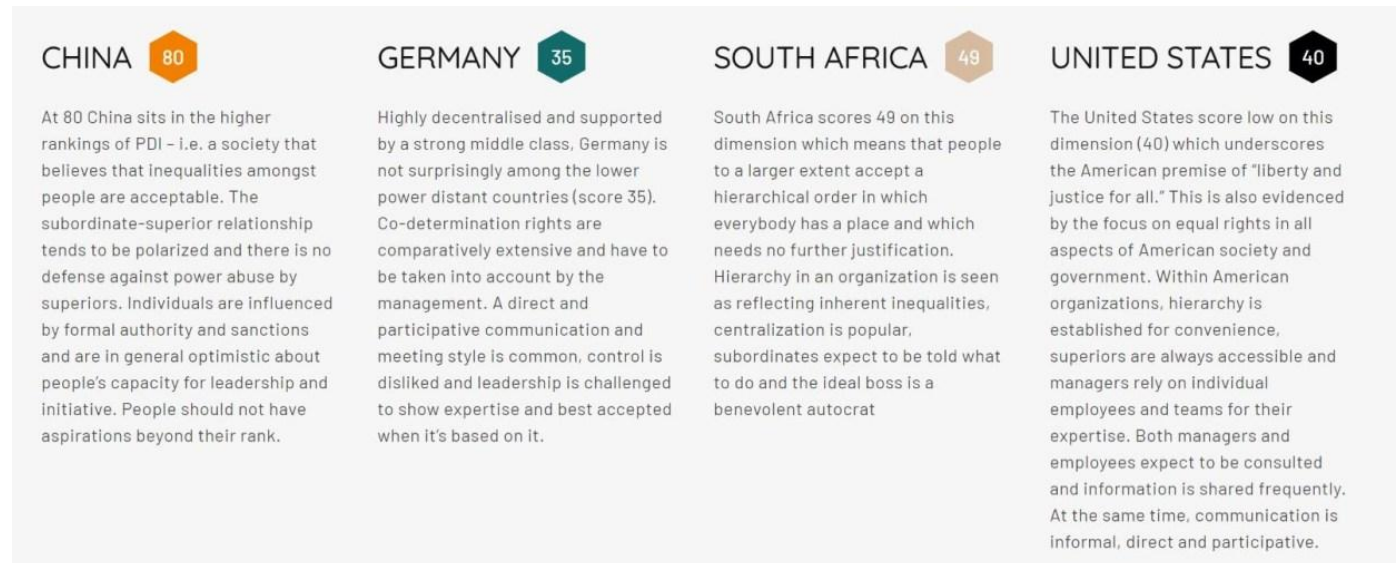
duplicitous, where trust is lacking, and personal interests overshadow collective goals. This could result in reluctance to work for us, and on a larger scale, we might face political rejection and damage our reputation.

### 3. Rejection of the corruption:

Germany\*(Us: taken as a first point of comparison) - Kant: Categorical Imperative Principle?

