



## Cultural Differences

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## **Understanding cultural differences**

According to Hofstede, there is a difference between national cultures and organizational cultures. First, it is important to understand what culture means. Culture can be seen as terms of relations between people instead of terms of stable sets of value (Soderberg & Holden, 2002). Therefore, culture can be seen as something that consists of layers such as, symbols, heroes, rituals, and values (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

For this reason, national cultures differ from organizational cultures. National culture can be defined as a culture that is based on personality traits that people from one nation created to differentiate themselves from other people who have another nationality (Hofstede Insights, 2019). On the other hand, organizational cultures are based on values from the organization itself and not the people in the organization.

Therefore, organizational cultures tend to be more straightforward and more precise than national cultures, as they have more clear objectives and requirements. In addition, organizational cultures can be observed more precisely for this reason.

## **Cultural Dimensions**

To dive deeper into the intercultural dimensions, the Norwegian and Romanian culture is analysed in connection with the culture of the most traveling Erasmus-students. The Erasmus countries are selected based on the countries present in the group and in addition France, the country which sends most students, is added. The four not as clear dimensions are explained in more detail below.

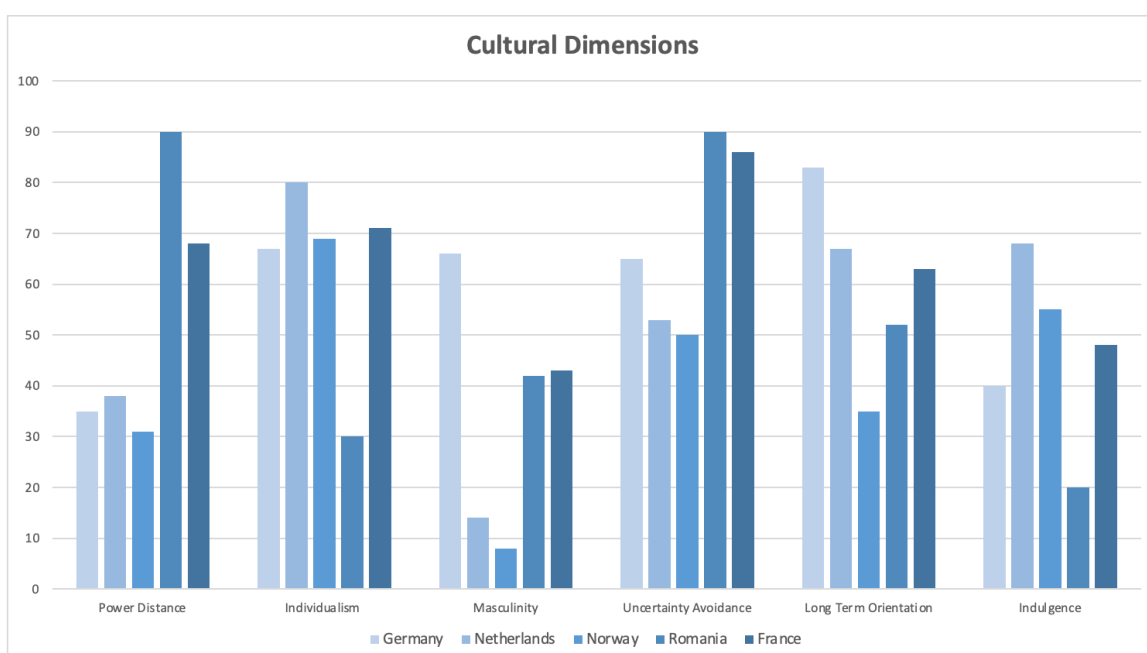
**Masculinity:** A high score (Masculine) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner/best in field; a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life. Having a feminine society means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life.

**Uncertainty avoidance:** The dimension Uncertainty Avoidance has to do with the way that a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting high Uncertainty Avoidance maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas.

Long term orientation: This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future, and societies prioritise these two existential goals differently.

Indulgence: This dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Relatively weak control is called “Indulgence” and relatively strong control is called “Restraint”.

The graph makes most of the points visible, though it is interesting that all countries except for Romania have a high degree of individualism and it is therefore considered as a collectivistic society. Also that the Netherlands and Norway have a very low amount of individualism sticks out. Finally, the power distance and uncertainty avoidance, which are especially high in Romania and France should be recognised as well. The Netherlands, Norway and Germany focus on bureaucracy in terms of interaction (low power distance). This makes it to be perceived as very stiff from time to time, though it is neutral with the goal to produce the same outcome for everyone who interacts with the system (low power distance and a bit of uncertainty avoidance). In Germany, the job itself has to be respected and all of the interaction is in a very formal way (still masculine influences). Furthermore, staff tends to fulfill one job and that one only, so flexibility in interaction is hardly seen but accepted. The Netherlands and Norway do not focus on titles as much and have a more egalitarian approach of interaction (low masculinity).



## **Norms and values**

Norms and values form the framework where people interact with each other (Browaeys and Price, 2008). Values hereby not up for discussion and therefore define what is good or bad (Browaeys and Price, 2008). First the current state is discussed, before focussing onto a possible future outlay.

