RESPONSE TO GEERT HOFSTEDE

CHARLES HAMPDEN-TURNER and
FONS TROMPENAARS

Centre for International Business Studies, The Netherlands

Geert Hofstede mounted an attack on the work of Fons Trompenaars in the spring issue of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 189–198). We are not remotely interested in counter-attacking or attributing to Hofstede the kind of motives attributed to Trompenaars. We do not know what Hofstede’s motives are, any more than he knows what our motives are. As Sir Thomas More put it “I have no window to look into another man’s soul”. If Hofstede “knows” that we are in this business for the money and are ready to practice intellectual dishonesty to this end, then we leave him to this immaculate perception. We have no knowledge of his motives and are content to leave such judgements to God. In the meantime we suppose him to be honest and trying his best. We do not know this to be the case. We assume it, since only in such circumstances can civilized discussion proceed.

So we intend to say no more about the “sneer elements” in his attack, save to point out that commercial success and successful public speaking are no bars to profound thinking and scholarly contribution. We do not feel the need to apologize for our success.

There are major differences between Geert Hofstede’s approach and ours, as there are differences in culture the world over. We believe that social science methodology is not culture free. There is no neutral point “above” culture from which to view the universe. It follows that many different ways of viewing culture are legitimate. We have learned much from taking Hofstede’s viewpoint. He appears to have some difficulty in adopting and understanding our viewpoint.

We will therefore content ourselves in this response with pointing out our differences with Hofstede. We shall try to avoid labelling the differences as “good” or “bad”, although we shall justify our attempts to see things differently. Readers should judge for themselves whether they prefer “The-World-According-To-Geert”, or our variations. Both points of view are inadequate and much more work needs to be done. Our most
fervent wish is that readers think for themselves and develop their own paradigmatic assumptions.

The differences between our approach and Hofstede's can be summarized under four heads:

1. Are cultural categories linear and exclusive?
2. Can culture be best expressed in mathematical language?
3. Is his approach more "empirical" than ours?
4. Are there pointers to successful business practice?

There is a final section to our argument, which we call "Meeting Hofstede on his own ground", which concedes the sovereignty of statistics, a belief we do not share, but answers his criticisms within the statistical domain. We have placed this last, because many readers will find it esoteric and technical. Yet within the language of statistics we also believe our case is strong and that Hofstede has judged us after examining less than a third of our database.

ARE CULTURAL CATEGORIES LINEAR AND EXCLUSIVE?

Hofstede's work uses Aristotelian categories of A and non-A. If you are individualist you cannot be collectivist. You are at one end of a linear measure or another, occasionally in between. Nevertheless, categories A and not-A are mutually exclusive or at least mutually subtractive. Every increment of individualism necessarily reduces your collectivism and vice versa.

While culture might be a series of straight lines, we decided on a different approach. By posing dilemmas we oblige respondents to put one of two values first. Hence, if the integrity of laws and particular situations are shattered by the story we tell or the dilemma we pose, this gives respondents the task of rebuilding the integrity of the law and particular circumstances starting either with universals or with particulars. Is the law to be imposed on the special circumstances or should the particulars in this case remake the law? Here we assume that both universalist cultures like the U.S.A. and the Netherlands, and particular cultures like France and Japan seek integrity, seek to make laws and particular cases fit together. But they resolve this dilemma in opposite sequences with different priorities.

If we are right, then this helps to make sense of France's formidable Napoleonic Code and its forest of rules. Yes, indeed, France is concerned with the unique, special and particular, but one of the intellectual challenges of its governing élite is to unravel (débrouiller) and reravel rules. The particular and brilliant intellect remains prior to the rules.

Without a dilemma approach we are left with nothing to say about for example — American group and social activity. Americans are "individualist", hence not group or community oriented. End of story.
But of course this is not the end. Americans form more voluntary associations than any other nation in the world. You cannot avoid articles on team-work even if you try. The U.S.A. has the highest church membership of the developed world. Only two decades ago, thousands of U.S. managers were in T-groups and Basic Encounter Groups. Dilemma theory argues that if you are an individualist culture, you will tend to hold individuals responsible for forming groups to get the job done. That the group comes second does not mean that it is unimportant or does not loom large in the consciousness of the culture. What it means is that the "sensitive individual" is seen as the originator of the effective group, rather than the other way around.