Yes

## POWER DISTANCE COMPARISONS

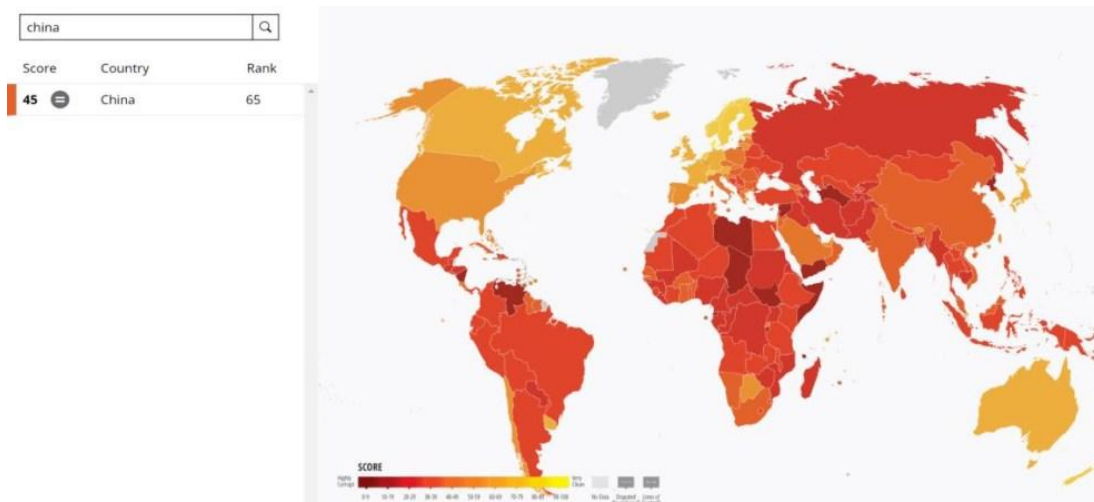


#### a. China:

High scores in power distance indicate an acceptance of superiors' decisions without questioning. Understanding the meaning of corruption and defining “ethics” clearly is a complex task, as one definition varies based on perceptions of our actions as good or bad. In China, where the government and the people are often seen as divided, a double-faced political approach is prevalent. What is perceived does not always reflect the reality of the situation. A non-direct language filled with subtleties requires us to remain vigilant. Referring to Edward T. Hall’s Cultural Iceberg Model and the concept of 360-degree feedback, we find that the book’s cover does not accurately reflect the story. [11]

If we strictly define China as a utilitarian state, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) suggests that we are facing a situation where corruption is present and continues to increase.

## Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)



[12][13]

Culturally speaking, and returning to Hofstede's chart, the rate of indulgence in China is lower than in Germany. In contrast, corruption levels are not. Domestic politics play a significant role in society.

"China is a restrained society, as evidenced by its low score of 24 in this dimension. Societies with a low score tend to exhibit cynicism and pessimism."

### **b. United States:**

The U.S. has a low score, similar to Germany, with a questioning of authority. Consequently, a more social aspect must be considered. While zero tolerance for corruption may be accepted as a rule, one risk remains: the definition of corrupt acts must be implemented clearly. Why?

Let's consider an example: an American team of 50 employees working together is planning to celebrate Christmas (in this case, LooCat is a company in the U.S., and the team does not work globally via the internet).

These 50 employees do not all share the same gender, religion, or affinities. In the U.S., we celebrate Christmas as it is a national holiday, and an important aspect to note is the stronger sense of patriotism compared to countries like France. Americanization during the Cold War propagated American culture worldwide, reinforcing this sense of belonging among residents. What can we consider in a situation where a young American woman in a lower job position offers a gift for the holiday to one of her superiors, an older man?

Assumptions could be:

- She simply has a closer relationship with him (which can happen naturally),
- or she is attempting to corrupt him.

A general rule might be:

- An anonymous gift draw will be organized for this special event for everyone,
- or no gifts will be allowed on company premises.

This approach avoids ambiguity, promotes general rules and equality, but risks losing our humanity.

*(NDR: Differences between equality and equity deserve particular attention.)*

### **c. South Africa:**

According to the corruption index, South Africa has a score similar to that of China.

Ubuntu emphasizes community, resource sharing, and a very low individual aspect. The correlations with capitalism and money differ significantly from the Economic Triad (the three centers dominating the world economy until the late 1990s: the United States, the European Union, and Japan).

South Africa shows no preference for avoiding uncertainty.

"Low uncertainty avoidance cultures display greater ease in unpredictable situations. They require as few rules as possible and approach change through adaptability, pragmatism, and comfort." [14]

Referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, this should not lead to an emphasis on adherence to negative group codes of conduct regarding ethical decision-making. Everyone should have the right to decide consciously on their course of action, albeit under general rules similar to those discussed in the United States.

Individualism in South Africa is low, and actions are guided by a common goal while respecting hierarchy.

In Germany, where individualism is higher, the risks of corruption may be more pronounced.



(This does not imply more corruption exists but suggests stricter rules may be established to address actions motivated by individual competitiveness.)

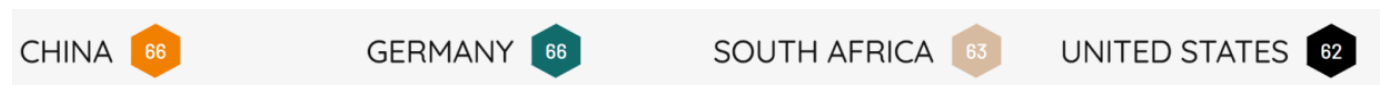
Returning to the previous case regarding gift-giving, an African employee may not understand why generosity towards others is prohibited. Moreover, hierarchy is accepted without needing justification; “the boss is a benevolent autocrat” capable of making beneficial decisions for everyone.

