Newcastle University e-prints

Date deposited: 13th January 2011

Version of file: Author final

Peer Review Status: Unknown

Citation for published item:


Further information on publisher website:

http://www.uk.sagepub.com

Publisher’s copyright statement:

The definitive version of this encyclopedia article was published by Sage, 2009. The title is available from:

http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book232589

Always use the definitive version when citing.

Use Policy:

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not for profit purposes provided that:

- A full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- A link is made to the metadata record in Newcastle E-prints
- The full text is not changed in any way.

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.
Masculinity/Femininity (Hofstede)

Overview
‘Masculinity/Femininity’ is one of the cultural dimensions out of the five identified by Geert Hofstede in his book *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind*, where he presented the results of research on cultural variability or national cultural differences using survey data collected from IBM in 50 countries. Hofstede argues that this dimension is fundamental to understand how societies cope with the duality of the sexes suggesting that coping strategies would indicate how sex roles are distributed in the division of labour and how they impact hierarchies of work goals at national level. He states that the decision to use masculinity/femininity as a label for this dimension is rooted on the findings, which indicated that this was generally the only dimension where men and women surveyed scored consistently differently. Nonetheless, it must be highlighted that the main trait is Masculinity, which can be identified in the use of the Masculinity Index (MAS), where feminine is the low or non-masculine, used to construct the dichotomy.

In theoretical terms, the dimension draws on ideas about how people ‘do’ sex differences in organisations or how dynamics of gendered normative are constructed around understandings of sex roles. In operational terms, it refers to the degree of value placed on behaviours associated with masculinity or femininity. It could be said that they use of the dimension aims to illustrate the interaction between understandings of masculinity/femininity, culture and behaviour by focusing on how specific orientations reveal differences in emotional roles, cultural constructions of gender and traits of ‘national character’.

In that respect, both masculinity and femininity behaviours are categorised based on socially accepted sex role patterns in traditional societies. For instance, Hofstede suggest that the main associations with masculinity and femininity can be identified as male assertiveness and female nurturance. He argues that “masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” On the other hand, “femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.”

Based on the previous understandings, the dimension opposes ego-goals (masculinity) to social goals (femininity) therefore suggesting that masculine behaviours prioritise the self while feminine behaviours prioritise the social. Masculinity behaviours include assertiveness, wealth acquisition and achievement, and femininity behaviours include offering social support, focus on quality of life and caring for others. The impact and presence of these behaviours on culture norms would indicate the level of masculinity or femininity hence the cultural orientation for this particular dimension.

Masculinity and femininity in 50 countries – Hofstede’s evidence
Using a Masculinity Index (MAS) based on social-ego factor scores; 14 work goals items were scored, asking participants to think about factors that would be important to them in their ideal job (regardless of whether these factors were present at their actual job).
The score results represented the importance attached to these factors. In line with what was previously mentioned about the traits associated with masculine and feminine, results were classified based on importance given to earnings, recognition, advancement, challenge, relationship with manager, cooperation, living area and employment security. Earnings, recognition, advancement and challenge were considered masculine, while relationship with manager, cooperation, living area and employment security were considered feminine. A brief description of these is included in Table 1.

(*) Insert table 1 here

The index used a range between zero and 100, where zero was the feminine or non-masculine score and indicated high importance of manager and cooperation and low importance of earnings. Conversely, lower importance of manager and cooperation and high importance to earnings increased the score, hence a higher masculinity.

Findings suggested that the country with the highest MAS was Japan with a score of 95 and the country with the lowest MAS was Sweden, with a score of 8. In the case of the highest scoring countries; the top positions after Japan comprised a mix of countries from different geographical and cultural regions, namely, Austria scoring 79, Venezuela scoring 73, Italy scoring 70 and Switzerland scoring 70. On the other side of the spectrum, at the lowest end, Nordic countries dominated, with Norway scoring 8, Denmark scoring 16 and Finland scoring 26. The middle scores of the index presented a combination of regions scattered throughout the scale; for example, South Africa (63) and the USA (62), Canada (52) and Pakistan (50), and Iran and France, both with a score of 43. See Table 2 for a complete list of the values of the Masculinity Index found for the 50 countries used in the study.

(*) Insert table 2 here

Countries with high MAS, such as Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Italy and Switzerland give importance to manliness and masculine traits, behaviours and products. As such, in these countries; it is expected that national cultures stress tougher values in men and tender values in women. Countries with low MAS, such as Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark and Costa Rica have a closer degree of equality between men and women and behaviours are less prescriptive in regards to gender roles.

In view of the general patterns of masculine/feminine orientation, Hofstede explains how dynamics operate in the workplace, within occupations, in the family and at school. He stresses the importance of socialisation as a key instance where understandings of individual sex/gender roles are learned and then continuously re-enacted by individuals in different contexts. Some of the characteristics of these dynamics are summarised in Table 3.

(*) Insert table 3 here

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that Hofstede suggests that a country’s location within the masculinity/femininity dimension is relative and mainly reflects prioritisation of specific work goals. Furthermore, for some dynamics gender is not considered a relevant variable for values. This in itself raises issues pertaining not
only to the exact nature of Hofstede’s work (what are the theoretical foundations of Hofstede’s work in terms of gender dynamics, masculinities and femininities?), but also to its focus (is the study about national cultures or organisational cultures?) and the relevance of the data collected to illustrate the dimensions identified (can it be argued that the masculinity/femininity dimension illustrates gender normative?)

**Criticisms**

The work of Geert Hofstede has been both widely praised and severely criticised. Brendan McSweeney and Rachel Baskerville-Morley are the sharpest critics; they argue that the two main fundamental flaws in Hofstede’s work are its methodology and theoretical foundations. In that sense, several points can be highlighted; for instance, methodologically; the lack of representativity of the sample in each of the countries raises questions about the possibility to speak of ‘national’ cultures. The research assumes that generalisations about whole national populations can be made based on a few questionnaire responses; that occupational cultures are universally the same, and that findings are situationally non-specific. Furthermore, the research does not consider issues pertaining to the nation-state debate, such as dynamity, variability and complexity. This last point brings to light issues about the theoretical outdatedness of Hofstede’s model. Lastly, the simplicity of Hofstede’s model is particularly important as the bipolarity of Hofstede’s dimensions is problematic because it obscures that organisational reality is not dichotomous; for instance, there are masculinity and femininity and it is not always masculinity versus femininity.

The main theoretical criticisms that can be made broadly pertain to culture in terms of assumptions that it is measurable, objectively observable, immutable, shared and homogenous and to organisational culture in terms of assumptions that it is uniform and monopolistic. This is particularly important in terms of how masculinity and femininity are understood as understandings of masculinity/femininity vary across cultures and reflect wider matrices that include combinations of national culture, institutions, structures, occupations and individuals.

Jenny K. Rodriguez, Ph.D.
University of Strathclyde

SEE ALSO: Hofstede’s Five Dimensions of Culture; Cultural Norms & Scripts; Culture-Specific Values; Power Distance (Hofstede).