So far from culture being linear as it is for Hofstede, we see culture as circular, but with arcs. Hence, the British and Americans celebrate the arc of the circle, which moves self-interested individualism to cooperating with consumers, the second seen as a consequence of the first; while the Japanese, Singaporeans etc. celebrate the arc of the circle which moves from cooperation with customers and fellow employees to individual benefits accruing to members, the second seen as a consequence of the first.

**CAN CULTURE BE BEST EXPRESSED IN MATHEMATICAL LANGUAGE?**

Geert Hofstede assumes that there is nothing in statistical procedures like correlation coefficients and tests of significance that distort or misapprehend culture. We believe that the common rules of statistical procedure, as taught in the West, are themselves a culture, with all the biases of their origins. This does not mean that you discard them. It does mean that you cannot simply chop into pieces phenomena which that culture regards as whole or diffusely organized. We recall the story of the learned researcher who diced a piece of cheese with a kitchen gadget and then wrote a learned dissertation on the cubic nature of cheese! Reducing a culture to numbers has its perils. Mathematics is a language. Each culture also has a language. They do not necessarily correspond.

Hofstede's criticism of Trompenaars work suggests a belief that "independent variables" account for variations in "dependent variables" in culture, much as they did in 19th century physics from which much of our common sense about things "scientific" derive. Indeed public discourse has yet to come to terms with the quantum revolution. Our view of cultures is that these are self-organizing systems of values, which have joined together in different ways, in different countries, in different times. Since cultures consist of interdependent, self-organizing values by definition, no truly independent variable exists.
Cultures have meanings which depend upon the entire context. No one element in that context dictates meaning to the whole.

The statistical procedures Hofstede uses are vital in aspects of the mechanical engineering in which he was trained. We do not think these are so useful to culture, although it is useful to see how cultural elements cluster. We believe statistics must serve culture, not culture statistics. The principle of the Drunkard's Search is that you do not look for your lost key beneath the lamp post, simply because the light is better.

The idea that six of our dimensions are “nothing but” derivatives of Individualism—Collectivism, a dimension Hofstede already measured, misapprehends, in our view, how cultural elements self-organize in different nations. That there is a global correlation between Individualism and Inner-directedness, for example, does not mean that the latter “depends” on the former. All it means is that in most cases the two dimensions make common cause. To believe that the locus of control is within me makes me more individualistic (usually).

Yet we know in several cases in Holland, parts of Scandinavia, in small countries generally, a feeling that the environment is stronger than you are, accompanies a sense of individual responsibility to be vigilant. Similarly, Trompenaars found the French to be inner-directed yet collectivist or communitarian. Every significant social and political advance made by French culture has needed whole groups to propel it, yet the motive force was the combustible inner indignation of angry citizens. Inner-direction brings you as a community to the barricades. There is no necessary connection between individualism and inner-direction, only a probability.

The philosophy of mathematics is that its units must be commutative and associative, which means roughly that 1 and 2 and 3 = 2 and 3 and 1 = 3 and 2 and 1 = 1 and 3 and 2. But this is not true in some of the more recent discoveries in subatomic physics, for example, in quantum mechanics. Here the wave-forms constituted by energy do not commute back and forth. We not only see values as wave-forms, but we believe that the order and organization of many cultural meanings can transform their sense. For example:

“What is for supper, Mummy?”

is not the same as

“What is for supper?’ ‘Mummy”

We can go from apple pie to cannibalism, with just a few punctuation marks! Similarly, “Strong individuals create effective groups” is not the same as “Effective groups create strong individuals”. That the separate words have been found in each others’ company, statistically, is not even half of it!
IS HOFSTEDE'S RESEARCH MORE EMPIRICAL?

_Culture Consequences_ originated in a personnel questionnaire used within IBM. Hofstede clustered the questions into subscales and was able to contrast scores for many of the different nations in which IBM was located. This has certain advantages. First the effect of corporate culture is controlled, although not the effect of IBM being headquartered in the U.S.A., and, important to Hofstede, the data came from the interstices of the company itself and were thus “found in the field” by him as a researcher. He even suggests that these came “from an open-ended inventory of issues that were on the minds of respondents around the world”.

In contrast, he states that Trompenaars dimensions come from American sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, etc. and were not, by implication, discovered “out there”. We find this argument curious for several reasons.