Being accurate and respecting the rules are mandatory in these countries. Unfortunately some of them are also not explained, like standing in line waiting and maintaining personal space in the meantime. Though laws in France can be seen as a bit more flexible, like walking over a red light, which will hardly occur in the other countries. Also filing complaints differs per country, where the northern ones address it rather indirectly, e.g. through official complaints, Romanian tends to be very direct here. Students in general furthermore value open communication and the possibility to express themselves in their own way. Though, there might be differences in the amount of interaction due to the cultural backgrounds. So that in northern countries it is more a discussion between the students and the lecturer, while the teacher is the source of truth in the south.

Therefore, a more open culture should be aimed for with a lower hierarchy and less bureaucracy. This should foster interaction and enable everyone to focus more on being productive and archiving valuable output. Also titles may be still in place, but the value of them should be decreased, to ease up giving credit to people without some.

Embedding this into a document is always hard, because culture has to be lived by everyone in the organisation, rather than being written down. Though, setting guidelines can ease up the start and thereby foster the application of it. The strategy therefore includes guidelines for the day to day interaction. The following has to be included into the founding document to ensure it. While not being complete, it provides a broad picture of the idea.

### **Art. 1 Corporate Culture**

- (1) Interaction between students, assistants and professors on campus has to be kept informal (no titles or surnames, except for identification) to ensure a low hierarchy and foster collaboration without any restrictions.

- (2) The dress code on campus may not be more formal than business casual, except for final presentations or ceremonies.
- (3) To reduce red tape, as many processes as possible have to be completed based on the same data set and within the same interaction.
- (4) Reducing complicated Q&A, campus guide personnel can be found on the floors and outside, especially during the first weeks of studies.

### **The relevance of national culture**

National culture is highly relevant for a university as it contains the norms, behaviours, beliefs, customs and values shared by a population. At a university there are a lot of different national cultures represented and therefore a lot of different points of view to consider when making decisions on behalf of the university as a whole and making the university guidelines. Having different national cultures represented in one place can cause complications if not handled well, however if the university does a good job educating everyone involved of the different cultures represented and has a good set of guidelines that takes all the cultures into consideration there should be no issues having multiple national cultures represented in one place. Having multiple national cultures in one place should in fact be an advantage for the university as people with different backgrounds and cultures think differently and can provide different ideas and solutions to issues at hand. It will also provide valuable experience for the students to cooperate with students from different parts of the world which they will have great use for when they eventually graduate and start working, possibly in an international market where they most likely have to work with people from different cultures.

### **Building knowledge and insights on cultural differences:**

When attending a university you are faced with a lot of different people coming from a lot of different cultures. When different cultures meet there are a lot of cultural differences to overcome and that can be challenging. In order to overcome these challenges as smoothly and efficiently as possible it's important for the university to build knowledge and gain insight on these cultural differences.

### **Suggested goals for the university to aim towards:**

- Increase students involvement and comfort with those from different cultures and backgrounds
- Enhance the respect people show for others who are different cv
- Increase students ability to cooperate and work together with people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Develop and enforce policies that ensure everyone's safety and rights regardless of cultural aspect or background

### **Propositions on how to reach these goals:**

- Arrange an orientation week where the new students get to know each other through different activities and events
- Celebration of traditional holidays and festivals from the different cultures on campus
- Promote work between students across different cultures by having them work together on group assignments
- Arrange study trips where the students meet and cooperate with students from other countries
- Having representatives in the student boards and committees that reflects the cultural diversity in the university

### **Building a common culture and identity:**

These days the cultures mix more and more. These persons can be work colleagues, fellow students or even the one significant other who has a different background. In short, there will always be individuals with different cultures and identities. Building a common culture and identity therefore can create benefits in the student-society. Sharing thoughts, values and standards has a big role in building these cultures. This will lead to individuals being more open minded and negotiating with each other. Indeed, it will also form a bond and lead to trust between those who are interacting. Creating this bond will further build a form of respect and careness for each other and the culture of the other person. At last it will make people feel

more safer to negotiate and communicate. Either at work or in school, it will make the communications between people a lot easier. In summary, building a common culture and identity will have a positive effect on the group and enable it to strive for the best.

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## **Intercultural Working**

Caltha: My experience while working with other students was very interesting but also very educational. I learned a lot about how to work with other students with another background, as I never studied abroad, and gained more experience and knowledge about Romanian and also Norwegian culture. After all, it was an interesting week full of new experiences and I am very glad to be a part of it.

Madon: It was a great experience to collaborate with international students! I am not used to talking in English so it was a little challenging, but I think it is good for my own experience. All and all it was a cool experience to work with other students and to make friends that could be my colleagues or business partners in the near future.

Marius B: Adding to the others, the intercultural experience was really good for all of us and I enjoyed working with different people again within another context. Especially the activities besides the classes and the group work fosters getting to know each other better and makes it an enjoyable time. Cultural clashes did not occur since we all (as Northern European) have a quite similar set of values and also have been in Norway for a bit now.

Marius K: Working with students from different cultures was a very giving and eye-opening experience. We all had different methods and perspectives when writing the paper that helped us write a well rounded paper. It was also a great experience getting to know everyone in the group.