The question of whether she is trying to corrupt him (possibly for promotion) is less relevant, as she is expected to conform to the group dynamics, and hierarchy is seen as intangible. Strong leadership is essential in this context, and we must choose the best guidelines. [15]

#### 4. Equal opportunity:

Germany\*(Us: taken as a first point of comparison)

#### Motivation towards Achievement and Success



##### a. China:

There is a difference between the power of the “Empire” over citizens and private foreign corporations. Homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder by the Chinese Psychiatric Association in 2001. However, in reality, non-acceptance and reluctance from the state persist.

Work, yes, but for China? Are we going to be the bad company that causes the “brain drain” of Chinese talent?

This raises a political question. Since the pandemic, China has been trying to attract the outside world and investors, but under what conditions? With a score similar to Germany’s, we might assume there will be no major adaptations needed nor many problems ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of age or gender. But what about the overall situation in this country? Are the Chinese able to accept a young woman as a superior? What is our scope for action? Are we going against the domestic politics and culture of the country?

##### Sinocentrism:

“In modern [Chinese foreign policy](#), the People's Republic of China has repeatedly stated that it will never seek to establish [hegemony](#) beyond its borders ([Chinese](#): 永不称霸).<sup>[57]</sup> However, some historians, such as John Friend and Bradley Thayer believe there are individuals in the Chinese government who doggedly hold onto Sinocentric beliefs.<sup>[58]</sup> [Chinese Communist Party](#) (CCP) [general secretary Xi Jinping](#) has called for a 'pan-Asian security concept', which has been compared to [Imperial Japan](#) by commentators.” [Wikipedia]

Is the definition of equality defined by the State?

**Play by my rules**

For example:

- According to United Nations data from 2021, China's population comprises approximately 703.8 million females and 740.4 million males. Although they represent roughly 48.7% of the population, women occupy less than 8% of senior leadership positions.
- The absence of diversity is noteworthy given the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's stated commitment to equal opportunity. [16]

So, we could offer Women the opportunity to get involved, but there is not much demand due to a lack of skills for the senior positions.

“As women have been, more frequently than men, confined to the least qualified industrial jobs and low-skilled service jobs, they are hit hard by sectoral restructuring. While men are promoted to managerial positions, women are pushed out of jobs that simply disappear.” [17][18][19][20]

#### **b. US:**

The U.S. is a country with strong internal conviction, where the desire for a better life is already embedded in routine. This could be accepted without issue. Nevertheless, the United States is controversial and varies by state.

“The United States of America is a federal republic consisting of 50 states, a federal district (Washington, D.C., the capital city of the United States), five major territories, and various minor islands. Both the states and the United States as a whole are each sovereign jurisdictions.”

For example, we need to check whether our concept of equality will be respected in certain specific states.

If LooCat has legal Mexican employees and if the local district is struggling against Mexican immigration, even if our employees are integrated as American workers, we must enforce equality of opportunity in the hierarchical process with firmness.

“A dimension of masculinity leads to increased acceptance of unethical behavior.” If the majority is anti-immigration in the district, providing the same opportunity to “our” employees might require real effort.

#### **c. South Africa:**

In South Africa, community and femininity dimensions are empowered.

Social aspects and relationships are important at all levels. Time isn't seen as money, unlike in our monochronic society. The polychronic aspect suggests that transactions are more important than deadlines or schedules, allowing our principle of equality to adapt.

Respect for others and recognition of both “him” and “us” likely offer the potential for tolerance regarding equal opportunities. We just need to be careful not to change their culture by imposing competition that could divide them. In reference to the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, a simple object from outside can completely disrupt a calm and peaceful world.

## **IV. Conclusion Of the Analytic Exploration**

Let's summarize the facts.

In **Chapter I**, we described a fictional German company named LooCat, which is guided by four main ethical principles based on Kant's Categorical Imperative. These principles are: a strong decision-making process, reporting misconduct to hierarchical superiors, rejection of corruption, and equal opportunity for all.

In **Chapter II**, we differentiated our principles from utilitarianism, which has two branches: quantitative and qualitative. We concluded that the latter follows rules for a larger number, with the risk of creating an "unethical" majority.

**Chapter III** highlights the risks of applying our guidelines worldwide, using China, the United States, and South Africa as examples. We aimed to predict the ethical, social, economic, and political facets and what attitudes could be adopted for good acceptance, as well as the potential risks to our identity and principles, using Hofstede's statistical chart.

At the end of this study, we can affirm that adaptation is key to success, but not at any price. The ultimate question for LooCat, as for any corporation and individuals in this new world, may now be:

**After the pandemic, economic or ethical?**

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