In the first place you can accuse Americans of many things, but not, we think, of lacking empirical rigor. It is continental Europe which has been accused of an excess of rationalism and grand theories. Americans are accused of precisely the opposite tendency, of amassing “bricks” which do not constitute a “house”. The idea that Kluckhohn et al. did no empirical research, or that generations of graduate students have not tested Parsons’ proposition is pure fantasy. Harvard’s Social Relations department did not allow nonempirical PhD dissertations to be written in the fifties and sixties (C.M.H-T knows, because he tried!).

Secondly, the questions made up by unknown members of IBM’s personnel department almost certainly had their origins in academic research. The “50’s and early “60’s were the hey-day of personality research in the U.S.A. Individual questions are copyrighted, so to make your own questionnaire you simply alter the phrasings. It does not take a genius to recognize in Hofstede’s original questions shadows of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, several subscales of _The Authoritarian Personality_ (1950), and David McClelland’s _The Achieving Society_ (1961). But the most obvious borrowings are from the CPI (The California Psychological Inventory) and the CPP (The California Psychological Profile) which all Californian students at the University level (five campuses) and the State College level (fourteen campuses) took as freshmen and often in their final year. In IBM’s “original” survey, well-known questions have simply been paraphrased.

Nor can we allow Hofstede to have it both ways. If American academics of the “50’s and “60’s are ethnocentric, how could American IBM managers be otherwise? After all, they learned their personality research at University. As for the suggestions that the IBM Personnel
Questionnaire represents the pooled opinions of some fifty nationalities thinking together, we only would it were so. But it is the practice of IBM even today, a quarter of a century later, to force HR policies created in the U.S.A. upon its various subsidiaries throughout the world. We use cases from IBM to teach the dangers of doing this—one is even in this book (disguised).

We happen to agree that Americans can be ethnocentric, but Parsons, Kluckhohn, Strotbeck, McClelland were cosmopolitans compared to your average "60's IBM computer engineers or those staffing Personnel.

As for Hofstede's labels Power, Distance and Masculinity-Femininity, these occur by the same names (or very similar) in The Authoritarian Personality (1950). This does not mean that he copied these from elsewhere. It does mean that coming up with a scale in American psychology which has not been anticipated by other researchers is well-nigh impossible. And as for finding American IBM managers not influenced by such scales, that is harder still!

As it happens the dimensions chosen by Trompenaars are massively researched. Achievement motivation has had 76 books published in its scales, and that was four years ago. Attempts to measure and improve achievement were undertaken in 46 countries and funded by the U.S., Australian, Mexican, Indian, South African and Brazilian governments. Achievement imagery was assessed by scoring children's readers from all 46 countries, with inter-judge reliabilities of 80–95%. Although McClelland uses three categories—Achievement, Affiliation and Power—the latter two constitute what we call ascribed status, so the match is good. Rotter's Internal vs. External Locus of Control has 20,000 journal articles. Individualism vs. Collectivism (or Communitarianism) has had so much attention with so many different scales that we have lost count! Hofstede's claim that he "introduced" this scale to social science is simply absurd. He was one of the last. The specialized brain hemispheres which give us specific/atomistic vs. diffuse/whole has spawned nearly a thousand books, and 60,000 journal articles. These constitute considerable empirical evidence.

Of course the concepts themselves are derived from researchers. The man-in-the-street does not say "I have an internal locus of control", but Rotter's concepts have forty years of empirical research behind them, as have most of our other dimensions. We see further by standing on the shoulders of giants. We suggest that Hofstede stood on some shoulders too, but he is not sure which! He appears to believe that those questions burst like Athena from the head of IBM. They did not. They were studiously plagiarized, only not by him. IBM-ers in the late "50's may have originated computers but not psychological ideas! This was the age of The Organisation Man (1956) whose 10th chapter is entitled
“How to cheat on personality tests” (“Remember — you love your father in a manly way, but you love your mother more!”). To claim that this mish-mash of conformity is hard empirical evidence of IBM’s “convictions” is to misread the times. You got your undergraduate psychology degree and sold the ideas to IBM.

The attempt to dismiss American cross-cultural research and personality studies are among Hofstede’s thinner rationales. While he was studying mechanical engineering, or something similar, thousands of first-rate American social scientists were busy on studies of which he appears unaware. Henry Murray was able to say in his Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association in 1969, that 75% of all the social scientists that ever lived were alive in the U.S.A. and Canada at that moment. Dismissing such work in a few sentences is a form of ethnocentrism in reverse (or eurocentrism). The American contribution is far too large and important to be ignored, and began well before World War II.

