**Cultural Awareness**

Tudor Rusu

ICT, Fontys University

Software Engineering

Professor Samuil Angelov

12.12.2022

Cultural Awareness

The definition of the word culture is a complex one and it refers to the characteristics and knowledge of a group of people, including social behaviors, norms, beliefs, arts, and customs.

Culture helps distinguish one group of people from another as we are wired to attach different meanings and react to situations in different ways. This document is the product of my interest in on the subject of cultural awareness as it is an important subject in software engineering due to the fact that teams are comprised of members coming from different nationalities. The main goal is to understand the differences between my and my team-mates’ culture and how to better communicate and collaborate.

# **National Culture**

To explore this subject I will base my paper on Professor Gert Hofstede’s studies on how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. He defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others”.

The Hofstede model of national culture consists of six dimensions that are based on extensive research that represent independent preferences for one situation over the other that help differentiate cultures rather than individuals from each other.

## **Power Distance**

Power distance describes how people in a society relate to each other on a hierarchical scale. Generally, it can be divided into high power distance and low power distance, with people from high power distance tending to view it as a reality of life and believing that everyone has a specific place in the hierarchy of power. On the opposite side individuals from low power distance cultures will tend to view relations with their superiors a more equal one, where they are not afraid to express their opinions and participate more in the decision-making process.

## **Individualism versus Collectivism**

This dimension compare how people from certain culture value more themselves than the collective group or families, where nationalities on the high-end of the spectrum tend to put more emphasis on achieving their own goals and take care only of themselves and their immediate family as opposed to the lower spectrum where individuals tend manifest by long-term commitment to the members of the group and where members feel compelled to take responsibility for their peers.

## **Masculinity versus Femininity**

A high score of this dimension means that the society will be driven by competitiveness, achievements and success, where the success being defined by being the winner or the best in a certain domain, starting in school carrying out in the organizational life.

A low score means that individuals put more emphasis on quality of life and also the well-being of others and the success being defined by high quality of life and standing out of the crowd is viewed as not admirable. Conflicts in this society are resolved by compromise and negotiation.

## **Uncertainty Avoidance Index**

Uncertainty avoidance has to do with how a community deals with the fact that the future is always unknown: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Typically, the high score for this index is manifested through individuals having high level of stress and anxiety, demonstrating apparent resistance to change. In contrast, the low index will have interactions with others in a informal way, displaying the willingness to question people in higher positions. When dealing with the future they will have a more hands-off position without having the need of formulating a plan in order to control it.

## **Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation**

This dimension refers to whether a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective or a conventional historic point of view. The long-term orientation consist of social members sharing the belief that the future will be more prosperous than the present, sacrificing the short-term gratification in order to achieve the long-term success and growth. They tend to overthink and dissect the problem in order to cover all the angles. On the opposite, short-term orientation nationalities tend to focus more on the present, time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Individuals will tend to tackle problems in a more rigid way, having the job done without thinking on the secondary issues that may occur as a result of the solution.

## **Indulgence versus Restraint**

This last dimension considers the extent and tendency for a society to fulfill its desires. In other words, this dimension revolves around how societies can control their impulses and desires. People in societies with relatively weak control generally show a willingness to realize their impulses and desires related to enjoying life and having fun. They have a positive attitude and tend towards optimism. In addition, they attach more importance to free time, do what they want and spend money as they please. When there is strong control within a society, people in that society are reluctant. Satisfaction of needs is suppressed and regulated through strict social norms.

# **Romania versus The Netherlands**

In this semester I had the opportunity to collaborate with individuals from The Netherlands and Bulgaria. In the below diagram, I have plotted the indexes for each country based on Hofstede’s 6 cultural dimensions. Because Romanian and Bulgarian cultures are alike, I have decided to focus on Romanian versus The Netherlands differences.

Chart, bar chart

Description automatically generated Figure 1.Culture comparison based on Hofstede's 6 cultural dimensions

When comparing Power Distance dimension, The Romanian score is quite high compared to the Dutch one and this can be seen when discussing with teachers, myself having a more formal approach, accepting hierarchical order , while Jan and Arnold, being more independent and their attitude towards our teachers being more direct and informal.

The difference in Individualism comparison is quite high, which may cause problems if not being taken into account, the Dutch placing more emphasis on their own well-being and interests while Romanians being more interested in how others are doing, taking responsibility for fellow members of their group.

The Masculinity index both for Dutch and Romanian society are on the lower spectrum, considered to be a Feminine societies, where we value equality, solidarity and then to care for the quality in our working life. This may be a plus for us because we tend to solve conflicts by compromise and trying to understand each other’s needs.

Both of our cultures have high Uncertainty Avoidance scores, however Romanians tend to be more strict and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior, having difficulties adapting to new situations. The Dutch although having a more pragmatic nature, they are flexible and are willing to change depending on the situation.

Although the Long-Term Orientation scores are high for both nationalities, I’ve seen a difference in the way we plan and manage problem solving. In the Netherlands they tend to try solving the issue in a more direct way, focusing on the direct objective, rather than thinking of all the consequences and implications that may follow. Both of these means having their pros and cons, in my opinion we complement quite well, bringing balance to the team.

When it comes to Indulgence dimension, our cultures are more different, the Romanian one being of Restraint, where I have noticed that I have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. In the Netherlands people tend to be enjoying life more and value their free time more. The Dutch optimism and the Romanian pessimism combination can be a beneficial both of them brining important insights to a certain situation and assessing it in a more real to the truth way.

# **Conclusion**

This team is strong and competent. We trust and support one another. The Hofstede Cultural Dimensions shows that we are not on the same page all the time and despite that every member is showing willingness to change and adapt over time and even though we feel the influence of different cultures we still manage to collaborate in order to achieve our ultimate goal: to successfully complete the semester.

# References

6-D Model of National Culture, Retrieved from

https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/

Davis, J. D. (2021, June, 2). Long Term Orientation Vs Short Term Orientation, Retrieved from

https://fosburit.com/culture/long-term-orientation-vs-short-term-orientation/

Examples of Cultural Dimensions, Retrieved from

https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/cultural-responsiveness/examples-of-cultural-dimensions/

Hofstede's Power Distance: Definition & Examples, Retrieved from

https://study.com/academy/lesson/hofstedes-power-distance-definition-examples-quiz.html

National Culture, Retrieved from

https://hi.hofstede-insights.com/national-culture

The 6 Cultural Dimensions, Retrieved from

https://gedragvandeconsument.nl/hofstede-dimensies/