ARE THERE POINTERS TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS PRACTICE?

While Hofstede has a good spread of national cultures in the four quadrants of his dimensions, there occur in all these quadrants both successful and unsuccessful economies. On this cross-axis diagram no positioning reveals that it is better to be in one place than in another. The inevitable question is “so what?” High Power Distance cultures like Japan can succeed as can low Power Distance cultures like the U.S.A. “Feminine” Scandinavia creates wealth as does “Masculine” Japan. What can we do about this? Even if we could change our culture, in what direction should we steer? There are losers and winners in every direction!

The same criticism can be made of Trompenaars dimensions, where Nigeria vies with the U.S.A. on several dimensions while not distinguishing itself economically. But we have now introduced new questions which measure the extent to which managers seek to integrate and reconcile values, and here the correlations with economic success look strong. Regardless of whether a culture puts laws before exceptions or exceptions before laws (Universalism vs. Particularism), it succeeds in wealth creation if the exceptions are used to improve the laws and the laws revised to cover more exceptions.

Regardless of whether a culture prefers to analyze phenomena into parts, units, numbers, facts, or whether it prefers to construct whole configurations and patterns (specific vs. diffuse), it succeeds in wealth creation if an analysis of the parts illumines the whole, or if the whole is seen in fine specific detail.
We can summarize by contrasting our assumptions with Hofstede’s below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hofstede assumes</th>
<th>Trompenaars assumes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultures are static points on dual axis maps.</td>
<td>Cultures dance from one preferred end to its opposite and back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One cultural category excludes its opposite.</td>
<td>One cultural category seeks to “manage” its opposite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Independent” factors account for “dependent” variables.</td>
<td>Value dimensions self-organize in systems to generate new meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established statistical procedures are culture neutral and value free.</td>
<td>Established statistical procedures are culturally biased and value full.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultures are linear with “more” or “less” of a fixed quality.</td>
<td>Cultures are circles with preferred arcs joined together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data derived from IBM is superior to ideas drawn from academic research and reflects management’s convictions.</td>
<td>Data derived from IBM are but pale imitations of academic research and reflect management’s compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofstede by thinking inductively derived his categories from IBM data and originated his own scales.</td>
<td>Hofstede by thinking inductively reinvented the scales from which IBM had plagiarized their questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No better place to be on the quadrant maps and no answer to the questions “so what?” and “where should we move?”</td>
<td>No better place to start on the seven dimensions but moves to integrate and reconcile values lead to superior performance.</td>
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Finally, anticipating what is probably coming …

A priori concepts like “dilemma” are metaphysical constructs with no basis in empirical research and with no testable validity or means of verification. Dilemma has been part of culture from Classic Greek Tragedy, from the Primordial Opposites of the Tao, through Shakespeare to the binary codes of anthropologists today

All cultures are different although those differences can be expressed as positions of relative salience on four variables. All cultures are similar in the dilemmas they confront, yet different in the solutions they find, which transcend the opposites creatively.

**MEETING HOFSTETE ON HIS OWN GROUND**

Let us suppose that we throw out our doubts as to whether culture can be expressed mathematically without distortion, and let us suppose that Hofstede’s “empiricism” is without serious objection. What about his specific attacks on our research methodology? Within the fairly restricted domains of statistical methodology, are his attacks warranted?

Our responses, like his objections, are rather technical and will not resonate with those unschooled in statistical refinements. Rather than
duck his objections, however, we feel we should meet them. He has, in our view:

1. Misapprehended our database.
2. Seems not to realize we are using weighted combinations not just individual questions.
3. Uses parametric scaling where nonparametric is more appropriate.
4. Is seeking “the perfect” model rather than models-to-learn-with.

**Misapprehended our Database**

Although our database is available for exchange with serious scholars—it only takes a telephone call—Hofstede has levelled his criticism at a book, which, because it was intended for working managers, and because it was sent to press four years ago, contains only about 30% of our current database and only illustrative samples of countries where we have researched.

A most important misapprehension is that the book contained all our questions when, in fact, the questions were shared between *Riding the Waves of Culture* and *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism*, two books by Trompenaars and by Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars which were published at the same time. Even these two did not cover all questions, and anyway the questionnaire is being constantly updated and refined. Much of this information was, and is, available.

**Seems not to Realize We are Using Weighted Combinations not just Individual Questions**

Hofstede’s own calculations intended to refute ours, are based not simply on too few questions, but on a methodology different from the one we used and hence generative of different results. We examined the weighted combinations of responses received, not individual averages on a bi-model spread. We used these combinations to make fine distinctions between countries and to pursue our hypothesis of self-organizing value systems varying, sometimes slightly sometimes massively, between countries and regions; for example the Catholic South of Europe and the Protestant Northwest, the G7 countries and the Gulf States. These combinations suggest patterns of connection to us.

Many of our questions are non-ipsative, that is they are used for more than one dimension. Not knowing this, he found internal cross-correlations among our dimensions and accuses us of not having “separated out our factors”. But we are not reductionists searching for “factors-which-explain-all”. We are trying to find out how cultural preferences cluster in various countries and we engage managers in
intensive dialogues around our dimensions when conducting seminars, which give rise to a never-ending stream of new information.

**Uses Parametric Scaling where Nonparametric is More Appropriate**

By using parametric factor analysis, Hofstede is clearly intent on pursuing his type of scientific inquiry in his preferred paradigm, while ignoring what we are trying to do. Correspondence analysis or homogeneity analysis would have brought him closer to our work and its significance, but not much! For we are not in the business of trying to achieve dimension reduction or attribute subtle culture distinctions to some background factor, wielded by the social scientists.

We see a world preconceptualized by the people inhabiting it and are not interested in reducing the world’s fascinating variety to More or Less, Power and Distance, Masculinity and Femininity, etc. Our own dimensions are heuristic devices which we use as gateways for discovering finer distinctions, what Wittingstein called “family resemblances”, among the major issues facing mankind. Universalism–Particularism for example, illumines conflicts around rules and exceptions, conjectures and refutations, contracts and relationships, the uniform and the unique, but these are not exactly the same. There are “family resemblances” among these constructs. They are “variations on a theme”.

**Is Seeking “the Perfect” Model Rather than Models-to-Learn-With**

Hofstede’s paradigm is still in the thrall of Newtonian science and celestial mechanics. He is searching for the least number of dimensions or factors which will account for the most observed differences. It is this one-dimensional thinking in which his factor somehow “causes” or “underlies” our cultural categories and concepts, which we do not accept. Neither Hofstede, nor Trompenaars, nor Hampden-Turner have the right to insist upon the sovereignty of their own “independent variables” and try to make other cultures’ concepts derivatives of these. We prefer to elicit responses from other cultures around core dilemmas, which our respondents can redefine in their own language. We learn from them and they from us by clustering issues by family resemblance around bifurcations, first suggested by major authorities in the social sciences. Ours is a model-to-learn-with when engaging other people with their own ideas. Hofstede is attempting to create a Newtonian synthesis for a silent and desolate universe on which he alone may pin descriptors. We believe that this slows his learning and has prevented the renewal of his work, so that for some years now, he has largely refined the original model and is likely to continue doing so indefinitely.
This concludes the summary of the differences we see. Our advice is to use both approaches and entertain both sets of hypotheses and so discover which are more useful to you. We are grateful to Hofstede who taught us much. We intend no disrespect in saying we seek to transcend his work, joining it to our own, but reaching beyond. We do not disagree with his results, but regret his inability to grasp that we have moved on. What we have done with Hofstede's work, i.e., relativize it, readers should do with our work. Happy leap-frogging! May it long continue . . .

REFERENCES

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication, developed by Geert Hofstede. It describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, using a structure derived from factor analysis. Hofstede developed his original model as a result of using factor analysis to examine the results of a worldwide survey of employee values by IBM between 1967 and 1973. It has been refined since. The original theory Copyright ( Geert Hofstede BV hofstede@bart.nl. Contents. How to use and not to use the VSM 94 3.À If the questionnaire is used to compare responses from individuals, from respondents with different occupations or employers, or from respondents belonging to any category other than nations or regions, the answers should be Continue Reading. Please join StudyMode to read the full document. You May Also Find These Documents Helpful. Assignment on Geert Hofstede Essay. ....important you think you are. Plus, Australia had a "gold rushes" in the 1850s and 1890s. Earlier gold discoveries were kept quiet so chaos didn't break out. But the 1848 California gold rush enticed miners to